



Deutscher Tropentag, October 8-10, 2003, Göttingen

“Technological and Institutional Innovations
for Sustainable Rural Development”

High Altitude NTFP Sub-Sector in Nepal — Opportunities and Constraints for Livelihoods Improvements

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Abstract

Nepal with its peculiar convergence of topographic, climatic, and edaphic factors has high floral diversity as well as unique ecosystem diversity. High mountains of Nepal are home to a diverse range of high-value non-timber forest products (NTFPs). NTFPs of Nepal Himalaya are of critical importance to hundreds of thousands of rural people as sources of nutrition, health care, raw materials and cash income. It is further critical to the poor as they are the ones mostly involved in the collection of NTFPs.

NTFP sub-sector in Karnali has unique features. Transportation of NTFPs is solely based on airlifting by plane or helicopter to Nepalganj and then to India. Almost all the traded NTFPs are exported to India in raw form, while some value additions are being tried within the region in an attempt to obtain better prices. The lack of NTFP management and the increasing national and international market demand encouraging intensive harvesting are leading to a decrease in the diversity, quality and availability of the NTFPs. In turn, it affects seriously the plant biodiversity and local collectors, who depend heavily on NTFPs to meet their basic needs.

This paper identifies and analyses opportunities and challenges in the NTFP sub-sector in terms of political, economic, social and resource dimensions and suggests priorities for livelihoods improvement opportunities from the sustainable management and optimum use of NTFPs. It is based on authors' discussions with stakeholders at national and district levels, local government bodies, community forest user groups, field observations in Karnali zone of Mid-Western Nepal. This paper explains the opportunities and constraints in policy, regulations and practices; the NTFP resource base distribution and occurrence; utilisation pattern of NTFPs; collection and management practices of NTFP resources; processing, trade and market channels; and equity aspects NTFP sub-sector in Nepal and it concludes with the possible areas of leveraged interventions in the sub-sector.

Keywords: Community forestry, livelihoods, Nepal, non-timber forest products, stakeholder analysis