Forest Fruits in Livelihoods
Policy Briefing Note to State public sector organisations

The research issue

Forest fruits contribute to the livelihoods of poor peoples in many parts of the tropics, but restricted access to natural resources, weak markets and poor information limit the realisation of benefits to forest-dependent poor peoples. Identifying these constraints can enhance livelihood strategies through promoting policy options which enable effective utilisation of forest resources.

This research concerns forest fruits in the livelihoods of forest-margin communities in Mexico.

Nance (Byrsonima crassifolia) in Mérida, Yucatán

Livelihood opportunities

Mayan communities in Yucatán have a history of semi-domestication of fruits in home gardens. Agroforestry will build upon silvicultural practices to help reduce deleterious impacts of shifting cultivation and overharvesting.

Natural resources policies in Yucatán, Mexico have not included NTFPs in their remit. Some NGOs have worked with rural communities to promote the use of NTFPs such as honey and medicinal plants, yet this work has not been widespread.

Formation of community-based groups and creation of simple extension materials in vernacular languages such as Mayan will enable the poor to achieve the objectives of sustainable utilisation.

Well-supplied market stall, Valladolid, Yucatán

Non-forest initiatives

The long-term dependence on Federal subsidies primarily for maize production is inadvisable.

Other livelihood strategies including improved educational and employment opportunities, and income remittance are likely to be significant also in enhancing the livelihood strategies of the people

Initial Uptake of Project Output

The Yucatán State authority and Mayan communities are now supporting initiatives that include *poox* in species programmes.

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Recommendations

For the Mayan communities, improving subsistence use is the most feasible livelihood-enhancing strategy in respect of forest fruits. The recommendations reflect the importance of forest fruits in strengthening the local subsistence economy, as well as meeting the conservation and sustainability objectives that define sound forest resource management.

Poox

Constraint	Findings	Action
Access to natural resources	Fruit tree abundance and regeneration are low in both forest and home gardens. Fruit tree productivity is significantly higher in the home gardens than in forest as a result of management practices rooted in silvicultural tradition.	Forest authorities should prioritise research and semi-domestication of fruit (and other NTFP) species through *in-situ* conservation and agroforestry. *Poox* (*Annona purpurea*) has market potential but its existence is threatened. Conservation and varietal development should be prioritised. New knowledge and technology transfer for improved tree production in *solares* and *milpas* must be integrated with traditional silvicultural concepts and practices.
Access to markets	Limited transport to regional markets and low quality and quantity of marketable product constraint to commercialisation. Moreover, there is low preference for and recognition of indigenous fruits in urban markets.	The Mayan case highlights the limited role of forest fruits in cash income generation, yet also shows the important role of NTFPs in general within livelihood strategies of these communities. The study suggests that alternative sources of income must complement that from forest fruits. In particular, improved access to labour markets and training will help diversify income sources and lower dependence on Government subsidies.

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