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Global Importance of NTFPs: A Perspective over Time on Trade, Conservation and Socio-Economy

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Abstract

Almost every paper dealing with Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) emphasises their importance. But real value and importance are not assessed properly at a global scale. There are several reasons which hinder the proper evaluation and monitoring of the value of NTFPs in global context. The information bases is obscured by a highly diverse resource and mutually exclusive or multiple indifferent NTFP substitutes. Often information bases about local consumption and domestic commerce is poor. Additionally, foreign commerce statistics give only a biased view on values and importance. Value adding processes using NTFP resources may not be distinguishable within the trade data. Furthermore, their value is seldom sufficiently reflected over time with respect to their ecological functions and social uses. Additionally, effects of global market pressure battled over local markets may further imbalance importance and price of NTFPs.

This paper will underline the need of a global strategy to integrate a general NTFP production and management approach into conventional forest management systems. Therefore, the global significance of NTFPs and management perspectives are highlighted with respects to trade, conservation and enterprise development. For the sustainable management of NTFPs and global conservation issues, the careful assessment of trade, production and the adaption of a new NTFP importance index have to be included. Such an index tool will have a direct impact on future forest management decisions stratified from global level down to local situations. The improvement can be pictured through the support of decision makers aiming to sustain their forest planning and implementation approach in a balanced economic and social manner. At the end, it can be used as a tool for safeguarding NTFP resource base at global level as well as on subsistence level addressing some of the millennium development goals (MDGs).

This study is based on international trade data and significant case studies of selected NTFPs from different regions of the world. Additionally FAO/CG centres databases and national communication reports are used and complemented by expert interviews and discussions.

Keywords: Importance index, MDG, NTFP, resource assessment, sustainability