



These traders in Belem will benefit from Brazil's decision to reduce red tape governing the transportation of non-timber forest products. Photo: Trilby MacDonald

Influencing trade policy in Brazil

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One of CIFOR's main aims is to conduct research which helps to inform and shape policy-making in such a way that it will benefit forests and those who depend on them for their livelihoods and survival. For this to happen, research findings need to be made accessible to policy makers, development agencies and National Agricultural Research Institutes.

An outstanding example of how some governments are using inclusive social processes to inform legislation, and how research can influence policy, comes from Brazil. In 2006, CIFOR scientists and their partners participated in a multistakeholder dialogue designed to inform regulations which governed the trade in non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

During recent years, CIFOR has produced a large body of work on NTFPs. The Non-timber Forest Product Case Comparison Project, which involved over 60 researchers from 27 countries, provided a detailed analysis of the use, management and marketing of some 61 NTFPs around the world. *Fruit trees and useful plants in the lives of Amazonians*, by CIFOR scientists Patricia Shanley and Gabriel Medina, was written in response to a request of the Brazilian government, and synthesised the findings of 90 Brazilian and international researchers. The book described the life histories of 30 Brazilian trees and palms whose fruits, nuts and fibre are used by local

people, and it has been widely used (and praised) by politicians, decision makers and educators. Shanley was also one of the co-authors of *Beyond Timber: Certification of Non-timber Forest Products*, which provided a critical analysis of NTFP certification using nine case studies from Latin America, Africa and Asia.

A common theme which emerged from these studies was that over-regulation and red tape frequently acted as a serious impediment to the trade in NTFPs. With this in mind, Antonio Carlos Hummel, the Director of Brazil's Environmental Protection Agency (IBAMA), invited CIFOR scientists to attend a meeting of senior policy makers in Brasilia in July 2006. The seminar was attended by representatives of key NTFP industries and local communities, as well as researchers. All were invited to share their views on the role of NTFPs in trade and livelihoods. Shanley and her colleagues presented the findings of their research, emphasising the importance NTFPs play in supporting the livelihoods of poor forest dwellers and urban populations. They also highlighted ways in which government regulations governing the transport of NTFPs, both in Brazil and many other countries, frequently hampered the trade.

CIFOR's thesis was very much in tune with Hummel's thinking, and he told participants that whenever he thought of government legislation



for NTFPs, he was reminded of Ver-o-Peso, the open-air market on the banks of the Amazon river in Belém. With its vast array of fruits, fibre, nuts, roots and gums, the market provides a graphic insight into the complexity of the NTFP trade – and the impracticability of producing standardised regulations to control it. Dr Joberto Velozo de Freitas, then Director of the National Forestry Programme, also presented a multiple-use vision for the future of Brazil's forests. In doing so, he drew on CIFOR's book, *Beyond Timber: Certification of Non-timber Forest Products*.

Just one month after the Brasilia meeting, IBAMA announced that transport documents would no longer be needed for ornamental, medicinal and aromatic bulbs, fibres and leaves of native or planted species. Confirmation of this – and of CIFOR's influence – came in a message from IBAMA's General Co-ordinator of Forestry Resource Management, José Humberto Chaves. "I believe that the conclusions of the workshop were the result of the input of all participants," he wrote. "Clearly, the experience of CIFOR contributed significantly to the consensus of ideas surrounding this decision."

In practical terms, the lifting of the transport regulations will make a significant difference to large numbers of people involved in the trade in NTFPs, whether they are collectors, growers or buyers. "Reaching legislative decisions through a multistakeholder process demonstrates initiative and innovation on the part of the Brazilian government," suggests Patricia Shanley. "It was gratifying to see how science can support forest people who are often invisible to policy processes."

Making the invisible visible

Many of the poorest people in rural South Africa use traditional skills to turn wild resources into marketable commodities: grass into brooms; fruits into alcoholic beverages; wood into building materials and carvings. Without the income from these activities, many would be faced by destitution and even greater levels of poverty, yet until recently the trade in South African non-timber forest products (NTFPs) – medicinal plants aside – has been poorly researched and little understood. "As a result, the trade is relatively invisible, and it has been largely ignored by policy-makers and the government," explains Sheona Shackleton, a research associate at Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

A three-year project coordinated by the Department of Environmental Science at Rhodes University, and funded by the South African Netherlands Programme for Alternatives in Development, has revealed just how important the trade in wild resources is for the rural poor, and why the government, along with NGOs and the private sector, should do more to encourage and support it. The project's findings were discussed in a policy briefing session – 'Making the invisible visible: ameliorating poverty through natural resource commercialisation' – held in Pretoria in February 2006, and CIFOR scientists were among the main speakers. CIFOR also acted as adviser to the project and supported the publication of a series of policy briefs.

Most of the people who participate in the trade in wild resources have little or no education, few assets, and little access to alternative sources of income or jobs. A significant number are women, and the project found that more than half were heads of household, many of which have been devastated by HIV/AIDS. "The cash they earn from selling natural resources may be modest," explains Shackleton, "but it is critically important." The income is used to buy food and other essential goods, and to pay for school fees and medical expenses.

The policy briefs, and the presentations at the Pretoria policy briefing session, promoted a number of measures which could improve the trade in wild resources, and thus benefit local livelihoods. These include minimising the regulatory burden on the NTFP trade, improving access to micro-finance and providing institutional support. It remains to be seen whether the government will take note. Although numerous efforts were made to encourage various government departments to send representatives to the policy briefing session, most failed to respond. However, the session was widely reported in the local media and well attended by development agencies and NGOs.



Bundles of reeds used for mat weaving in Bushbuckridge, north-east South Africa. Photo: Sheona Shackleton