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Farmers’ Benefits in Different Value-chains of Non-timber Forest Products in China

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Abstract

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are critical to most rural livelihoods in developing countries. Therefore, commercialisation of NTFPs has been widely supported to achieve rural development and poverty reduction, as anticipated in the Millennium Development Goals. However, many initiatives have failed to fulfil these expectations. In fact, the benefits rural populations receive from selling NTFPs are often minimal compared to benefits received by other stakeholders in respective value-chains. Subsequently, alternative schemes, such as fair trade, social and organic certification, as well as, ecological and ethnical branding are currently promoted as the means to ensure that NTFP commercialisation makes a positive contribution to the livelihoods of the rural poor. Achieving fair benefits from NTFPs is particularly important in China, where the utilisation of NTFPs, i.e. mushrooms, herbal medicine, bamboo, vegetables and many more, has a long history and markets are well established. To date, China processes and trades more wild products than any other country, thus dominates world trade in NTFPs. Yet, the overlap between severe poverty provinces and provinces with abundant forest resources is still significant in China. In the framework of a German-Chinese research project between the World Agroforestry Centre in China (ICRAF-China) and Hohenheim University, the benefits of collecting and producing NTFPs within different value-chains are examined. In particular, the benefits for small-scale farmers connected to different NTFP value-chains will be evaluated to assess if the benefits of alternative schemes for NTFPs actually justify the participation of poor rural household in China. The study is conducted in North-Western and South-Western China, in two of the poorest provinces, i.e. Gansu and Yunnan, by applying socio-economic surveys in the study sites, a market survey and value-chain analyses of selected key NTFPs within the following two years.

Keywords: China, non-timber forest products, value-chains