

A right to food based approach to enhance the contribution of non-wood forest products to food security and nutrition



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## Key messages

- Too often underestimated and little known, there is a need to increase the dissemination of knowledge and information on the crucial role played by non-wood forest products (NWFPs) for the realization of the right to food, whether for access to food, income generation or income diversification.
- States need to ensure that their laws, policies and actions do not lead to violations of the right to food (obligation to respect), protect their citizens from violations committed by third parties (obligation to protect), and provide for concrete possibilities to enable people to feed themselves, either directly through the consumption of NWFPs, or from the revenue they can generate from NWFPs (obligation to fulfil).
- NWFP policies should have well-defined objectives, targets, benchmarks and time frames for their implementation that are known and understood by all stakeholders. One way to provide for informed policy decisions is to establish a clear and accessible NWFP information system, which would also enable stakeholders to hold decision-makers accountable.
- Emphasis must be placed on strengthening the capacities of forest-dependent communities on: gathering NWFPs sustainably; domestication and processing techniques; NWFP managerial and entrepreneurial skills; understanding the right to food and what it means for access to and the use of NWFPs; and what constitutes a violation of the right to food and the possibilities for claiming this right and holding the state accountable.
- All stakeholders, from forest-dependent communities to ministries, need to be actively involved in the drafting and implementation of NWFP policies. The establishment of transparent, inclusive and efficient platforms for the exchange of NWFP knowledge and experiences is one way to foster such involvement.
- There is a need to establish accessible claim and recourse mechanisms, whether administrative, political, judicial or quasi judicial, to allow even remote and marginalized communities to question decisions and to have access to justice and to remedy.

## INTRODUCTION

Originally mentioned in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the right to adequate food (hereinafter called the right to food) has been the subject of recent increased international attention. Whether as a main objective of consensual international documents, such as the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*, or as an aim reiterated by the United Nations Secretary-General in light of various initiatives, such as the Zero Hunger Challenge launched in the context of Rio+20, the right to food is gradually being established as a priority on the international agenda.

Despite this growing attention, when it comes to the practical realization of this human right, stakeholders at different levels are yet to fully perceive what the right to food means and how it could be put into practice, notably for policy design and programme implementation. This is true for stakeholders involved in the management of forest resources. Non-wood forest products (NWFPs) are crucial for the subsistence and income generation of forest-dependent people; for the latter, small-scale forest-based enterprises play a key role in commercialization. For a long time, the contribution of NWFPs to food security and nutrition has not been fully understood and therefore has often been underestimated. This has resulted in missing or inappropriate policies and strategies, as well as institutional obstacles to increasing the contribution of NWFPs to national economic growth and household food and nutrition security.

This paper illustrates – through descriptions, analyses, examples and practical recommendations for all stakeholders involved in policy-making – how a right to food based approach can be beneficial for the NWFP sector. It aims to equip policy-makers with human rights tools that will maximize the contribution of NWFPs to improved food security and nutrition and to the realization of the right to food for all.

The paper begins with conceptual clarifications of the right to food; the right to food based approach; and NWFPs. Then, recurring challenges encountered in practice by the NWFP sector are identified, and elements of a right to food based approach are proposed that would help turn those obstacles into opportunities. A case study is presented and an innovative tool, developed in Central Africa, is introduced. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for a right to food based approach in the NWFP sector.

### Conceptual background

#### Right to food

“The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.” (CESCR, 1999)

Generally understood as the right to feed oneself in dignity, the right to food has long been a part of the international legal order. First recognized in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, it became a binding right in the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*

(ICESCR), which has thus far been ratified by 160 states parties. Subsequently, several other international treaties were written guaranteeing the right to food of specific groups, such as women, children and persons with disabilities.

Aside from such international commitments, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provided a clear interpretation of the right to food, as guaranteed in the ICESCR, in its 1999 *General Comment No. 12*. In 2004, states also adopted, by consensus, the *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security* (hereafter referred to as the Right to Food Guidelines), which provide practical guidance on the implementation of the right to food in a wide range of policy areas.

Already done in a limited way a few decades ago, in the past few years there has been a surge in the number of countries that have included the right to food in their national constitutions or basic laws, through constitutional amendments or legal reforms. Moreover, in the last decade several countries have developed and implemented national laws, strategies, policies and programmes on the right to food, or with right to food components. FAO has developed several tools to assist countries in implementing legislative and policy frameworks aimed at the realization of the right to food as well as to incorporate this human right in the context of monitoring, assessment, budgeting and programming. A key example is the Right to Food Methodological Toolbox, which covers all the aforementioned areas (FAO, 2009b).

#### *A right to food based approach*

Although additional elements can be found in several publications, this paper focuses on three important elements of a right to food based approach for policy-makers – objective, principles and conceptual clarity.

**Right to food as a key policy objective.** The realization of the right to food requires a strong commitment by states and all its components. Policy-makers should address several elements to contribute to the achievement of such a goal. When a new forestry policy – in this case on NWFPs – is being developed, it is important to clearly and expressly write in the policy that the realization of the right to food is one of the main objectives to be achieved. This will help ensure that the various measures taken to use NWFP resources for improved food security and nutrition will collectively aim to contribute to the realization of the right to food, to eliminate contradictions and limit adverse effects. Moreover, policy-makers should also ensure that the right to food is appropriately defined in accordance with the internationally recognized and agreed-upon definition (FAO, 2009c).

**Principles.** Apart from stating the realization of the right to food as a main objective of a forestry policy, the right to food based approach emphasizes the need to consider and use the following seven human rights principles (known collectively as PANTHER): participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment, and the rule of law. These principles are needed not only to guide the policy development process – which extends from the moment that government entertains the idea of developing a new policy to the time the policy is finalized – but to guide the implementation process and the monitoring of it.

The use of such principles aims to increase the viability, sustainability and acceptance of the new policy. Each principle is further described below (FAO, 2009a; United Nations, 2011):

- *Participation* is inclusive and requires of government to actively encourage people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, to genuinely, freely and actively participate in decision-making.
  - How can the meaningful participation of NWFP-dependent communities and women be assured in the design, implementation and monitoring of the policy?
  - Are other stakeholders of the NWFP sector (e.g. ministries of agriculture, land tenure, environmental protection, economic development etc., civil-society organizations representing rights holders, and timber-exploiting companies) involved?
  - Is there a transparent, inclusive and efficient platform for the exchange of knowledge and experiences on NWFPs?
  
- *Accountability* refers to liability for the consequences of public decisions, actions and performances for those people most affected by them. It is also directly related to the human rights obligations of conduct and result.
  - Are there well-defined objectives, targets, benchmarks and time frames for the implementation of the policy?
  - Are responsibilities clear and human and financial resources available for the implementation of the policy?
  - Are responsibilities known and understood by the ministry in charge of forests and forest-dependent communities, NWFP traders and other stakeholders?
  
- *Non-discrimination* is the entitlement to all human rights without any kind of distinction, exclusion or restriction, as well as the recognition that certain conditions in society sometimes result in or maintain inequality, thus requiring governments to take temporary special measures to remove those conditions.
  - Are there special measures in the policy to remedy the effects of discrimination against more vulnerable and marginalized NWFP communities so as to achieve formal and substantive equality?
  - Is specific attention paid to gender equity, especially when it comes to capacity development activities?
  
- *Transparency* means that public documents, decisions, rules, regulations and processes are readily and freely accessible, complete and understandable, thus allowing rights holders and other actors to see openly into all activities of governments.
  - Are NWFP legal regulations and the NWFP policy disseminated in appropriate ways and understood by national and local stakeholders, including NWFP producers, processors and traders, law enforcement agents, local authorities and ministry representatives?
  
- *Human dignity* is the basis of all human rights and rests on the intrinsic value or worth of the human individual.
  - Does the NWFP policy emphasize the well-being and dignity of all human beings, especially the most marginalized and vulnerable, as its basis and overarching goal?

- *Empowerment* acknowledges and respects people's capacity to think and act freely for and on their own behalf to create solutions to address their own problems, control their own destinies and fulfil their potential while also building the capacity of people to engage in decision-making processes.
  - Are there clear provisions for activities or steps to be taken, such as education and awareness-raising measures, to empower forest-dependent communities (rights holders) on sustainable NWFP gathering, domestication and processing techniques; NWFP managerial and entrepreneurial capacities; their right to food and what it means for access to and the use of NWFPs; and what constitutes a violation of their right to food, as well as the possibilities to claim this right and hold the state accountable?
  
- *The rule of law* requires, among other things, that government provides appropriate remedies and effective redresses mechanisms, including appeals mechanisms, as well as efficient monitoring mechanisms, to ensure the impartial and just implementation of laws, rules and regulations.
  - Are claim and recourse mechanisms, whether administrative, political, judicial or quasi judicial, in place and easily accessible to allow even remote and marginalized communities to question decisions and to have access to justice and to remedy?
  - Are there clear and specific policy actions to combat informal NWFP taxes?

**Conceptual clarity.** A right to food based approach requires an overhaul of how governments approach hunger. The right to food based approach has acquired legitimacy through international law and its monitoring bodies and has the advantage of conceptual clarity; it thus offers policy-makers with clear guidance in solidifying the right to food in forestry policies for food security and nutrition.

The first element of such guidance of which policy-makers need to be aware is that their citizens are not beneficiaries or passive recipients of whatever policy they decide to develop but, rather, **rights holders** entitled to a panoply of **rights** with claiming power to be exercised through claim mechanisms, whether administrative, political, judicial or quasi judicial. Policy-makers should therefore also realize that the right to food is not a simple responsibility but an **obligation**, which **duty bearers** need to meet. Some elements of the guidance provided by a right to food based approach need to be met immediately, such as by refraining to adopt policies or laws that prevent or impede people from accessing the NWFPs they need to ensure their well-being. Other elements may be met progressively, such as facilitating access to markets to enable people to sell and buy NWFPs more efficiently (OHCHR, 2010).

Moreover, in light of international human rights law, the commitment by states to realize the right to food involves three types of obligations: respect; protect; and fulfil. The **obligation to respect** implies that a state will not affect negatively the right to food of its citizens, which could be done by ensuring that all its policies that directly or indirectly affect NWFPs will not make it more difficult for people depending on NWFPs to use or sell them. The **obligation to protect** implies that a state will ensure that no third party infringes on the right to food of its citizens, which could be achieved by ensuring that private entities will always be obliged to respect the rights of local communities if they want to

exploit forest resources. Finally, the **obligation to fulfil** requires actions by a state to *facilitate* access to food or to the means for its procurement, such as by developing the NWFP sector, and to *provide* food when other options have failed or are not possible (FAO, 2006).

### Non-wood forest products

NWFPs comprise a variety of natural resources that are easily accessed by vulnerable poor households, especially in remote rural areas, and therefore they play an important role in subsistence and as a source of income. NWFPs are used as foods, medicines, construction materials, tools and furniture, as well as in cultural traditions and for sale at the local, regional and international levels. FAO defines NWFPs as goods of biological origin other than wood, derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forests (FAO, 1999).

NWFPs contribute to the realization of the right to food in two ways: through their direct consumption in rural and urban households, adding proteins, fats, minerals and vitamins to staple food (**access to food**); and through the trade of NWFPs, which generates revenues that are used, among other things, to purchase food and medicine and to access health care, drinking water and sanitation facilities (**income generation**). While most producers and traders involved in NWFP value chains consider this business to be complementary to other sources of income, such as agricultural production (**income diversification**), NWFPs constitute the only source of income for some entrepreneurs. Moreover, during economic crises, when job opportunities in urban areas decline, NWFPs often serve as a **safety net** for urban dwellers who pursue income possibilities in forests (Tieguhong *et al.*, 2009). In rural areas, people increase the consumption and trade of NWFPs in agriculturally lean periods, such as just prior to harvest.

### **Key challenges and opportunities for a right to food based approach and NWFPs**

#### Inappropriate legal and regulatory frameworks

Legal constraints to the development of the NWFP sector occur mainly when legal and regulatory frameworks are not adapted to realities in the field. The user rights of local communities are often protected by law but limited to subsistence use, thus excluding the commercial use of NWFPs, even though local communities – especially indigenous people, women and children – regularly trade small quantities of these products. The revenues obtained from such use are mainly spent on food, health, clothing and schooling, or invested in other economic activities, such as agriculture, transport and housing.

Implementing the right to food requires a thorough assessment of existing relevant laws and regulations that will help remove such constraints and ensure they address root causes of hunger, thus contributing to the realization of the right to food. Forestry laws should be aligned with international obligations on the right to food. In Central Africa, for example, progress is being made in improving national forestry laws by aligning them with COMIFAC's *Sub-regional Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Non-wood Forest Products of Plant Origin in Central Africa* (see case study). Forestry laws should ensure that they do not lead to violations of the right to food by the

state itself (obligation to respect), or allow third parties to violate that right (obligation to protect). Forestry laws should also provide for concrete possibilities for people to feed themselves through the direct consumption of NWFPs and through the revenue they can generate from the sale of NWFPs (obligation to fulfil). A simple way to accommodate the right to food is to enlarge subsistence rights with rights to the limited commercial use of NWFPs – where the limitations may be quantitative or geographical (e.g. limited to the closest significant market).

#### *Informal taxes, illegitimate payments and corruption*

NWFP traders may face high transport costs because of a high number of roadblocks, which tend to be used by law enforcement agents to illegitimately obtain payments from traders. These costs are transferred to NWFP collectors by paying them lower prices and to consumers by charging them higher prices. Thus, this practice limits producers' revenues and consumers' purchasing power. Both legal and illegal traders are usually subject to these illegitimate payments.

Strengthening the rule of law and increasing transparency could help mitigate some of these impacts. It is imperative that producers and traders know their rights and obligations, as prescribed by forestry laws and other regulations pertinent to the business of NWFP harvesting, transport and sale, because this knowledge will allow them to better defend themselves against illegitimate payments. Moving away from a culture of negotiable rules and laws towards one that respects rules and laws, independent of status and influence, is a long but necessary process that will benefit from clear and accessible claims mechanisms. Suggestions to ease this process include setting appropriate salaries for law enforcement, the stricter application of disciplinary measures, and the establishment of an easy, accessible and efficient system that allows stakeholders to report on and investigate corruption (e.g. by telephone) and the taking of remedial actions.

#### *Inappropriate administrative rules for small-scale and medium-scale NWFP businesses*

Small and medium-sized gatherers, producers, traders and processors of NWFPs tend not to obtain legal entrepreneurial status or the necessary exploitation permits. This is because administrative rules and procedures are usually designed for large-scale (timber or NWFP) enterprises and therefore may be inappropriate for generally remote, less educated, uninformed and financially weak NWFP entrepreneurs.

Administrative procedures to obtain licences for small and medium-sized NWFP businesses should be transparent, easily accessible, understandable and inexpensive. Moreover, an emphasis on the principles of non-discrimination and participation will help ensure that target groups benefit from reforms to administrative procedures. Participation implies working jointly with marginalized and vulnerable entrepreneurs to ensure that such procedures yield better results. The principle of non-discrimination requires that vulnerable entrepreneurs are given the same opportunities as more powerful ones and may even benefit from special measures if there is a need to address an existing disadvantage.



### Imbalanced access to market information

Locally based economic NWFP activity has advantages such as less need for external inputs, the proximity of local markets, and easy access to resources, but local collectors and entrepreneurs are also at a disadvantage when it comes to negotiating prices with traders from nearby or distant urban centres. In fact, local entrepreneurs often have little access to market information, such as product prices at different stages of the value chain and current demand for a specific product. Therefore, they have to accept prices imposed by traders that might be unfairly low. Local entrepreneurs and communities with little means of transport must often rely on traders travelling from village to village.

Based on principles such as transparency, non-discrimination and empowerment, a more equitable and balanced access to market information for traders and producers can help mitigate such negative effects. One innovative approach that aims to increase transparency uses mobile phones, community radios and other communication means to link the demand side (traders) with the supply side (producers) to enable producers to know the real market prices of their products and create a competitive situation when negotiating with several traders. In this specific example, special measures, such as prioritizing access to information for specific groups, were needed to address a clear existing disadvantage. Empowering generally less-informed producers through capacity development on access to markets is another way to address imbalances.

### Missing national information systems for NWFP resources and trade

In contrast to their treatment of timber, Central African countries tend to ignore both the quantity of available and gathered NWFP resources and, more importantly, the traded quantities of key NWFP products. NWFPs cover a range of animal and plant species and are used in a large variety of products. Although gathered by local communities and entrepreneurs in a dispersed way in the region, huge quantities are sold in urban markets or exported. In addition, governmental agencies in charge of forests, trade and statistics focus their work at the central level, while deconcentrated services and decentralized administrations do not systematically collect data or sufficiently communicate available data to the centralized level. The fact that NWFP resources and trade are not monitored has at least two impacts: the existing resource base and its regeneration capacity are unknown, which results in NWFP exploitation quotas being allocated arbitrarily without considering ecological imperatives; and flows of NWFP trade are qualitatively but not quantitatively known, with the effect that the contribution of NWFPs to the national economy, through revenues and taxes, cannot be determined.

The principles of accountability and transparency mean that a government should be willing and able to explain and defend its decisions to its citizens. This is an essential component of a policy framework that aims to realize the right to food and the long-term conservation and sustainable use of forest resources. The establishment of a clear and accessible national NWFP information system may be difficult, but it is necessary to ensure that decision-makers have reliable and accurate information to guide transparent and well-founded decision-making and policy-design processes.

Such a system should be transparent and therefore easily accessible and understandable to NWFP stakeholders, enabling them to hold decision-makers accountable for their decisions.

#### Limited dissemination of existing NWFP knowledge

In Central Africa, for example, many experiences and practical tools are available for the sustainable harvesting, domestication and processing of NWFPs as well as for entrepreneurial development and value chain promotion. However, these experiences and tools are not widely disseminated or always adapted to specific socio-economic and geographic contexts. Government agencies do not always have access to existing tools and, if available, their financial and operational capacities are often insufficient to support NWFP users and entrepreneurs who live in remote areas. Given their ephemeral nature, development projects can play only a limited role in this regard.

Limited knowledge of NWFP stakeholders in combination with rural poverty and commercial pressure severely diminishes the contribution of the NWFP sector to the realization of the right to food, while leading to the depletion of NWFP resources. However, a right to food based approach serves to empower stakeholders and strengthen their capacities. As an alternative to business as usual, the development and implementation of national strategies and action plans, aligned with the PANTHER principles and the conceptual clarity of a right to food based approach, can play a central role in the development and strengthening of the NWFP sector. Moreover, the establishment of exchange and knowledge forums, with an intersectoral and multilevel approach, can help coordinate limited financial and operational resources while disseminating existing best practices. Research programmes need to be linked with extension activities so that research results can be implemented in the field. Large-scale extension programmes with long-term field agents (e.g. for NWFP domestication and processing) could draw on existing pilot experiences. In sum, the principle of transparency points to a more open handling of information and knowledge, which tend too often to be considered private by government agents and NGOs. Transparency needs to be scaled up.

#### **Case study: Sub regional NWFP guidelines orient and encourage Central African governments to improve their legal and institutional frameworks**

This case study focuses on Central Africa and shows that a subregional approach offers opportunities for harmonized policy and legislation design in a specific geographic and sectoral context. For the purpose of this paper, we consider the ten member countries of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) when using the term Central Africa: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

Most rural communities in Central Africa depend on subsistence agriculture and the use of forest resources for their survival, with NWFPs playing an important role as a source of food and income. NWFPs are often marketed and traded by small-scale enterprises, which mainly operate informally. Key NWFPs for consumption, and therefore also for trade, are the green leaves of *Gnetum* spp. (a liana), the oil-rich kernels of bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), the protein- and oil-rich nuts of the *Ricinodendron heudelotii* tree, several other nuts (e.g. *Garcinia kola*, *Cola acuminata* and *Cola nitida*),

the fatty safou fruits (*Dacryodes edulis*), honey, bushmeat, insects and mushrooms. There is also a wide variety of medicinal and pharmaceutical plants as well as rattan, bamboo and fuelwood.

Between 2006 and 2007, COMIFAC, with the support of FAO, analysed six national forest-related legal and regulatory frameworks through an NWFP lens. The analyses revealed that legislation was focused on the exploitation of timber for export and attributed insufficient importance to NWFPs, which were mostly referred to as secondary or accessory products. The findings of these analyses were discussed by decision-makers, politicians, scientists and development cooperation partners. Afterwards, an interdisciplinary working group developed a regional model law designed to assist COMIFAC member countries to improve NWFP aspects in their laws, policies and institutions. In 2008, the *Subregional Guidelines on the Sustainable Management of NWFPs of Plant Origin in Central Africa* were validated by all stakeholders and officially approved by COMIFAC's Ministerial Council.

COMIFAC's NWFP guidelines recommend, among other things: the extension of the subsistence user rights of local communities to allow limited commercial use; the use of simplified procedures for the delivery of exploitation permits; improved tax and trade regulations; and the carrying out of NWFP inventories for the sustainable allocation of exploitation quotas (Masuch *et al.*, 2011). The guidelines also emphasize the right to food: one of their main objectives is to ensure that all COMIFAC countries have policy, legal, fiscal and institutional frameworks that promote the significant contribution of NWFPs to the full realization of the right to food.

Since 2010 and with the support of FAO, the guidelines have been introduced progressively in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo and Gabon. Ministries in charge of forests have compared the provisions and arrangements of their policy, legal and institutional frameworks with COMIFAC's NWFP guidelines and FAO's Right to Food Guidelines. These comparisons have taken place independently or within general law review processes and resulted in the amendment of existing laws and the development of new laws. In the case of Central African Republic, Congo and Gabon, national intersectoral NWFP advisory groups have followed the processes closely and validated the suggested changes. Other COMIFAC countries envisage following similar approaches.

### **The toolbox: a new instrument to integrate the right to food based approach in the NWFP sector**

#### *What is it and how was it developed?*

The toolbox shows, in a practical way, how to adopt a right to food based approach to support the Central African NWFP sector. NWFP policy-makers and practitioners learn about the right to food and the NWFP sector's contribution to its realization, and how a right to food based approach can accelerate the economic development of the NWFP sector. Stakeholders learn how they can design their work and activities in order to strengthen the linkages between the right to food and NWFPs.

The toolbox incorporates COMIFAC's NWFP guidelines and broadens their reach to aspects of market development, capacity development and the design of a right to food policy. Despite its subregional character, the toolbox could serve as a policy document in other regions, given that many countries could reap similar benefits from the realization of the right to food through NWFPs. The process by which the document was developed provides additional guidance for other countries.

The toolbox is a subregional guiding instrument developed through a multistakeholder approach within the COMIFAC framework, which, over a period of three years, included training, awareness-raising and experience-sharing on the right to food at the national and subregional levels. The toolbox was approved by COMIFAC's Biodiversity Working Group (known by its French acronym GTBAC) in 2012, and activities are being planned to encourage the use of the toolbox at the national level.

#### *What are its objectives?*

The toolbox presents various tools to promote better governance in the Central African NWFP sector. It aims to contribute to the realization of the right to food through the economic and structural development of the NWFP sector and the sustainable management of its resources.

#### *Who is the target audience?*

The toolbox addresses states, citizens, grassroots and other civil-society organizations, private enterprises, technical and financial development partners and the international community. The idea is to provide stakeholders with a number of tools, from which each group can choose those that are most pertinent to its role and tasks. Stakeholders can adapt selected tools to their needs.

#### *How is it used?*

The toolbox introduces users to the right to food based approach and the NWFP sector. It analyses political, legal and institutional frameworks, NWFP value chains and markets, and the sustainable management of NWFPs from a right to food perspective. Based on this analysis, the toolbox formulates actions and suggests practical tools to increase the contribution of the NWFP sector to the realization of the right to food. Specific tools can be used for decision-making processes; the design of policies, strategies, projects and programmes; to set up appropriate policy, institutional and legal frameworks, including recourse mechanisms; awareness-raising, lobbying and capacity building among various stakeholders and target groups; the monitoring of state obligations; and the development of research and partnerships to promote the NWFP sector. The document pays special attention to addressing the vulnerability of women and indigenous people and to reducing their marginalization.

#### *Why is it an innovative policy instrument?*

The toolbox is based on the technical field experiences and research of governments, communities, grassroots organizations, civil-society development partners and research institutions. It was developed not as a theoretical desktop study but using a participatory multistakeholder approach, which included initial awareness-raising on the right to food based approach.

COMIFAC took the initiative to develop the toolbox and will oversee its implementation. With the help of the Right to Food Guidelines, the toolbox applies a right to food based approach to analyse the shortfalls and opportunities of the institutional, policy and legal frameworks governing the NWFP sector, its value chains and markets, as well as approaches to sustainable resource management.

The toolbox will be used during the implementation of a future NWFP project covering five COMIFAC countries. This approach makes use of the lessons learned in the implementation of COMIFAC's NWFP guidelines.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the following to put in place a right to food based approach to enhance the contribution of NWFPs to food security and nutrition:

- A recurring challenge is the lack of understanding and dissemination of such vital elements as the components of a right to food based approach, effective access to administrative and market information, and general knowledge about NWFPs. Governmental practitioners and development partners should **increase the amount and scope of innovative capacity development activities**, especially at the local level, addressed at the various stakeholders of the NWFP sector.
- Ministries in charge of NWFP should **create forums and platforms for the exchange of information and best practices** among NWFP stakeholders at various levels. Those stakeholders should include, among others, governments, research institutions, civil-society organizations, private enterprises, development partners and indigenous and local communities. Such forums and platforms will foster a better understanding of the actions needed to promote the NWFP sector and to enhance its contribution to the realization of the right to food.
- Government decision-makers and practitioners, development partners, forest enterprises and civil-society organizations should **widen their perspective of the technical NWFP sector** by involving social, political, economical and legal aspects and elements in order to better reflect the complexity of the sector. This approach will help to provide an enabling environment for duty-bearers to meet their commitments and for rights holders to realize their right to food.
- Decision-makers and development partners should **adapt the elements of a right to food based approach to their specific geographical context** to provide practical actions and tools adapted to specific needs. This approach will provide a clear and pragmatic orientation for practitioners on how they can contribute to the realization of the right to food.
- Policy-makers at all levels (national, subregional, regional and international) should **analyse the pitfalls of existing frameworks governing the NWFP sector and develop concise political, legal and institutional frameworks** to facilitate the realization of the right to food.

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