

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN PRIVATE FORESTS

Author: Senior Forestry advisor, Petrovski Saso

Country: Macedonia

Challenge

Private forestry in Macedonia is part of the overall forestry which is not developed as state forestry sector. Even it is only 10% of total forest area (according to official statistic data), it is important part for more than 65.000 forest owners in Macedonia providing firewood, construction materials and income for their households.

Up to 2008 private forests were not part of any support from the responsible Ministry. From 2009, after many efforts done in advocacy for development needs of private forests, Ministry provided space for private forest owners to use subsidies for supporting forest activities which leads to SFM (Sustainable Forest Management). This fund provides subsidy for forest measures, like pre commercial thinning operations in premature forests, forestation of bare land, and restoration of sites affected by forest fires.

- Thinning operations in young forest are included in the programme because such operations have high costs with only limited income. To stimulate sustainable forest growth such operations are recommended. It will lead on the long term to higher wood production and ecological sustainability of the stand.
- Forestation is part of the overall state strategy envisaged in the Physical plan of RM to enlarge forest areas in the country.
- After big forest fires occur, like in the year of 2007, there is a big need for subsidies that will support the restoration of burned forests.

Even that the subsidies provided opportunity for forest owners, since information was published only in official gazette, none of the forest owners was properly informed about the possible funding support. Additionally, the procedures for applying and using the subsidies were not provided, leading to a lot of confusion if it is possible or not to make use of the fund. Even the department of forestry in the Ministry could not provide clarity on this.

National Association of Private Forest Owners (NAPFO) in cooperation with SNV took the responsibility to assist forest owners in the preparation and implementation of all the steps to apply for the subsidy from the support fund.



Method

NAPFO decided to assist in preparation of programme for submission on forest thinning operations and forestation to submit to the Ministry Programme for Forest Subsidy.

In 2009 the Programme for Forest Subsidies were 100.000 € in total, supporting the thinning operations with 200€/ha and 700€/ha for forestation. These subsidies in 2009 were very limitedly used and only two people applied with NAPFO support as a piloting experience.

With the good example of the two forest owners from 2009 and lobbying from the Association of PFO, the subsidies for 2010 were increased to 130.000 € allowing to use the support for thinning also in artificially planted forests. More precisely the Ministry allocated fund for thinning operations in private forest supported with 250€/ha and fund for forestation of private land supported with 1000€/ha, where the land owner had the obligation to provide him self with seedlings and necessary field work on preparation of the land for forestation. NAPFO had identified 23 forest and land owners with more than 21ha of forest and land properties that were fitting in to requirements for thinning operations and forestation.

According to the selection, the forestry engineers team on the field joined by the owners and other members of NAPFO in order to collect all data that are needed for the forest structure. In the collection of data, assistance was provided by NAPFO members. After the data collection, SNV provided proper analyse of the data collected and prepared the programmes for thinning operations and forestation. The programmes were developed in the standard format for this kind of operations, same as programmes from last year. Innovation in the programmes for 2010 was introduction of GIS applications, clearly presenting the current situation of the parcel. This innovation was highly appreciated by the MAFW since they were able to determine the right parcel without going on the field. The 23 developed programmes were submitted by the owners with support of NAPFO and SNV.

The Ministry for Forestry was positively surprised by this initiative. They have reviewed, approved the programmes and prepared contracts with forest owners for the foreseen activities.

After approval of programmes, the forestry engineers team advised the owners how to perform the thinning operations, how to prepare land and perform the forestation. NAPFO supported their members to provide quality seedlings for lower prices. In addition based on real need a fund was raised for procurement of seedlings, in order to meet the requirements of the members. At the moment all activities on the field are finished. Forestry inspection is working on the final reports which will be provided to the MAFW. Based on this positive reports owners will be reimbursed.

Outcome

This activity contributed to several outcomes:

*** Improved Sustainable Forest Management practices**

Through the activities on the field on data collection and programme preparation, NAPFO gained knowledge and experience on why and how thinning operations in forestry are contributing in better quality of forest, quantity of forest products. In forestation NAPFO gained knowledge how that contributes to improvement of land and site conditions. The awareness of the importance on the provision of tending measures in forests is now higher among members of NAPFO. With this knowledge and experience NAPFO is able to repeat this action among the members which will improve overall management of forests in private ownership.

*** Improved service delivery to PFO**

With this activity NAPFO has improved the service delivery to their members. 23 forest owners got advice and assistance on programme preparation and submission for subsidy. NAPFO also distributed a letter of support to the Ministry together with the programme submitted by the forest owners.

As a result of this success, more members of NAPFO declared request for assistance in to submission of the programmes and training on forest subsidy funds. Also NAPFO started to collect the membership fee from their members they became aware of the benefit that association is providing to them. This is also positive for NAPFO in financial terms, association started collecting and forming their own fund that will help in sustainable work of the association in the future.

*** Improved enabling environment**

The Ministry has accepted the standard formats proposed by SNV and NAPFO to be used for application of subsidy for the future. Still this is quite complicated. Many forest owners are not able to fulfil all the requirements on the format of the programme because it is on expert level. NAPFO initiated discussion with Ministry on how to simplify the procedures for the subsidy requests. With the discussion it is expected that rules will be adapted to the needs of forest owners. The Ministry has indicated already an increased allocation for private forestry, up to 100 ha for 2010 (50 ha in 2009). We expect that this numbers will go up in 2011.

*** Improved organizational structure of NAPFO**

With this activity NAPFO has fulfilled the representation role. They were the link between Ministry and forest owners. NAPFO focused on advocacy a lot in the past, dealing with the needs of forest owners for support. They have proved that forest owners also show interest to the forest development. With the Programmes approved, NAPFO became effective organization that is able to provide space for development for its membership.

Impact

With this activity provided, impact can be foreseen on:

*** Increased income from private forests**

As above was introduced, the programs for 21 ha thinning operations and forestation were approved and the forest owners will gain more than 15.000€ in total. This was obtained directly as income for the subsidized activities undertaken. Additional wood will be obtained from the thinning, while the thinning operation is improving the quality and production of the forests in general. Thinning operations in forestry are leading to increased production in quantity and quality of wood which is proved by forest science.

*** Improved products and services from private and decentralized forest**

Provision of tending measures in forests has influence on the improvement of the structure in the forests and also speeds up natural processes of selection. Sustainable thinning operations are improving the structure of the remaining stand and contribute to better products coming from the private forests in the future. The forest owners will be able to provide higher quality products, which is also benefitting wood industry.

Forestation of bare land also contributes to overall development of private forestry, because with these activities the share of private forests in the country will increase in the future, and will provide more space for development and income generation of private forest owners.

On the other hand, following sustainable forest management practices, private forests are increasing their contribution in to environment and social requirements.



Lessons learned

Assisting private forest owners on the submission on forestry subsidy funds, it becomes clear that positive examples are bringing more confidence and encourage forest owners to apply sustainable forest management practices. Using such positive examples it is easier to build up future practice and procedures. It brings positive spirit among forest owners.