

## Agriculture and Forestry in Pakistan (5)

### Part 5: Forestry in Punjab

As an agriculture and environment specialist, I participated in the Rehabilitation Project of Taunsa Barrage Irrigation System, and, as part of its environmental impact assessment, I had a chance to learn about the reality of the forestry industry of the area.

In the area surrounding the Taunsa Barrage, a huge quantity of forest resources are consumed as an energy source or as other raw materials for the local small- to medium-scale industries such as brick factories. This is in addition to all the wood that is consumed as household fuel in the local communities. Therefore, conservation of the existing forests and plantation activities in this area play an important role in supplying raw wood resources for the region. The Forestry Bureau classifies the local forests into five types: pastureland plantations, irrigation plantations, roadside plantations, watercourse-side plantations, and riverbank forests. In terms of acreage the pastureland plantations account for over 50% of the total area. They are found mainly in the Suleiman mountain range. This type of forest is comprised mainly of bushes planted for the purpose of soil conservation and for utilization in livestock farming. In the area along the River Indus, Obhan (*Populus euphratica*), Farash (*Tamarix* spp.), Kikar (*Acacia nilotica*) etc. are the major components of the natural vegetation. In the irrigation plantation area along roads and watercourses, Shisham (*Dalbergia sisso*) and Kikar (*Acacia nilotica*) are planted. These are used as construction materials and fuels. Most parts of the riverine forests are made up of the natural vegetation of Obhan (*Populus euphratica*). Regular flooding is necessary for this species to grow. However, such flooding has come under control in recent years, which has caused depletion of the riverine forests, and today much of these forests are designated as protected forest area. Also, Siris (*Albissia lebbek*) is often planted in farmlands as it is used as cattle forage.

The Forest Bureau has carried out various activities such as maintenance of existing forests, marketing of forestry products and promotion of plantation activities. However, in addition to the depletion of riverine forests due to flood control, demand for fuel wood is far exceeding its supply, and if no measures were taken, it would be difficult to carry on using the forest resources in a sustainable manner. In particular, immediate actions should be taken to increase the amount of forest resources by forestation and to decrease the amount of fuel wood use. For this purpose it is necessary to promote plantations in farmlands by introducing agroforestry. It is also necessary to introduce agroforestry in areas that are unsuitable for agriculture due to waterlogged conditions or salt accumulation in the soil. Furthermore, efforts should be made to lower the wood consumption level while using forest resources more efficiently, as well as to introduce alternative fuels.



**A huge quantity of forest resources are consumed.**



**Irrigation plantation (Shisham)**



**Watercourse-side plantation (Kikar)**



**Riverine forest (Obhan)**