

Civil society engagement

A new sustainable model of forest management founded on local knowledge, innovative business strategies and entrepreneurship is being pioneered to provide rural livelihoods and mitigate further climate change.



THRIVING ECONOMIES



IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS



FOOD SECURITY



WATER SECURITY



HEALTHY BIODIVERSITY



CLIMATE RESILIENCE



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Local forest economies

Context and challenge

Tropical forests are being razed, primarily to make way for intensified agriculture. This leads to vast degraded areas, soil erosion, devastating floods and the extinction of unique plant and animal species. Between 10-15% of global emissions stem from this deforestation as much of the CO₂ absorbed from the atmosphere by the forests is released in one go when they are cleared.

Beyond climate change impacts, forest loss is of particular concern to the millions of people worldwide who are directly dependent on these ecosystems for their health and wellbeing. For centuries, communities have harvested a wide range of non-timber forest products (NTFPs, defined as “any product or service other than timber that is produced in forests”) both for subsistence use and as a source of income. Forest products such as fruits, nuts, mushrooms and game play a key role in ensuring food sovereignty and security. Equally important are the forest-based sources of traditional medicine, and the local knowledge on what to use and how, both of which are disappearing as the forests are flattened.



PARINEETA DANDEKAR

The forest can also serve as a safety net in times of scarcity when collecting forest products can prevent families from going hungry or slipping further into poverty. In addition, forests support agriculture by recycling nutrients, countering erosion and floods, and serving as the habitat for insects that pollinate crops. Money earned selling fruit, honey, rattan, medicinal and other products at the market is often people's only source of cash, making a huge difference by, for example, enabling them to send their children to school.

Given the role of forests in providing livelihoods and combatting further climate change, a new sustainable model of forest management is needed. This fundamental turnaround requires a combination of local knowledge, innovative business models and entrepreneurial spirit, all dedicated to taking an ecosystem approach.

Taking an ecosystem approach through civil society engagement

The ecosystem approach promotes the integrated management of land, water and living resources in a way that achieves mutually compatible conservation and sustainable use, and delivers equitable benefits for people and nature.² Working with communities toward the optimal use of NTFP resources can both support basic livelihoods and provide an

incentive for forest conservation. The Ecosystem Alliance has applied this approach in several ways:

- Alliance partners are closely engaged with the NTFP Exchange Programme, a civil society network focused on capacity building and organisational strengthening support in the sustainable management of forest-based communities' natural resources in several Asian countries.
- In India, the Keystone Foundation assists indigenous communities across the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve in livelihood generation and environmental protection. NTFPs such as honey, coffee, tea, spices and essential oils are harvested, processed and traded through equitable, sustainable practices. Local groups are supported to secure forest rights, protect the environment, set up sustainable NTFP value chains and ultimately attain internationally recognised organic and fair trade certification. Several Alliance partners in India have also conducted training and orientation workshops with communities and government officials on the provisions of the Forest Rights Act to help clarify individual land and production rights. Work with the government also focuses on a mainstreamed livelihoods program through the National Rural Livelihood Mission of the Ministry of Rural Development.
- In Ghana, a partnership between A Rocha Ghana and Savanna Fruits Company has helped enroll 600 women in the certification of organic shea nuts across 1200km² of community managed landscape. The process includes training, registration, contract signing and organic certification.
- In Paraguay, Alliance partner Comunidad de Desarrollo Sustentable is working with 50 families in three indigenous communities to produce honey for both consumption and sale. Contracts have been established with the individual honey producers who commit that in return for materials and training they will sell their honey to Comunidad de Desarrollo Sustentable for two years. Through this process the honey producers who have organised into an association.



SANDIER VAN ANDEL





PARINEETA DANDEKAR



JUANJO MENDEZ



JUANJO MENDEZ



JUANJO MENDEZ

Impacts on communities, nature and policy

- In India's Nilgiris Reserve 3,850 families (12,000 people) in 89 villages have so far been supported in claiming forest rights, forest regeneration and ecological monitoring. A virtuous circle of fairer prices, steadier income and higher product quality has been created as production groups evolve into viable enterprises. Thus far, six such enterprises source products from over 50 local production groups to further process and refine the NTFPs collected. A range of high-quality, marketable products is now being traded by over 40 retailers and distributors. Some are sold under the brand *Last Forests*, one of the largest networks of organic and fair trade product chains in India. Further, under India's Forest Rights Act, over 450 families from 25 tribal habitations have been supported in filing their individual land claims.
- In Ghana, in 2013 the Savanna Fruit Company bought a total of 35.2 tons shea nuts directly from the newly certified women groups at a price 15% higher than that offered on the local market, significantly increasing household incomes.
- In the Paraguay project, 200 bee colonies currently produce 20 liters of honey three times a year, leading increased incomes of €40,000 per year for 50 families. In future, members will donate 1-2 liters of honey per harvest to the association to fund training, material replacement and marketing to help scale up on both the supply and demand sides.

Looking to the future

Governments and business can support the scaling up of this vital work through three main avenues:

Sustainable Livelihoods: As NTFPs provide employment and increase the long term output of forests, governments should promote their sustainable commercialisation by creating enabling conditions by:

1. Supporting further research to both link the economic impact of NTFPs with local livelihoods regarding contributions to ecosystem management and value and identify new means for 'upscaling' and replication;
2. Training producers and harvesters in enterprise-oriented resources management;
3. Developing community-based enterprises and expanding their participation in the value chain;
4. Assisting producers and harvesters in meeting marketing requirements;
5. Developing networks, alliances and learning mechanisms.

Market Potential: Governments and businesses should ensure adequate access to information and marketing support for communities and civil society groups. Available data on details such as price, options for adding value and sustainable harvesting techniques would greatly increase the bargaining power of NTFP collectors and traders. Assistance could also be offered toward gaining credit, technology, skills and fair trade and/or organic certification. Moreover, governments should address relevant policy and regulatory issues, such as user rights and unfair competitive advantage. A global forum could develop and share trade related best practices toward improved NTFP marketing and management with the aim of creating functional NTFP markets where producers add more value.

Community Forest Management: NTFP collectors and producers intimately familiar with forest ecosystem dynamics have much to offer to forest resource management. Governments should ensure that all actors are engaged – from communities and civil society to forestry departments and, in some cases, donor agencies – in community forest management geared toward NTFP-oriented sustainable use. Communities which do not see meaningful benefits from sustainable use tend to be indifferent to sustainability practices, so it is vital to ensure that the benefits of any such enterprise are equitably shared.

The processing and marketing of NTFPs creates rural assets and wealth through the development of micro-enterprises. This both relies on, and can in turn contribute to, a healthy locally managed forest. Governments and business have a responsibility to support local civil society in making these productive ecosystems a reality.

For more information, please contact:

Both ENDS: Paul Wolvekamp, pw@bothends.org
Keystone Foundation: Snehlata Nath, sneh@keystone-foundation.org
IUCN NL: Liliana Jauregui, liliana.jauregui@iucn.nl;
Jan Kamstra, jan.kamstra@iucn.nl

Further reading

1. www.ntfp.org
2. <http://keystone-foundation.org/>
3. www.abc.com.py/nacionales/producen-miel-ecologica-en-pantanal-paraguay-1306211.html
4. www.ecosystem-alliance.org/organisations/rocha-ghana

REFERENCES

1. www.cifor.org/publications/corporate/factSheet/NTFP.htm
2. <http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/>

MADE POSSIBLE BY THE ECOSYSTEM ALLIANCE

