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Sustainable Use of Non-timber Forest Products: Pathways Toward Balancing Poverty Reduction and Biodiversity Conservation Goals in Mountainous Southwest China

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Abstract

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) have been defined by the FAO as goods of biological origin other than wood, derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forests. NTFPs have attracted considerable interest in rural development initiatives in recent years due to their ability to support and improve rural livelihoods while contributing to environmental objectives, including biodiversity conservation. However, in spite of more than a decade of research and targeted development projects, systematic understanding of the role and potential of NTFPs in conservation and development remains weak. Among the many non-timber forest products that are being extracted by rural households from natural and planted forests in mountainous Southwest-China, mushrooms, medicinal plants, walnuts, pine nuts, wild vegetables, eucalyptus oil and honey play an important role in the household economy. Institutional arrangements aimed at the sustainable utilisation of NTFPs in communal forests only exists for a few more valuable products threatened by over-exploitation, such as the Matsutake mushroom.

Studies conducted at the Center for Mountain Ecosystem Studies (CMES), a joint Center of the Kunming Institute of Botany and the World Agroforestry Center point to important knowledge gaps that may lead to serious exploitation and unsustainable use of the natural resource "NTFP", such as: **(1)** lack of basic knowledge on germplasm and non-existing or incomplete inventory; **(2)** no institutional arrangements to ascertain sustainable extraction levels; **(3)** insufficient market transparency for communities' (in terms of quality, price, markets for NTFPs); **(4)** insufficient knowledge of NTFP domestication and little understanding of the effects of domestication on product quality and price and the conservation of wild sources; and **(5)** no existing research on the full length of the commodity chain for major non-timber forest products and the various actors in the chain.

This paper discusses in particular the potential of certification of NTFPs under organic, ecological and fairtrade schemes as a pathway toward balancing poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation goals in China's remote mountain regions.

Keywords: Commodity chain analysis, organic and fairtrade certification, Yunnan

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