

LES ACTIONS DE LA DGD

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Increasing Benefits from Agroforestry Tree Products in West and Central Africa

Introduction

Innovative strategies are needed for poverty reduction and environmental sustainability in West and Central Africa, which is home to some of the world's poorest people. Forest resources in this area are under threat from logging and agricultural expansion. The recent move to increase protected areas squeezes people into smaller areas and reduces their access to forest resources, leaving them with very few options to make a living.

Despite the importance of non-timber forest products for the nutrition and incomes of poor farmers, they have so far received little attention from development practitioners. In response, ICRAF and its national partners in 1998 initiated a programme on domestication and conservation of agroforestry species in West and Central Africa. Since then, major advances have been made with regards to the production, post-harvest and commercialisation of agroforestry products (AFTPs). Nevertheless, a number of issues remain to be addressed in order to improve poor farmers' participation in AFTP value chains.

The project and its components

The project "Increasing small-scale farmer benefits from agroforestry tree products in West and Central Africa" (AFTP4A), funded by the Belgian Development Cooperation, is being implemented in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo between 2009 and 2012 by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and its main partners (IRAD, INERA, University of Ghent-Belgium, Institut Facultaire d'Agronomie de Yangambi-DRC). The project AFTP4A aims at improving participation of smallholder farmers in agroforestry tree product markets in order to increase and diversify their incomes, while at the same time preserving the natural resources and improving nutrition. These agroforestry products are 'safou' (*Dacryodes edulis*), 'bush mango' or ndo'o (*Irvingia gabonensis*), 'njansang' (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*), 'kola' (*Cola spp.*) and 'okok'/'fumbua' (*Gnetum africanum*), 'anguto'/'bombi' (*Anonidium manii*) and honey as a by-product.



Photo 1: Safou (*Dacryodes edulis*) for sale a road market, Makenene, Centre Region of Cameroon.

The project that follows the value chain approach is built on 5 pillars, which complement one another:

1. *Development and promotion of improved techniques for production, harvest and post-harvest of target AFTPs.* This pillar must ensure the supply of quality products in sufficient quantities to sustain growing AFTP markets, without depleting the natural resource base. On the one hand, there are research-oriented activities which aim to fill knowledge gaps on the propagation and on-farm production of target species. On the other hand, development-oriented activities are carried out with the objective of increasing farmers' access to quality germplasm. More specifically, the project deals with the set-up of Rural Resource Centres for diffusion of tree domestication, training of relay organisations and farmers in tree domestication



Photo 2: Kola nuts (*Cola nitida*): an important income source and culturally valuable product for farmers all over the African humid tropics (white are unpeeled and red are peeled nuts).



Photo 3: Njansang producers and traders weighing a bag of njansang during a group sales in Ondeck, Centre Region of Cameroon.

and supporting of farmer nurseries with technical backstopping and small nursery tools. In terms of harvest and post-harvest techniques, bottlenecks were identified in a participatory diagnosis prior to the project and project activities so far have concerned 3 products: njansang (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*), bush mango (*Irvingia spp.*) and kola nuts (*Cola spp.*).

2. *Development of adequate organisational mechanisms and arrangements to improve the integration of poor farmers in AFTP value chains.* Main activities developed under this output are: (i) analysing value chains in order to identify actors, costs, benefits, opportunities and constraints related to the marketing of the product; (ii) strengthening producers and traders so they can engage in collective action and link up with each other; and (iii) develop and test financial mechanisms to overcome some of the barriers that both producers and traders face when wanting to increase their participation in value chains. To put the research on mechanisms and arrangements to strengthen linkages between actors in the AFTP value chain to action, substantial work has been done on organizing and training producer groups to increase their bargaining power and management skills with a view to organizing group sales. Likewise, contacts have been made with traders of targeted

AFTPs in main markets with a view of linking them with collaborating producer groups. As the financial needs, the environment and the experience of target groups are not similar; the project identified different options allowing producers and traders to access financial resources more easily.

3. *Establishment of a community-based market information system.* The market of AFTPs in Cameroon, as in many other African countries, is characterised by incomplete or asymmetric market information. A Market Information System (MIS) has two objectives: (i) to improve the functioning of the markets because of better information leading to enhanced power of negotiation by producers, broader choices for consumers and better flow of products for traders; and (ii) to provide deeper understanding of the markets for decision makers. Taking into consideration the needs of the various actors contacted, a system thought appropriate and more adapted to the needs of direct beneficiaries was developed and is currently under evaluation in a number of project sites. This system makes use of relay organizations as major focal points for information exchange. On the supply side, producer groups diffuse information on quantities and quality of the product available in their area to the relay organization and propose a selling price. On the demand side, individual traders, or trader associations where they exist, send to the same relay organization information on quantities of products they are willing to buy and propose a buying price. The role of the relay organization is to facilitate the gathering of information on both sides and to facilitate linkages between these actors to debate on the price. It is however expected that with time, producers and traders would have established strong relationships and would be able to communicate directly with each other to exchange market information, eliminating the role of the relay organization



Photo 4: Improved packaging has helped beekeepers in Kiduma, Bas-Congo (DRC) to commercialise their honey in urban centres.

4. *Analyse policy and institutional context and develop policy guidelines to create an enabling environment for cultivation and commercialisation of AFTPs.* This is a very crucial element for the success of the project as it is widely known that external factors largely affect the outcomes of marketing efforts of small-scale farmers in rural areas. In this output we study how valorisation and domestication of NTFPs, together with the institutional environment and existing policies, have shaped the behaviour and performance of actors in selected AFTP value chains in Cameroon and the DRC. Research activities are divided into two main axes: (i) analyses of national and regional policies; formal and informal institutions as they impact access and trade in AFTPs and (ii) effect of informal institutions on the choice of coordination mechanism/governance structure adopted by AFTPs producers and traders, and on the performance of the value chain. Preliminary findings indicate that existing policies and legislations make way for forests and police officials to increasingly seek rents from traders who commercialise AFTPs. These again stand as disincentives for traders to obtain formal papers and operate legally.
5. *Training and dissemination* to bring the benefits of this project beyond the scope of contact farmers and pilot zones. Activities under this output focus on the need to build rural actors' capacities to access knowledge, technologies and information related to tree domestication and AFTP marketing; and adapt these to their respective social, cultural, political and ecological environments. Apart from the organisation of training sessions at different levels in the value chain, activities under this output include the development of learning material in the form of technical leaflets, videos on different propagation and cultivation techniques and other publications.

Conclusion

This project is really a research for development project whereby useful and valued agroforestry tree species are incorporated in the landscape, producing AFTPs that are in high demand in markets. In doing so, tree resources are conserved, biodiversity is enhanced, agricultural systems become more sustainable and farmers get more income through diversification and specialization, thus improving their livelihoods, particularly women farmers. Currently, the project is working with about 2500 households gathered in 100 producer groups. The action focuses on Rural Resource Centers where groups of farmers, in many cases women groups, come together centred around a nursery where a number of key species are multiplied at large scale through seedlings, cuttings, grafting and marcotting. The project not only addresses production but also every aspect of the value chain, including post-harvest, processing and marketing, as well as policy and institutional aspects of agroforestry production. Marketing actions focus on collective actions with producers and traders for better market information and group sales. This is also new and income via group sales has already been increased substantially, thus encouraging them to increase production and sales. Finally, capacity development of all concerned in the value chain is taking place through trainings. For the research aspects, an impressive number of M.Sc. and Ph.D. candidates are benefiting from the project (both in Belgium and abroad).

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