



2.6 Certification of non-wood forest products

PAUL VANTOMME

A proxy for monitoring forest biodiversity?

Monitoring biodiversity to determine how management is complying with guidelines is a complex and costly exercise. Not only do habitats and their species differ in many ways; it is generally a challenge to define what exactly needs to be measured, and how and when to measure it.

In forest habitats, forest inventories provide a useful framework to support biodiversity monitoring (including non-tree species) by including measurements and observations of selected biodiversity indicator species. However, the longer such list of species becomes the more complex — and more expensive — biodiversity monitoring will be.

The question is: does certifying non-wood forest products (NWFPs)¹ guarantee that biodiversity will be monitored in the habitats where they were collected? In some cases, the answer is yes. The certification of Brazil nuts from Amazon forests in Bolivia or in Acre, Brazil, for example, includes monitoring of the pollinator species (bats) and the small rodents that disperse the seeds, because they contribute to a sustained supply of Brazil nuts and the natural regeneration of the Brazil nut tree.



CERTIFICATION OF AN NWFP SPECIES REQUIRES NOT ONLY ITS SUSTAINABLE USE, BUT ALSO PROVIDES A WAY TO ASSESS THE ABUNDANCE OF OTHER SPECIES DIRECTLY LINKED TO ITS SURVIVAL.

Several certification schemes address forest management for NWFPs. A good example is provided in the Forest Certification Council (FSC) step-by-step guide to certification requirements (FSC 2009). Step 3 of the guide describes the procedures to monitor the population levels of the NWFP species being harvested and those of other species in the harvested forest. Certification of an NWFP species requires not only its sustainable use, but also provides a way to assess the abundance of other species that it is ecologically

Paul Vantomme works for the Forestry Department, FAO, Rome. His interest in this topic is based on extensive work at FAO HQ and in the field with producers, traders and consumers of NWFPs as to advice member countries on improving their forest policies and institutional capacities.

linked to. In this way, certification of NWFPs provides an opportunity to assess at least a part of the biodiversity of the harvested forest, and have some of the associated monitoring costs borne by the consumers of the certified NWFPs.

Although considerable indigenous knowledge often exists for specific NWFP, formal resource inventory techniques for them are relatively new, especially in tropical countries, and have received little attention to date. The assessment of NWFPs and the resources that support them is a difficult task for several reasons:

- the number and variety of NWFPs;
- the multiplicity of interests and disciplines involved in NWFP monitoring;
- organizational and financial constraints;
- the lack of globally or even nationally recognized common terminology and units of measurement.

In response to this situation and to raise awareness of the importance of accurate and precise resource assessments at all levels of forest use for NWFPs, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has compiled a technical guidebook (FAO 2001). It provides information about the design and selection of appropriate methods of resource quantification for a range of situations and products. It also reviews and analyzes a wide range of approaches developed to measure NWFPs.

Certification of NWFPs is increasing quickly for both global and national markets in developed and developing countries. In addition, technical manuals are becoming available to assess the status of NWFP-producing species. They include information on how to define sustainable harvesting levels for mushrooms, medicinal plants, berries, wild honey, fruits, as well as best-practice guidelines for the certification of NWFPs. It is expected that the growing number of certified NWFP species and their increasing market share will strengthen conservation of these species, and of the general biodiversity of the forests where they were harvested.

Endnote

1. FAO defines non-wood forest products as “products of biological origin other than wood derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forests” (www.fao.org/forestry/nwfp/6388/en/).

References

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). 2001. *Resource Assessment of Non-Wood Forest Products*. Non-Wood Forest Products Series No. 13 Y1457/E. Rome: FAO. www.fao.org/DOCREP/004/Y1457e/Y1457e00.HTM.

FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). 2009. *FSC Step-by-Step Guide. Good practice guide to meeting FSC certification requirements for biodiversity and High Conservation Value Forests in Small and Low Intensity Managed Forests (SLIMFs)*. FSC Technical Series No. 2009 – T002. Bonn: FSC International Centre, 38 pp. www.fsc.org/fileadmin/web-data/public/document_center/publications/FSC_Technical_Series/Step-by-step_pocket_guide-EN.pdf.