

## **TO AID AGRICULTURE: THE MAIN ROLE OF SOCIAL FORESTRY IN CHINA**

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There are five major objectives for social forestry (FAO, 1985:43):

- Meeting rural people's basic needs
- Participation of local people
- Counteraction of land degradation
- Economic growth
- Social equality

There are three levels of social forestry in China: state plantation of protection forests; local forestry projects for soil conservation in mountainous and desert areas; and village-based Sound Ecological Agriculture (SEA).

Protection forests have been established in 551 counties in the north of China. Between 1978 to 1985 5.30 million ha have been planted. In the second phase (1986-1995) to date 3.70 million ha have been planted. The whole plantation phase is scheduled to end in 2020 with a final target of 30 million ha of forest. This will represent an increase in forest cover from 5.05% in 1978 to 7.09% in 1990 and 10.55% in 2020. There are protection forest schemes in other areas of China including plantations established to prevent soil loss in the Yangtze River area. This scheme will take about 30-40 years to complete and will lead to the afforestation of 20 million ha. The third area of protection forest is to secure the eastern and southern coasts against typhoon damage. All these schemes are supported through state funding.

Counties in northern China are faced with poor soil conditions, deserts and mountains. In these areas protection forests have been established together with water-soil conservation forests and forests for the supply of fuelwood and cash crops.

The particular local farming system determines the form local forests take. For example, some counties in inner mountain areas give priority to cash crops such as mulberry. In other areas animal husbandry and agriculture are more important and take priority over forests. Exploitation of natural resources has been intensified in some southern counties under the name of 'suitable-scale management'. These counties have developed particular forest products such as traditional Chinese medicines, tea, bamboo, rubber, and fruit trees such as orange, mango and litchis. Capital for local forest products has been collected from bank loans, donations, international organisations and from a special levy on miners and other enterprises which benefit from forestry.

Forestry was a component of a village-based SEA that began in Dafong County, Jiangsu Province in the early 1980s. It has since been extended to neighbouring counties and provinces in central China. SEA has been developed to include appropriate animal-agroforestry components, improved stove technologies and appropriate methods to control plant diseases. Apart from money obtained from loans and allowances some of the money for SEA projects comes from the rural people themselves.

The three levels of social forestry are usually complementary. For example local projects establish forest nets between fields, houses and roads; the SEA component ensures that agricultural land is used to its maximum potential with trees, crops and animals fully integrated. These two village-level systems link with the larger state protection forests.

FAO (1985). *Tree growing by rural people*, FAO Forestry Paper 64, Rome.