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“Can agroecological farming feed the world?
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Extension and support services for utilisation of farmed and wild forest products: Experiences from Malawi

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Abstract

Empowering and encouraging farmers to grow trees and utilise farmed and wild forest products through extension and support services provides many diversified benefits for agroecological farming. The role of extension and support services to farmers to increase tree production in farming fields and to sustainably utilise farmed and wild forest products was investigated in a cross-sectional study targeting 373 smallholder households in 2017, in Lilongwe district which has diverse farming areas, from close to vast but dwindling forests to expansive farming fields having fewer trees. Multistage sampling was used to select the farmers from four ecological zones with a wide range of potentials and limitations for tree production and non-timber-forest-products.

Results showed that 72% of all farmers accessed extension services and 67% of all farmers grew trees in their fields. Approximately 41% of farmers grew fruit trees for home consumption while only 2% grew them for sale. Lower access to extension services reduced the number of farmers growing trees in their fields. Stakeholders’ support for input access was low, as 80% of farmers sourced seedlings through own collection, 33% allowed trees to either regenerate or left volunteer seedlings to grow, 3% bought the seedlings, 3% were given seedlings by friends, 1% got seedlings from Government or NGOs. Farmers reported that access to tree seedlings was a medium to severe problem.

Wild fruit collection was practised by 63% of farmers. Some of farmers reasons for eating wild fruits were “food diversification”, “fruits were locally found”, “no need to purchase”, “preference”, and “need to supplement food during lean season”. Wild vegetables were also collected and consumed by farmers, such as okra (64%), mushrooms (24%), and leafy vegetables (6%).

The study proved that tree and wild forest based agroecological farming can feed communities. Increasing extension access and support service provision can broaden the farmer access to farmed and wild forest products for food and potentially for sale of surpluses.

Keywords: Farmer preferences, tree seedlings provision, wild and farmed food