
Book Reviews

Non-Wood Forest Products no. 13. Resource Assessment of Non-Wood Forest Products: Experience and Biometric Principles (NWFP)

Jennifer L.C. Wong, Kirsti Thornber and Neil Baker,
FAO Publication, Rome, Italy. Pp. 128, \$18.00. ISBN 92-5-104614-X 2001.

For a very long time forests and trees have been valued for the basic wood products –, i.e. timber, poles, firewood, pulp and paper, panel products and carnings. Other non-wood services including soil erosion control, prevention of land slides and habitat for other biodiversity conservation were appreciated but without quantification.

The non-wood forest products were categorized as minor forest products and more or less relegated to indigenous people's use where considerable knowledge, practice and skills exist. This situation was basically because adequate methods had not been developed to both quantify and value these non-wood products and integrate this into the contribution of forestry to the socio-economic development of the country to show their importance.

However, in the last few years, non-wood forest products and services have acquired higher value than solid timber products and the need to accurately assess them has become an urgent and indispensable matter.

Therefore, the authors and funders have to be congratulated and thanked, respectively, for producing this book that has come out at the most opportune time. It is indeed a very valuable tool to forest resource managers, policy and decision makers especially when NWFP have to be fully identified and described. The methods can be easily used to assess other natural resources use. It will be appropriate for persons with basic training in natural resource inventory, forest mensuration or biometrics. Other users can easily be trained to appreciate it although it lacks step-by-step guidelines of how to use it. Therefore it is also very good text book for training colleges and universities.

It will be necessary to produce a simpler version for real producers and users of NWFP for keeping accurate

records at household or community level where the actual centre of activity is. The book is highly recommended for all foresters and other natural resource managers.

John Aluma

Nature Divided – Land degradation in South Africa

Timm Hoffman and Ally Ashwell,
2001 University of Cape Town Press ISBN 1-919713-54-9.

During the years of apartheid in South Africa, the country's land was divided along racial lines, along with its people. The types and intensity of land use in the homelands and self-governing territories, which were predominantly communally farmed, differed greatly from the commercially farmed areas. Since the 1940s, soil conservation initiatives have been concentrated on commercially farmed areas. Despite the end of apartheid and the return to inclusive democratic rule, this division still has a profound effect on current patterns of land degradation, which is a major problem in much of South Africa today. The problem is still particularly severe in areas of communal farming. Soil degradation alone is estimated to cost South Africa nearly two billion rand per year (\$200 million).

In 1997 a major study was commissioned by the South African Government Department of Environment Affairs and Tourism to establish the status of land degradation in the country. This study was designed to meet the country's commitment to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification which requires the development of a national action plan to combat desertification. The study resulted in a detailed technical report and this book is a popular summary of the report. The term desertification in the UNCCD is used to mean land degradation in dry areas. The authors describe this as more of an 'outbreak of rash' rather than an 'advancing tide of sand'. Patches of degradation can result from a combination of climatic factors and poor land management. As the authors point out,