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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

The Distances Rural People Travel to Collect Forest Foods from Timber Trees in Cameroon

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Abstract

A quarter of the 169 million hectares of Congo Basin lowland dense forest have been allocated to logging concessions. Over 80 tree species are commercially felled for timber in Cameroon, and 1.2 m cubic meters of timber are consumed annually on informal domestic markets in Central African cities. However, 61 % of timber species in the Congo Basin also bear locally used non-timber forest products (NTFP). Amongst these are the fruits of *Baillonella toxisperma* and edible caterpillars hosted by *Entandrophragma cylindricum* and *Erythrophleum suaveolens*. A participatory inventory of these species was conducted around two villages adjacent to each of two logging concessions in Cameroon to map trees of these species from which local men and women gather food resources on one-day collection trips. The distance from villages to trees was measured to determine the spatial overlap between NTFP collection and logging concessions.

The distance between the villages and the trees varies by village, gender of the collector and the tree species, ranging 390 m-6.2 km, with 95 % of the trees located within a range of 5 km. Only 10 % of these trees fall within concession boundaries, but multi-day trips take place to collect these resources further within logging concessions, and the overlap of concession boundaries with a 5 km 'resource shed' ranges from 22 ha to 3777 ha, and could have an impact on the one-day collection distance. Although collection of these resources was generally not found to be a gender-specific activity, 10 % of the trees were collected from by men at 4.1–6.2 km and by women at a distance of under 3km as a result of the spatial spread of other gendered activities. Using a 2.8 km (average) collection radius from the village to represent a resource shed for 4111 mapped villages in the forests of Cameroon, an area of over 10 m ha of forest is required to safeguard forest-dependent livelihoods, and 495000 ha of this will overlap with logging concession boundaries. Currently under 2 m ha have been designated as community or communal forests, and this gap should be addressed using participatory mapping in order to improve forest resource access and tenure through stakeholder dialogue and local geospatial knowledge.

Keywords: Cameroon, collection distance, logging concessions, non-timber forest products, rural communities