



AFF COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS (NTFPS) VALUE CHAINS

CONCEPT NOTE

NOVEMBER 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

The African Forest Forum (AFF) is a pan-African non-governmental organization with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. It is an association of individuals who share the quest for and commitment to the sustainable management, use and conservation of the forest and tree resources of Africa for the socio-economic wellbeing of its people and for the stability and improvement of its environment. The purpose of AFF is to provide a platform and an enabling environment for independent and objective analysis, advocacy and advice on relevant policy and technical issues pertaining to sustainable management, use and conservation of Africa's forest and tree resources.

The scope of AFF's work requires an interdisciplinary approach and an understanding of a wide range of economic, scientific and policy issues in order to provide evidence-based information to support decision making and guide implementation of various activities in the forestry sector. In this regard, facilitating access to relevant information and knowledge-sharing platforms could provide opportunities for exchanging ideas, seeking advice, co-creating solutions, and capacity building for improved use and management of forests and tree resources. As identified in the *AFF Knowledge Management Strategy (2021-2025)*, Communities of Practice (CoPs) provides an ideal, efficient and easily accessible platform for sharing information and learning.

Communities of Practice (CoP) are active networks whose members are interested in learning about the same topics (FAO,2016) and, as such, can draw on AFF's membership to advance knowledge sharing, innovation and the uptake of best practices to solve critical problems. Applied to sustainable forest management and climate change related challenges, functional CoP allow a geographically and professionally varied audience to tackle the complexity of issues by deepening their knowledge and sharing expertise.

AFF continues to encourage relevant and interested stakeholders to establish CoP focusing on a range of forestry-related topics of relevance for forestry stakeholders. One of these, is the CoP online discussion forum on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) value chains.

2. BACKGROUND

In many parts of Africa, people's livelihoods depend on natural resources. Due to growing populations, as well as, changing aspirations, economic conditions and technologies, forestry activities are changing fast and becoming increasingly market oriented. Rural poverty is generally considered to be linked to lower forest productivity and limited access to economic opportunities. Changes in the quantities of gathered items from common property resources such as forests go largely formally unnoticed and are not even presented in the national accounts. However, IFAD (2016) indicated that about 284 million people living in and around forests in Africa derive their livelihood support from the collection and marketing of NTFPs. According to United Kingdom Forestry commission (2006), NTFPs are any biological resources found in the woodland/ (forest except timber, FAO (1992) equally defined NTFPs as plants or plant parts that have perceived economic or consumption value sufficient to encourage their collection and removal from the forest. NTFPs comprise forest products (excluding sawn-timber, pole-timber,

natural gas, crude oil, sand, gravel, shale and building stone) harvested or removed from the forest lands for private use or for sale.

Today, NTFPs are faced with myriads of challenges due to, among other things, destruction of forest resources arising from increasing human population pressure and demand for livelihoods. Particularly in Africa, forests have been degraded over the years as a result of agricultural expansion, uncontrolled livestock grazing, logging and fuel wood collection annually, but the threats on NTFPs are mainly related to overexploitation, habitat destruction and poor regeneration. As a result, there is serious threat to many NTFPs.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the economic and social importance of NTFPs are well known, a number of problems are militating against optimal development and utilization of NTFPs in Africa. These have made it difficult to obtain adequate benefits from their harvesting and sales (that is, value chain) locally and on global basis. Some of the major constraints are subsequently discussed.

- **Lack of adequate policy on the development of NTFPs.** A major obstacle to the development and optimal use of NTFPs is negligence among policy makers, planners and forest managers. Governments should therefore undertake formulation, review and/or revision of forest policies with clear orientation towards sustainable management of NTFPs.
- **Lack of adequate inventory/assessment of NTFPs:** There is need for detailed inventory on the NTFPs. Although, a number of reconnaissance surveys have been carried out, they were neither detailed enough nor covering large areas to provide information on the status of the resources and ease planning of sustainable use / development of the sector. The surveys have been fragmented and uncoordinated. Precise information must be obtained on the abundance, quality, distribution, variation, ecology, reproductive biology, traditional and new methods of propagation and above all, the dynamics of the different characteristics of the resources under current and projected climate change. This will serve as a sound basis for identification of candidate to be developed for specific products. Without the relevant, reliable and timely information, estimates on NTFPs and forecast of prospects for utilization will be mere conjectures. The interactive session with AFF CoPs will provide necessary guidance on how initiatives could be taken to make such information available.
- **Destructive methods of harvesting:** The methods of harvesting most NTFPs are regarded as being crude and unregulated. Most of the collectors tend to pull the shrubs and herbs gathered up by the roots. Equally, a number of cases, the reproductive organs are extracted for medicinal purposes, leaving little or no consideration for sustainability of the species

Prospects for development of NTFPs

NTFPs have continued to be overshadowed by timber products; however, this is gradually changing. They started receiving policy and research attention in the last few decades. According to Arnold and Ruiz-Perez (2001) the policy and research attention on NTFPs are premised on three major requirements. These include their possible contributions to the livelihood and

welfare of households living in and adjacent to forests; prospects of ecologically sound and less destructive methods of harvesting in comparison to timber and other forest uses coupled with the possibility of using them as a key basis for sustainable economic development that could reduce tropical deforestation. It is becoming increasingly clear that harvesting of most NTFPs except charcoal has a lower impact on the forest ecosystem than timber harvesting and can provide an array of social and economic benefits, particularly to community operations and can therefore be an important component of forest ecosystem management.

According to the *Sustainable Forest Management Framework for Africa (2020-2030)*, much of the trade of NTFPs is currently at the local community level, although certain NTFPs, such as gum arabic, shea butter, baobab, vanilla, marula, honey and wild nuts are traded internationally. Further, over the past decades biotechnology, pharmaceutical and human health care industries have increased their interest in natural products found in non-timber forest products as sources of new biochemical compounds for drug, chemical and agro-products development. Such products are traded internationally and thus also play a role in international economic development but the challenge has been the lack of equity in sharing of the benefits that accrue.

Despite this potential, many NTFPs enterprises tend to be very small, informal and not well structured/disorganized and are therefore generally not captured in official statistics. Nevertheless, they are gaining prominence in Africa and making important contributions to socio-economic development in many countries. For example, there are many honey trading companies and cooperatives in

Africa (https://www.apiservices.biz/documents/articles/en/honey_trading_companies_cooperatives_africa.pdf), also, there are companies using Bamboo and Rattan for production of value-added items such as furniture and gift items. NTFPs act as safety nets in times of food insecurity and provide income opportunities for otherwise marginalized people. In South Africa, 27 million people benefit from medicinal plants, wild fruit and other forest-based foods, and 20 million tonnes of medicinal plants are harvested annually in natural forests and traded (DAFF, 2015). The Sudan is the largest producer of gums and resins worldwide, meeting about 80 percent of global demand.

The production of shea fruit, which is widely consumed by local people and also sold in local and urban markets, in the woodlands, dry savannahs and forests of West Africa involves 20 000 women farmers. Easy access to NTFPs does prevent millions from going hungry. Closely allied with this, is the role of NTFP plants in gender equality, women empowerment and employment creation. Rural women have access to harvesting NTFPs and this leads to their empowerment in most cases.

From the foregoing, the AFF CoP on NTFPs value chains will have the following objectives.

3. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED RESULTS AND OUTPUTS

The aim of this on-line discussion forum is to provide a platform for sharing of knowledge, resources and best practices amongst African forestry stakeholders, with focus on NTFPs and how they can contribute to livelihood and climate resilience. Specifically, the platform aims to

discuss challenges, opportunities, share best practices and useful resources for supporting development of the value chains of:

- NTFPs that are of nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic significance in general with particular focus on gums and resins;
- NTFPs of wood products (e.g., firewood, charcoal, wood carvings, etc.).

4. COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE APPROACH

The CoP platform will take place from 15 November to 3 December 2021. During the first two days of each week, a zoom meeting will be held starting with a short introductory presentation of about 20 minutes followed by discussion / experience sharing among participants (see table below about topics to be discussed). The remaining 3 days of each week, participants will continue sharing experiences through an e-discussion platform. These interactive sessions will be scheduled for between 1 – 3 hours per day during weekdays, at a time best suited to the time zones of registered participants. On the e-discussion platform, participants will be able to view daily summaries, discussion threads and access resources at any time during the three-week period that the platform is live.

Three blocks of discussion topics will be organized over the three weeks as presented in the table below:

Table 1: Topics to be discussed during the three weeks

Days	Week 1: NTFP of nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic significance on the African continent	Week 2: NTFPs of nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic significance on the African continent - Gums and resins	Week 3: NTFPs of wood products and important to the African continent
Day 1 Zoom	General introduction – clarification of concepts (NTFPs, NWFPs, among others)	General introduction – Gums and resins	General introduction - NTFPs of wood products and important to the African continent
Day 2 Zoom	Examples of NTFPs that are of nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic significance on the African continent (incl. fruits and oils, etc.) - marketing and trade	Significance of gums and resins for nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic uses on the African continent - marketing and trade	NTFPs of wood products (e.g., firewood, charcoal, wood carvings, etc.) - marketing and trade
Day 3 Platform	Examples of NTFPs that are of nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic significance on the African continent (incl. fruits and oils, etc.) - examples of value chains - opportunities for development and challenges	Significance of gums and resins for nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic uses on the African continent - opportunities for development and challenges	NTFPs of wood products (e.g., firewood, charcoal, wood carvings, etc.) - opportunities for development and challenges
Day 4 Platform	Examples of NTFPs that are of nutritional, medicinal and	Significance of gums and resins for nutritional, medicinal and	NTFPs of wood products (e.g., firewood, charcoal, wood

Days	Week 1: NTFP of nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic significance on the African continent	Week 2: NTFPs of nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic significance on the African continent - Gums and resins	Week 3: NTFPs of wood products and important to the African continent
	cosmetic significance on the African continent (incl. fruits and oils, etc.) - examples of value chains - opportunities for development and challenges	cosmetic uses on the African continent - opportunities for development and challenges	carvings, etc.) - opportunities for development and challenges
Day 5 Platform	Wrap up of discussion - on platform	Wrap up of discussion - on platform	Wrap-up on overall CoP on NTFP

5. TARGET AUDIENCE

AFF, which provides a platform that creates an enabling environment for this discussion.

AFF's members and those involved in the recent AFF-hosted sub-regional webinars on national forest governance responses to Paris Agreement and the contribution of forest resources to strengthening resilience of communities,

Africa Forest Enterprises Connect Network, which is committed to the development of locally controlled forest enterprises for livelihood improvement in Africa;

Forest and Trade Networks for Legal and Sustainable Forest Management in Africa and Asia, which promote the conservation and sustainable management of tropical forests by assisting developing countries to improve forest governance while contributing directly to the implementation of the European Union's Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade;

African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests, which is involved in sustainable forest resource management in Africa;

African Community Forestry Network, which brings together community-led organizations working in agroforestry and forestry across Africa;

African Academy of Sciences, which honours achievers in African science and technology and acts as a development-oriented mobilizer of the African science and technology community with the aim of facilitating the development of scientific and technological capacity for science-led development in Africa; and

NGARA, which brings together a broad set of stakeholders (e.g. farmers, collectors, traders, governments, non-governmental organizations, exporters and importers) with a common desire to improve the production and quality;

Association of Women in Forestry and Environment (AWIFE);

Experts in NTFPs along the value chain;

International Network on Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR);

Other interested stakeholders such as universities offering courses in forestry.