

non-wood

news

EDITORIAL

The editorial for this issue of Non-Wood News has been written by Sophie Grouwels, Forestry Officer in charge of the small-scale forest enterprise development programme.

The Millennium Development Goals commit most countries to reducing global poverty in half by 2015. Perhaps nowhere are the stakes higher for meeting this goal than in forest-dependent communities in tropical countries, where poverty tends to be more pervasive and deeper than in urban and more-favoured rural areas. According to the World Bank, approximately 90 percent of the poorest people rely on forests for subsistence and income. The development of small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs) represents an opportunity for strengthening the livelihoods of these people and conserving the natural resource base through sustainable forest management and processing of timber and non-wood forest products (NWFPs). Local benefits from SMFE development may include wages and employment, profit-sharing, capital accumulation, cultural and political empowerment, investment in public goods, and increased conservation of forest ecosystems through long-term sustainable management.

Several new market trends favour the development of SMFEs, including increased tourism, providing expanding markets for handicrafts and ecotourism; specialized export markets, e.g. fair trade NWFPs and bio-ingredients; and growing specialized domestic and regional markets for NWFPs such as bamboo, rattan and palm hearts. In this issue, *Non-Wood News* has highlighted a variety of aspects related to this development. For example, one of the Special Features includes information on the marketing of traditional NWFPs, including various handicrafts. In addition, in the Products and Markets section, you will find articles on the fair trade of two specific NWFPs (shea butter and palm fronds), as well as information in the Products and Markets section on bamboo and rattan.

However, most SMFEs are not able to capture the benefits from these opportunities fully. They struggle to advance beyond the start-up stage of business development, exhibiting low levels of output, productivity, value added and profit. Overcoming these challenges requires concerted action and long-term investments among the various stakeholders, including SMFEs themselves, their business partners (processors and buyers) and service providers, as well as government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One of the key constraints that

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Non-Wood News is open to contributions by readers. Contributions are welcomed in English, French and Spanish and may be edited to fit the appropriate size and focus of the bulletin.

If you have any material that could be included in the next issue of *Non-Wood News* for the benefit of other readers, kindly send it, before 15 October 2009, to: NON-WOOD NEWS – FOIP

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First FSC-labelled gin from Belgium

The first Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-labelled gin was launched on the Belgium market in December 2008. Made from the green pine cones of *Pinus sylvestris*, a common tree in the Flemish region, the launch of this gin also marks the first FSC-certified NTFP originating from Belgium.

Known as *dennenknopje*, "little pine cone" in Dutch, the gin is made from cones that are collected from the FSC-certified Domeinbos Pijnven forest. Owned by the Flemish Government, it is managed as part of a larger FSC group that has been certified since 2006. Certification under FSC's Principles and Criteria for responsible forest management ensures that the natural forest complexity is maintained and social issues are considered, while securing long-term supplies of forest products.

Distilleerderij Leukenheide is the family-owned company responsible for producing the gin. Founded in 1833, it is the oldest traditional gin distillery in the region. The company achieved the FSC chain of custody certification in May 2008, facilitating completion of the supply chain from Domeinbos Pijnven forest by processing the gin and labelling the bottle with the FSC label.

The eye-catching FSC-labelled gin promotes FSC in the country and has strengthened local identity for this relatively forest-rich region. It also demonstrates that responsible management of forests can bring new and interesting opportunities, not only for recreational purposes, but also within the economic perspective of responsible forest product harvesting. [Source: Forest Stewardship Council, 19 January 2009.]

Consumers' contribution towards biodiversity – the cork case study

Cork oak forests extend over an area of almost 2.2 million ha, concentrated mainly in the Mediterranean region, in southern Europe and North Africa.

Cork oak forests are an effective barrier against the desertification affecting a large part of the Mediterranean region, playing a key role in ecological processes, such as water retention, soil conservation and carbon storage (carbon sink of over 14 million tonnes annually) – environmental services with a non-market value (externalities).

In the undergrowth of cork oak forests, and supported by its features of multiple-use low-intensity agroforestry systems – a

unique system shaped by human beings – aromatic and medicinal plants, mushrooms, natural grazing with extensive livestock farming and game complete this fantastic ecosystem and provide rural populations with work and sources of income.

These landscapes also support one of the highest levels of biodiversity among forest habitats (they are listed in the EC Habitats Directive – 92/43/EEC), reaching levels of 60–100 flowering plant species per 0.1 ha, as well as species-rich grasslands with up to 135 species per 0.1 ha. They also provide habitat requirements for a large number of endangered species (Iberian lynx, Iberian imperial eagle, the black vulture, the black stork, etc.), and large numbers of wintering birds from northern Europe, together with a rich diversity of fauna.

The sustainable cork use for wine bottle stoppers is the strongest economic activity. The cork oak tree has a lifespan of around 170–200 years, during which time it will be stripped about 15–18 times (every nine years). After the harvest, the bark renews itself until it is ready to be harvested again; none of the trees are cut.

Through cork, the European Union (EU) is also the world leader in the wine stopper sector – perhaps one of the few cases in which a natural product persistently holds on to its leadership of the market. With a total cork market value of about €1.5 billion, with EU exports worth €0.47 billion, cork stoppers also account for 70 percent of the international wine stopper trade.

Besides their superior quality as closures, cork stoppers have numerous advantages (environmental and social values) that clearly distinguish them from alternative wine stoppers, specifically plastic stoppers and screw tops (aluminium).

Cork for bottle stoppers accounts for almost 70 percent of the total value of the cork market, ensuring a vital role in maintaining the economic value of cork and the low-intensity use of cork oak forests.

There has been a significant decrease in the cork stopper market because of the increase in the market share of alternative wine stoppers (plastic stoppers and screw tops), supported by a huge marketing campaign and by what some retailers are choosing for the wine consumer. This change in the global closure market is reducing the economic value of cork forests, which represents a major threat to the sustainability of these important landscapes.

Even though wine drinkers continue overwhelmingly to prefer cork wine closures

to the alternatives, they do not have the information to enable them to make sustainable choices that take into consideration wider society concerns, because of the absence of labelling about the type of stoppers used in the wine.

The cork oak forests and cork case study is one of the best examples of how a consumer's choice, through an informed purchasing decision, can contribute to supporting high biodiversity levels and sustainable economic activities. [Contributed by: Nuno Mendes Calado (Secretário-Geral), UNAC-União da Floresta Mediterrânica, Av. Colégio Militar, Lote 1786, 1549-012 Lisbon, Portugal. Fax: +351 21 710 00 37; e-mail: ncalado@unac.pt www.unac.pt]

Honey and wax: a sticky challenge

The Blue Mountains or Nilgiris region of India are considered one of the most ecologically fragile areas in the region. The Nilgiris hills have varied flora, ranging from scrub and dry deciduous to moist evergreen and montane or shola forests. The Nilgiris total land area of 2 749 km² has long faced threats from encroachment and illegal felling of timber; its greatest threat now is the expanding tea and coffee plantations, which cover about 50 percent of the entire cultivated area. Thus, protecting what is left of the forest is crucial to conserving its flora and fauna.

The new system of economics and land use has significantly affected the traditions and culture of the Adivasis, the collective term used to describe the indigenous peoples of India. Numbering about 30 000, the Adivasis of the Nilgiris are known for living in harmony with nature, as seen in their daily lives and survival strategies.

Honey gathering is a traditional activity with a long history in the Nilgiris. For the Adivasis living in the region, marketing support from the Keystone Foundation, using fair-trade practices, was crucial in finding local markets for this traditional product, increasing their incomes and



protecting biodiversity. In 1995, this NGO established its base in the Nilgiris after conducting a survey of honey gatherers and beekeepers in the state of Tamil Nadu. The organization works in the field of environment and development, and the initiative in the Nilgiris was an attempt to harmonize the needs of ecology with the demands of the local economy.

Traditional beliefs, customs and superstitions guide the honey-gathering activity. When collecting from the Idigh cliffs, the Adivasis use forest vines as ladders; collecting honey from trees is easier, since they simply climb up the trees. In both methods, smokers made of fresh leaves and dry twigs are used to flush out the bees. The gatherers use their spears to collect the honeycombs, which are then placed in bamboo baskets and carried to the village.

On average, one honeycomb yields between 8 and 15 kg of honey. During the peak season, which lasts about two months, a group of honey gatherers can collect up to 500 kg of honey. In 1994, honey could be sold to traders for Rs18–30 (around US\$0.45–0.75) per kg in bulk; if bottled, it could be sold for Rs40 (\$1) per kg. Thus, a gatherer's average income would be about Rs3 000 (approximately \$75) during the honey season. In 2008, the price had increased to Rs80 (\$2) per kg but the level of compensation is still quite low, given the amount of effort and skill involved in honey gathering.

To address this issue, Keystone initiated training for a number of honey gatherers in the Kotagiri district. The training focused on both indigenous knowledge and modern/scientific aspects of honey collection. After the training, the honey extracted by the gatherers had a better quality and a longer shelf-life. Keystone started a processing and marketing unit as well, where Adivasis could sell their produce, such as honey and beeswax. In addition, Keystone incorporated fair-trade principles in procuring honey, which increased the confidence of the Adivasis.

Soon, more honey started arriving and more people were trained. News about the "honey unit" spread by word of mouth in the community. The unit conducts regular training for newcomers and now sells over eight tonnes of honey and beeswax every year in the region. It also has over 2 000 Adivasi honey gatherers in its network.

Finding local markets. After experimenting and developing the

appropriate technology for processing, Keystone began bottling honey and forming beeswax into hand-rolled candles and comb foundation sheets. Initially, it was difficult to find a market for these products. Local people in the towns of Nilgiris had no knowledge about the Adivasis or their special niche in collecting forest products. Keystone increased its efforts to inform consumers about the honey and the people behind it. Because of the high-quality products and regular supply, local people from the towns started buying the goods and the clientele steadily increased. The products eventually infiltrated the tourist market and now more than 60 percent of goods are sold in small towns in the Nilgiris.

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Custom-made Crafts Centre: creating new markets and appropriate strategies for communities

A non-traditional approach to the development of traditional crafts has allowed a unique marketing programme in the Philippines to bring the benefits of well-planned marketing strategies to indigenous peoples' communities.

Hinabol is a colourful loom-woven cloth made of abaca fibre produced in Bukidnon Province, in the southern Philippines. It is one of the handcrafted traditions whose cultural value is recognized through the alternative marketing centre, Custom-made Crafts Centre (CMCC), which offers a collection of products from indigenous artisans. Their materials are made from non-timber forest resources and the designs are drawn from timeless traditions that have been fashioned into functional items for home or personal use.

A livelihood programme of the Non-Timber Forest Products – Task Force Philippines, CMCC is a marketing initiative that provides a stable source of income and better returns for artisans, as well as a venue for expressing traditional art forms. It balances the needs of both consumers and producers by "customizing" the crafts to the tastes of the modern market while respecting the artisans' traditions and lifestyles.



Fourteen people's organizations and NGOs participate in the Centre's programmes in manufacturing and marketing community handicrafts. The operations of CMCC also support small cottage industries in Manila and nearby provinces, as well as urban poor enterprises. Moreover, several craft designers and experts contribute their time and effort in coming up with unique and high-quality products for CMCC.

The Centre supports ten cultural communities, each with an array of unique handicraft products – basketry, hand weaving, bead work and embroidery. For these communities, handicraft-making is a heightened expression of their cultures and traditions. At the same time, it is a traditional economic activity as well, with handicrafts being bartered for household needs. When the market economy became increasingly influential in their communities, the economic value of crafts gained more importance and, eventually, handicraft-making metamorphosed into an important source of livelihood. The indigenous artisans learned that they could earn cash by selling their handicrafts. Treating the crafts as novelty products, tourists bought one or two as souvenirs, thus starting the handicrafts trade.

However, the market economy exposed the indigenous communities to risks. While they profited from selling handicrafts, they also learned that the market could be fickle and unstable. They have to scout constantly for regular buyers. Without them, cash flows tend to be irregular.

CMCC faced similar problems. Gaining access to appropriate and new markets, and meeting market requirements were constant worries. Hence, its livelihood programme was designed to weave varied but interrelated socio-economic, cultural and environmental considerations in its production and marketing planning. [Source: *From seeds to beads. Tales, tips and tools for building a community-based NTFP*