

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF
FORESTS:
FOOD

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

1. “FORESTS”: ?, & biodiversity, Food
2. FOOD FROM FORESTS: ?, & dynamics
3. CHALLENGES of forest foods
4. FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. “FORESTS: ?”

- what is a “forest” (for FAO): [FRA](#)
- 30% of earth’s terrestrial surface (4 billion ha) (1/3 “primary” forests ! Deforest/degrad)
460 m. ha designated for cons. of biodiversity
- lion share of animal & plant species (majority with still unknown (food) potential –tropical species)
- livelihood support (to approx. 300 million to 1 billion people) (80% of forests are public owned)

FAO definition of a “Forest”

- Land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds *in situ*.

It does not include land that is predominantly under agricultural or urban land use

2. FOOD FROM FORESTS: ?

- FOODS: nuts, fruits, mushrooms, bushmeat, edible insects, leaves, roots and tubers, honey / and used for food, spices, colorants, medicinals, herbs, fodder for livestock,.....
- **Non-Wood Forest Products**, NTFP's, emerging-, underutilized-, uncultivated, indigenous-crops,...
- NWFP Global reported removal value: US\$ 18.5 billion (underestimation) (eq. value of global apple production (FAOSTAT))

2. FOOD FROM FORESTS: characteristics & dynamics

- most farmed species originated from forests and have their origin still wild growing in the forests:
f.ex.: apple, coffee, tea, ananas,....
 - importance of “wild” species for genetic improvement of farmed species
 - “domestication” process still ongoing ! (particularly of tropical species) *Macademia nuts, Theobroma grandiflora,...*
- direct food contribution + provides diversity in diets (proteins: bushmeat, edible insects, fish,.. /vitamins: fruits, leaves,.. / fats: nuts,...)
- Forests and trees provide indirect protection of farmland & water supplies

3. FOOD FROM FORESTS:

Major challenges

- **majority produced from gathering/hunting on “public”-owned lands** (“tragedy of commons” - leads to species depletion (large fauna spp./flora: medicinal plants)
- **conflicts among forest user stake holders:** “timber – versus food” (ex.: sapelli wood versus edible caterpillars: logging companies versus indigenous peoples)
- **fragmentation of NWFP production**, + local importance
- poor institutional, legal, policy and regulamentory framework (most of production/sector is “**informal**” and for subsistence use)
- low technological level and limited value added by producers
- indigenous knowledge and practices are disappearing (deforestation, rural exodus, changing food habits,.....)

4. FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- need for awareness raising (Forestry depart. : “Forests are more than just wood” !)
- need for cross-sectorial approach when developing edible NWFP (involvement of Forestry, Agriculture, Nutrition, Health, Trade,...)
- improve/ adjust technical skills and indigenous knowledge base (incl. nutritional data of forest foods)
- adjust policy/ legal/ regulamentary frameworks governing production and trade of forest foods with a more “pro poor” focus

Activities by FAO Forestry Dept.

- awareness raising on the contribution of forests to food security (direct + **indirect**)
- improving technical knowledge on major edible NWFP (**honey**, mushrooms, edible **insects**, nuts, ...) and topics (domestication, assessment, adding more value, **enterprise development**,...)
- support to institutional capacity of member country's forestry agencies, curriculum devel
- improving related **Policy and regulamentory framework**
- technical assistance (field projects)