

The case study of oak forest of Ain Snoussi in Tunisia

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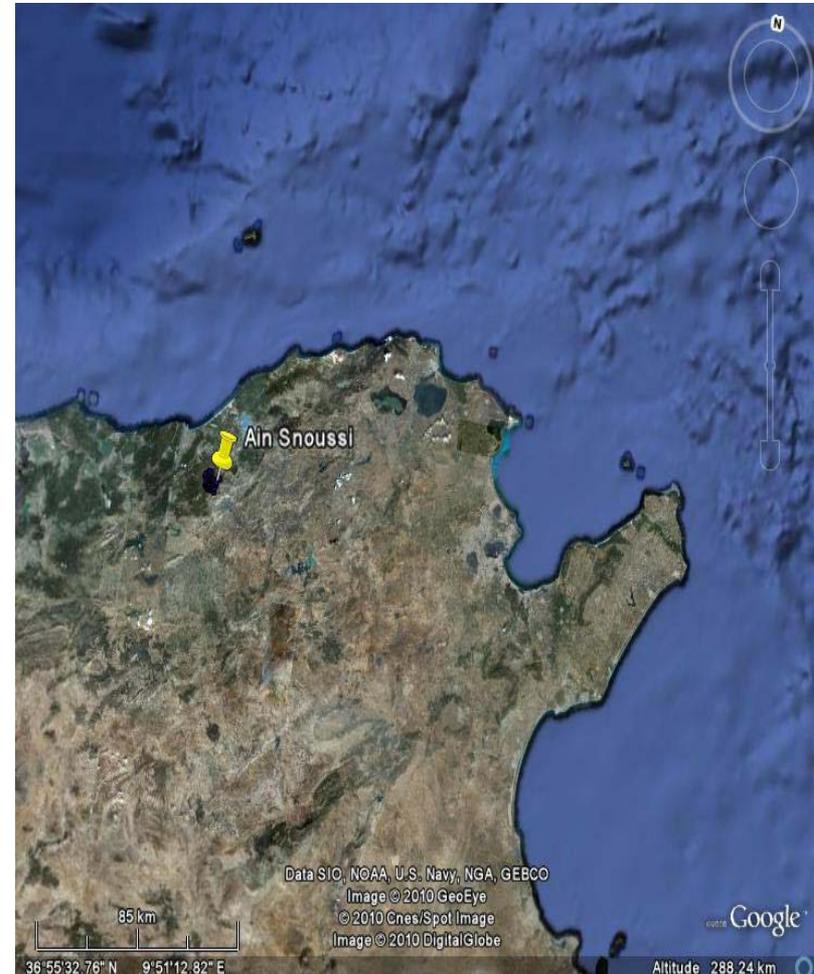
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Background: context, challenges

- The oak forest of Ain Snoussi in Tunisia represents a case of unsustainable forest use.
- It is located in the Eastern Atlas mountains, in the northern side of Tunisia, in a sub-humid to humid environment. Ain Snoussi is the only densely wooded area in Tunisia.
- It has a beautiful scenery.
- The main land-uses are cork oak trees and pasture land.

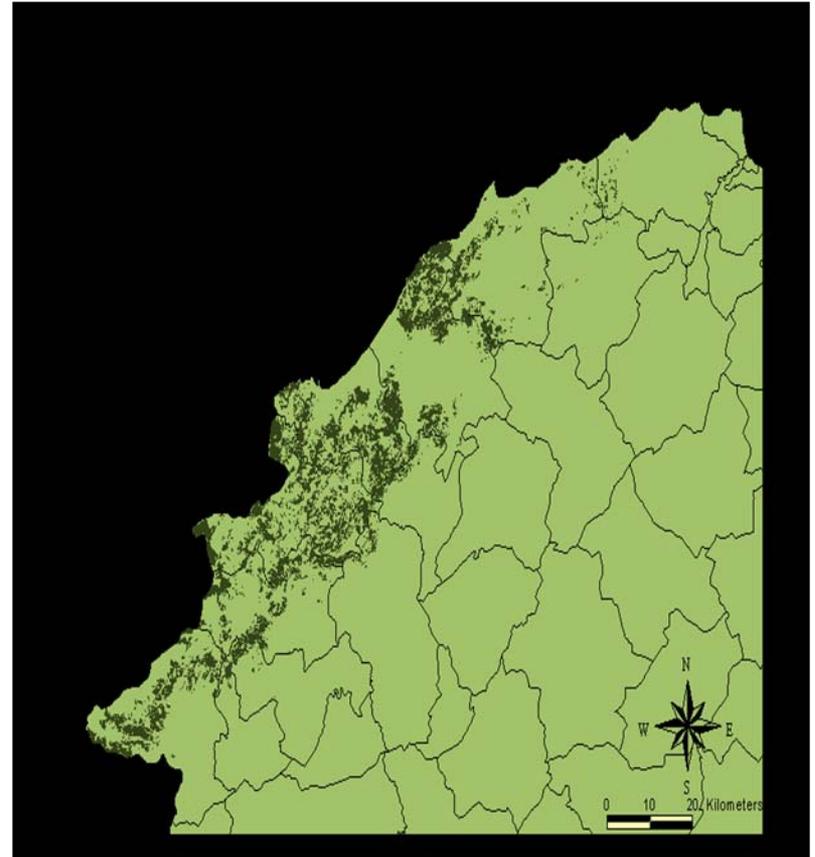


Background: context, challenges

- . Ain Snoussi forests offer many services and goods
- . They have private values and conservation values.
- . Private benefits are derived from the use of the private goods such as cork, fuelwood, grazed forage, etc.
- . Conservation values are derived from reducing soil erosion, decreasing dam siltation, carbon sequestration, high water quality and biodiversity conservation

Background: context, challenges

- Local residents suffer from a poor and rough life. They have no alternative other than to use the dense forest to make a living.
- In the forest of Ain Snoussi, oak trees are most noticeable. Also known as cork oak trees, they are used as the raw material for wine corks.



Background: context, challenges

- . The majority of the residents wait for the hottest summer days. They make a year's income by participating in peeling tree bark in July and August.
- . According to the forestry statistics of Tunisia, the total area of oak forest was 140,000 ha in the 1930s, and now it has been reduced by half to 70,000 ha.



Background: context, challenges

- In 2006, the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources recognized the gravity of the situation and requested a research consultation.
- Researchers concluded that several factors, including climate change, are causing the degradation of the forest, but that the major cause is the residents' livestock (chiefly sheep and goats), which eat up the seedlings of oak trees, and ultimately make holes in the oak forest that take as long as 120 years to recover.



Background: context, challenges

- . Thus, indiscriminate livestock grazing is threatening the future of the forest as well as the livelihood of the residents themselves.
- . In Ain Snoussi, forest resources control is shared by the Tunisian State and local inhabitants. The State property rights are therefore incomplete.
- . Also, insufficient enforcement of existing rules was also outlined to be another factor that contributed for the misuse of Ain Snoussi forests in Tunisia.
- . Sustainable management of the forest is an urgency.

Policy measures

- There is a conflict among sustainable use of Ain Snoussi forests and private income demanding some kind of compensation for those farmers adopting sustainable land use practices.
- In this regard payments for forest services could be of great importance in solving this conflict.
- However, these payments do not need to be necessarily in cash. It is important to use all forms of incentives possible to encourage sustainable management and use of forests.
- This means that residents of Ain Snoussi will learn a new way of living by caring about the future of the forest and diversifying their sources of income.
- Such alternative measures would surely contribute to the restoration of the oak forest in the long run.

Policy measures

- In this regard sustainable use of the forest could be encouraged by, for example, assigning conditional incentives for those who applied sustainable practices.
- In recent decades, the Tunisian forest administration has focused on greater involvement of local inhabitants in forest development plans.
- This new approach began with the creation of forest associations.
- These associations can serve for both building and bridging social capital among the forest dwellers.

Policy measures

- They can be especially helpful to implement local development plans for improving crop lands and scrublands productivities and introducing alternative activities such as milk and cheese production for greater income generation.
- However, these incentives should be conditional with the control of forest resources allocation.
- From the analysis of the experiences of the payments for environmental services (PES), it was observed that NGOs were behind the success story of almost all of the schemes considered.

Conclusion

- It is important to increase communities' role in Ain Snoussi forest management.
- Doing so could contribute to lifting local people out of poverty, as well as improve the conservation of the forest.
- In Tunisia NGOs are already well introduced and this is a positive factor for strengthening community rights over their own forests and PES development.
- The NGOs could be even instrumental in generating donor funding as they are in a better position to attract more funds than the inefficient State bureaucrats.