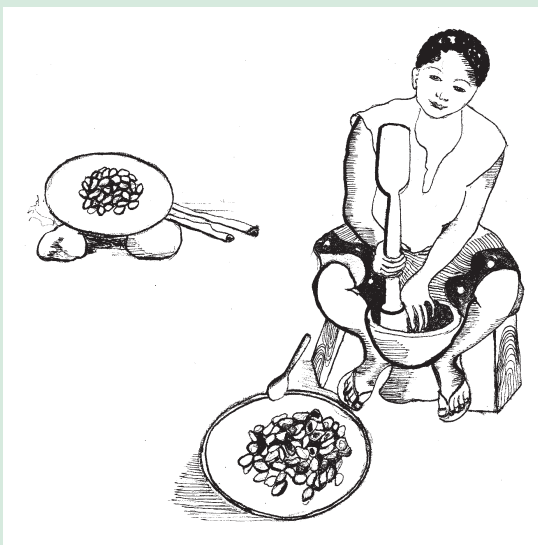
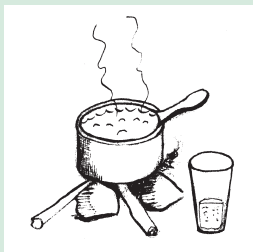


Non-timber forest products

the value of wild plants



partageons les connaissances au profit des communautés rurales
sharing knowledge, improving rural livelihoods

Agrodok 39

Non-timber forest products

the value of wild plants

Tinde van Andel

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Foreword

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are wild plant and animal products harvested from forests, such as wild fruits, vegetables, nuts, edible roots, honey, palm leaves, medicinal plants, poisons and bush meat. Millions of people – especially those living in rural areas in developing countries – collect these products daily, and many regard selling them as a means of earning a living.

This Agrodok presents an overview of the major commercial wild plant products from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. It explains their significance in traditional health care, social and ritual values, and forest conservation. It is designed to serve as a useful source of basic information for local forest dependent communities, especially those who harvest, process and market these products. We also hope that this Agrodok will help arouse the awareness of the potential of NTFPs among development organisations, local NGOs, government officials at local and regional level, and extension workers assisting local communities.

Case studies from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Central and South Africa, the Pacific, Colombia and Suriname have been used to help illustrate the various important aspects of commercial NTFP harvesting. Several examples are given of how NGOs can help local communities to improve the sustainable harvesting and marketing of wild plant products.

Agromisa is grateful to Tropenbos International, ICCO and SNV, who made it possible to publish this Agrodok.

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Tinde van Andel

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1 Introduction

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are wild plant and animal products harvested from forests, savannahs and other natural vegetation types. This definition includes the use of wood for canoes, woodcarvings, local house construction, fencing materials and firewood, but excludes industrial timber. We have decided not to use the term non-wood forest products (NWFPs), often employed by the FAO, because this would exclude the use of wood for dye, poison, craft making and medicine. We also felt the reference to ‘minor forest products’ to be less appropriate as the local people regard many NTFPs as being more important than industrial wood.

Although NTFPs are harvested from the wild, people often gather the seeds of useful plants from the forest and plant them near their homes. These plants are then in the process of domestication. Plants and trees exclusively cultivated in plantations or gardens and no longer collected in the wild (e.g. neem tree and potato) are considered to be agricultural products and are not included in this Agrodok. Some important subjects covered by the definition of NTFPs mentioned above but not dealt with here, such as firewood and bush meat, merit separate publications.

In this Agrodok we use the term *sustainable use* to mean a condition in which people take advantage of the NTFPs in their region, while making sure that care is taken of the plant species that deliver these products and of the environment in which they grow. This helps maintain the important functions that these plants play in the daily social and economic lives of the local people.

We explore and explain the main issues associated with NTFPs, such as subsistence use, commercial use, sustainable and destructive harvest, transport, marketing, their potential for forest conservation, indigenous land rights and the loss of traditional knowledge. More specifically, we provide information surrounding the following questions:

- What is the importance of non-timber forest products to rural and forest-dwelling communities?
- How can these products increase the income of local people?
- Does harvesting them help to protect the forest?
- What are the major commercially harvested NTFPs in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific?
- How can NGOs and government officials support local initiatives related to NTFPs?
- Can wild plant products be harvested sustainably?
- What are the effects of overharvesting?
- Can certification contribute to sustainable NTFP harvesting and increased local income?

Case studies from various parts of the world illustrate these issues and provide possible solutions to the main problems associated with NTFP extraction. Particular attention is paid to the potential role of NGOs in the successful commercialisation of products and the development of sustainable management plans.

Our objective is to provide civil administrators at local and intermediate level, NGOs working at local and/or regional level and extension supervisors with basic information on the subject.

Our focus is on the so-called ACP countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific). These include all African states, the Caribbean islands including Guyana and Suriname, and the Pacific islands excluding Indonesia and Australia. Within the ACP region, we predominantly focus on Africa, since most available information is from that continent.