



Project Cycle Management training for staff of the Turkish Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs in Ankara. (Photo: UNV Turkey, 2014)

Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Central Asia

Ankara, Turkey: Coming to Turkey in May 2013 has been literally my first experience as a UN Volunteer. No long preparation time after the final “go!”, just getting everything packed and saying (temporary) goodbyes. Of course I volunteered before. In my younger years, in my hometown in Germany, I was involved with environmental groups and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). I helped out at an association to integrate foreign students and promote cultural diversity at my university, doing a bachelor in

forestry. During my master's programme, I had great experiences being a member of the International Forestry Students' Association, an example for global cooperation to provide a voice for youth in international processes.

I am in Turkey now. My host agency is the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and I work as Forestry Specialist at their Sub-regional Office for Central Asia. My work area consists of seven countries: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. My assignment has a background: Central Asia is one of the world's areas with the lowest forest cover. Forests often belong to the state, with weak user-rights and little participation of local people in decision-making processes.

Forest management is very often based on outdated practices and of lower importance when compared with other land-uses. Yet, a great potential exists for the development of forestry in order to help eliminating hunger, reducing rural poverty and making people less vulnerable to disasters. Despite their limited cover, forests and woodlands can provide important ecosystem services like soil conservation, drinking water and pasture for livestock. Firewood remains an important source of energy and non-wood forest products like nuts, fruits and honey are a significant source of food and income for people in rural areas.

In Central Asia, as well as in many other parts of the world, forests and with them the livelihoods of local people are threatened by climate change, land degradation and water scarcity. Together with my colleagues at FAO and other partners at national and international levels, e.g. the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), we are providing technical assistance for overcoming these threats.

My work contributes directly to projects on different topics within our region. I work on forest management in Kyrgyzstan, on combating desertification and preserving biodiversity in Turkey, and on protecting desert ecosystems in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Another main task of mine is to help mobilizing funds from different donors for our projects with accurate and in-depth project proposals.

Apart from learning about this variety of countries in my work area, I am also grateful for participating in small events, like the annual World Food Day, marking FAO's "birthday". This day is celebrated together with our host municipality here in Ankara and many activities are organized to raise public awareness of hunger in the world.

Approaching the end of my first assignment as a UN Volunteer, I can say

that I am very happy to have had this opportunity, to have been able to fulfill a dream: working as a forester in an international environment, combined with the humanitarian aspects of the United Nations Volunteers programme. With each small step and each small seedling planted I could contribute to a sustainable future for our forests in *the world we want*.

Bio: Jaspar Albers is an international UN Volunteer, Forestry Specialist, at FAO Sub-regional Office for Central Asia, based in Turkey. Jaspar's assignment is fully funded by the German Government.

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