



THE CONTRIBUTION OF NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Since the beginning of the human history, the early civilizations learned the importance of non-timber forest products “NTFPs” as a provider of different amenities necessary for their subsistence. Through the last decades many development agencies, governments and environmentalists have encouraged the commercialization of NTFPs as a way to foster sustainable development for poor rural communities^{1,2}. This article presents some significant approaches about the commercialization of NTFPs in order to learn about their experience and contribution.

The utilization of natural resources has been the main source of provisions, remedy, and shelter for the mankind since ancient times. Before the nomad living patterns were modified and the domestication of different crops appeared with agriculture, the early civilizations learned the importance of non-timber forest products “NTFPs” and its adequate disposition in order to preserve it. Through the last decades many development agencies, governments and environmentalists started to promote the commercialization of NTFPs as a way to encourage the sustainable development of poor rural communities.^{1,2}

To date, many successful examples have been experienced around the world, as well as some unfavorable cases that have provoked certain controversy about its implications.^{3,4} Even though, since every region and example has its very own characteristics and conditions, there seems not to be a definitive approach about its effects, however the balance is pointing towards the benefits received from this activity and the improvements on the living conditions of many rural communities.

According to the experience gained from different study cases, in order to consider as “successful” a development project based on commercialization of NTFPs, some authors⁵ consider imperative to acknowledge the perceptions and interests of the related actors. For that purpose it is necessary to integrate all the value chain’s stakeholders to identify the criteria of success and negotiate the trade-offs that might be needed. Additional, since the level of success might vary in perceptions for the different actors, it results essential to set the level of success according to the needs of all the people involved (rural communities, local authorities, traders and consumers), following a sustainable business philosophy by preserving the environment; improving the social conditions and; generating the sufficient financial resources to foster the favorable outcome and continuity of the value chain⁵.

Mexico, along with most of the Latin American countries, has a broad variety of natural resources, as well as a considerable room for improvement on its utilization. However there are currently many flourishing projects that are boosting the benefits from a rational commercialization of NTFPs by providing improvement opportunities for poor rural communities with the collaboration of organisms such as CONAFOR and FIRA that promote sustainable business models through productive clusters and the integration of the actors from the value chain.^{6,7}



Picture © Candelilla Institute: NTFPs from the Chihuahuan Desert

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