

Chenini Oasis: Sustainable management of natural resources

COSPE1

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Abstract

The objective of the project is the promotion and diffusion of agricultural and eco-sustainable techniques to ensure the local production improvement and the relevant growth in added value.

The purpose of the project "Sustainable Management of Natural Resources" is to contribute to preserve environmental balance within the Chenini Oasis (South Tunisia), to promote organic agriculture and enhance the oasis' natural capital through the improved use of its natural resources, the spread of methodologies, and experiences worked out at local level, and the exchange among other actors at the national, international, and Mediterranean level. In particular, it has a special focus on the improvement and diffusion within both involved local communities and institutions of an environmental culture, allowing sustainable enhancement of the oasis capital, development, and strengthening of eco-friendly economic activities.

The direct beneficiaries of the project are as follows: 47 organic farmers whose plots of land are presently in the process of organic certification; 120 oasis farmers that have been provided with technical support and organic compost by the project in order to adopt ecological agricultural techniques; 155 participants (among whom 80 women) in vocational training sessions delivered by the project on topics such as organic agriculture, sheep and goat farming, beekeeping, fruit tree growing, horticulture, food processing of the oasis' agricultural products, and traditional craftsmanship; over 100 scholars and researchers and 460 university students that have visited the project's premises and furthered research works on recycling and conversion of organic matter; and 430 students of primary and secondary schools visited the project and have been made aware on the importance of recycling vegetable waste. The indirect beneficiaries of the project are 12,000 people living within the Chenini Oasis and the consumers of the locally produced organic products.

The project has set up and manages a fully equipped composting unit for the recycling of green waste and date palm byproducts (over 500 tons picked up in the oasis and converted per year). This supplies over 100 tons of ripe compost to the oasis' farmers, who have developed specialized technical skills in management and compost processing. The implication of green waste collection for the local population is significant; the collection has attained a monthly average of 12 tons of picked-up waste from date palm pruning. A pilot action of organic certification is involves 47 farmers, whose plots of land accounts for more than 25% of the total oasis area.

The project has also fostered a study of the oasis' soil profile and supplied technical support to the local association responsible for water supply and management within the oasis. The aim is to contribute to rationalize farmers' use of water for irrigation and consequently curb the relevant consumption by 40%. Additionally, in-depth and thematic capacity building (10 days altogether) has been provided to the local partner association's members and staff (16 people). A two-day national conference focused on the role of civil society in the management of natural resources, and 80 representatives from local NGOs and associations, and both national and local public authorities concerned with the issue of environmental preservation participated.

Through the provision of specific grants and the staff's technical tutoring, the project has also made it possible for 20 young university researchers and students from higher educational institutions to carry out research on the topic of organic waste transformation, both at the project's premises and within other public and private labs.

With the aim to promote the consumption of biological products cultivated in the Chenini oasis, the project is currently focusing on market research in order to contact commercial operators, import-export firms, and cooperatives working in the sector. The outlook for the next season is very promising. The main organic products are large pomegranates with a high sugar content and henna. Both are well known at the national and international level for their excellent quality. The project is also fostering the processing of organic products (such as local dates, whose quality is not first rate) in order to give them added value and marketing them easier.

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¹ Cooperazione per lo Sviluppo dei Paesi Emergenti (Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries).