

Closer to forests, out of poverty

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The forests that provide most of Beijing's water are being given a new lease of life by the partial lifting of a logging quota for the first time in 20 years.

This change is part of a wider evolution in understanding how best to manage forests in the Miyun watershed, just north of the Chinese capital, in order to provide multiple ecosystem services to 17 million residents in Beijing. Although it may at first sound contradictory, allowing local people to harvest certain wood and tree products will not only improve their livelihoods and earning capacity, it will also permit better care for the forest, boosting the biodiversity and functioning of the natural systems that supply up to 70% of Beijing's drinking water.

"When we started working here, much of the original forest had disappeared and reforestation activities had planted conifers and other tree species. To protect the new forests, strict controls on land and forest use were imposed, including a stiff logging quota system that bans almost all logging in natural forest," explains **Li Jia, IUCN Forest Programme Officer**.

But this approach is overprotective, denying the interdependence between local livelihoods and forests, but also ignoring local communities' role and capacity in on-ground forest management, leading to a separation between forest sustainability and community welfare. In the case of Miyun, the forests were not actively managed, and many of the trees are in poor condition. Around three quarters are classified as unhealthy, with limited capacity for soil, water source and biodiversity conservation.

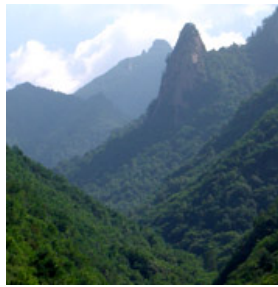
Not only the forest was suffering: local communities had become progressively disadvantaged in economic terms, as a result of the stiff logging quota system and strict regulation of people's access to forests. "Few income and employment opportunities are available, as cash income from timber selling is not allowed and introduction of polluting industries are strictly banned. While some protective measures are well-intended and necessary, it is also true that local livelihoods are constrained and they are not provided with many alternatives for the contribution they are making for the wider community. Currently it is only possible to carry out limited collection of fuelwood and non-timber forest products," says **Li Jia**.

It was against this backdrop that IUCN's Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy (LLS) was initiated in the Miyun watershed in 2007. The project responded to the paradox of a landscape which was dominated by forests which were subject to little or no active management and a livelihood situation where local communities had become impoverished, underpinned by the ever-more urgent need to ensure that Beijing's dwindling water supply was protected.

"It was clear that the strict logging ban needed to be replaced with a new forest development and management strategy," explains **Stephen Kelleher, deputy head of IUCN's Forest Conservation Programme**. "This needed not just to allow for better forest biodiversity and watershed services, but also to ensure improved incomes and livelihood security for the surrounding human population. The project introduced a new set of forest management tools which represent a

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Miyun County, Beijing China
Photo: Andrew Ingles



shift from a strictly protective approach, to one which is based on sustainable use and active management by local communities.”

Although the changes that the project aims to effect in the Miyun landscape and livelihoods are long term in nature, it is possible to discern some very positive signs already. Participatory planning has resulted in a formal agreement to recognize different forest management and use regimes, harmonizing the technical information held by government foresters with local knowledge and interests.

A set of ‘close to nature’ silvicultural treatments has been developed and is being implemented by local communities. This has resulted in the regeneration of natural forest and in improvements in forest structure, quality and function. A permit for harvesting timber has been secured – the first such quota issued in more than 20 years. A new system of harvesting fuelwood has been set in place, and significant progress has been made in reducing local fuelwood demands.

Last but not least, support has been given to the development of cooperative arrangements for utilising and developing the market potential of forest goods and services, with the aim of increasing and diversifying local income and setting in place local structures that will be sustainable over the long-term. A much more integrated form of landscape management and restoration has been introduced in the Miyun landscape which recognises the multiple needs and functions of the watershed, and brings together the many different stakeholders, sectors and levels of scale which have interests in them.

A new report on the Miyun work, and on the results following the partial lifting of the logging quota, is expected in April and will be published by IUCN.

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