



Enhancing the Contribution of Non-Wood Forest Products to Poverty Alleviation and Food Security in Central African Countries

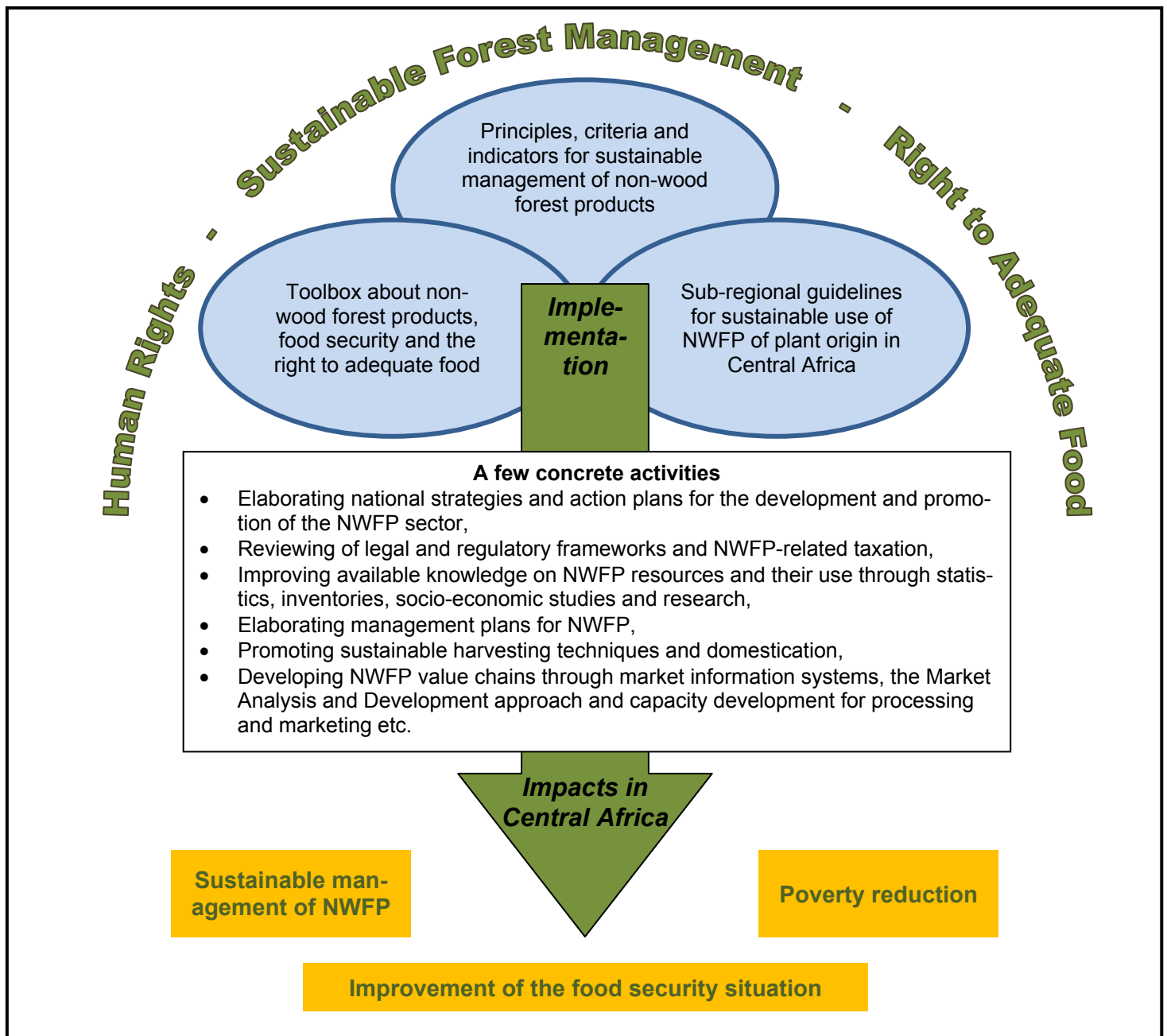
Introduction

This information note suggests a conceptual framework for sustainable management of non-wood forest products (NWFP) in Central Africa. The framework features an approach based on the right to adequate food, sustainable forest management and the human rights principles. Main elements are described, guiding the technical assistance of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) within the NWFP sector. These activities contribute to sustainable management of NWFP in Central Africa and follow FAO's general mandate: Achieving food security, reducing poverty and contributing to sustainable forest management.

The figure and its elements shown on this page are explained in detail on the following pages.

FAO and non-wood forest products

Established in 1991, the programme *Promotion and development of non-wood forest products (NWFP)* is one of the priority areas of FAO's Forestry Department. As part of this programme and since almost ten years, FAO provides technical assistance and policy advice to the Executive Secretariat of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) and its member countries. In doing so, FAO supports the development of the NWFP sector in Central Africa, the improvement of national and regional policies and legal frameworks and sustainable management of non-wood forest products. Entrepreneurial and technical capacities of local communities and small and medium scale enterprises (SME) for a better utilization of NWFP are developed and/or strengthened.



The Right to Adequate Food

The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.

States are legally obliged to put this human right into practice. However, all members of society have responsibilities with respect to its implementation.

States as duty-bearers – individuals as rights-holders

All member states of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) with the exception of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This covenant formally recognizes the right to adequate food and obliges States to take steps to the maximum of available resources to progressively realize this human right for each individual. The State is obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the right to adequate food.

In contrast to the common understanding of poor people as simple dependent beneficiaries, in a rights-based approach each individual is a rights-holder who is entitled to hold the government accountable for its actions or omissions. Therefore, the right to adequate food complements the technical food security concept with the legal and enforceable aspects of human rights.

The concept of states as duty-bearers and individuals as rights-holders underlines the importance of recourse mechanisms on national level in case of alleged violations of the right to adequate food.

The human rights principles



Participation
Accountability
Non – Discrimination
Transparency
Human Dignity
Empowerment
Rule of Law

HUMAN RIGHTS
principles

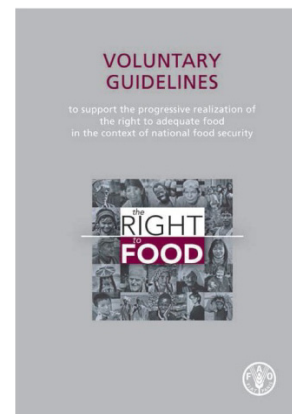
Voluntary Guidelines

In 2004, FAO's member countries adopted the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security (Right to Food Guidelines), providing practical guidance to States in their implementation of the right to adequate food.

The Right to Food Guidelines translate the content of the human right to adequate food and the above mentioned human rights principles into concrete recommendations for action and guide States on how to practically implement their legal obligations based on international, regional and national human rights instruments.

Linkages between NWFP, food security and the right to adequate food

NWFP contribute to food security through (i) their consumption in households, adding proteins, fats, minerals and vitamins to staple food, and through (ii) their trade that generates revenues, which are among other things used to purchase food and medicine and to access health care.



Applying the right to adequate food to improve the contribution of NWFP to food security

Using a right to adequate food approach – based on the Right to Food Guidelines as an orientation for concrete action – could improve the contribution of NWFP to food security. Examples are:

- Assure access of local communities and indigenous peoples to forest resources while respecting customary tenure laws and the rights of indigenous peoples (individually or in groups) to own, possess, access and use land and natural resources.¹ Put recourse mechanisms in place that can be accessed and used by local communities and indigenous peoples.
- Expand traditional user rights to a limited commercial user right by allowing local populations to trade NWFP within the collection zone in order to buy other products of basic necessity.
- Decrease the number of road blocks which are used by law enforcement agents to get illegitimate payments from traders who then transfer these costs to collectors (by paying them lower prices) and to consumers (by charging them higher prices).
- Promote the intersectoral collaboration of all stakeholders involved in food security.



Figure 1: Female trader of *Gnetum* spp. at the Oloumi market in Gabon (Photo: Ousseynou Ndoye)

¹ FAO member states currently negotiate the new "Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security".

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)

This concept emerged during the Rio 1992 conference and is based on three pillars describing economic, environmental and social concerns of forest management. FAO defines SFM as “the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems” (FAO).

Key elements of Sustainable Forest Management

The following seven thematic areas further define the SFM concept and orient its implementation:

1. Extent of forest resources,
2. Biological diversity,
3. Forest health and vitality,
4. Productive functions and forest resources,
5. Protective functions of forest resources,
6. Socio-economic functions,
7. Legal, policy and institutional framework.

Criteria and indicators

Criteria and indicators are tools that support countries in the practical implementation of the sustainable forest management concept. They are used to define, monitor and evaluate progress towards SFM or setbacks in this process. The sustainable management of NWFP is only partly taken into account by already defined principles, criteria and indicators (PCI). Further efforts are needed in order to define additional NWFP-specific principles, criteria and indicators and related activities.

Sustainable Management of NWFP

Non-wood forest products are mainly used by local communities and small and medium scale enterprises. Newly designed or changed principles, criteria and indicators should reflect this particularity of NWFP utilization, respect customary user rights and apply existing laws governing collection, processing and trade of NWFP.

Criteria and indicators for sustainable management of NWFP contain inter alia the following elements:

- Establish inventories that list not only the NWFP species but also their quantity and annual use,
- Collect statistical data and evaluate the contribution of NWFP to the national economy,
- Improve the legal framework governing the NWFP sector in order to encourage the sustainable management of NWFP resources,
- Simplify and explain administrative procedures necessary to obtain a permit for the commercial use of non-wood forest products,
- Develop and use techniques and guidelines for a sustainable harvest and collection of NWFP,
- Establish forest management plans that include the socio-economic value of NWFP,
- Reach a consensus on the use of NWFP by different stakeholders and establish conflict resolution and compensation mechanisms,
- Respect and, if necessary, formalize customary user rights for forest and land resources of local communities with a particular focus on indigenous peoples.

Toolbox about non-wood forest products, food security and the right to adequate food

This toolbox mainly aims at giving an orientation to COMIFAC member countries on how to integrate NWFP, food security and the right to adequate food into their policies, programmes and development activities related to forestry, agriculture and other sectors. Being elaborated as an orientation document, the toolbox uses a multi-stakeholder approach taking perspectives and experiences of all stakeholders into consideration. The toolbox covers the following dimensions:

- i. Capacity development,
- ii. Sustainable resource management,
- iii. Institutional and legal framework,
- iv. Market and value chain development,
- v. Partnerships and research.

Sub-regional guidelines for sustainable use of NWFP of plant origin in Central Africa

In 2004, the Council of Ministers of the Central African Forests Commission has endorsed the sub-regional guidelines and recommended them to its member countries as guidance for developing and/or improving their NWFP legislation.

FAO supports governments in the process of integrating the guidelines in their national policy, legal, fiscal and institutional frameworks.

The guidelines form the mutual base for the governments of Central African countries and propose how national policies and legal, fiscal and institutional frameworks could integrate NWFP of plant origin to allow a sustainable use of forest resources. The right to adequate food is an integral part of these guidelines.

Summary

This information note shows that sustainable management of non-wood forest products is an important part of sustainable forest management. The principles of the right to adequate food add a rights-based approach to the SFM concept.

The conceptual framework presented and explained in this information note is a work in progress and stakeholders are welcome to discuss, refine and adapt it to their needs. The framework orients stakeholders on key questions and needed activities on the way to promote and enhance the contribution of non-wood forest products to food security and poverty reduction.

This information note was elaborated by the team of the regional project GCP/RAF/441/GER in collaboration with FAO's Right to Food Team.

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Please visit our websites for more information:
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/nwfp/55079/en/> and
http://www.fao.org/righttofood/index_en.htm.

