

non-wood

news

EDITORIAL

The editorial for this issue of Non-Wood News has been written by Dr Wulf Killmann, Director of the Forest Products and Industries Division.

From 3 to 5 June 2008, FAO, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), hosted in Rome an International High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy. For three days, over 4 700 people, among them 43 Heads of State or Government, discussed options and ways forward to overcome a major challenge for the years to come: global food security in times of changing climatic conditions.

Indeed, not since the 1970s have we seen rises in food prices like those of the last few years. The FAO Food Price Index rose by 8 percent in 2006 and by a further 24 percent in 2007. The index average for the first three months of 2008 was 53 percent higher than for the same period in 2007; the price of vegetable oils rose by 97 percent, grains by 87 percent, dairy products by 58 percent and rice by 46 percent. Sugar and meat prices also rose, but to a lesser extent. This rapid rise in food prices is affecting people in all countries, particularly in low-income and food-deficit countries, where it is raising the cost of food imports and exacerbating the balance of trade. The livelihoods of hundreds of millions of already-vulnerable, poor and hungry people in developing countries are further threatened. However, rising food costs are affecting consumers in wealthy countries as well.

About 850 million people of a world population of 6 billion still go to bed hungry. By 2050, the world population is expected to have increased to 9 billion people. During the same period, climate change and related extreme weather events will affect food production and infrastructure, and thus further challenge the attainment of food security.

What does this mean for forests?

The population increase and negative impacts of climate change will especially affect tropical countries. The resulting rising demand for food, water and energy is likely to put additional pressure on tropical forests. In some countries, the demand for wood fuels may increase. More forests may be converted for cultivation of agricultural crops or liquid biofuel crops, or for raising cattle. This will affect the water cycle, biodiversity and the carbon cycle. Already, 13 million ha of forests, roughly the area of Greece, are deforested annually, leading to greenhouse gas emissions in the order of 1.6 gigatonnes of carbon.

However, the food crisis also represents new opportunities for forests. Sustainably managed forests play an important role in contributing to food security, both directly and indirectly. Forests regulate the water cycle and protect



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Non-Wood News is open to contributions by readers. Contributions are welcomed in English, French and Spanish and may be edited to fit the appropriate size and focus of the bulletin.

If you have any material that could be included in the next issue of *Non-Wood News* for the benefit of other readers, kindly send it, before 31 October 2008, to:

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watersheds, and thereby also agricultural production in the lower catchments. They protect and conserve soils; give shelter for agricultural crops in agroforestry and mixed cropping systems; provide fodder for livestock and offer grazing in silvopastoral schemes; and conserve biodiversity that may provide gene banks for future crops. Forests supply employment and income for an estimated 1.2 billion people, thus allowing them to buy food. They also directly supply food and livelihoods for an estimated 450 million people worldwide.

Non-wood forest products play an important role in all this. They are a direct source of staple foods, essential nutrients such as proteins, carbohydrates, fats and vitamins, snacks and relishes, and they cater for a diverse and flavourful diet. They also play a very important role in health care, and in alleviating seasonal hunger, i.e. during dry spells and monsoons, or periods of high food prices.

Thus, the global food situation should be an incentive for us to take a closer look at the existing, as well as the as yet unrealized, opportunities that NWFPs provide for food security!



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Non-wood forest products (NWFPs) are goods of biological origin other than wood, derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forests. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs), another term frequently used to cover this vast array of animal and plant products, also includes small wood and fuelwood. However, these two terms are used synonymously throughout this bulletin. Other terms, such as “minor”, “secondary” or “speciality” forest products, are sometimes used to keep original names and/or titles.