Book Reviews
Book Review Editor, Daniel F. Austin


Non-timber forest products (NTFP) have stirred the imagination of conservationists and proponents of sustainable development for at least two decades. During the same period the certification of sustainable forest management plans for timber has expanded (e.g., Forest Stewardship Council = FSC), as have other types of certification (e.g., organic, fair trade etc.). The marriage of certification and NTFPs started a decade ago and has expanded enthusiastically since, with some stirring successes and some disappointing failures. This small volume comes at an appropriate moment (marriage + 10!) to evaluate the successes, failures, limits, opportunities and challenges, building on a larger, more technical volume that evaluated the state-of-the-art of how to certify NTFPs and how this might be done for 23 products or groups of products (Shanley et al., 2002). The three authors are leaders in the field and have the experience to critically examine the past decade.

The number of successes is smaller than I expected: 16 projects certified by FSC in the world, including maple (Acer saccharum) syrup in the USA, Christmas trees in Lithuania, and vegetable ivory (Phytelephas macrocarpa) in Acre, Brazil. Some projects have certified up to 40 species, with the largest project concentrating on phyto-pharmaceuticals and botanicals for cosmetics. Strangely, the number of certifications being processed is not much different: 17 projects, including mushrooms in Switzerland, piacava (Attalea funifera) fiber in Amapá, Brazil, and maté (Ilex paraguariensis) in Rio Grande de Sul, Brazil.

The authors examine the reasons for this limited success and tease out the numerous factors that influence success and failure. In this endeavor, they count on short case studies by 18 collaborators from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, all of whom have detailed experience in the process of certification. The variety of factors that influence failure are especially interesting, as they highlight the limits of certification.

Although the number of certifications is small, as one rubber-tapper leader pointed out “Certification must be seen as an instrument to encourage forest management and not as an end in itself. It is a process.” This insightful remark points to the greatest success of the numerous attempts at certification, even when they fail to be certified: the process generates spin-offs that are supporting community empowerment, equitable benefit sharing, forest management, best practices in associated areas, in short, sustainable development.

The volume lists, explains and examines each limitation, each challenge and each opportunity. The authors are optimistic and fully realistic, recognizing that internationally accepted certification will only work for a small number of products, but that national and even local certification schemes offer opportunities for social, ecological, and economic sustainability. Their final section contains recommendations based upon the lessons learned in the last decade which are especially clear and insightful. If adopted, the next decade will be even more interesting than the last!

This book is essential reading for all those interested in certification and NTFPs, both proponents and detractors, as well as for all those interested in maintaining and expanding useful, viable, economic forests throughout the world. Unfortunately, the book is only available in Portuguese. I hope that CIFOR and other international agencies will translate it widely, as this kind of critical analysis is essential for the development community worldwide.

Literature Cited

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The first half of this substantial volume introduces selected complementary and alternative medicine