



FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

FAO Committee on Forestry

The Committee on Forestry (COFO) is the most important of the FAO Forestry Statutory Bodies. The biennial sessions of COFO (held at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy) bring together heads of forest services and other senior government officials to identify emerging policy and technical issues, to seek solutions and to advise FAO and others on appropriate action. Other international organizations and, increasingly, non-governmental groups participate in COFO.

The 18th session of COFO – with the theme “Weaving knowledge into development” – took place from 13 to 16 March 2007.

WEAVING KNOWLEDGE INTO DEVELOPMENT

Information – disseminating knowledge
 Networking – sharing knowledge
 Fora – exchanging knowledge
 Analysis – furthering knowledge
 Capacity building – strengthening knowledge
 Technical support – transferring knowledge
 Traditional knowledge – using knowledge

The final report plus all COFO presentations are available from FAO's forestry home page at the following address: www.fao.org/forestry/site/37836/en



COFO

The 18th session of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO18) may be recorded in the annals of history as one of its most successful forest-related meetings. The meeting was superbly organized, disciplined but broadly participatory and accommodating, richly informative and always running on time. Delegates found the massive exchange of information gratifying.

FAO, on the other hand, was pleased to receive considerable concrete guidance from delegations in crafting its future action programme. On the last day, some veteran participants described COFO18 as the most substantive forest policy meeting in years. This analysis will examine the internal dynamics of COFO18 and interpret them against the global context within which the meeting took place. (Source: Earth Negotiations Bulletin, <http://www.iisd.ca/fao/cof18/>)

FAO IN THE FIELD

Development of the NWFP sector in Central Africa

FAO contributes to the development of the NWFP sector in Central Africa through its regional project “Enhancing Food Security through Non-wood Forest Products in Central Africa” [GCP/RAF/398/GER]. In its second year of implementation, the project, which is funded by the German Government, is analysing the legal framework in order to ensure that forestry laws promote the sustainable management and use of NWFPs in Central Africa. The appropriate inclusion of NWFPs in forestry laws is an important precondition to promote sustainable forest management, allowing local populations to enhance their well-being and develop the largely informal but economically important market for NWFPs.

The project, therefore, facilitates the elaboration of a subregional model law promoting the sustainable management of NWFPs. An interdisciplinary working group on this matter has been established, to elaborate a first draft of the law, which will be made available for comments on the project's Web site at www.fao.org/forestry/

site/6406/en. Before its submission to the Executive Secretariat of the Central Africa Forestry Commission (COMIFAC), the draft will be discussed and validated during a subregional workshop in the second half of 2007.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the respective governments, the project organized national workshops in the Central African Republic, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo in order to identify national priorities to develop the NWFP sector.

Together with the various workshop and meeting reports, recent additions to the project's Web site (all available for downloading) include information notes and reports on various ongoing studies, such as the following.

- Perspectives of certification of NWFPs in Central Africa.
- Sustainable exploitation of non-wood resources.
- Impact of timber harvesting in forest concessions on non-wood resources and its users in the Congo Basin (to be published by FAO as Forest Harvesting Case Study No. 23).

Upcoming Web publications include the following.

- A study on the commercialization of NWFPs in Central Africa.
- An overview of policies relevant to the NWFP sector in Central Africa.
- A study on the consumption of *Irvingia* sp. and *Ricinodendron heudelottii* in Yaoundé and Libreville.
- An overview of the national bibliographies on NWFPs in the six Central African countries covered by the project (Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo).

Activities foreseen for the near future include the elaboration of a strategy for the development of the NWFP sector in the Republic of the Congo; the improvement of the system to collect NWFP-related statistics in Cameroon; the creation of a directory of entrepreneurs involved in the trade of NWFPs in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the analysis of the impact of timber harvesting in forest concessions on non-wood resources and its users in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

Building on this ongoing project, FAO's project activities in the Congo Basin have

recently been broadened through the implementation of a new three-year project entitled "Strengthening Capacities of Small and Medium Enterprises in the NWFP sector in Central Africa". The new project aims at developing market chains of NWFPs, some of which are traded in large volumes across borders. The project is funded by the European Commission and has been initiated in close collaboration with the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF). (Contributed by: Daniel Knoop and Sven Walter, project CP/RAF/398/GER, Cameroon.)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
Mr D. Knoop, Associate Professional Officer,
c/o FAO Representation in Cameroon,
PO Box 281, Yaoundé, Cameroon. Tel. : +237 535
63 48, / +237 220 24 72; Fax : +237 220 48 11;
e-mail: Daniel.Knoop@fao.org

Killing two birds with one stone: transferring knowledge to fight poverty and land degradation

With help from FAO, farmers in six sub-Saharan countries have been able to increase their income from the sale of gums and resins and to restore degraded land.

In Burkina Faso, Chad, Kenya, the Niger, Senegal and the Sudan, FAO launched a three-year pilot project in 2003 with financial support from the Italian Government to help local farmers to restore degraded land by planting native acacias that produce gums and resins, which are important products for Sahelian people's livelihoods.

For their adaptation to poor soils and arid and semi-arid climates, *Acacia* sp. are common and important trees in this region, where land degradation is a serious problem. The trees are important fighters against the advancement of deserts, the tree tops intercept wind and rain drops, and the root systems are effective in reducing land erosion. In addition, they restore soil fertility as they fix nitrogen and are an important source of fodder.

At the same time, *Acacia* trees produce gum arabic, which is a valuable natural product for a large range of industries, including the food and pharmaceutical industries. In the food industry, the gum is used to thicken, stabilize and emulsify food and drinks. It is also used in diet products against obesity. The pharmaceutical

industry uses it to bind tablets and as a suspending and emulsifying agent in creams and lotions. This NWFP is an important component of inks used in the press industry. Gums and resins are therefore important sources of revenue for people in this region, who are usually the poorest and most vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition.



Acacia flower

Despite the tree's economic and environmental importance, the farmers in the region still use traditional production methods. As a result, they cannot produce gum and resin of a quality high enough to sell on international markets at a desirable price. The production and commerce of the gum and resin had not evolved sufficiently at the local level.

In order to plant more of the species, FAO intervened and first tested new methods of harvesting rainwater in this water-scarce region. It also trained about 56 000 producers of gum arabic and resin on ways to improve their production to meet international market standards. The Organization helped the farmers develop new markets and encouraged producing countries to cooperate and organize themselves, to prevent international buyers from setting the producers in competition against one another and reducing prices. To guarantee a stable supply of the goods, FAO supported the establishment of warehouses to store unsold gums and resins.

As a result, more than 13 000 ha of degraded land have been restored. This has improved animal feeding and reduced conflicts between farmers and shepherds. The mixed cropping of *Acacia* trees with tomatoes, sesame and beans has boosted the growth of them all. The sale of gum and resin overseas has brought in much-needed cash to the region and helped the farmers diversify and increase their sources of income.

"The local response was overwhelming. The people benefiting from the project were both surprised and pleased with what they saw and earned," said Michel Malagnoux, an FAO forest expert responsible for the project.

Based on the success of the pilot project, FAO plans to expand it to other *Acacia*-growing countries. (Source: FAO Newsroom, 5 March 2007.)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
Michel Malagnoux, Forestry Officer
(Arid Zone and Fuelwood Production), Forest
Conservation Service, Forestry Department,
FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla,
00153 Rome, Italy. Fax: +39 06 57 05 51 37;
e-mail: michel.malagnoux@fao.org



On 20 December 2006, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution declaring 2011 as the International Year of Forests. The International Year of Forests will raise awareness that the world's forests are an integral part of global sustainable development, providing crucial economic, sociocultural and environmental benefits. It will promote global action for the sustainable management, conservation and development of all types of forests, including trees outside forests.

To celebrate the year, activities will be organized to foster knowledge exchange on practical strategies to promote sustainable forest management and reverse deforestation and forest degradation. To help facilitate organization of these activities, governments are encouraged to create national committees and designate focal points in their respective countries, joining hands with regional and international organizations and civil society organizations. The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat has been tasked as the focal point for the implementation of the International Year of Forests.

This is the second time that forests will have their own "international year". The first was in 1985. (Source: *Unasylva*, 225[57].)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE THE WEB SITE
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FORESTS:
www.un.org/esa/forests/2011/2011.html



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF NATURAL FIBRES

The United Nations General Assembly, on 20 December 2006, declared 2009 the International Year of Natural Fibres. In doing so it invited FAO to facilitate the observance of the year, in collaboration with governments, regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and relevant organizations of the UN system.

Some progress in making initial preparations had already been made in the lead-up to this declaration, and more has been made in the period since then.

An informal International Steering Committee has met several times. It has formulated objectives for the year, and has overseen the preparation of a communications plan to guide activities through to the end of 2009. Most important, perhaps, it has brought together international representatives of the various

natural fibre industries, among whom there had been no contact prior to the beginning of this process. The success of the International Year of Natural Fibres will depend on a strong international partnership of all the natural fibre industries.

The objectives of the International Year suggested by the steering committee are:

- to raise awareness and stimulate demand for natural fibres;
- to encourage appropriate policy responses from governments to the problems faced by natural fibre industries;
- to foster an effective and enduring international partnership among the various natural fibre industries; and
- to promote the efficiency and sustainability of the natural fibre industries.

What comes next

For the various natural fibre organizations and groups around the world, it is time to

begin planning activities for 2009. FAO has the role of leading and coordinating but cannot undertake to plan and implement activities on various fibres in individual countries. Where appropriate, you may wish to talk to people in nearby areas, and to people interested in other natural fibres, perhaps to form a local committee in your country or region. Plan for yourselves how you will work to promote natural fibres and to help meet the objectives listed above for the International Year of Natural Fibres.

FAO needs funding for its activities in preparing and disseminating information, preparing global-level activities and coordinating. A budget of around US\$2.5 million has been proposed for the period through to early 2010. This money needs to come from donations from national governments or from industry organizations.

Most urgently, we have an immediate need for a relatively small amount (US\$100 000 to \$200 000) for initial partnership-building and communication activities such as establishing a Web site and preparing a brochure. So far, this money has not been forthcoming; if you are able to help potential donors (government or industry) decide to contribute to the International Year of Natural Fibres you could be making a major contribution to its success. (Source: International Year of Natural Fibres 2009, Newsletter No. 1.)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Brian Moir, Senior Economist (Trade), FAO, Trade and Markets Division (EST), Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, Rome, 00153, Italy.
E-mail: IYNF-2009@fao.org;
www.fao.org/es/esc/en/20953/22215/highlight_108451en.html

NATURAL FIBRES

What are natural fibres?

Natural fibres are produced from animals or plants. Animal fibres are largely those that cover mammals such as sheep, goats and rabbits, but include also the cocoon of the silkworm. Vegetable fibres are derived from the stem, leaf or seed of various plants. Close to 30 million tonnes of natural fibres are produced annually in the world, of which cotton is dominant with 20 million tonnes, and wool and jute each around 2 to 3 million tonnes, followed by a number of others.

What are natural fibres used for?

Natural fibres form an important component of clothing, upholstery and other textiles for consumers, and many of them also have industrial uses in packaging, papermaking and in composite materials with many uses, including cars.

Why are natural fibres important?

Apart from their importance to the consumer and in their various industrial uses, natural fibres are an important source of income for the farmers who produce them. In some cases they are produced on large farms in developed countries, but in many developing and least developed countries proceeds from the sale and export of natural fibres contribute significantly to the income and food security of poor farmers and workers in the fibre industries. For some developing countries natural fibres are of major economic importance, for example, cotton in some West African countries, jute in Bangladesh and sisal in the United Republic of Tanzania. In other cases these fibres are of less significance at the national level but are of major local importance, as in the case of jute in West Bengal (India) and sisal in northeast Brazil.

Why an International Year of Natural Fibres?

Since the 1960s, the use of synthetic fibres has increased, and natural fibres have lost a lot of their market share. The main objective of the International Year of Natural Fibres is to raise the profile of these fibres and to emphasize their value to consumers while helping to sustain the incomes of farmers. Promoting measures to improve the efficiency and sustainability of production is also an important aspect of the year.



THE UNION FOR ETHICAL BIOTRADE (UEBT)

Natural ingredients businesses receive a BioTrade boost through this Union.

Natural products are becoming big business. High street stores are lined with every imaginable natural cream, lotion or supplement that promise anything from skin rejuvenation to reducing inflammation. The truth is that what is available to the consumer actually represents only a fraction of the plant species that the world's biodiversity has to offer. Even for natural ingredients that have been harvested for centuries, research is still

ongoing to bring them to the market and special attention is being given to ensure product traceability along the supply chain. But the drive behind this niche market is coming from consumers who are looking for fresh, new products, as well as becoming increasingly aware of the impact their choices are having on the environment and the social conditions of those involved in production. These intangible qualities are adding value to biodiversity-based goods and services that show tremendous potential for growth in the future.

Natural ingredients, in fact, provide important inputs to the pharmaceutical, cosmetics and food industries. These industries are always looking out for new and innovative natural ingredients that can be used in their end products. What is important to these industries is that the source is sustainable and, increasingly, that certain ethical practices have been implemented along the value chain. Conventions like the one on Biological Diversity (CBD) have laid down clear objectives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of benefits for those who use this resource. This is where BioTrade has drawn the attention of the market by offering goods and services derived from native biodiversity under the criteria of environmental, social and economic sustainability. Nevertheless, many small BioTrade enterprises from biodiversity-rich (developing) countries have a hard time implementing the rather complicated and costly processes. Many need guidance, business development support and market outreach expertise.

BioTrade refers to those activities of collection, production, transformation and commercialization of goods and services derived from native biodiversity under the criteria of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

In response to the private sector call for further guidance on integrating the CBD objectives into their business models, the Union for Ethical BioTrade (UEBT) has been launched. As a private sector-driven initiative, the UEBT is a membership-based association that will bring together

CASE STUDY: BOROJÓ

Borojó (*Borojoa patinoi Cuatr.*) is a new plant that has become attractive to the natural ingredients industry. Traditionally, the species is part of the staple diet of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in the Colombian Pacific rain forests. It is used to make juice, pulp, marmalade, ice cream and jelly. It is also used as a preservative to embalm corpses, and is considered a good healing agent and energizer. Raw plant material from the Borojó fresh fruit's hydrated pulp is used traditionally as a natural ingredient. Because it is rich in essential amino-acids and triterpenes, it has various applications in the cosmetic and nutraceutical industries.

Further research on the fruit reveals that the product could be used as a natural ingredient in the preparation of shampoo, hair conditioners, facial masks, body creams, fragrances and ointments. So, the future looks bright for the plant, but further studies are needed.

Ecoflora Ltda, Phitother, Labfarve and Laboratorios Medick are four companies in Colombia that supply Borojó extracts, having incorporated BioTrade principles and criteria into their business practices – minimum requirements established for BioTrade activities for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of benefits derived from the resource.

As requirements of quality standards and traceability become increasingly higher in international markets, companies dealing in natural ingredients are realizing the need for strict production practices in order to guarantee a sustainable supply to secure business deals. Management plans for Borojó, developed at company level, are therefore all-important to the importing companies that want to be able to see clearly that certain practices have been implemented from the beginning of the chain, backing their own claims of sustainable use.

Borojó is a tree species of 3–5m in height, belonging to the Rubiaceae family. Its origin is in tropical America, and it grows mainly in the Colombian Pacific plains – a biodiversity hotspot better known as Chocó.

organizations from different sectors of society around the globe that are working in the field of native biodiversity. The UEBT will offer its members a broad range of services that promote, facilitate and recognize their contributions to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Through the UEBT verification framework for natural ingredients, members will also be able to verify their claims that their business practices are in line with BioTrade principles and criteria, which have been developed in the spirit of the CBD.

The Union for Ethical BioTrade provides the private sector with a robust framework with which to contribute to the objectives of the CBD, back Corporate Social Responsibility claims and receive much needed expertise in international market access and business development.

The UEBT will be a solution that meets the current needs of the private sector involved in BioTrade activities, and will play an important role in raising the awareness of related issues among the general public.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
Rik Kutsch Lojenga, Union for Ethical BioTrade,
c/o United Nations Conference on Trade and
Development (UNCTAD), Palais des Nations,
1211 Genève 10, Switzerland. Fax: +41 22 917
0247; e-mail: info@uebt.ch; www.uebt.ch ♣

