



AN OVERVIEW OF POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS IMPACTING THE USE OF NON TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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Abstract

This study describes an exploratory data gathering process aimed at constructing a rudimentary image of non timber forest products (NTFP) in national, regional and international policy processes. Primary data was collected through guided interviews and informal discussions. Respondents surveyed included various ministry officials and representatives of the private sector in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as well as knowledgeable experts on the subject matter. Secondary data was also collected through internet searches and document analysis. Policies affecting NTFPs in Central Africa are inferred across a wide range of forestry, financial, agricultural, cultural, pharmaceutical and commercial domains. For edible NTFP, food security, health, sanitary and phytosanitary policies are usually applicable. Other policies on sustainable development and environmental management also influence NTFPs directly and indirectly.

At the international level, policies affecting NTFPs are generally preoccupied with climates and ecosystem conditions, the conservation of endangered species and assurance of balance of trade between countries. These policies articulate around the Millennium Development Goals in which NTFPs could contribute to the realization of goals 1, 7 and 8. At the regional level, NTFP policies are oriented towards the better management of trans-boundary forest resources to ensure equitable and rational benefit sharing from forest resources between participating countries, protection of national territory and maintenance of peace within the sub region. These policies articulate around the Commission of Central Africa Forest (COMIFAC) initiative

Keywords: *action plan, collaboration, institutional framework, NTFP, policy framework*

Introduction

Non timber forest products (NTFP) play an important role in the lives of poor people living in forest communities. They also provide important

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alternative employment opportunities and revenues, sometimes occasionally, to rural people. These people obtain a considerable amount of food, revenue and medicine from the harvesting and sales of these products.(Clark & Sunderland, 2004; Ndam and Ewusi, 2000; Ndoye et al., 1998 and McLain, 2002). A study carried out by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) showed that in seven different markets situated in the humid forest zone of Cameroon, *Gnetum spp* (okok or eru) alone had an annual sale volume of 25,254 tons in 1998. This represented an annual monetary value of 971,874,000 FCFA (Awono et al, 2002).

The recent emergence of NTFPs in large-scale international trade is amongst the most important innovations in world forestry (FAO, 2005). Despite this, there is a wide gap in information on the full economic potential of NTFPs sourced from tropical forests and traded in international markets. Work by Toirambe (2002a), Duguma et al. (2001), Sunderland & Ndoye (2004) and Shanley et al. (2002) indicates that the available information regarding the economic value of tropical forests is incomplete and does not take into consideration micro and macro-economic data regarding NTFPs at national, regional and international levels, partly due to the lack of defined structures and institutions specialized in NTFP affairs.

In analysing the legal and statutory framework impacting NTFPs in Central African countries, Bonannee et al. (2007) noted that the phrase NTFP is not found in any forestry codes in Central Africa. NTFPs are given a variety of appellations depending on the country and context. The small and scattered nature of the products and the presence of multiple users with different interests makes their exchange flow complicated to assess (Shanley et al. 2002; Sunderland et al. 1999). However, other authors like Tabuna (2000) and Awono et al. (2002) have documented the existence of an important flow of products like *Gnetum and Irvingia spp* between West and Central African countries, Europe, America and the United Kingdom. This trade takes place through a variety of uncoordinated institutions who do not generally have either qualitative or quantitative information regarding NTFP trade flows or policy options at all scales. In addition, actions to address these gaps or explicitly integrate this sector within national, regional and international policy frameworks and planning processes are limited in scope and scale, as well as uncoordinated.

Though some efforts to address these shortcomings are underway, there is a need to ask questions such as, what are the policy options available at the national, region and international levels for NTFPs? Who are the different actors? What loop holes are there in these efforts and how could they be made better? The answer to these questions could strengthen the contribution of NTFPs to forest resource management, poverty reduction and sustainable development. This paper sets out to shed light on the way NTFP-related

matters have been handled up to present in Central Africa by analysing the existing policy and institutional structures governing NTFP trade flows, with Cameroon and DRC serving as case studies.

This exploratory study seeks to construct a rudimentary picture of the national and regional policies affecting edible NTFPs harvested in both forest and agroforestry systems and the key elements of existing institutional frameworks (i.e., ministries, departments, autonomous organizations, civil society organizations etc.). Our specific objectives are to:

1. Analyze the major national, regional and international policies affecting NTFPs and illustrate the extent to which NTFPs are explicitly addressed in these policies.
2. Analyse the institutional structures such as ministries, autonomous organizations, civil society organisations, etc. influencing the development and implementation of policies pertaining to NTFPs

Method

Data Collection

Data was collected through desk-reviews, an internet search and guided discussions with experts and authorities in Cameroon and DRC using an institutional analysis framework to synthesize the information gathered. This approach was used by McLain (2002) and Brown et al. (2007) in their research on NTFP policy. For this study, all the government agencies, autonomous institutions, and civil organizations with activities relating to NTFPs, agroforestry and food security directly or indirectly were identified as targets for field visits. During each session with an expert, efforts were made to ask questions relating to all the other institutions to assess the degree of collaboration between them. The purpose of these questions was primarily to verify the relationship of the targeted institution with other institutions active in the NTFP sector and secondarily to get information on the activities of these institutions. Though some of these institutions and their activities were represented at different administrative levels, emphasis was placed at the ministerial level because this is where most policies were being formulated and implementation strategies developed.

Documents consulted were obtained from private libraries and those of institutions like CIFOR, International Center for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), IRAD and FAO, the ministries of forestry and agriculture, and from experts in Cameroon and DRC. Libraries visited and documents consulted were chosen based on their content *vis à vis* NTFP policy. The decrees creating most of the ministries visited were consulted to understand the organization and missions of the various departments, their activities and how they could be useful to our work. Other decrees relating to NTFPs and forestry codes in Cameroon and DRC were also consulted together with the Poverty Reduction

Strategy Paper (PRSP) of both countries for further information. Finally, some private libraries were also accessed.

Administrative visits were carried out with four main objectives. First, to discuss the ideas of the project with the authorities concerned, and to find out if they were familiar with NTFPS or if they had any NTFP related activities. Second, to assess the level of their institutional involvement in and collaboration with other institutions on NTFP based activities. Third, to identify the areas of future collaboration on NTFP based activities with other institutions as well as the specific focus areas for such collaboration. And finally to verify information we gathered from past records, internet searches and the desk review.

Data analysis and Presentation of Results

Knowledge and inspiration was drawn from Kowero et al. (2003), McLain (2002) and Peach Brown (2005) in the analysis and presentation of results. Due to the high degree of diversity in responses obtained during the field work, a narrative analysis was used to present results. Broadly speaking, NTFP affairs are integrated to some extent, often implicitly rather than explicitly, in almost all ministries. However, in our analysis, we considered only the most significant ministries. As well, the names of the ministries in Central Africa states are frequently modified during each change of government and at other times when ministries and their departments are reorganized. As a result, the names of the ministries may vary.

Overview of NTFPs in Different Protocols, Accords and International Conventions

Generally forest resources, and particularly NTFPs, encompass global interests. For example, the forest of the Congo Basin greatly influences the world's climate regimes. This creates a demand for international organizations to be positively involved in the sustainable management of these resources. Though NTFPs are not explicitly integrated in most international conventions and/or protocols, their management is considered by most governments and locally based international organizations. These entities include structures like COMIFAC for the Central African subregion and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), at the regional level for Africa. The following sections present the main elements of some of these conventions, with emphasis on describing how NTFPs are addressed or could be further associated with them.

1. *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES)* (Rey & Hermeline 1999)

Given the widening world commercial arena and the changes that are going on in global trade flows, the trade in fauna and flora cannot be left out. As many of these products are traded across national frontiers, the regulations associated with the trade in such products necessitate strong international co-operation to preserve some species from over or illegal exploitation. CITES has a goal to act as a watchdog in ensuring that international trade in animal specimens and wild plant species threatened by extinction is controlled. In Central Africa, CITES is already being applied to NTFPs like *Prunus Africana* and the African Gray Parrot.⁴

2. *UNESCO Convention on Cultural and Natural Goods - World Heritage* (Mechtilf & Galia 2000; Kabala, Bedel & Njine 1992)

This convention acknowledges that cultural diversity constitutes a common heritage for humanity and that the protection and promotion of the cultural diversity implies treating all cultures as equal and deserving dignity and respect. Furthermore, cultural activities, goods and services have a dual nature in that they are often both economic and cultural simultaneously. Consequently, they should not be treated as if they possessed only commercial values. To attain this goal, the convention reaffirms the sovereign right of states to conserve, adopt and put in place policies and measures judged appropriate to enhance the protection and promotion of the cultural diversity on their territory. In Cameroon and DRC, NTFPs are often important elements of cultural identities as well as important sources of revenue. For example, a majority of traditional dishes are prepared from NTFPs and kola nuts are used in traditional ceremonies in most Central African countries. Such examples among others illustrate why governments implementing this convention should consider NTFPs in elaborating their action plans.

3. *The Millennium Development Goals* (Bigg 2005; Cameroon PRSP 2003; Tapani & Mersmann, 2003)

Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) were a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions⁵ on the 8th of September 2000. NTFPs could be considered as integral to the achievement of these goals at many levels. First, regarding food security and income generation for forest-adjacent populations, studies have shown that NTFPs play an important role and could reduce the number of people living on less than \$1 per day. NTFPs serve as basic food stuffs, snacks and condiments. Hence NTFP development has the potential to reduce hunger

⁴ http://www.iucn.org/news_homepage/events/cities/

⁵ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

among a large number of people, especially those living in forest-adjacent zones. This would contribute to the realization of Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals.

Goal 7 has as one of its objectives to ensure sustainable management of environmental resources by integrating sustainable development principles into national policies and avoiding the waste of environmental resources. NTFPs are exploited by actors with little understanding of sustainable resource management to a greater extent. They have little control over how environmental resources are used (for example, governments may issue timber concessions on lands that are valuable for NTFPs). They usually lack economic and political control which means that training has to be accompanied with mechanisms to enhance the political and economic capacity of people exploiting and using NTFPs to negotiate forestry programs more equitably.

Given that forest resources and NTFPs are often common properties shared across various national territories, their management require transnational collaboration. This responds to the achievement of part of Goal 8. Since NTFPs provide employment options for rural and urban poor and help to reduce unemployment rates in most nations, they further contribute to the realization of this goal.

4. Action Plan for the Environment Initiative of NEPAD (UNEP, AMCEN & GEF 2003)

The NEPAD initiative offers an appropriate framework between Africa and her global partners for the protection of the environment. This initiative's second domain of intervention emphasizes the conservation of humid zones in Africa. Such efforts can only be successful by integrating NTFPs into these plans. NEPAD's 3rd intervention domain has to do with the prevention and control of invasive high value species like *Gnetum*, *Prunus* and many others. The initiative's 5th intervention domain has as its goal successfully addressing climatic changes in Africa. This is complemented by the 6th domain of intervention which is centred on the conservation and transfrontier management of natural products (fresh water, biodiversity, forest and genetic vegetal resources). A comprehensive approach to forest resource management requires taking into consideration NTFPs. This domain of intervention provides answers the transversal question on poverty and the environment. NTFPs remain key elements in efforts to fight poverty in most forest communities.

5. *Convention on Biological Diversity* (Glowka, Burhenne-Guilmin & Synge 1994; Rey & Hermeline, 1999)

The Convention on Biological Diversity assures not only the protection of different species, but also that of ecosystems and genetic heritages. It also integrates the sustainable use of natural resources. Here, the conservation of biodiversity is a communal preoccupation to humanity acting as an integral part in sustainable social and economic development.⁶ Given the relationship between forests, biodiversity conservation and their contribution to improvements in the socio-economic well-being of forest populations, NTFPs occupy a crucial position in this convention.

6. *The Kyoto Protocol and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* (PNUE/IUC 1992; Rey & Hermeline, 1999)

Climate change is influenced by a number of human activities ranging from slash and burn agriculture to timber harvesting to urbanisation. According to FAO (2007), the estimated forest area for Africa in 2005 was 635 million hectares. Net annual forest loss was about 4 million hectares for the period of 2000 – 2005 amounting to 55percent of the global reduction in forest area. In Central Africa, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo account for 65% of the loss. Many strategies have been put in place to reduce the rate of deforestation and encourage the conversion of non-forest land to forested areas. Such efforts include awareness campaigns and reforestation through tree plantations.

7. *World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)*

The Johannesburg Summit recommends a series of measures to reduce poverty and protect the environment.⁷ These measures apply to many activity domains, particularly water, health, energy and the action plan elaborated in Agenda 21 of the Johannesburg plan of implementation. In establishing the yearly work programs of the commission on sustainable development, NTFP development could be inserted as a critical element for accomplishing the 2012/2013 multi-year programs relative to forest, biodiversity, and tourism.⁸

8. *World Trade Organization (WTO)* (Mangeni 2003)

The WTO is in charge of regulating the trade policies and practices of member states and their products (<http://www.wto.org/>). For NTFPs to be appropriately commercialized and fully integrated into world commerce, actions need to be taken to define more clearly NTFP status in trade matters. This could be done through the establishment of codes and standards,

⁶ <http://bch-cbd.naturalsciences.be/belgium/convention/convention.htm>

⁷ http://www.un.org/jsummit/html/documents/summit_docs.html

⁸ http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_multyearprogwork.shtml

including sanitary and phytosanitary codes and standards, with respect to international trade in NTFPs. Developing these standards will promote the marketing of NTFPs products. This will further encourage NTFP harvesters to engage more extensively in NTFPs certification schemes in order to guarantee more durable markets for their products (Mbolo 2006).

9. *International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO)* (ITTO 2005)

Within the different sustainable forest management programs in wood producing countries, the ITTO objectives can influence decisions in the NTFP domain. These objectives permit ITTO to establish a knowledge base for financing research and development issues on these products. As the case with many international programs interventions, paying more attention to NTFPs could give greater impetus to wood products. For example, criterion 2.5 notes that with Forest Management Units, NTFPs are to be harvested on a sustainable basis in consultation with relevant stakeholders. However, most central Africa countries lack appropriate frameworks and resources for collecting data on most of the indicators and sub-indicators.

10. *Certification*

There exist a diversity certification systems regarding forest management. At the moment in Central Africa, mostly the FSC and the Keurhout ISO 14001 certification systems are being proposed (Mbolo 2006). Regarding NTFPs, their certification is still at the embryonic stage, particularly in Africa. For example, according to the Pan African Forest Certification (PAFC) program, NTFPs amenable to being studied for certification include the following: *Gnetum* leaves, marrantancee leaves, *Prunus* bark and seeds of *Irovingia spp.* The main constraints to NTFP certification include limited scientific understanding of the NTFP resource base, lack of knowledge about production cycles, inappropriate definition of the types and norms of certification and limited markets for certified NTFPs (Mbolo, 2006).

11. *Summary of International Initiatives*

Countries ratify many international conventions (Table 1), meaning that they agree to the terms of these conventions. Since few of these conventions, as shown above, directly address NTFPs, the likelihood that NTFPs will be adequately addressed when implementing their provisions at the level of nation-states is low.

Table 1: Ratified International Conventions by Selected Countries In Central Africa.

Country	CBD	UNFCCC	The Kyoto Protocol	CCD	CITES	COMIFAC
Cameroon	√√	√√	√√	√√	√√	√√
Central African Republic	√√	√√	X	√√	√√	√√
Congo	√√	√√	X	√√	√√	√√
DRC	√√	√√	X	√√	√√	√√
Equatorial Guinea	√√	√√	√√	√√	√√	√√
Gabon	√√	√√	X	√√	√√	√√

Legend: √√ - Ratified; X- Not ratified

Source: Conceived by the author based on data obtained from FAO, 2005

NTFP activities are spread across a wide range of institutions which are difficult to systematically identify. This implies that an in-depth evaluation of their national and regional programs is needed in order to determine how to incorporate NTFP issues within the frameworks of international conventions. Research has shown that NTFP considerations are indispensable to successful implementation of most policies at all levels (Laird et al, 2010). Reinforcing NTFP activities as part of the strategic objectives in these conventions is crucial.

NTFPs *vis a vis* Regional Policies and Policy Processes in Central Africa

Sound management of NTFPs and an equitable distribution of their benefits from the harvest through marketing stages, will significantly enhance local economies and reduce poverty levels of the local populations. However, the trans-border nature of the forest landscape in Central Africa challenges efforts to achieve sustainable management and conservation at the regional level. This is the main reason why, in 1999 at a Central African Heads of State Summit held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, leaders of Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Republic of Congo signed the Yaoundé Declaration (COMIFAC, 2005a), with the Democratic Republic of Congo signing later. This Declaration was put into action through the creation of a regional body, the Commission of Central African Forests (COMIFAC) - Africa's first regional accord for forest conservation. In this same vein, different governments and research institutions have sought to put in place common action plans in almost all the domains involved in forest management. Such initiatives reinforce the management of NTFPs in various

ways. The sections below analyze some regional initiatives and their impact on NTFPs in Central Africa.

1. Commission of Central African Forests (COMIFAC) (COMIFAC 2005a)

COMIFAC has developed a convergence plan (CP) (COMIFAC 2005b) that lays out the different sub-regional strategies for the sustainable management and development of the forestry sector. The implications of the different strategic axes of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan on NTFPs are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: The expected outcome of the convergence plan of COMIFAC on NTFPs.

Plan	Strategic Axis	Expected Results	Implications for NTFPs
1. Harmonization of forestry and fiscal policies	1. Putting in place international accords and conventions; 2. Ensuring coherence in forestry policies ; 3. Harmonization of the tax system	Essential international conventions on forests and biodiversity are ratified by member countries; Each member country has in place a sectorial program on the development of forests, integrating fully the orientations and strategies of the sub regional convergence plan; The directives and common criteria in the domain of sustainable management of forests are regularly applied by member states; The different taxation systems are harmonized and compatible with the exigencies of sustainable forest management; Valorisation of forest fields serving as economic pools for development in less developed countries; A sub regional strategy to control taxes, circulation of forest products and anti-logging activities; Strive to establish an action plan.	The place of NTFPs in international conventions is recognized and respected; The development of NTFPs as the case with other forest products is reinforced; Different pathways to NTFPs management are identified; Better tax systems for NTFPs are tested and adopted; NTFPs from the natural forest will have high recognisance and therefore value The contribution of NTFPs to local and national economies are known and recognized; Strategies for the domestication of NTFPs and wild animals are developed and implemented.

<p>2. Knowledge about the resources</p>	<p>1. Inventories of forest resources: wood, NTFPs, fauna, flora and other medicinal plants. 2. Reinforcement and/or putting in place national and regional observatories. 3. Installation of spatial geographic instruments to monitor and track forest resources.</p>	<p>Forest resource (fauna, flora and NTFPs) inventories are completed and achieved; A geospatial monitoring and tracking system is created and implemented;</p>	<p>NTFPs of the sub region are known; Different NTFPs are identified for better monitoring and management.</p>
<p>3. Ecosystem management and the replanting of trees in forests</p>	<p>1. Organization of the forest area; 2. Management of a sample of forest plots and protected areas; 3. Regeneration and reforestation; 4. Fight against desertification.</p>	<p>A solid organization plan encompassing primarily the permanent forestry domain; The permanent forestry domain, particularly sample forest plots and protected areas are managed; Reforestation assures the restoration of degraded soils, an increase in the surface area of forests, and an increase in the production of woody products (i.e., wood for energy and other purposes); Forest activities contribute to the fight against desertification.</p>	<p>The production capacity of NTFPs on a wide range of territories and ecosystems could be easily studied.</p>
<p>4. Sustainable valorisation durable of forest resources</p>	<p>1. Economic valorisation of wood, fauna, NTFPs and tourism product chain; 2. Follow up and control of the management and uses of resources; 3. Forest</p>	<p>The development of socio-economic activities generated from the sustainable management of forests helps create new employment opportunities and thus contributes toward the fight against poverty; Partnerships and</p>	<p>A high value is placed on NTFPs</p>

	certification and the plotting out; 4. Fight against the un wanted exploitation of forests and poaching.	agreements in forestry regulation and monitoring of the use of different resources are established and functional; The fauna product chain and - faunal resources contribute to economic growth; The flora product chain and flora and phyto-genetic resources are managed so as to contribute to the economic development of forest adjacent populations.	
5. Reinforcement of capacities, participation of actors, Information and training.	1. Participation of actors and organisation of partnership fora 2. Involvement of forest dwelling populations; 3. Communication/i nformation/sensitization ; 4. Academic, professional and on-the-job training.	The institutions in charge of training operate in a networking system and provide support for student internships within the Congo Basin; Institutions within the sub region assure the training of professionals in different specialties necessary for forest development as identified through recently harmonized programs.	Internship work on NTFP studies is encouraged. NTFP curricula are included in school programs.
6. Research and development.	1. Forestry research programs; 2. Recognition of the value of traditional knowledge;	An applied research program taking into consideration the assemblage of preoccupations relative to the sustainable management of forest is operational in the sub region. A computerized network to manage information is operational in each country and centralized at the level of the sub observation base in COMIFAC.	Research on the importance of/ value of traditional knowledge, transformation and uses of NTFPs are reinforced.
7. Development of financial mechanisms.	1. National Forestry Fund. 2. Debt reduction	The installation of a fiscal tax system in different countries within the sub	A fiscal tax system is developed and monitored as a

	mechanisms of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative; 3. Bilateral and multilateral financing.	region on the definite conversion of forest land, to help increase the sub regional funding for reforestation efforts in areas with low vegetation cover.	mechanism for developing the NTFP sector.
8. Cooperation and partnership.	1. Sub regional cooperation and partnership development.	Conventions and partnership agreements between the different parties involved in the enhancing the value of resources are established and made operational.	A network for the enhancing the value of NTFPs is established with the objective of monitoring the extent to which NTFPs are included in the processes leading to the development of national, regional and international action plans.

2. The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP)

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), established in September 2002⁹ at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, is a structure that brings together some thirty governmental and non-governmental organizations. The goal of CBFP is to improve communication between members and coordination among their projects, programs and policies. This will enhance the sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests and improve the standard of living of the regional inhabitants of the region. Its activities are being facilitated by various member countries.

Since governmental and non governmental organizations are involved in the structure, this means that its institutional capacity to influence NTFPs even at the local level is already strong. However, there is a need to define more clearly the role of NTFPs in its priority areas.

3. Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG)

The AFLEG process is part of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and is intended to strengthen international and multi-stakeholder commitment. The objectives of the AFLEG process are to confirm the will and commitment of producer and consumer country governments and other stakeholders to Forest Law Enforcement/Governance (FLEG),

⁹ <http://www.pfbc-cbfp.org/home.html>

address the need for shared responsibility and or cooperation between stakeholders, and develop a program of action.¹⁰ The AFLEG process aims to strengthen high-level commitment in Africa to build capacity for forest law enforcement, in particular relating to illegal logging and hunting, associated trade and corruption.¹¹ In May 2002, the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC) at its 32nd session adopted a decision on forest law enforcement in Africa, which calls for data collection on forests in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of Congo, in order to improve forest concession management and ensure conservation in protected areas. In the elaboration and execution of most AFLEG-FLEG processes, NTFPs are left out.¹² This may be one of the sources in the weaknesses observed on the national and regional legal and statutory framework on NTFPs. This weakens the implementation of the national forestry law in most Central Africa States. Hence underscoring NTFP law enforcement through the AFLEG process will help fill in some of the gaps observed in the forestry law in most States.

4. The Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) (Bigg & Satterthwaite 2005; Tapani & Mersmann, 2003)

The World Bank and IMF's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative was launched in 1996. At that time, it was a radical departure from previous approaches to "debt relief" for the poorest countries. The HIPC initiative is aimed at cancelling the debts of 44 countries, among which 33 are found in Africa.¹³ A Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper identified key obstacles to foster growth and poverty reduction, specified realistic and monitorable goals, and set out the macroeconomic, structural and social policies the country intends to adopt to meet those goals. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was elaborated in the DRC in 2002 and in Cameroon in 2003.

The PRSP in Cameroon and in the DRC did not make specific mention of NTFPs, but made allusion to agriculture and forestry, and the fact that people living around forest margins fell amongst the poorest segments of the population. Private investments planned in these sectors should focused more on these population segments. Results from studies like Ruiz et al. (2000), Peach Brown (2005); Ndoye & Awono (2005), Mathurin et al. (2002); Malaisse (1997) and Toirambe (2002b), suggest that NTFPs are major sources of

¹⁰ <http://www.iisd.ca/sd/sdyao/sdvol60num7e.html>

¹¹ <http://www.iisd.ca/sd/sdyao/sdvol60num3e.html>

¹² <http://www.iisd.ca/sd/sdyao/sdvol60num7e.html>

¹³ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/intdebtdept/progressreports/21656521/hipcprogressreport20070927.pdf>

nutrition, employment and revenue to forest people in Cameroon and DRC. Hence, in trying to improve the living conditions of forest-adjacent populations, it is imperative to take into consideration mechanisms to develop the NTFP sector. Tapani et Mersmann (2003) and the World Bank (2001) made similar analyses and suggestions for forest products management and development as engines for the fight against poverty in forest-adjacent zones.

5. Conference on Central African Moist Forest Ecosystems (CEFDHAC) Networks (CEFDHAC 2004; COMIFAC & CEFDHAC 2010).

Other regional initiatives strategic for NTFP development include the Conference on Central African Moist Forest Ecosystems (CEFDHAC). It brings together law-making actors through the network of parliamentarians on the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa (*Le réseau des parlementaires sur la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers d'Afrique Centrale* (REPAR-CEFDHAC); the views of the resource users themselves through the Network of Autochthones and Local Population for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (*Le réseau des Populations Autochtones et locales pour la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers d'Afrique Centrale* - REPALEAC); policy actors through the Network of the Directors of Forestry in Central Africa (*Le Réseau des Directeurs de Forêts d'Afrique Centrale* - REDIFAC); and lastly the African Network for Forestry Action (*Le Réseau Africain d'Action Forestière* - RAAF).

Given that youth and children are often involved in forestry issues, the Youth Network (*Réseau des Jeunes*) was also created. For the purposes of training, all training institutions were brought together under the banner of the Network of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions in Central Africa (*Réseau des Institutions de Formation forestière et Environnementale en Afrique Centrale* - RIFFEAC). Finally, to address gender and women's concerns, The Network of African Women for Sustainable Development ('*Réseau des femmes africaines pour le développement durable*' (REFFAD)) was put in place.

Although REDIFAC, REPAR-CEFDHAC, RAAF and RIFFEAC look globally into forestry issues, REFFAD and REPALEAC always emphasize NTFPs and associated problems in their actions.

6. Conclusion on Regional Processes

Coordinating many actors is difficult and complex. A code of ethics to guide researchers and field actors need to be designed. Real action needs to be stimulated on economic schemes and the commercialization of NTFP at the sub-regional level. The policy resolution on the exploitation and commercialisation of NTFPs by SNV and the sub regional guidance on the

sustainable management of NTFPs in Central Africa by FAO 2008 could be used as starting points on such endeavours.

Institutional Frameworks Impacting on NTFPs

The exploitation and management of NTFPs necessitates the involvement of a number of institutions to cope with the diverse array of products that must be considered. At the international and regional levels, these are mainly decision making and policy structures with some implementation structures at specific sites. Many of these institutions are found at the national level, including government agencies (ministries), civil society organizations, community based organizations and national NGOs. Because these institutions are so numerous, the ministries concerned have been summarised in Box 1 together with their domains of intervention.

Box 1: Key roles of national Ministries on NTFP affairs

National Ministry	Domain of intervention with effects on NTFPs
Ministry of Forestry	Norms and regulations on forest resources (NTFPs included)
Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs	Gender issues
Ministry of Animal Husbandry	Grazing land and animal domestication norms
Ministry of Research	Research modalities
Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Higher Education	Training on NTFPS and teaching curricula
Ministry of Health	Consumption, health and pharmaceutical policies for medicinal plants
Ministry of Defense	Law enforcement and the maintenance of peace
Ministry of Agriculture	Agricultural standards and Values
Ministry of Small and Medium Size Enterprises	Enterprise development
Ministry of Commerce	For commercialization norms
Ministry of Culture and Tourism	For national patrimony and cultural heritage
Ministry of Finance	Taxation policy and payment of taxes
Ministry of Transport	Transportation norms
Ministry of Environment	Environmental policies

Source: Content analysis of the decrees creating these ministries and their various ministerial departments

These key roles of ministries in NTFPs affairs are also mentioned in Laird et al. (2010), indicating that their activities overlap and are linked to many international and regional structures. In some cases, these initiatives designate a focal point within the ministries. For instance, the Ministry of Forestry in both Cameroon and DRC are focal points for COMIFAC and ITTO, but these focal points need to be empowered to also take into consideration the field realities associated with NTFPs. Most ministries (research, environment, health, education, agriculture) in exercising their duties on poverty reduction, environmental protection and sustainable development neglect to address NTFP issues.

Activities on NTFPs were conducted mainly through the Ministry of Forestry and the other ministries were unsure of their involvement with NTFPs. This again confirms the uncoordinated and ad-hoc nature of the approaches the Central African countries are taking to addressing NTFPs. In addition, most of the ministries were not aware of the provisions of the forestry law, the policy manuals, or major policy instruments on NTFPs, indicating a gap in communication between different ministries and within the same ministerial departments. For instance, the wildlife and NTFP departments within the Cameroon Ministry of forestry fall under two separate sub departments with different coordination schemes. One of these schemes; (NTFPs with medicinal values) or medicinal plants is under the exclusive supervision of the Public Health Ministry and the Ministry of Forestry exercises different functions. This complex and bureaucratic coordination and monitoring system greatly impacts the resource base and the marketing intermediaries as well inhibiting their overall contribution to development.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the range of institutions that might influence policy options for NTFP activities at the international, regional and national levels in Central Africa, outlining how each institution is integrating or could integrate NTFPs in its respective action plan. Furthermore, it has shown how the diverse nature of NTFPs makes it difficult for the products to be handled by a single institution without adequate coordination across institutions. Based on this analysis, three main problems negatively affect the proper handling of NTFP issues. First is the lack of coordination between actors which prevails at all levels and especially at the national level. Second is the presence of too many national multilevel structures working on NTFPs and a lack of communication between and among them. This is complicated within ministries because of the frequent turnover of authorities and lack of coherent documentation processes. Lastly is the limited diffusion of existing policy

instruments and the lack of understanding of these instruments by the related staff.

The results of this study should enable policy and decision makers to appreciate the impact of policies on NTFP development, valorisation, and contribution to food security and to the fight against poverty. The main advantage presented by NTFPs relative to other forest products is their socio-economic and cultural potential. As such they are involved in a wide range of policies in most domains and various policy implementation processes will be incomplete if in their elaboration and execution NTFPs are not considered.

Generally, policies that influence NTFPs at the international level are mostly related to nature conservation. At the regional level they are mostly for heritage protection and maintenance of peace; while at the national level they are mainly for the fight against poverty, improvement of living conditions and sustainable development. Most of the international and regional initiatives are highly diversified with very few specific actions, plans or activities directed towards NTFP development even though they could intervene in domains that may affect NTFPs.

Recommendations

Looking at the institutional framework, NTFPs, depending on their nature and use, are managed by a multitude of institutions and ministerial departments. This makes it difficult for the crafting and implementation of direct policies that are conducive to the development of NTFPs. This calls for strong collaborative action between the ministries and department involved in their management. Once collaboration has been established, there is a need to establish a code of ethics for field actors. This will provide a strong foundation for direct actions and emphasize the role of NTFPs in local communities.

The various initiatives analysed show that there exists a high potential for the development of the NTFP sector, but only under the conditions that:

- They are properly integrated in the above mentioned international, regional and national processes;
- The existing rules and regulations are applied correctly;
- Transparency and institutional collaboration is encouraged.

Sustainable NTFP management requires trans-departmental action in part because it cannot be achieved by a single institution be it a government agency, local and or international NGO, and in part because of the diverse nature of these products. It would therefore be worthwhile to develop an internal and external collaboration manual on NTFP management that could be adapted to Central African states. In order to develop sustainable policies on NTFPs, some key indicators should be identified and monitored within 3–

5 years after which the results will enable decision makers to develop more practical policies for the products.

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