

Title: Forests for nutrition and Food Security

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Script

It's early morning in the village of Esson in Central Cameroon and Patrice Mvezo'o is sharpening his machete before heading out hunting into the surrounding tropical forest.

The forests here in Central Africa are some of the richest in the world, home to a huge diversity of plant and animal life. Here, as in other forested regions, forests make a major contribution to food security.

Bush meat provides between 30 and 80 per cent of the protein intake of households. While the forests here are not as rich as they once were, they are still a critical source of protein, as well as income.

Today, there's a dead porcupine in one of his traps.

Patrice Mvezo'o

Bushmeat hunter

When I have more meat than we need for our own consumption, I am able to I sell it for some money and, with that money, I can afford to buy shoes and clothes when my clothes are torn.

Another popular source of protein is edible insects.

Here, in the village of Dzeng, it's the grasshopper season. Women are collecting grasshoppers from the surrounding forests to prepare a protein packed meal. Thanks to the forest the women have both the insects and the firewood needed to cook them. Among them, is Philomène Enama.

Philomène Enama

Village woman, Dzeng

Insects are good because, when we no longer have crops in our fields, they provide us with some sustenance as we can prepare the insects to eat. And also, we can sell them. So, they really provide for us.

The women here are also collecting edible *Gnetum* leaves from the forest and the trees on their farms. The leaves are an excellent source of vitamins. Some are eaten, while the rest are sold to wholesalers or directly at the local market.

More than 90% of the sellers of forest produce are women. They use their money for school fees, other staple foods and medicine. The role of women is very important since they are responsible for ensuring that there is food to feed the family.

Ousseynou Ndoye heads up a programme on forests and food security at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation in Cameroon.

Ousseynou Ndoye
FAO

Government and policymakers have, for a long time, overlooked the important contribution that forests and trees can make in order to improve food security and nutrition, and, now it is about time to do something, something must be done. For example, policymakers, and government, should improve access to forest resources especially to women. They also should promote small and medium sized forest-based enterprises by increasing their capacity and also access to financial resources. Also, they should be more sensitized to include forests and trees into their national poverty reduction and food security strategies.

The market for Cameroon's five most important non-timber forest products is worth some 34 million US dollars while, both directly and indirectly, it creates close to 300,000 jobs. While the government *does* have a national forest management plan in place, better enforcement of regulations is needed as well as a greater commitment to combat corruption to ensure the forest is sustainably managed and can continue to provide for local populations.

Vincent Ndangang is Senior Technical Advisor within Cameroon's Ministry of Forests.

Vincent Ndangang
Senior Technical Advisor, Cameroon's Ministry of Forests

We are getting quite a lot of pressure on timber forest products, on non wood forest products, from within Cameroon, from within Africa and from outside. At first we didn't have a lot of pressure from Asia but I would say that Asia is one of the biggest markets that we have now. And so to say that the pressure on resources is increasing, that's why we've got to stand up and manage our forests sustainably, otherwise in the near future we are losing everything.

Trees not only provide nutritious foods to more than a billion people around the world. They also benefit food security in indirect ways.

When trees grow, they absorb carbon dioxide - helping reduce climate change – that can put local food production at risk. Trees also prevent soil erosion and play a key role in the water cycle. A huge amount of water vapour evaporates from the forest, irrigating farmlands when it falls back down to earth as rain.

Forests also enable water to slowly filter into the ground, charging the water table and providing local communities with drinking water.

When forests start to disappear, the result is less water and fewer forest products.

Ngon André lives near the town of Bafia, Cameroon, where logging and slash and burn agriculture has led to deforestation and forest degradation.

Ngon André

Village elder, Bafia

Life before was much easier. Just behind the house you'd find fruits you could eat. My parents didn't have to walk far at all to catch rats, porcupines and to collect other forest foods that they would bring home for the family to eat. Now, life is more difficult and you have to walk a long way to get foods to eat from the forest.

Singing to his 18 grandchildren, Ngon Andre hopes that better management of forest resources will enable them to enjoy food security in the future.

With 870 million people in the world experiencing food insecurity and the commitment of the Millennium Development Goal of reducing hunger by half by 2015, the contribution made by forests and trees to food security and nutrition deserves urgent consideration.