Benefit sharing in mountain households – a case of NTFPs A gendered approach to informing national level policies

Tshering Choden and Rik Van Kuelen

Non-Timber Forest Products are an important source of income for mountain people in Bhutan and elsewhere in the Hindu-Kush. Till 2006, Bhutan did not even have a legal framework for harvesting and trading NTFPs. At present the sector has advanced and various agencies are actively supporting around 50 legally registered NTFP groups, a number which is increasing year by year. Lauri geog in Samdrup Jongkhar district is one of the rich NTFP areas, where around 400 households are organised in 8 NTFP groups. Various supports have been provided under the IFAD-funded Market Access and Growth Intensification Project (MAGIP), in which the Social Forestry & extension Division and SNV work together for improved collection, value addition and marketing. The two agencies are conducting a study, combining a poverty and gender analysis in Lauri related to the increased incomes earned from NTFPs. The findings from the study, which will be available in July, provides valuable insight on who invests (labour), who earns (marketing), what happens with the income (who decides), from a gender perspective. The study helps us understand the underlying factors of gender (power) relations which determine who (woman or man) has the decision-making authority at home, in the community and beyond related to NTFP products. This will be combined with finding out which factors make NTFPs a preferred income generating opportunity and how this differs between richer and poorer households. The findings from the study feed into the discussion (also during the presentation) and influence policy formulation and/or practices in terms of benefit sharing and serve as a baseline to help improve gender focussed project implementation, NTFP promotion and women’s economic empowerment.