



Leaves from the baobab tree are important ingredients for the local cuisine in Burkina Faso. Photo: Mathurin Zida



Children outside their school made of straw in northeastern Burkina Faso. Photo: Daniel Tiveau

Forests and Livelihood

Making forests work for the poor

Almost a quarter of a billion people live in or near tropical forests, and they depend on them for building materials, food, land on which to grow crops and many other things. CIFOR's Forests and Livelihoods Programme seeks to bring about improvements in their welfare by helping governments, conservation organisations and development agencies to work out how to handle the trade-offs between livelihood enhancement and forest conservation. The programme also aims to help raise the living standards of forest-dwelling people by providing information about markets and by improving forest management.

CIFOR's research also seeks to inform policy-making in such a way that it will benefit forests and the communities who depend on them. Two classic examples of how research can influence policy come from Brazil and Ethiopia. In 2006, CIFOR scientists and their partners convinced the Brazilian government that it should get rid of regulations which were hampering the trade in non-timber forest products. And in Ethiopia, CIFOR and its partners convinced government officials that the country's forestry law should encourage greater community participation. Both these measures will do much to enhance the welfare of the rural poor.

Africa's dry forests cover over 40 per cent of the continent and they are home to over 230 million people. In many areas, the forests are suffering from degradation, and this is inevitably having a serious impact on the rural poor. Several CIFOR publications – some are described in the following pages – have explored the importance of Africa's dry forests, and shown how their sustainable management could do much to improve the livelihoods of some of the poorest communities on the planet.

Tropical forests contribute a great deal to human welfare; they also harbour some of the nastiest diseases known to man. However, there is no simple relationship between forests and disease, a subject explored in great detail in a CIFOR Occasional Paper, *Forests and Human Health – Assessing the Evidence*. The report provides a detailed analysis of the links between forest degradation and disease, the contribution which forests make to medicine, and their importance to local cultures. The report suggests a number of measures which could be taken to tackle forest-related disease, conserve medicinal plants and ensure that families who depend on forest products have access to forest foods and medicines.



The harvesting of non-timber forest products provides food and an income for millions of forest dwellers. Tucumã-açu is widely consumed in Amazonia. Photo: Flávio Contente