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NON TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS AS A SOURCE OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION FOR WOMEN

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Abstract

The study evaluated the contributions of non-timber forest products (NTFPS) in the alleviation of poverty. The study concentrated on some non-timber forest products which are used both as food security and source of income to the rural women. These include *Parkia biglobosa* (Locust Beans), *Irvingia gabonensis* (Bush Mango), processed *Vitellaria paradoxa* (Shear butter tree) and notably, honey from beehives to mention but a few. The review showed that a sizeable number of rural dwellers depend on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) for livelihood activities. Some sell them outright as harvested while some add value by processing them before sale. Many of the people use them as food items or spices thereby enhancing their intake of essential supplements.

Keywords: Poverty, Alleviation, non-timber forest products and Gender issues.

Introduction

Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), sometimes referred to as Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs), are of enormous economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and spiritual importance to the Nigerian populace. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 1995) defines Non-Timber Forest Product as a product consisting of goods of biological origin other than wood as well as service derived from forest and allied land use. They include minerals, water, fauna and flora used for medicinal, cultural, ornamental or religious purposes. It is common knowledge that majority of the Nigerian rural people depend heavily on NTFPs for their livelihood.

Non-timber forest products are an integral part of the survival and development strategy for the continued well-being of man, livestock and native flora and fauna. For many households, gathering, processing and trading in NTFPs provide a great source of supplementary income. These activities are especially important at instances when agricultural tasks diminish or when the need for cash is acute for some households. NTFPs provide the source of livelihood (FAO, 2000). Popoola (2002) observes that in Nigeria NTFPs production, utilization and marketing dominate the rural economics but are now making forceful incursion into the peri-urban and urban economics.

Popoola (2002) also, rightly noted the need to intensify research and development on NTFPs which have become the mainstay of the rural poor in order to reduce rural poverty and enhance sustainable livelihood.

Some NTFPs that have been identified and use in Nigeria include *Parkia biglobosa* (Locust beans) *Irvin met gabonensis* (Bush mango), *Dacrvodes edulis* (Pear), *Blighia sapida* (Akee apple), *Gacinia kola* (Bitter Kola), *Vitellaria paradoxa* (Shear butter Tree), *Zingiber officinales* (Ginger),

Vernonia amygdalina (Bitter leaf) and mushrooms. Popoola (2002) outlined the various ways in which exploitation of NTFPs contribute to poverty reduction as follows: Culinary uses, medicinal uses, Traditional and cultural uses and income generation.

The usefulness of these NTFPs in both medicinal, dietary and income generating aspects and the attendant reduction in availability due to deforestation and over exploitation has triggered off this review.

Causes of Poverty

Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) (1997) describes poverty as a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his/her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lack gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem, and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as health, education, portable water and sanitation and consequently has limited chance of advancing his/her welfare to the limit of his/her capabilities. Many reasons have been advanced for the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria. Essentially, the causes are implicit in its definition which is the inability to cater for one's need adequately. Underlying the reasons for widespread poverty is the inadequate purchasing power and other resources. Poverty, however has both income and non-income dimensions. While it refers to lack of physical necessities, it also represents a general condition of deprivation manifesting in social inferiority, powerlessness, isolation and degradation (Idumah, 2001). Poverty may be transitory or temporary and therefore reversible, if it is caused by natural or man-made disasters such as flood, drought, war, environmental degradation or even failure of public policy. This gives the picture of poverty as a multi-dimensional problem that will require multi-disciplinary approach and solutions (Idumah, 2001).

Economic Value of Non Timber Forest Products

Okafor (1993) identified diverse kinds of NTFPs of economic value which if effectively harnessed can reduce poverty among the rural people. Some of the NTFPs include the following:

Firewood as a Source of Cooking Energy

The collection of fuel-wood is allowed in some plantations as well as off cuts from trees harvested in the forest. After felling and evacuation of logs, the left over branches, twigs and off-cuts are removed as fuel wood. Sawdust and stacked into tin containers which serve as source of energy in preparing their meals.

Products from Mangrove

Fishing stakes are for fish drying, thatch from Nypa Palm Fodder, Tannin Suitable for leather work and for curing and dyeing of fishing nets, household items such as glue, hair dressing oils, tool handles are all gotten from the mangrove forest.

In Nigeria, women are involved in gathering a vast range of diverse products from the forest such as fruits e.g. *Chrsvophyllum albidum* which serves as vitamins and mineral thus improving the health of the consumers, the leaves in combination with natural honey are used in the treatment of dry coughs (Adewusi *et al*, 1997). The stem barks and flowers are used in medicinal preparation for curing variety of ailments (Adewusi *et al.*, 1997). The seeds serve as condiment in the preparation of soup which also serve as a means of generating income for the women.

Piper guineense, *Parkia biglobosa*, *Prosopis africana* are all used as composition seasoning by women and are also sold to generate income. Non-alcoholic beverages are gotten from *Treculia africana* Seeds, *Spondias Mombin*, *Clapaea esculent a*. Leaves used for wrapping and products for income generating activities such as basket and mat making are all from the forest. In Nigeria, women depend on forest-based gathering and processing of plants for income. The root of *Parkia bicolor* are gathered by women and beaten in sponges for sale in rural and urban markets. The gathering of food wrapping leaves (of the marantaceae family) is the main source of income for many women. (UNDP, 1997). FAO (1997) Stated that 33% of women's incomes are derived from forest and community land.

Advocacy of Sericulture

Sericulture is a vocation, which involves the production of mulberry leaves for feeding silkworms with the sole aim of producing Cowons from which silk is obtained (Jayeola and Adedutan, 2002). Jayeola and Adedutan (2002) posited that a hectare of mulberry generates remunerative employment to 12 to 20 persons throughout the year. Women are committed to this vocation because it provides income and contributes to poverty reduction

Panacea to the Problem of Poverty

There should be increased interest in enhancing the production of tree products particularly the non-timer forest products (NTFPs) through domestication of indigenous tree species to increase farmer's income, their food and nutritional security (Agbogidi *et al.*, 2005 and Oregbome, 2005). The NTFPs have been identified as the most formidable way of meeting the aims of development, conservation and poverty (Belcher and Kusters, 2005).

Table 1: Value Added to Common Non-Timber Forest Products

NTFPs	Value Added
<i>Irvingia gabonensis</i> (Bush Mango)	Seed extracted and dried;
<i>Parkia bizlobosa</i> (Locust bean)	Seeds Processed into Spice;
<i>Blizhia Sapida</i> (Akee apple)	Seed, Leaves and Root Dried before Sale/use as medicinal ingredients;
<i>Vittellaria Paradoxa</i> (Shear butter)	Seed Processed into Shear Butter and sold for consumption as cooking oil or used medicinal ingredient;
Honey	Harvested from beehives and sieved

Table 1 shows Non-timber forest products to which values have been added to before sales are made in order to generate income.

Table 2: The Structure of Income Poverty

Group	Group Share in Population	Rural		Urban		
		Percent Poor in Group	Group Share in all Poor	Group Share in Population	Percent Poor in Group	Group Share in all Poor
Self-employed in Agriculture	44.3	38.3	37.9			
Self-employed in Non-Agriculture	12.5	39	10.8			
All Self-employed	56.8	38.5	48.7	38.8	40.4	43
Agricultural Labour	27.1	62.7	37.8	12	76	25
Other Labour	8.1	48.7	8.8	43.7	22.8	27.3
Others	7.9	26.4	4.6	5.5	31.2	4.7
All Households	100	44.9	100	100	36.5	100
SCs	18.4	56.1	23	11.7	53.3	17
STs	10.5	62.7	14.7	3.8	48.3	5
Female Headed		47			43.4	

Source: Sen (1996), using World Bank estimates up to 4th round and own estimate with same methodology for 1993-94

Table 2 showed the income poverty of various group among the rural and urban areas. The self-employed in Agriculture under the rural group has a percentage of 38.3, Self-employed in Non-Agriculture has 39, All self-employed has 38.5, Agricultural Labour 62.7, Other Labour 48.7, others 26.4, All Households 44.9, SCs 56.1, STs 62.7 and female-headed 47 while in the Urban group ,All self-employed has percentage of 40.4, Agricultural Labour 76, other labour 22.8, Others 31.2, All Households 36.5, SCs 53.3, STs 48.3, Female-headed 43.4. This structures revealed that that the poverty level among female high but Non timber Forest Products could go a long way in alleviating the poverty level among the women folk because it produces both employment and income to them.

Conclusion

Women constitute a functional group in forestry activities and using non-timber forest products have contributed greatly in alleviating poverty among the women folk. Non timber Forest Products contribute both directly and indirectly to food security in the review. Women constitute a functional group of forestry activities and using NTFPs have contributed greatly in alleviating poverty among the women folk. It is recommended that: NTFPs be integrated in fanning systems to ensure the continued availability of NTFPs and to ease the pressure on the natural forest; Development Potentials of NTFPs in terms of value addition should be explored to ensure efficient utilization of the products.

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