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## Contribution of NTFP certification to smallholder forest livelihoods: A case from Kyzyl-Unkur village in walnut-fruit forests in Kyrgyzstan

KLARA DZHAKYPBEKOVA<sup>1</sup>, DIETRICH DARR<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Germany*

<sup>2</sup>*Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences, Fac. of Life Sciences; Sustainable Food Systems Research Centre, Germany*

### Abstract

The walnut-fruit forests on the Ferghana and Chatkal mountain ranges in Kyrgyzstan are considered as a global biodiversity hotspot, they also have the soil-protection and water regulating functions, and are the major source of income to the local households. Collection of walnuts and other NTFPs in Kyrgyzstan constitute an important basis for the local livelihoods. Previous studies recommended that the logistical and infrastructural improvement of the existing value-chains in accordance with the international sustainability standards might positively change the socio-economic welfare of the local livelihoods, and promote sustainable forest management to reduce deforestation. The NGOs and donor programmes introduced the NTFP certification projects of the Fair Trade certification in 2008 and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) NTFP certification in 2018 within the selected pilot communities of the walnut forests in Kyrgyzstan both aiming to improve the socio-economic welfare, sustainable forest utilisation and conservation of the walnut forests. However there is a limited understanding about the possible effects and impacts of these certification programmes on the local livelihoods and the socio-ecological situation in the local forests.

It is important to analyse the current state of the existing NTFP certification cases along with their success or failure factors, as well as other important contextual conditions. 510 households' socio-economic data was collected within five communities of the Kyzyl-Unkur village, located in walnut-fruit forests in Kyrgyzstan. The data collection was performed among the households who participated in NTFP-certification schemes and those who did not take part in these activities. A comparative socio-economic analysis was done in order to understand the contribution of the existing NTFP-certification schemes to the local livelihoods. Along with that the stakeholder and social-network analysis was applied in order to analyse the patterns of involvement of the local households in the NTFP-certification activities. The provided research results are used to describe further challenges and opportunities for the future of NTFP certification schemes in the country.

**Keywords:** Forest certification, non-timber forest products