



Wild Product Governance: Finding Policies That Work for Non-timber Forest Products

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Wild Product Governance: Finding Policies That Work for Non-timber Forest Products

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Wynberg. London, United Kingdom:
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84407-500-3.

Foresters and other natural resource managers have become much more aware of the importance of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) as the basis for local livelihoods, production, trading activities, and, in some contexts, the maintenance of forest biodiversity. Important recent texts address product commercialization or the contribution of NTFPs to livelihood resilience, and others describe what is collected by different forest people and forest users and how this harvest can be managed. However, a detailed examination of the governance aspects of NTFPs—that is, the systems of social rules and decision-making that shape what people do when it comes to managing, harvesting, using, and trading NTFPs—has remained a significant gap in the literature. This book sets out to address this gap by describing how policies, regulations, and resulting social action can support or hinder the sustainable use and trade of the range of products that fall under the banner of NTFPs.

The introductory chapter sets out the objectives and scope of the book and presents an overview of the current literature. A total of 14 chapters follow, with 4 accompanying case studies that add more detail to the material covered. The chapters present data from very different climatic regions of the world—from tropical moist forests to the boreal forest of the Northern Hemisphere—in a mix of developed and developing nations, including Nigeria, Cameroon, Scotland, Canada, the United

States, India, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, China, Fiji, South Africa, and Finland. Chapters covering Scotland, British Columbia, the Olympic Peninsula of the US Pacific Northwest, the Philippines, and Yunnan have the most to offer readers with an interest in mountain research and development because they discuss the social and ecological context in highland regions. However, because the book is general in outlook, specific governance challenges facing mountain regions are not explored in any depth.

Some of the chapters investigate products and local contexts that are likely to be familiar to readers with an established interest in NTFPs, such as the case of eru (*Gnetum africanum* and *G. buchholzianum*) or bush mango (*Irvingia* spp) in Cameroon and Nigeria, or tendu (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) and sal (*Shorea robusta*) leaves from the tribal forests of India. Other chapters discuss rapidly developing governance situations linked to products that might be familiar and well-researched in some aspects but offer the reader new insights, such as the globalization of traditional wild berry collection in Finland or the development of the Brazil nut (*Bertholletia excelsa*) sector in Bolivia. Coherence and flow between chapters presenting such varied material is maintained by a common structure composed of the historical and contemporary governance context; the ecological, social, and legal conditions linked to specific products; a conclusion; and a set of forward-looking recommendations.

The editors use the last 2 chapters to draw together key lessons from this eclectic mix of cases and produce a useful synthesis of emerging trends and patterns. Their analysis reveals a remarkable similarity in the characteristics of NTFP governance throughout the world. Most countries lack a coherent policy framework for NTFPs, with opportunistic and reactive laws put into place as NTFPs become valuable or threatened.

Much governance is not linked to the ecological, cultural, and economic realities of forests and societies. In nearly all countries, NTFP governance sits between policy and regulatory systems designed for different land uses, and it is usually unclear which organizations and institutions actually hold responsibility for aspects of governance along the product supply chain. In some mountain areas, for example in the Philippines and the Ghats of India, the legal protection of ecosystem services and watershed functions of forests can conflict with governance systems aiming to protect indigenous use of forest resources, such as NTFPs, and can undermine ancestral claims to land and territory.

Many of the benefits of and barriers to effective governance have particular resonance in mountain areas. Transportation is often used as the main mechanism for monitoring and enforcing regulatory systems, but in remote and upland areas this becomes more problematic, as shown by the situations described in the chapters about Yunnan and British Columbia. The expansion of the forest frontier often brings new immigrant populations into direct conflict with mountain populations as pressures on lowland areas increase, and traditional NTFP harvesting, trading, and governance systems can be disrupted as a consequence. Although local and indigenous people may have rights to manage and trade NTFPs, as in British Columbia, they do not usually have the right to restrict or regulate use, and may, as in India, be subject to state control and price setting for the most valuable products. Although the book presents evidence suggesting that indigenous claims to land and forest resources can strengthen governance systems, many more examples show continued ineffectiveness of governance and policy because harvesters and producers are not included in policy formulation or have little knowledge of formal systems of regulation as they develop.

The book concludes by recommending the potentially most effective governance alternatives to support the sustainable use and management of NTFPs. The authors suggest that these need to be linked to integrated systems of land use governance, focused on those NTFPs that are most heavily traded or are under greatest threat, and formulated to be “light touch” and responsive, rather than fixed and bureaucratic.

Overall, the book presents a balanced and considered tour of the key

governance issues connected with NTFPs. As the introduction points out, the work on NTFPs is enormous. However, the book fails to mention well-known and significant bodies of research on NTFP commercialization, inventory and conservation management, and species ecology, all of which have a bearing on NTFP governance.

This text will make a useful addition to the bookshelves of researchers, decision-makers, and practitioners with a general interest in forest governance, biodiversity conservation,

land and resource tenure, community forestry, and enterprise development.

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