

Project Update: March 2006

The Val-Martanesh population is the most valuable walnut massif with individuals of outstanding qualities both in pomological and wood traits, being the last viable remnant of wild walnut populations. To be successful in achieving the final aim of the project - conservation and rehabilitation of walnuts and increasing the public awareness about walnut resources in area of Martanesh - we started by elucidating the single components of the project. As we considered essential: (1) to have precise information about the relevant components of biodiversity (focusing on species and habitats) and (2) to know the relevant pressures and threats to them, this background information constituted the starting point for this project.

1. Review of the existing data and literature.

We started with a concise review of indicators on status-pressure-threat for biodiversity (scale and intensity, trends, likely future trends etc.). All relevant and recent scientific reports and studies about the environment in the region as well as relevant legislation and legislative proposals are being reviewed. We took into consideration the intensive studies of species' biology from both literature and own experience and from intensive editing of data collected in previous years. The team has been expanded with Mr. Gjon Fierza from the General Directorate of Forest and Pastures (GDFFP), a forest specialist with a long experience in working with local communities. Field forms for data acquisition have been prepared and the logistics organized.

2. Preparation of promotional materials.

The second component of the project is the increase in public awareness, especially of the local community, through educational and training activities. To achieve that, we have started to set up the concepts for leaflets, flyers, and educational and promotional materials. Since in the poster and the leaflets we like to have the picture of the massif, we expect that to take part in the late spring. Technical notes about walnuts have been prepared and will be distributed (see attached).

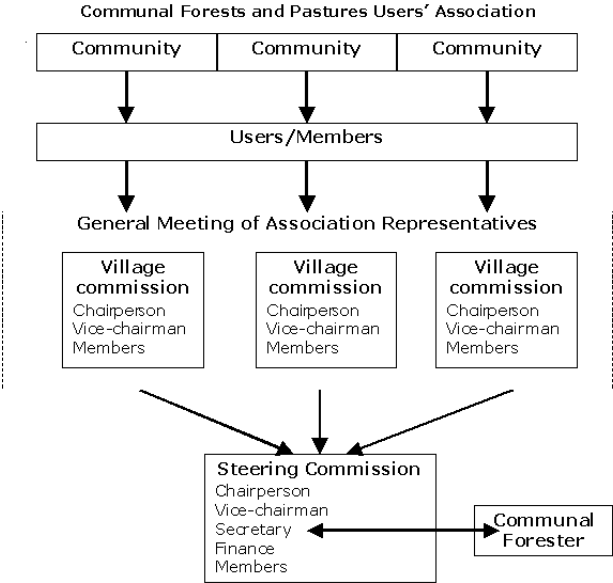
3. Local contacts and project support.

Extensive effort has been put into strengthening the local contacts in the area of the project. At the end of January, a trip to Val was organized, but unfortunately the weather conditions didn't allow us to go to the massif. However, contacts with the representatives from the Martaneshi commune (administrative unit), the Forest Service of Bulqiza District, Forest and Pasture Users Association (FPUA) of Martaneshi commune and Commission of Forest and Pasture (CFP) of the Vali Village were established. The Commune Chairmen and the other community members were informed about project objectives and components. All parties participating in the meeting showed great interest in the project and offered their support. They also promised to help and contribute with the organization of the workshops and distribution of leaflets, flyers, and educational and promotional materials. The proposal of including this population into the "Bize-Martanesh" zone with the status of the "Landscape protected area" was discussed but will need to be redefined in the course of the project.

4. Information of the main partner on project implementation: Local structures for forest management:

Forest and pastures in Martaneshi commune are transferred from the state ownership to the commune in 2002, through the financial support of Albanian Forestry Project. Commune has contracted the FPUA-s for implementing the forest and pasture management plan. All forest and pasture users in commune are members of the FPUA. Users are identified during the transfer process: families with private user claims; individual users; family group (so-called 'fis'); and village use (land in use by the whole village called 'mera'). As part of the process of transferring usage rights, Val villagers have created *village commissions*, consisting of individuals elected by the users of communal forests and pastures. The forest and pasture village commission are elected in an open meeting of the village members and assist in the development of the projects.

The diagram below indicates how village commissions and FPUA-s are related. This is based on statutes and regulations. The FPUA is a legal entity and registered at the court as a non-profit making organization.



The FPUA can employ staff to carry out CFPM implementation tasks. In general, a Communal Forester is employed who is responsible for the administrative tasks and technical issues related to CFPM. The Communal Forester also gives technical assistance to the users in implementation of activities.

5. Coming activities

As soon as the weather conditions will allow, we have planned another visit and a workshop with the local community will take place. Technical notes on walnuts already prepared will be distributed.



Figure 1. The valley and the village of Val at the end of January.



Figure 2. Dr. Haki Kola in his office preparing the materials for the project.