



Enhancing the Contribution of Non-Wood Forest Products to Poverty Alleviation and Food Security in Central African Countries (GCP/RAF/441/GER)

1. Introduction

Despite their importance and significant potential in the fight against poverty and food insecurity, non-wood forest products (NWFP) are often neglected and hardly visible in national economic statistics. In addition, the NWFP sector is mostly informal, generally characterised by an inappropriate legal, institutional and organisational framework.

FAO contributes to the promotion and development of the NWFP sector and the sustainable use of these forest resources in Central African countries. The German funded project GCP/RAF/441/GER aims at enhancing the contribution of NWFP to food security and poverty alleviation through the valorisation and sustainable utilization of these products by local people in Central Africa, especially in Gabon, Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. A second project, funded by the European Union, aims at promoting small and medium scale enterprises involved in NWFP value chains in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

During the 17th Session of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC), held in Brazzaville from 22nd to 26th of February 2010, these two FAO projects and their activities in the region were presented by the project team of GCP/RAF/441/GER.

Regional Forestry Commissions

Six Regional Forestry Commissions were established by the FAO Conference between 1947 and 1959, one of them the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission created in 1959.

Every two years, the Commissions bring together the Heads of Forestry in each major region of the world to address the most important forestry issues in the region.

The Commissions consider both policy and technical issues. The Commissions play a key role in the international arrangement on forests, serving as a link between global dialogue at the Committee on Forestry (COFO) and the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), and national implementation.

The Regional Forestry Commissions are also active in-between formal sessions. Most of the Commissions have technical working groups or sub-regional chapters that implement projects that benefit from collaboration among countries in the region.

(Source : <http://www.fao.org/forestry/46199/en/>)

On the 22nd of February, a side event on non-wood forest products and their contribution to food security and poverty alleviation in Central Africa attracted great interest of the participants and was complemented by a presentation of the regional project coordinator, Ousseynou Ndoye, in the session's plenum on the 23rd February.

The side event

Over sixty participants were attracted by the side event on NWFP, moderated by Honoré Tabuna, Divisional Chief for Biodiversity for the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The following four presentations were given:



Figure 1: Tree nursery for the domestication of *Gnetum* spp.

The contribution of NWFP to poverty alleviation and food security in Central Africa

Prepared by Ousseynou Ndoye and presented by Félix Koubouana, National Coordinator of the NWFP project GCP/RAF/441/GER in the Republic of Congo: Several examples drawn from practical experiences in Central Africa demonstrated the importance of non-wood forest products for food security and poverty alleviation. In Cameroon, average prices per kilogram of some NWFP can reach up to 200 % of kilogram prices for cocoa; harvesters of *Prunus africana* bark gain around 70 % of their income from the commercialization of this non-wood forest product; for rattan producers 42 % of their income attribute to this product; traders of *Gnetum* spp. can gain between 98 and 110 US\$ per month.

Producers selling six principal NWFP in the Democratic Republic of Congo gain around 84 US\$ per month whereas a primary school teacher earns a salary between 80 and 120 US\$ monthly. Traders of charcoal and palm wine earn between 216 and 116 US\$ monthly and *Gnetum* spp. sellers between 270 and 1.300 US\$ monthly. To allow comparison, the salary of a medical doctor ranging between 190 and 250 US\$ was cited.

Contribution of the Network for Natural Gums and Resins in Africa (NGARA) to poverty reduction and food security in Africa

By Sheila S. Mbiru, NGARA Secretariat: The presentation illustrated the contribution of gum arabic and resins to poverty reduction and food security. Connecting producers and traders of gum arabic and resins, the network joins forces from different stakeholders for the development and promotion of markets for these products.

Current situation of the NWFP sector in the Republic of Congo and strategies for a better integration of the private sector

By Antoine Moutanda, National Coordinator of the project "Support to the valorisation of NWFP in the Republic of Congo": Based on recent studies and the given institutional framework governing the NWFP sector, the presenter described the potentials for the commercialization of NWFP in Congo. The cross cutting character of NWFP, touching forestry, agricultural, economic, research and conservation issues, leads to the implication of numerous different stakeholders in the sector whereas roles and responsibilities of these stakeholders are not legally defined. The presentation points out that a proper coordination and cooperation within the NWFP sector needs an adequate institutional and legal clarification.

Bush meat trade in Central Africa

By Christian Fargeot, Centre for Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD): Financially supported by the French Global Environment Facility (FGEF/FFEM) and the Central African Republic's Government, the CIRAD implemented from 2005 to 2008 a project on the management of village hunting areas to promote sustainable production of bush meat. Christian Fargeot presented the results of this project and pointed out the importance of including all stakeholders along the bush meat value chain, starting from local hunters to urban consumers.

Discussion

The subsequent discussion covered different aspects of all presentation but focused mainly on the recently started FAO project GCP/RAF/441/GER and its activities. The participants understood and appreciated the project as an opportunity to enhance the economic valorisation of NWFP and to adapt the informal character of current NWFP activities towards a more formalized economic sector. Formalization could be for example achieved through the creation of and support to small and medium scale forest enterprises as envisaged by the project. Additionally, practical question in regard to the execution of project activities were discussed.

The presentation of the Network for Natural Gums and Resins in Africa (NGARA) was valued as a good example of in-depth knowledge about the regional market of Gum Arabic and resins. Moreover, the participants drew useful information from the two other presentations about the NWFP sector in the Republic of Congo and bush meat utilization in the Central African Republic.

2. Participation in the plenary session

AFWC's plenary session offered a good opportunity to disseminate information about the importance and contribution of NWFP to poverty alleviation and food security to a wider audience via a presentation of the regional project coordinator of GCP/RAF/441/GER, Ousseynou Ndoye.

The presentation pointed out the diversity of non wood forest products in Africa, especially in Central Africa and showed the historical link between local communities and NWFP. In addition, Ousseynou Ndoye illustrated the

importance of NWFP to food security and poverty alleviation and as well the constraints for a dynamic development of the NWFP sector and private investments in Central Africa:

- Inappropriate legal framework for the exploitation and commercial valorisation of NWFP,
- Only minor private investment in the NWFP sector due to missing confidence,
- Non-availability of credits to establish forest enterprises,
- Insufficient political support for the promotion and strengthening of business knowledge for stakeholders involved in the NWFP sector.

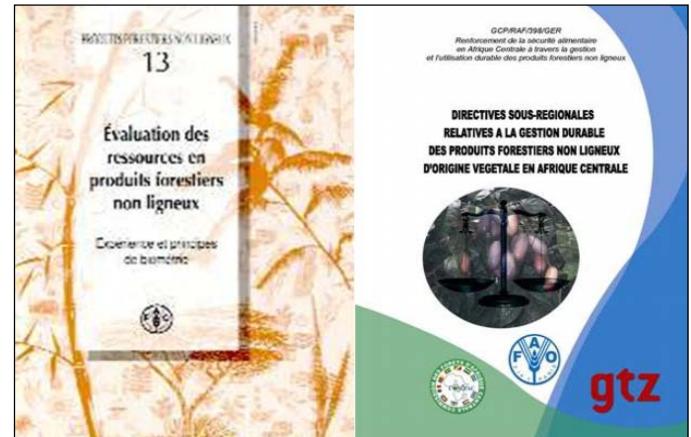


Figure 2: COMIFAC sub-regional guidelines; Study on the assessment of NWFP

Summarizing its presentation, Ousseynou Ndoye proposed six recommendations on how to develop the NWFP sectors in the Central African countries. Including the comments from the discussion afterwards, the following recommendations were retained:

- Disseminate the study of Jennifer Wong on the methodology how to do NWFP inventories (<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/Y1457F/Y1457F0.0.HTM>).
- The need to recognize that local population and their participatory inclusion as well as market conditions are the bases for the selection of NWFP and their subsequent domestication.
- The COMIFAC countries should incorporate the sub-regional guidelines on sustainable use of NWFP of plant origin in order to improve their legal framework governing the production and commercialization of these products.
- There is a need to enhance the technical and business capacities of stakeholders involved in the NWFP value chains and to share experiences.
- Technologies on production, harvesting, conservation and processing of NWFP needs to improved in an innovative way.

In the end, the participants acknowledged the importance of NWFP for the livelihoods of local communities and suggested to focus on their valorisation and conservation through domestication.