

Taking tree products to markets, paving the way

The World Agroforestry Centre studies ways of improving market access for smallholders in the developing world

In many developing countries the sale of tree products could earn subsistence farmers extra income, but fruits and other tree-based resources are often not traded. According to Amos Gyau, a marketing specialist at the World Agroforestry Centre in Nairobi, the reason is because farmers are not linked to markets. “At ICRAF scientists work on different agroforestry techniques for smallholders, but without access to markets farmers will remain poor,” he claims. It is difficult for many smallholders to find a market for their tree products, often produced in fragmented small quantities and not always meeting quality standards. As a result small-scale producers do not meet the demands of buyers. At ICRAF’s Tree Products and Markets Science Domain, Gyau and his colleagues are carrying out research on best policies and practices that could link farmers and small businesses to local, regional and international markets. They analyse the different market requirements and try to understand key constraints in agroforestry product value chains from production to markets. Research is taking place in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Diversity dividend

Smallholders have to overcome a long list of hurdles to take their tree products to the market. These include organizational constraints, institutional and policy challenges. Beginning with the latter, many agroforestry tree products are underutilized and their markets underdeveloped, because there are few clear-cut institutions or policies to guide their production and marketing. Take for instance *Prunus Africana*, an indigenous tree grown in Cameroon. The bark is used for medicine in the pharmaceutical industry. Unsustainable harvesting of the tree in the wild – spurred by high prices – resulted in a blanket harvest ban of the endangered species. This provided no incentive for farmers to grow the profitable tree on farm.

Marketing an Amazon flavour

In Peru the World Agroforestry Centre is looking at opportunities for developing the value chain for camu-camu (*Myrciaria spp*), an indigenous fruit that is common along flooded lands in the Peruvian Amazon. The camu-camu berry has a distinctive sweet-and-sour taste and contains up to 30 times more vitamin C than oranges. The fruit is exported to the US and Europe for use in nutritional and cosmetic products. Although the indigenous fruit tree has been subject to over 30 years of research and some 15 years of promotion, its fortunes have been mixed. While there is a growing domestic market, exports are down by 77% from a peak of US\$ 5 million in 2007. “In the past most of the research has focused on agronomic issues, but the business side has been neglected,” says Jason Donovan, a marketing specialist with ICRAF in Peru. Donovan and his colleagues are now studying and debating with stakeholders what value chain actions can be taken to reinvigorate the market for the Amazon fruit.



A Peruvian woman picking camu-camu fruit (Photo: ICRAF/Bruno Paino)

ICRAF came up with policy briefs and got involved in the debate to make a case to distinguish wild trees from trees on farm. This was an 'eye-opener' for most policymakers says Gyau. ICRAF advocated for policies based on 'place of origin', allowing trees on farm to be exploited, while protecting the wild varieties.

The World Agroforestry Centre together with local partners also addresses organizational constraints, helping to establish farmer cooperatives and conducting training

on propagation methods, production and post-harvest handling. Better quality produce fetches higher prices. In Peru ICRAF is currently studying ways of enhancing the profitability of local cocoa cooperatives. Finally, eco certification and 'fair trade' are possible approaches to improving market access for subsistence farmers. These schemes not only promise premium prices for smallholders, but also promote more environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, generating, in the words of Amos Gyau, 'a diversity dividend'.

How to crack a hard nut?

In Cameroon Njansang spice paste – made from the roasted kernels of the indigenous tree species *Ricinodendrom heudelotti* – livens up the flavour of food and thickens soups with its paprika/ginger-like taste. It is a valuable commodity, but there is a catch. Artisanal processing traditionally takes up to eight weeks with fruits having to decompose before cracking. This difficult processing procedure represents a major constraint in the value chain, creating a

bottleneck to wider production and commercialization. To enable smallholder farmers to increase supply of njansang, ICRAF scientist Amos Gyau and his colleagues, in partnership with a local women's group, developed an alternative technique that dramatically cut the processing time to a mere eight hours by boiling the nut before cracking. Around 100 njansang producers have adopted this new technology, on average doubling the quantities they process.



ICRAF regional leader West and Central Africa, Zachary Tchoundjeu, handing over a njansang cracking machine to a local community in Cameroon (Photo: ICRAF/Julius Atia)



For more information visit www.worldagroforestry.org and search keyword 'tree product markets' or 'value chains'



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