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# Forest certification: innovating to ensure a sustainable valorisation of Mediterranean forest products

Desertification is one of the major environmental problems faced by the Maghreb. The sustainable use of forests in these countries would help mitigate and adapt to this global change. This is why forestry experts gathered in Barcelona to discuss opportunities and challenges brought by innovative solutions such as forest certification in the Mediterranean region.

In Morocco, 80 % of the lands are at high risk of desertification. To face this challenge, Morocco has made significant effort to address land degradation. However, forest management remains an important issue for the country. Indeed, in Morocco as well as in Tunisia, forests are of public ownership and inhabitants can use their resources for their own needs. Unfortunately, this legal framework has led to abuses and to desertification due to a lack of awareness regarding the value of the forest and its products and the need to exploit it sustainably.

Being able to identify a certified product issued from a Mediterranean forest as environmentally friendly and socially fair is key in the development of a market for Mediterranean forest products. The development of such a market would favour growth in the Mediterranean by attracting investors, and therefore increasing the interest of local stakeholders in using their source of income in a sustainable way.

'If, in the northern Mediterranean PEFC certification is well developed, it's not the case in the south,' explained Sarah Price from PECF international. 'The MENFRI project is therefore a great opportunity to discuss how forest certification could help Mediterranean forests and their products to be better valued.'

PEFC is the world's largest forest certification system and it endorses national forest certification systems developed through multi-stakeholder processes. Their moto is 'Think Globally, Act Locally', ensuring that standards meet the expectations of

stakeholders on the ground, address local conditions, and are consistent with national laws and regulations while at the same time meeting international benchmarks and being internationally recognised. In addition, PEFC certification covers the entire custody chain and includes social aspects such as workers' rights and welfare, local employment, indigenous peoples' rights, etc.

PEFC endorses national forest certification systems, therefore, national administrations have to develop national standards for sustainable forest use. While Morocco is reviewing its legislation to support public-private partnerships for forest management, Tunisia still has to launch this legislation reform to allow actual pilot projects already in place to become the rule on the territory. 'Certification will not be a solution to this urgent need for legislative reform,' warned Abdhelamid Khaldi, from the National Research Institute of Rural Engineering, Water and Forests in Tunisia.

'We need to show the advantage of forest certification to the administration so as to encourage them to set national standards. We have to demonstrate that forest certification can ensure an environmental, social and economically viable product,' stated Mrs Druget from the EU delegation to Morocco. She added that a four year programme was launched in 2013 by the European Commission to support the adaptation of the Moroccan forestry sector to new challenges, to promote territorial approaches and ensure the participation of local communities to the sustainable use of forests.

This demonstrates that many actors are on the ground developing strategies and pilots in order to find solutions for a bright and sustainable future for Mediterranean forestry. The MENFRI Network allows all these actors: researchers, forest managers, administration, cooperatives, investors, policymakers, etc to find a common platform to exchange ideas and build strong collaborations.

The MENFRI experts' meeting was completed by a visit of certified forests in the Catalan region. This field trip allowed southern actors to compare their own management with the local requirements in terms of forest planning. This exchange will continue, as MENFRI is also preparing training sessions in November 2015 in Morocco and in May 2016 in Tunisia on forest certification and innovation in the forestry sector for women empowerment to develop capacity building in the Maghreb.

## **Keywords**

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## **Countries**

Spain, Morocco, Tunisia

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