

Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs): Clearing the Confusion in Semantics

Albert Ahenkan¹ and Emmanuel Boon²

Human Ecology Department, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
E-mail: ¹<aahenkan@vub.ac.be>, ²<eboon@vub.ac.be>

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ABSTRACT Though a significant volume of information has been documented on the importance and potential of NTFPs' utilisation and its impacts on poverty reduction, livelihoods improvement and environmental sustainability, a lot of confusion is still associated with NTFPs semantics and terminologies. NTFPs have proved to be difficult to clearly define because of the blurred boundaries between timber and non-timber products and the underlying difficulty in defining a forest. The overabundance of terminologies relating to a single term having a range of interpretations, and none of which is universally recognised is at the heart of the NTFPs semantic confusion. Consequently, the meaning of "NTFPs" has generated a lot of controversy. In other words, there is no universally accepted operational definition of NTFPs. Various definitions proposed in literature tend to expound on specific species, aspects and products according to different authors' focal interests. The increasing realisation of the importance of all forest resources makes the dichotomisation of forest resources into "timber" and "non-timber" overly simplistic. The lack of a common definition, terminologies as well as the multiplicity of interest, constitutes a real hindrance to research on and development of NTFPs. Through an extensive and critical review of literature and consultations with experts, this paper examines the semantics and the difficulties in defining NTFPs, the ensuing confusion and the consequences for research, and development and promotion of these products.