



Gum arabic, produced from *Acacia senegal*, is an important non-timber forest product in Burkina Faso. (Daniel Tiveau)

Translating local action into policy reforms in dryland Africa

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Dry forests cover over 40 per cent of the African land mass and yield a range of products – timber, wood fuel, animal fodder, wild game, thatching grass, resins and much else – which are vitally important to the welfare of tens of millions of people. In many countries, forest-based enterprises provide over a third of all non-farm income in rural areas, but they could do much more to reduce rural poverty.

A three-year project managed by CIFOR and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) – ‘Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in African Dry Forests’ – seeks to improve local livelihoods by encouraging forest-based enterprises in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zambia, all of which suffer from high levels of rural poverty. In each country, CIFOR and its partners have selected for management, production and marketing interventions non-timber forest products (NTFPs) with a high commercial potential: gum arabic and shea nuts in Burkina Faso; several gums and resins in Ethiopia; honey and beeswax in Zambia.

“During 2007, the project achieved considerable success in promoting development activities with our partners,” explains Daniel Tiveau, CIFOR’s

Regional Coordinator for West Africa. “We have also been gathering data which will enable us to analyse different commercialisation strategies for NTFPs like gum arabic and honey. The research will enable us to identify local constraints and the ways in which forests and NTFPs could be managed and used to increase rural incomes in an equitable manner.”

In Burkina, as in the other two countries, development activities have laid the foundations for future research, and they have involved collaborations with a range of partners. During 2007, the main activities focused on Yagha Province, in the north-eastern part of the country, and involved capacity building, establishing a gum-harvesters’ union, conducting literacy training for women, and developing a technical guide to managing gum arabic in partnership with the Government’s Forestry Service. “The guide will help harvesters to improve the quality of gum arabic and ensure that the trees are exploited in a sustainable way,” explains CIFOR scientist Mathurin Zida. CIFOR also began to conduct household surveys and identify the key research questions which need to be addressed.

In all three countries, initial findings suggest that there are a number of factors which are hindering the development and commercialisation of NTFPs. These include the lack of basic management skills, the lack of access to credit, the lack of trust between producers, intermediaries and consumers, poor information about markets, inconsistent and poor product quality, and weak producer organisations. All these issues will be addressed by the project during the coming years.

The data gathered will be used in cross-country comparisons which will focus on three main topics. First, how does the production and trade of the selected products help to improve the livelihoods of producers and others along the production chain? Second, how do different value-adding and marketing strategies affect the poor and forest management? Finally, how can collective action and decentralisation help to improve the management and trade in NTFPs, and at the same time benefit both the rural poor and Africa's dry forests?

Some believe that CIFOR's dry-forest project veers too far towards development. Tiveau refutes this. "CIFOR assumes a coordinating role over both the research and development activities, which go hand in hand in a project like this," he says. "Most of the development activities are conducted by our NGO partners, while our scientists are concentrating on the research." Eventually, he says, the findings, which already demonstrate the important contribution forests can make to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, will help to provide guidance to policy-makers and others at national, regional and international levels.



Africa's dryland forests produce many products which support local livelihoods, ranging from honey to baobab leaves and charcoal. (Daniel Tiveau, Mathurin Zida and Sven Wunder)