
NTFP NETWORK FOR SOUTH & SOUTHEAST ASIA

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DISCUSSION PAPER

REGIONAL NETWORK ON NTFPs: PAST AND FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

The forests of South and Southeast Asia are extraordinarily rich in biological diversity and contain many ecosystems and species of global importance. However, there are grave concerns on the rapid losses of these forests. According to a recent estimate, the average deforestation rate of 1.6% per annum for Continental Southeast Asia is the world's highest¹. South Asian countries have suffered from forest loss over a long period and deforestation rates for individual countries remain alarmingly high, especially in Bangladesh and Pakistan². Extensive deforestation and wide-spread loss in forest quality are causing losses of ecosystem function, reduction in supply of forest products and affecting spiritual, cultural and recreational values.

Many of the region's nations share serious problems associated with rapid population growth, poverty; unemployment and underemployment; food shortage; and low levels of infrastructure, health and other social services. The region is home to some 1.8 billion people, representing approximately 31% of the world's population³. Such conditions of under-development increase both the importance of remaining forests to human well being and the challenges associated with forest conservation.

In recent years, concerns on forest loss and degradation, poverty and inequity have increasingly focused the attentions of community development workers, conservationists, foresters and others on sustainable NTFP management from forests and agroforests. NTFPs underpin the livelihoods of huge numbers of rural people in the region, as they are used for food, medicines, fibres, fuelwood, resins and other materials for consumption, barter and income generation. A study of NTFPs in Asia⁴, for example, found that:

- NTFPs have the greatest importance to traditional forest-dwelling people;
- the welfare of rural people is at risk while NTFP remains unsustainable.
- NTFPs can be used in a sustainable way (with traditional forest management systems providing useful models), providing economic incentives for forest conservation;
- the economic value of NTFPs is highly significant to rural and national economies in terms of the provision of material needs, cash income and employment;

Despite the importance of NTFPs and their potential in forest resource conservation and poverty alleviation, there are also concerns that the current use of NTFPs is unsustainable. Continued over-exploitation of NTFPs threatens rural livelihoods and the biological diversity and integrity of forests. For many of the NTFPs, the issues of what constitutes sustainable level of utilisation of these products; how can local communities retain and use their traditional or indigenous knowledge on such resources and benefit more from such resources (such as through processing); techniques for domestication; linkages of NTFP marketing from local to international markets are still on-going topics of action-research in most countries. The policies on sustainable NTFP utilisation are also not well defined or are non-existent, and there is also a considerable potential in learning from different countries of the region.

Therefore, the management of NTFP resources is an important conservation and development issue requiring urgent support. It has only been in the last few years that governments and some donors have shown the sector some interest. However, platforms to learn from different countries' experiences, study, support, and guide the sustainable use of NTFPs remains very weak. Therefore, the NTFP Network for South and Southeast Asia is

¹ Food & Agriculture Organisation (1997) *State of the World's Forests* FAO Rome, Italy.

² WWF/ IUCN (1996) "Forests For Life: The WWF/ IUCN forest policy book" WWF International and IUCN (WWF-UK, Surrey, Britain)

³ <http://www.popin.org/pop1988/2.htm> (UN Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

⁴ Jenne H. De Beer and Melanie J. McDermott (1996) "The Economic Value of Non-Timber Forest Products in Southeast Asia" Netherlands Committee for IUCN, Amsterdam.

proving to be a valuable forum to promote sustainable forest resource management for biodiversity conservation and community development.

BACKGROUND TO THE NETWORK

The background to the Network gives a brief history, goal and objectives of the network and some of the major activities accomplished to date.

The Initiation of the Network

The NTFP Network for South and Southeast Asia was initiated by IUCN in 1995, and was initially funded by IUCN's Global Forest Conservation Programme. The inaugural meeting of the Network was held in Bangkok on 21 October 1995 established a goal, objectives and initial tasks for the network, which are provided in Box 1 below.

Box 1: The Goal and the Objectives of the NTFP Network for South and Southeast Asia

Goal

To develop and promote best practice NTFP management (and use) and policy for rural development and forest conservation in South and Southeast Asia.

Objectives

- To identify, develop and refine methodologies for NTFP research, management, and policy.
- To analyse and share experiences and lessons to gain a better understanding of the evolving role of NTFPs in rural development and forest conservation.
- To contribute information and analyses to the policy debate.

After its establishment, the initial tasks of the Network included the field test and review the first part of a four part method for conducting marketing systems analysis and development (MSA&D) of non-timber forest and tree products. It also organised a workshop to share knowledge and experience about methods for understanding and promoting the sustainable use of NTFPs and identified and invited other people from the region to contribute to the workshop and consider the longer-term future of the network in a network business meeting held at the end of the methods workshop.

The Second Business Meeting of the Network, Cinajure, Indonesia 23 May 1999 discussed the structure and operation of the network. The members agreed that the network should not spend its energy on large and regular meetings of members and newsletters but rather to keep activities restricted to specific tasks with identifiable outputs of joint utility. To facilitate this, membership was seen to consist of the following:

Pool members: People who have common interests aligned to the goal and objectives of the network and who may be interested from time to time in assisting with one or more specific tasks. These people would receive all information circulating within the network and be invited to participate in various tasks that are suggested.

Working groups: Groups of pool members who volunteer to work on a specific task and form around a working group leader who takes responsibility for managing resources and producing the required output. When the task is completed, the working group dissolves back into the pool.

Accomplishments of the Network

1. *Developing a Broad Regional Membership Base*

The current network pool constitutes of 57 people from 11 countries. These include community development workers, foresters, entrepreneurs, project managers, teachers and researchers.

2. *Case Studies Concerning The MA&D Method, February -March 1996*

The Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) Method provides an approach for promoting sustainable use and development through NTFP-based enterprise. In addition to the commercial aspects on the enterprise, the approach takes into consideration environmental, social, and technological aspects of sustainable NTFP enterprise. The approach provides a framework, which are divided into

four phases: assessing the existing products; markets and means of marketing (Phase 1); identifying potential products, markets and means of marketing (Phase 2); developing and enterprise strategy and a sustainable business plan (Phase 3) and follow up the implementation of the enterprise (Phase 4).

Network Activities included:

- Application of Phase 1 in two communes in Ke Go Buffer Zone, Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam.
- Support for production of an overview document
- Support for regional project development

3. *Workshop on methods: "Research And Planning Methods For NTFP-Based Conservation And Development Initiatives" Cianjure, Indonesia 21 - 23 May 1996*

Twenty-five participants, reporting experience from eight countries attended the workshop. Eleven papers were presented and three workshop sessions covering the assessment of ecological sustainability, strategic alliances, business planning, and information collection at international and national levels were organised.

4. *Preparation and Publication of a Monograph on NTFP Methods*

CIFOR and the network collaborated to prepare a book that describes and analyses the range of methods that have been adopted, modified and developed for the NTFP sector to promote rural development and forest conservation aims. The book, entitled "Income from the Forest: methods for the development and conservation of forest products for local communities" (edited W. Wollenberg and A. Ingles) was published in 1998 and includes a chapter, which was the output of the Writer's Workshop organised by the Network.

5. *Writer's workshop to document NTFP business planning methods: Bangkok, Thailand 20-25 March 1997*

A working group of network members met to document their experience in planning NTFP-based businesses that have adopted the dual aims of financial viability and responsibility towards forest conservation and rural development. The output has been worked into a chapter of the monograph published with CIFOR (see above).

6. *Representation and contribution at an International Workshop On Sustainable Management Of Non-Wood Forest Products, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, 14-17 October 1997.*

Five network members attended this international conference and several delivered papers. They identified additional pool members, raised awareness about the existence of the network and held a side meeting to discuss future network activities. The group leader produced a workshop report.

7. *Workshop on "Evolving Mechanism for NTFP- Oriented Need-based Sustainable Forest Management", conducted by the South And East Asian Countries NTFP Network (SEANN) during 27th and 28th October 1998.*

Arlynn Aquino from Appropriate Technology International, Philippines and Bishwa Nath Regmi of the Nepal Agroforestry Foundation, Nepal, attended the SSEAN workshop in India under the sponsorship of the NTFP Network for S&SE Asia.

8. *Support Provided For The Finalisation Of An NTFP Planning Field Manual*

The Community Forestry Unit of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (CFU/FAO) and the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC) are preparing a new Market Analysis and Development Field Manual. This network is has provided an amount of US\$ 5,000 to support revisions and final production of the MA&D Field Manual.

9. *Regional Strategy for Supporting Market Analysis & Development: A Planning Meeting at the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC), Bangkok, 16-18 June 1999*

I attended a three-day planning meeting at RECOFTC on 16-18 June 1999. The major objectives of this workshop were to discuss the potential for developing a collaborative regional strategy to support the use and development of the Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) methodology, and to identify ways in which the Network and RECOFTC could participate in such a strategy. As many of you are aware, MA&D is a methodology for promoting sustainable NTFP-based enterprise and RECOFTC has run many regional

training on MA&D since 1994. The Network, with assistance from IUCN's Regional Forest Programme, supported the participation of two Network members, Isabelle LeCup and Ken Nicholson, to attend this workshop. Isabelle and Ken have been involved in developing the MA&D methodology, teaching the MA&D Training Course at RECOFTC as well as supporting practitioners in several countries and preparing training material for different levels of stakeholders for a number of years.

FUTURE NETWORK ACTIVITIES

A number of activities that contribute to the network's objectives have been proposed and await working group formation and funding. These are described below.

Promoting regional and national networking of persons involved in NTFP sector

The Network will continue to promote regional networking in issues of common interest among its members. Where possible, national NTFP Networks will be used as a vehicle to promote in-country networking. Such networking activities will facilitate such activities as:

- Exchange trade data and other information on specific NTFPs
- Cooperate in method development and training
- Access expertise for short-term inputs
- Compare studies of enabling environments (law, policy, institutions) and marketing.
- Share experience and lessons
- Improve the understanding of the role of NTFPs in forest conservation and development and test the hypotheses of Integrated Conservation and Development Programmes/Projects.
- Obtain a critical mass for influencing policy and gaining wide support for successful NTFP development models.

Comparative Case Studies of NTFP Use and Conservation

Little is known about the use and trade of many important products because NTFPs have been a neglected part of forestry. Assistance to rural communities whose livelihoods depend on these products must start on the basis of a participatory assessment of the current situation. There are people in governments and NGOs who have received training already in how to conduct such assessments (e.g. those trained in MSA&D and Sub-sector analysis at RECOFTC), but they do not have the resources and support to use the skills they have attained.

A small amount of support for field work and report preparation can result in a plan for supporting NTFP use in selected villages, an increased capacity of extension workers to conduct assessments, and improved knowledge about NTFP use and trade for influencing policy.

Facilitating the development and implementation of community-level NTFP projects

On the basis of the assessments funded in the case studies described above, plans for developing NTFP projects to support NTFP user groups in various small-scale conservation and development projects could emerge. The NTFP network, through its members can assist other members refine their skills in project development in helping community level stakeholders of NTFP to develop and implement such plans. Refining skills of members could include training of members on how to design projects to promote sustainable community-level NTFP utilisation, and it could also seek to refine proposals by members by peer review of project design. The Network also aims to support implementation of such plans through provisions of small grants.

Disseminating NTFP information and experience on collaborative arrangements for developing and running NTFP enterprises for rural development and conservation.

Some organisations have been testing approaches for developing NTFP businesses in such a way that maximise benefits for local forest users. In recent years, experience has been gained in various countries but there has been little dissemination of this knowledge to improve approaches and methods in other countries. There is a strong interest in the network to encourage the dissemination of the social and environmental results and lessons from collaborative experiences gained within the region. The network could organise or contribute to either:

- focused writers' workshops (where practitioners meet at a venue to share, analyse and write down their joint experiences on specific topics);

- the translation of reports documenting specific field experience on products or issues of interest from regional languages to English and vice versa.
- regional workshops on collaborative management of NTFP businesses.

Securing and exchanging trade and technical information about major NTFPs

Local NTFP collectors and traders, and national governments are all disadvantaged by the lack of technical and market information about products which are exported and consumed elsewhere. Securing better economic returns as an incentive for sustainable NTFP harvesting and forest conservation, is dependent on being informed about quality requirements, technical innovations achieved elsewhere, opportunities for value adding, and prices further down the market chain. It is difficult and expensive for developing countries to collect all this information outside its borders. The network can use its presence across the region to examine and create new ways for such information to be secured and exchanged more efficiently for mutual benefit. Funds could be used to undertake a feasibility study for maintaining lists and databases on NTFPs in various commodity groupings.

Understanding enabling environments for NTFP development and influencing law, policy, and institutions

A number of circumstances limit the opportunities for developing NTFPs in ways which are equitable, financially viable, and contribute to conservation. There are variations between countries. There are problems with inappropriate laws, regulations and policies, and there are gaps, such as in the protection of intellectual property rights and mechanisms for bio-prospecting. Much could be gained from understanding the enabling environment for NTFP conservation and development and influencing appropriate changes in various countries through network activities. The network is well placed to participate in such regional assessments and lobbying.

Enhancing the reach of regional training initiatives

At the regional level, the course work and material for training in important NTFP topics such as ethno-botany, market systems analysis, extension, protected area management, forest assessment and business planning are in English. There are a limited number of practitioners in each country that can take advantage of such regional training courses and materials. Often, the material is pitched at a relatively high academic level. There is a need to simplify the curriculum and materials to a level more accessible to middle and field level practitioners and then arrange for translation into those regional languages where NTFP development activity is especially high. Both RECOFTC and FAO are revising MSA&D manuals. Following their revision, the NTFP network could assist in translation, training and dissemination and back-up support for the use of the manuals in a particular setting.

Outputs

It is not possible to specify outputs here because the actual activities supported by project funds depend on the collective interests of network members. However, an indicative list of outputs can be provided based on the general activities described above. These are:

- Case studies on NTFP use and its impact and potential on rural development and forest conservation.
- Plans and proposals for supporting the sustainable use of NTFPs at various locations.
- Increased capacity of extension workers to conduct NTFP assessments.
- An improved knowledge about NTFP use and trade for influencing policy.
- New documents about NTFP experience and translations of important reports.
- Simplified or translated curriculum materials and manuals.
- New training materials relevant to obtaining and maintaining NTFP trade information.
- Reviews of NTFP laws, regulations and policies.
- Improved communication and cooperation between NTFP specialists and field workers in the region.

FUNDING

The Network requires grant funds to function. Such funding is needed for co-ordination, communication and other administrative costs of running the Network. Funds are also needed for holding meetings and workshops of members to refine the aims of the Network, develop work plans and outputs, and to develop a sense of ownership and a common sense of purpose. The Network will also fund Working Groups to work voluntarily on activities, such as those already listed in this paper. The Network will produce funding proposal for securing such funds. It will also explore opportunities for joint regional projects with other institutions working on similar issues.

Your comments and suggestions on these ideas are welcome.

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