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FAO'S GLOBAL PROGRAMME ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-WOOD FOREST PRODUCTS (NWFP), WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON NWFP FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will introduce FAO's Forestry Department global programme on the promotion and development of Non-Wood Forest Products. Only the key components of the programme and its publications that are relevant to this workshop will be highlighted.

For the purpose of consistency and clarity, in this presentation I will use the terminology 'Non-Wood Forest Products', to refer not only to the products covered by this seminar, such as wild foods, but also to all other plants and animal products derived from range lands, forests and forest tree species, like cork, pine resins, medicinal and aromatic plants, essential oils, wild mushrooms and honey, etc.

WHAT IS FAO AND HOW DOES IT WORK

Established in 1945, FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, is the UN largest technical agency and is among the world's leading international agriculture, forestry and fishery technical development organizations. Today FAO has 174 member governments, a comprehensive regional representation structure (e.g. our sub-regional office for the western part of the Near East is in Tunis), a physical presence in more than 100 countries, and at its headquarters in Rome, a cadre of specialists in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and related disciplines. The fact that FAO houses under the same roof, so to speak, all the major disciplines related to overall agriculture development puts it in a unique position with respect to the pursuit of holistic agricultural and agro-industrial development programmes, including those related to the sustainable production of NWFP such as those discussed at this meeting.

The primary roles of FAO are to serve as:

1. a neutral forum for policy dialogue (including international governmental meetings for example on agricultural trade, on natural resource management issues, etc.)
2. a source of information and knowledge (technical information on products , methodologies and statistical data on production and trade on agriculture)
3. a provider of technical assistance (field projects to develop/introduce new products or technologies, to assist governments in institutional capacity building, etc.).

Each of these roles offers ample opportunity to advance the cause of NWFP in the Mediterranean.

HOW DOES FAO DEAL WITH WILD FOODS AND OTHER NWFP?

To understand what FAO is doing on these products, we must first recognize that there exist two main categories in producing them:

- 1) Products that are fully domesticated and which can be cultivated by farmers as agricultural cash crops, such as some spices, medicinal plants and aromatic oils.

This group of plants is covered by FAO's Agriculture Department, who has accumulated over the years a wealth of information on the production and development of these plants and their products (FAO's publication catalogue or via internet at <http://www.fao.org>).

- 2) Products which are gathered from (wild) sources in forests or other related land-uses. This large group of plants (and animal products) is part of what we call 'Non Wood Forest Products' (NWFP) at FAO (also called minor forest products, non timber forest products, special forest products, etc..); and fall under the responsibility of FAO's Forestry Department.

My presentation here covers both groups, but is however focusing on the second one as FAO's activities in this field may be lesser known by you.

Turning now specifically to these non-wood forest products, I feel it may be useful to recall that the FAO forestry programme is unique among international organizations. FAO's Forestry Department is in fact among the largest and oldest international forestry units of its kind with a broad and comprehensive charter that addresses all forests and all forest products in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary way; and this is done in a manner which recognizes that environmental protection and economic development are mutually dependent.

FAO'S FORESTRY DEPARTMENT PROGRAMME AND PUBLICATIONS ON NWFP.

Three main activities make up our programme on NWFP: information gathering, partnerships and technical assistance.

A) Information gathering:

Successful implementation of programmes on NWFP require comprehensive, quality information on the plants themselves, the forest ecosystems in which they grow, on their harvesting and processing practices and on the marketing and trade aspects of these products. The collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of such information world-wide has been a priority of FAO from the very beginning.

Essentially, FAO provide three types of information:

1. descriptive information on given NWFP

2. information on technologies, methodologies and best practices for their production, harvesting, processing and marketing.
3. production and trade statistics.

In the NWFP work programme, there are two types of publications:

a) the 'Non Wood Forest Products Series', which are in-depth technical documents on specific NWFP or issues. Examples of already published issues are:

'Non-wood forest products in the Mediterranean Region' (working paper),

'Flavours and fragrances': dealing with cinnamomum, sassafras, rosewood, eucalyptus, sandalwood, litsea cubeba, frankincense, cedarwood, myrrh and opopanax oils. (description, uses, world supply, demand trends, harvesting, processing, etc..).

'Gum naval stores: turpentine and rosin from Pine resin'

'Gums, resins and latexes of plant origin' (gum Arabic, carob, tara, copal, damar, benzoin, copaiba, chicle, balata, etc.....).

'Natural colourants and dyestuffs' (annatto, henna, lac, cochineal...)

'Nutmeg and derivatives'; 'Edible nuts'

'Marketing information systems for NWFP'; 'Domestication and commercialization of NWFP in agroforestry systems'; 'NWFP for rural income'

'Medicinal Plants'

'International trade in NWFP: an overview';

'Trade restrictions affecting international trade in NWFP'

b) the 'Non Wood News' bulletin, which is a yearly published newsletter by FAO of approx. 60 to 80 pages compiling all relevant information on ongoing activities dealing with NWFP world-wide, and for which text contributions are made by readers themselves. The bulletin links some 1200 people, institutions and agencies which are involved in one way or an other with the promotion and development of NWFP.

B) Partnerships

Partnerships with other organizations are essential, as FAO's Forestry Department cannot and indeed does not wish to undertake its NWFP promotion and development activities on its own. Obviously, it has neither the resources nor the capability to provide all that is needed.

Although FAO is an intergovernmental organization, and as such our main line of communication is with our member governments, it is not our only one. It needs to receive and welcome input from a broad range of interest groups, including the private sector, universities, forest industries and non-governmental organizations representing environmental and developmental interests. There is need, therefore, to ensure collaboration and to avoid duplication of effort so that skills and resources are most efficiently utilised.

Especially related to our networking activity on NWFP, presently we are identifying through a questionnaire all interested partners involved in one way or the other with the development and promotion of NWFP. A copy of this questionnaire is here available for you, and I would very much appreciate it if you could kindly complete and return or mail it to me. The results of processing this questionnaire will lead to the development of a global Directory on "Who is Who" in the field of NWFP (including government, private sector, universities, funding agencies, etc.). Later-on this Directory will also serve as a base to further develop our statistical knowledge on global production and trade figures on NWFP.

C) Technical assistance

To help put into practice policies and technologies on NWFP production and commerce, FAO offers technical assistance to all member countries. The objective of such assistance is to strengthen national capacities to effectively plan and carry out the full project cycle of improving or introducing new products and or techniques for NWFP development in a sustainable manner. Technical project-level assistance covers most dimensions of sustainable NWFP development, but with emphasis on resource protection and management, information gathering and processing, improved people's participation through community forestry, and institutional strengthening.

At the project level, FAO is currently active in some 250 forestry technical assistance projects in 90 countries, in which for many of them NWFP activities are an essential component. Financial support for such projects comes from a variety of sources including FAO, but especially from donor governments, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and others.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me repeat that FAO, by serving as a neutral policy forum, a source of technical information and by assisting countries in field projects, can do a great deal to help with the successful development and sustainable production of NWFP. FAO is pleased to share its information with you as well as to offer its services for the promotion of a sustainable development of NWFP in the Mediterranean.