



NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

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Women's participation in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains in the Near East Region

Executive Summary

Forest and rangeland ecosystems in the Near East region are characterized by their multi-functionalities and play crucial economic, social and environmental roles. Besides being a provision of fodder for livestock and agroforestry practices, the use and trade of non-wood forest products (NWFP) as well as pastoral value chains are important pillars of the rural economy.

Non-wood forest products are defined as goods of biological origin other than wood, which are derived from forests, other wooded land, and trees outside of forests. (FAO, 1995)¹. They are classified into plants and plant products, mushrooms, plants and animal products and handicrafts. Valorization of these products in the Near East Region is handled mainly by women.

The 25th session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission recommended FAO (i) to provide support for conversion of NWFP raw materials into finished products with value added in a way that enables NWFP producers/collectors to earn higher prices for their products, and (ii) to establish protocols and/or guidelines for sustainable NWFP harvest, resource management and international trade.

The same Session also recommended member countries to promote efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems that contribute to sustainable forest and land management, including through agricultural capacity building programmes and improved access to technologies and markets, especially for women and youth.

In this regard, the FAO Regional Office of the Near East commissioned a regional assessment on the contribution of women in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains in the Near East Region. The assessment was based on a literature review and virtual interview with some key informants.

¹ FAO, 1995. Non wood forest products for rural income and sustainable forestry

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

This document summarizes the main findings of the above review and presents the main recommendations and areas for consideration in the commission's future priorities.

Suggested actions by the Commission

The Commission may wish to invite Members to:

- Further strengthen the policy and institutional environment of women's economic empowerment in the Region and develop an enabling environment that would support women and enhance their contribution to the sustainable management of NWFPs and pastoral value chains.
- Consider collecting gender-disaggregated data and statistics in surveys and assessments related to forestry and rangeland ecosystems services, in order to analyze the gender-differentiated perceptions and knowledge in terms of NWFP and pastoral product collection, valorization and management.

The Commission may wish to request FAO to:

- Support countries in contributing to conserving and restoring biodiversity while improving nutrition, food security, and livelihoods through the identification of opportunities, challenges and specific technical support requirements for the sustainable use NWFPs and pastoral value chain
- Conduct a stocktaking exercise on the contribution of women and youth to the pastoral and non-wood forest products value chain in the Near East Region. The assessment would help by collecting gender-disaggregated data and relevant information on women's formal and informal participation in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains in the Near East Region. It would also focus on the access of women and youth to productive resources, extension services and capacity building programmes, financial services, markets, and decision-making bodies.
- Support countries in assessing women's and youth contribution in climate smart agriculture and NWFP and pastoral value chains.

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Introduction

1. Forests and rangelands in the Near East Region are characterized by their multi-functionality, they contribute to natural resources protection, biodiversity conservation, provide feed and habitat for livestock and wildlife, food for local communities, and offer opportunities for decent employment for youth and women through ecotourism, the use and trade of non-wood forest products, aromatic and medicinal plants as well as pastoral value chain.
2. According to FAO, non-wood forest products are classified into plants and plant products, mushrooms, plants and animal products and handicrafts. In the Near East Region, valorization of these products is mainly handled by women.
3. NWFPs grow in their natural and original environment and are mostly harvested from wild ecosystems. Planting and restocking of NWFPs producing plants is carried out in few countries and at narrow scales mainly through pilot experiences or under development programmes and projects. Overexploitation is noted mainly for aromatic and medicinal plants. Overgrazing and agriculture

encroachment in marginal lands is one of the factors contributing to the degradation of these resources.

4. Investing in the sustainable management of NWFPs, their conservation, harvesting, domestication and valorization is still facing several constraints, related mostly to the absence of appropriate legislation, lack of formal institutions (e.g cooperatives, unions, associations, etc.) for the producers/collectors, as well as the low price of these products which are normally sold raw with no value addition.
5. Despite the great potential of NWFPs in the region, their valorization has yet to be developed. In fact, management and valorization of NWFPs has always been addressed according to sectoral approaches and was rarely considered as an integrated vision targeting the whole value chain (production, processing, branding, certification, marketing...). This was due in large consideration to lack of sustainable resources.
6. Based on the recommendation of the 25th session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission, FAO commissioned a regional assessment on the contribution on women in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains in the Near East Region.
7. This document summarizes the main findings of the assessment and presents the main recommendations and areas for consideration in the commission's future priorities.

II. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT

8. Valorization on NWFP and pastoral products in the Near East Region have crucial environmental and socio-economic roles in improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities. Sustainable management of these resources and products contributes to combating desertification and preserving animal and plant biodiversity while contributing significantly to food security, poverty alleviation and promoting employment opportunities for local communities.
9. Inadequate policies and legal frameworks coupled with unsustainable management of resources and inappropriate practices by local communities, are the main cause of the degradation of these multifunctional ecosystems. Furthermore, communities, especially women, are facing complex problems due to difficulty in accessing information, markets, and natural resources, as well as lack of efficient professional bodies.
10. The literature review highlighted that, in the Near East Region, women play an important role in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains mainly through the collection, harvesting and processing of forest products, including firewood, fodder, medicinal and aromatic plants, handicraft, wild fruits and livestock activities; which may contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources.
11. Based on the review, the active contribution of women in NWFP and pastoral value chains is not well recognized in the Region mainly due to the lack of a reliable data base containing specific studies and assessments targeting these aspects. Available data is often mixed with agricultural production statistics and rarely gender-desegregated. Usually, it comes from case studies carried out separately, in different periods, for different purposes and targets only some pilot areas.
12. Recognizing the importance and relevance of women's involvement in the valorization of these products, would not only contribute to biodiversity conservation and to the sustainable management of natural resources, but would also improve livelihoods.
13. Considering the difficulties in accessing land, which is usually only granted to men, women have difficulties in accessing productive resources, markets, services and capacity building programmes. Women also face challenges in accessing the financial support usually provided for

land owners. This could not also be further analyzed due to the lack of a reliable national database in the Region.

III. AREAS OF CONSIDERATION IN THE COMMISSION'S FUTURE PRIORITIES

14. The literature review highlighted women's participation in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains and their economic, social and environmental roles. It underlined the importance of the contribution of women to the valorization process from production and harvesting, to processing and marketing. However, further efforts need to be deployed at the institutional and technical levels, and national and regional measures are to be undertaken to quantify and analyze effectively the contribution of women in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains and their role in the sustainable management of resources. Below are some areas of consideration in the commission's future priorities.
15. At the institutional level, it is necessary to further strengthen the policy and institutional environment towards women's economic empowerment in the Region and develop an enabling environment that would support women and enhance their contribution to the sustainable management of NWFPs and pastoral value chains. This would facilitate women's access to resources including to land, market, extension and services as well as to decision-makers through cooperatives and non-governmental organizations.
16. At the technical level, consider gender-disaggregated data collection and quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to evaluate the effective contribution of women in NWFP and pastoral value chains and their impact on the sustainable management of resources, conserving biodiversity and improving livelihoods, and building capacities of relevant national institutions accordingly.
17. At the organizational level, build capacities of women through the valorization of products, supporting entrepreneurship, and managing essential components that would empower all women and support them in accessing services, resources, markets, financial support and decision makers.