

EDITORIAL

The editorial for this issue of Non-Wood News has been written by Dr Maxim Lobovikov, Chief of the Forest Products Service.

The current global financial crisis aggravates food security problems and draws more attention to non-wood forest products (NWFPs), particularly as an alternative source of food. Forests rarely provide the bulk of the human diet, but their role in food security is often critical. Forests and trees are significant sources of food such as fruits, berries, leaves, honey, mushrooms and bushmeat. Rural livestock often depends on fodder from forests. Wildlife in the forest environment provides an essential part of animal protein for the rural poor. A recent study undertaken in three communities in southern Cameroon revealed that, while agriculture provided 80 percent of the carbohydrate intake, rural Cameroonians received 90 percent of their protein from bushmeat. Forest fruits and herbs are excellent sources of vitamins and nutrients for rural dwellers. Millions of Asians depend largely on fish supplies from mangrove forests. According to the 2005 FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA), the reported value of forest food removals exceeds US\$1.3 billion, of which about US\$820 million are attributed to Asia.

The role of forestry and NWFPs increases in crisis situations after wars and during natural, economic and social disasters when nutrition, fuel for cooking and heating, and timber for the reconstruction of homes and animal shelters become critical. Forest seasonal and emergency food is often a question of people's survival. In areas of frequent crop failures, food from forests is known as emergency or "famine" food. Trees and forests indirectly support food supply by providing fodder for livestock, which supply milk and meat, or for draught animals in farm production. As an example, trees provide about 50 percent of animal fodder in Nepal and some parts of India. Food insecurity in forest communities is not only a problem in developing countries, but also an issue in developed countries, especially when filling the gaps after closure of local industries and during economic crises and recessions.

Food consumption implies not only physical but also economic access to food through job and income generation. Forests generate a tremendous income for forest communities, allowing them to purchase food rather than produce it. It is estimated that about 80 percent of total employment in forestry is in the developing world, which is a major contribution to job and food security.

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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.

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How medicinal plants promote agribusiness

The National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), established in 2000, is responsible for supporting initiatives for the conservation and cultivation of medicinal plants, both *in situ* and *ex situ* in India. In the latest 11th Plan, the outlay of Rs990 crores to the NMPB represents a sevenfold increase in financing from the previous plan.

A study of demand and supply of medicinal plants in India carried out by the Board during 2007-2008 highlighted alarming shortages of some of the plants used by the Ayurvedic industry.

Of particular interest were tree species such as Sita Ashok (*Saraca asoca*), the main ingredient of Ashokaristha, a key Ayurvedic formulation for gynaecological disorders; Guggal (*Commiphora wightii*), a thorny bush that yields gum resin used in more than 100 Ayurvedic preparations; and the Dashmools, used in the popular Ayurvedic preparation, Dashmoolarishta. The estimated demand of Sita Ashoka bark is in excess of 2 000 tonnes, but availability in the wild is extremely rare. Likewise, although more than 1 000 tonnes of the gum resin from Guggal is used by the Ayurvedic industry, over 90 percent of this is imported.

The Board has sanctioned the conservation and plantation of some of the rare and endangered species in high demand on thousands of hectares across multiple states.

Special Board initiatives include the conservation and propagation of high altitude plants such as Atees, Kuth and Kutki, led by the Task Force on High Altitude Medicinal Plants. The School and Home Herbal Gardens programme in over 1 000 schools across the country has driven awareness about the healthy role of India's biodiversity.

A new Government-approved initiative, the National Mission on Medicinal Plants, seeks

to promote market-driven cultivation with a focus on the development of selected clusters with potential for inclusive growth in agribusiness through medicinal plants. The goal is to improve market access of farmers to better prices for their produce and better quality of raw material for the Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani industries. [Source: Commodity Online, Kerala [India], 15 September 2008.]

Low prices strain Mahua flower-dependent villagers in Orissa

Villagers across Orissa are under strain as the Panchayat Samiti has fixed what most consider to be a low rate for the Mahua flowers they depend upon for their livelihood. Mahua, the raw material used for making country spirit, is a major source of revenue for the state government.

The subcollector of Bargarh district said that this year the rate for the sale of Mahua flowers is fixed at Rs1 500 per quintal, and Panchayat Samitees have been entrusted to ensure that villagers get minimum support prices for their produce.

"For the last two years, the Mahua yield has not been sufficient. We collect Mahua flowers every day with the hope that we will earn something, but unfortunately we have to sell the flowers at a throwaway price," said Kanak Pradhan, a villager.

"This is a season of Mahua flowers and the government of Orissa has made adequate provisions for the sale of these flowers by the villagers wherever Mahua is produced. It comes under non-timber forest products. The rate for such products, including Mahua flowers, is fixed by the Panchayat Samitee concerned. The Gram Panchayats are given the responsibility to see ... that the poor people get a minimum fixed support price by the Panchayat Samitee," said Bishnu Prasad Mishra, subcollector, Bargarh district.

Almost all villagers, especially women, gather Mahua flowers from early morning until sunset. The flowers are then dried and sold to entrepreneurs, leaving most villagers largely unaware of the fixed prices. Most tribals along the forested area of Orissa depend on such NWFPs for sustaining themselves for around six to seven months in a year. [Source: DailyIndia.com, Florida [United States of America], 7 June 2008.]

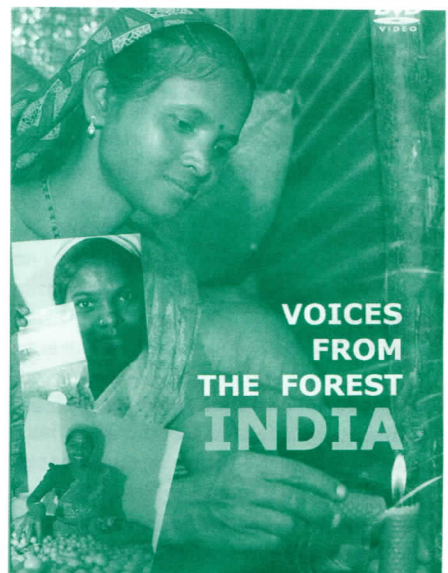
Voices from the Forest, India - new film

All across India, NTFPs are a critical source of income for indigenous people and forest-dwelling communities, who are among the poorest of the poor. Not only do the NTFPs

play a crucial role in the livelihood of these people, but form a key incentive to conserving the forests of India. Moreover, NTFPs are woven in with the social and cultural fabric of the communities living in India.

Women from a self-help group in India sort through dried amla fruit. Traditionally, amla is made into chutneys and pickles. Here it is processed into sweets and a breath freshener.

Through the assistance of the Keystone Foundation, productivity has increased threefold with the adoption of new technology for processing. This story, and many others, are featured in a new 30-minute film - Voices from the Forest, India - made by the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme, through Gekko Studio/Telapak and Dusty Food Productions.



FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REQUEST A COPY OF THIS FILM, PLEASE CONTACT: Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme, 92 Masikap Extension, Barangay Central, Diliman, Quezon City 1100, Philippines. Fax: +63 2 4262757, 9293665; e-mail: info@ntfp.org or publications@ntfp.org (Manila); www.ntfp.org/

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