Forest Fruits in Livelihoods: Policy Briefing Note

The Issue

Forest fruits contribute to the livelihoods of poor peoples in many parts of the tropics, but lack of access to natural resources, markets and knowledge limits the realisation of maximal benefits. 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 India and Mexico.

Findings

•In BR Hills and MM Hills of southern Karnataka, India, forest margin communities derive up to 60% of their cash income from forest products, with 15% derived solely from three forest fruit species: amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*), arle (*Terminalia chebula*) and seege (*Acacia concinna).* Products are highly commercialised, but

•Among Mayan communities in the State of Yucatán, Mexico, market access constraints result in much lower cash incomes from forest fruits, nance (*Byrsonima crassifolia*), sakpá (*B. bucidaefolia*) and zapote (*Manilkara sapota*) but forest fruits and other NTFPs contribute substantially to household subsistence

•Constraints to the enhancement of livelihoods through improved use of forest fruit products, and approaches to overcome these constraints are presented below.

Constraint	*Mexico*	*India*
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	• Reduced population sizes and poor regeneration result from extensive and indiscriminate forest fruit harvesting, which imperil the sustainability of livelihood strategies based on forest resources
Access to markets	• Limited transport to regional markets and low quality and quantity of marketable product creates dependence on monopolistic marketing intermediaries • There is low preference for and recognition of indigenous fruits in urban markets compared to conventional temperate and tropical fruits • Poox (*Annona purpurea)* has market potential but its existence is threatened	• Legislation creates a marketing monopoly through state-authorised contractors and contributes to low returns to harvesters • Local cooperatives and on-site partial value addition enhances income • Harvesters respond to evolving market demand for a wide range of forest fruits as inputs to national and international food and pharmaceutical products
Access to knowledge	• Scarcity of production and marketing information restricts the promotion of forest fruits	• Indigenous knowledge of tree ecology and management promotes sustainable utilisation

Full Project Title: Enhancing the Role of Forest Fruits in Sustaining Livelihoods of Forest Margin Communities.
Disclaimer: This publication is an output from a research project funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID. [R7349, Forestry Research Programme].

DFID Department for International Development

ATREE Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment

Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán "Luz, Ciencia y Verdad"

Forest Fruits in Livelihoods: Policy Briefing Note

Initial Uptake of Project Output

- In Mexico, the Yucatán State authority and Mayan communities are now supporting initiatives that include poox in species programmes
- Formation of a community marketing organisation and Self-Help Groups has occurred at the Malè Mahadeshwara Hills site, India

Policy Recommendations

Semi-domestication of forest fruit trees in **agroforestry** systems is needed in home gardens and degraded forest areas. This recommendation applies to both **Mexico and India**.

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

•In Karnataka State, India, agroforestry can be introduced in the degraded land surrounding communities such as Ponnachi, Kombudikki and Chengadi. The State Chief Forest Conservation Officer agrees that intensified cultivation on disturbed land in the forest reserve can ease harvesting pressure in the rest of the forest. Such agroforestry initiatives should be accompanied by reviewing and revising land entitlements.

Existing **forest policy in India** needs to incorporate considerations of the livelihoods of forest margin communities. The rationale for this recommendation is that the thrust of forest policies focuses on conservation with little regard for forest dwellers' livelihoods. This shortcoming is being recognised by the **State Government** which needs assistance in understanding the issue through research and also requires case studies to serve as a means to gain experience in delivering such livelihood-focused policy.

Natural resource 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. The State authority for natural resources (**SEMARNAT**) should include **wild fruit species in their dissemination programme**. Such fruits can be cultivated in home gardens or in agroforestry plots. Semi-Official institutions such as the Campesino University and the Autonomous University of the Yucatan are identified dissemination pathways for information on NTFPs in general and forest fruits in particular.

Value-addition and formation of collectors' associations need to be encouraged. This recommendation is specifically targeted at **Indian and Mexican NGOs**. The Soligas in the MM Hills do not carry out any value addition to forest fruits and are at the mercy of the buyers and the restrictive State NTFP marketing policy in terms of prices and competitive outlets. In the BR Hills, Tribal peoples have formed a cooperative which buys raw fruits from the State-authorised contractor and process them into chutney and pickle to be sold on to grocers and consumers thereby enjoying the higher returns derived from of value-addition and association. Moreover, 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 and marketing.

The Mayan case highlights the **limited role of forest fruits in cash income generation**, yet also shows the **important role NTFPs in general have within livelihood strategies** of these communities. This study suggests that **alternative sources of income** need to be enhanced to 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.

Full Project Title: Enhancing the Role of Forest Fruits in Sustaining Livelihoods of Forest Margin Communities.
Disclaimer: This publication is an output from a research project funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID. [R7349, Forestry Research Programme].

DFID Department for International Development

Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment

Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán "Luz, Ciencia y Verdad"