



Sharing science with the people in Mexico

All too often, scientists rely heavily on rural communities to gather information for their research, but fail to share their findings with them. This may be because they have got what they want, and feel no strong obligations to those who assisted them. But just as frequently, it is because they simply don't know how to package their research in a way which is accessible to a non-scientific audience. This means there is plenty of good – and potentially useful – scientific research that never reaches the public domain.

The Non-timber Forest Products (NTFP) Case Comparison project, described in last year's annual report, produced three books under the title *Riches of the Forest*, one for Asia, one for Africa and one for Latin America. Attractively illustrated and written in layman's language, these told the life histories of some 60 different NTFPs, from edible invertebrates in west Africa to fibres and resins in Asia and fruits and waxes in Latin

America. 'We wanted to make the knowledge about the commercial potential and cultural significance of NTFPs as widely available as possible,' explains CIFOR ethnobotanist Citlalli Lopez, one of the co-editors.

The success of the Latin American book prompted two government departments in Mexico – the Programme for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forest Resources (PROCYMAF) and the Center for Environmental Education and Capacity Building for Sustainable Development (CECADESU) – to suggest to CIFOR that a new edition, specially tailored to Mexico, should be produced with their support.

'These departments publish lots of technical and educational materials,' explains Lopez, 'but they'd rarely produced anything with such broad appeal as *Riches of the Forest*. They decided this would be the ideal way to inspire people across the country.' CIFOR and its government partners, who paid for the printing and distribution of 10,000 copies, hoped that *La riqueza de los bosques mexicanos: más allá de la madera* – 'The Riches of the Mexican Forests' – would spread the NTFP message far and wide. Mexico is a huge country and people at one end often don't know what's happening at the other.

The book includes stories about eight Mexican NTFPs which featured in the Latin American version of *Riches of the Forest*, but there are 11 new cases as well. The stories are told not just by experts, as they were in the first series of books, but by local people involved in the harvesting, cultivation and processing of NTFPs.

Take, for example, mezcal, the strong liquor produced in the drier regions of Mexico from several species of the maguey plant. The book describes the cultivation and harvesting of the plant, how it is baked in underground pits, and how it is bottled and blended. It describes the status of the plants, the growing demand for mezcal and the significance of the trade for local livelihoods and local culture. The chapter is a collaborative effort, written by a researcher from a Mexican NGO and by members of a farmers' group. It thus blends hard science with local knowledge.



Painting wooden figures in Oaxaca, Mexico. Wood carving has provided a dramatic boost in income for many families. (Photo by Silvia Purata)

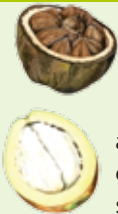
La riqueza de los bosques mexicanos was launched in September 2005 in Mexico City. Among the 200 people who attended were government officials, people who collaborated on the book and the local press. 'This wonderful book is an original work full of deep commitment to the conservation of forest ecosystems and the communities who live in the forests,' said Leticia Merino of the Institute of Social Research, the Autonomous University of Mexico. She told the audience that the book was far more than a compendium of information about different forest species for which there is a use. It gave a detailed account of traditions that stretch back many generations and of the cultural importance of many non-timber forest products. It also highlighted the challenges

which rural communities, and the Mexican government, face if the trade in NTFPs is to prosper in the future.

'The Mexican book provides a template for the sort of publications other countries could produce about non-timber forest products, drawing on the *Riches of the Forest* series and adding case studies of their own,' explains Citlalli Lopez. In the meantime, Indonesia decided to go ahead with a direct translation of *The Riches of the Forest: Food, Spices, Crafts and Resins of Asia* from English into the local language. This has been produced by one of the country's leading commercial publishers, Gramedia, with the support of the Department for International Development's (DFID) Multistakeholder Forestry Programme and BP.



Amazon fruit book gets its just deserts



In last year's annual report, we described the launch of *Frutíferas e Plantas Úteis na Vida Amazonica* – 'Fruit Trees and Useful Plants in the Lives of Amazonians' – by CIFOR ethnobotanists Patricia Shanley and Gabriel Medina. It was an astonishing event, attracting over 400 people to Governor's House in Belém. The culmination of a dozen years of research, involving scores of scientists, the Fruit Book, as it is known, combines rigorous scientific research with traditional knowledge to describe 30 trees and palms whose fruits, nuts, fibres and resins are widely used in Amazonia. Its use of illustrations, cartoons and popular songs make it accessible to rural people with minimal literacy skills.

But that was just part of the story. Further launches were held in 2005. The one in Brasilia, the capital, was opened by the executive director of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) and it attracted large numbers of politicians and civil servants. The Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva, was so enthused by the Fruit Book that she declared: 'Had I read this book earlier in my life, I would have become a researcher of non-timber forest products, not a politician.'

One of the great strengths of the book is that it appeals to a wide range of people, as was apparent when it was launched, for the fourth time, in the Amazonian city of Santarém in June 2005. Large numbers of local forest-dwelling women turned up for the launch, some coming from far away. 'The fact that these rural women, many of whom have had little formal education, responded so enthusiastically to the book was a major endorsement,' says Patricia Shanley.

The launch was timed to coincide with a meeting of some 30 World Bank representatives who were in town to study local knowledge networks. They were as enthusiastic about the Fruit Book as the forest women. Kevin Cleaver, the Bank's Director of Agriculture and Rural Development, suggested that the book deserved to be 'scaled up to other regions'.

Shanley's great talent for making serious science accessible was recognised by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) when she received the Science Award for Outstanding Communications. 'It is very difficult to take complex messages and make them intelligible,' said one of the experts on the award panel, Latifa Akharbar, Director of the Institut Supérieur de l'Information et de la Communication in Tunis. 'This book does exactly that.' She even recommended that the Fruit Book should be translated into Arabic for use in communications curricula.



CIFOR ethno-botanist Patricia Shanley receives the Science Award for Outstanding Communications at the 2005 CGIAR Annual General Meeting in Morocco. (Photo by Chris Barr)