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Research and Development in the Kyrgyz Walnut-Fruit Forests: Achievements and Lessons Learned for the Future

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Abstract

The walnut-fruit forests of Kyrgyzstan are one of the centres of origin of many cultivated plants in Central Asia and a gene pool of global importance. Between 130–180 species of trees and shrubs alone have been found in these forests. In addition, they harbor many other, partially endemic, species of other classes and orders. At the same time, these forests provide numerous forest products and a source of livelihood to local populations. However, current patterns of forest management are unsustainable, vast parts of the forests are over-aged, and derived benefits are unequally distributed among local populations. Because of their unique importance, the walnut-fruit forests and their sustainable management have been an object of scientific inquiry and a target of interventions by development projects alike. Significant academic work has been accomplished in studies of the biology, ecology, morphological diversity, the development of propagation methods, the protection of walnut and other nuts species from pests and forest diseases, and silvicultural and agroforestry research with a view to sustainably use the walnut forests. Development projects have focused on promoting sustainable forest management, participatory forms of resource governance, and the development of inclusive value chains for selected forest products. This paper presents the results of an extended analysis of secondary sources on the objectives, methods employed and results generated by previous academic research and largely donor-funded development projects in the walnut-fruit forests of Kyrgyzstan. It investigates how the activities of these projects have been sustained after project end given that many of these projects were of relatively short duration; how the project results were incorporated into management practice and which practical impact they had; and to which extent successor projects drew from previous works given that they were often funded by different organisations. The paper delineates two stages of research and development work that clearly appear from the analysis. It also presents the results of a stakeholder mapping of the various research and development organisations that are currently working on the sustainable utilisation of the walnut-fruit forest and identifies overlaps, blank spots and priorities for further research.

Keywords: Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan, sustainable forest management