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StarTree

Multipurpose trees and non-wood forest products a challenge and opportunity

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Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Meeting policy challenges.....	4



1 Introduction

Within the StarTree project, the main task of WP4 was the study of institutional framework surrounding NWFP production, harvesting, trade and use. The final deliverable D4.5 provides policy recommendations that have been derived based on all the work WP4 has done within the project. Specifically, it relies on a large extent on an analysis of formal institutional framework documented in D4.1. and on an assessment of institutional adjustments documented in D4.4. The policy recommendations included in this document are presented as short key messages that can be used for dissemination activities to different groups of stakeholders.

2 Meeting policy challenges

Focus on people. Policies and regulations addressing harvesting of NWFPs are the cornerstone for successful enterprise development based on NWFP exploitation and are key for socioeconomic development in rural communities that use NWFPs for their livelihood. Policy-makers seeking to encourage NWFPs in rural development may benefit by looking to other sectors such as food industry and tourism that have proved viable in fostering multiple benefits at a range of scales across Europe, including for small local producers. Ideally, policies should take into account different uses of NWFPs and should rely on a coherent approach to NWFP harvesting, management, trade and use.

Tailor the policy to the problem it is intended to address – whether to protect the resource from overharvesting, to limit the pressure on areas where massive harvesting takes place, to obtain income for the public administration or private forest owners, or to support sustainable natural resource use for rural development. While regulatory instruments are required to govern sustainable NWFP harvesting and use in a coordinated manner, economic incentive instruments such as unified trade tariffs are promising if they allow for innovative and value-generating activities in the NWFP sector. In each case, it is important to consider the implications of the policy or regulation for household consumption as well as for recreational and commercial activity in the specific context where it is planned to be applied. Assuming that a particular regulatory measure will work in a region just because it is successfully implemented elsewhere might prove erroneous or in the worst case lead to undesirable outcomes, as the performance of any instrument hinges on local socio-economic and ecological conditions and attitudes of relevant actors.

Adopt a long-term vision. Ideally, policies would take into account different uses of WFP and would rely on a coherent and proactive approach to WFP harvesting, management, trade and use so as to foster the sector and contribute to rural development. Policies should be developed with a strategic vision (see Box), rather than in a reactive or opportunistic way (as when a rapid increase in the marketability of a product triggers a shift towards privatization or domestication, or when governments sets up harvesting limits as a reaction to a perceived change in the harvesting dynamic of a species).

Strategic design of policies for berries and mushrooms in Finland

The most iconic case of coherent policies addressing WFP is probably represented by Finland. Under everyman's right everyone can pick and collect WFP in forests, as long as what is picked are not protected species and the habitat is



undamaged. Recognizing the traditional and economic importance of some WFP, such as berries and mushrooms, the Finnish government has for a long time supported scientific studies to assess their biological productivity. It also has encouraged harvesting and fostered supply chain development by financing the preparation of models for forecasting production of these species. Moreover, economic incentives are also in place: harvesters are tax-exempted and berries and mushrooms can be sold tax-free on a market place and to restaurants or wholesale buyers. There are also associations and thematic groups, sponsored by the Government, directly focusing on berries and mushrooms (and broadly on WFP), which provide support for business development.

Carefully evaluate the effects of harvesting regulations, and revise policies in this light. NWFP policies need to be based on ensuring rational and sustainable harvesting. However, measures that restrict collection require careful consideration, as they can have a direct, strong effect on household consumption, recreational activities and commerce. Restrictions such as maximum harvestable limits ideally would be based on solid ecological knowledge and in accordance with the precautionary principle articulated in the Convention on Biological Diversity. Assumptions may not apply to all species. For example, high rates of harvesting can be detrimental for medicinal and aromatic plants, but may not affect the reproducibility or yields of other species, such as mushrooms. Moreover, policy instruments should be revised periodically in the light of recent scientific studies, and taking into account the history and tradition of the uses and commerce of the specific NWFP in a given area.

Support policy implementation. Laws, regulations and economic/financial incentives are needed to make policy effective. They must be appropriate to the socioeconomic and cultural context in which NWFP production and exploitation occurs, otherwise they will not be followed. NWFP-related policies need to be coherent with existing legislation. Overlapping laws and institutional mandates can sometimes result in confusion as to which procedures NWFP entrepreneurs or harvesters should follow. Furthermore, the implementation of NWFP policies requires institutional support structures with adequate capacity and resources to address the different aspects of the multifaceted NWFP sector (e.g. inventory, land management, harvesting, transportation, processing and trade). In most European countries such institutional structures either do not exist or lack power, resources and capacity to deal adequately with the issues.

Support development all along the NWFP value chain. Public policies should set incentives to foster regional horizontal and vertical cooperation and business opportunities along the NWFP production and processing chain, from low-value exports of unprocessed raw material to value-added products of distinct origin. NWFP opportunities can support rural development particularly effectively if the actors are well organized along the value chain. The introduction of standards and certification schemes can help overcome perceptions that NWFPs lack quality, supply stability and traceability of origin.

Transcend sectoral policies. NWFPs are a cross-sectoral domain: They emerge from a variety of production and management systems, have many uses and contribute to different dimensions of local livelihoods. In the EU, policies and regulations in many areas govern the various stages of the NWFP value chain – some with binding implications, others just providing orientation to guide decisions (Table 1). The provisions and boundaries set by these policies and regulations should be considered in building an effective policy for NWFPs. The importance of NWFPs also needs to be recognized in other policy fields such as nature conservation, food, health, recreation, trade and industry. Special attention should be paid to support structures for better communication across these diverse sectors.



Facilitate coordination of policy at different levels (EU, national, sub-national) and across borders. As seen in Table 1, NWFP-related policies, laws and fiscal measures can be established at different levels, EU, national or sub-national. Differences in regulations among countries may have considerable effects on NWFP markets. If collection of a certain NWFP is restricted in a country, economic actors will seek a supply from another country with laxer regulations, displacing the supply chain. Products that cross national borders may require common policies, especially for strategically important resources. The EU could have a role in streamlining policies at the national level, but so far has not done so owing to the complexity and diversity of legal and institutional mechanisms across countries, and the multiple jurisdictions and cross-cutting nature of conservation, trade, intellectual property and benefit sharing.

Table 1. Major European Union and national policies and regulations that may directly affect different segments of NWFP value chains, with different status and legal implication.

Policies/ regulations Value chain segments	Forest tenure	Forest managemen t		Harvesting		Production €		Processin g		Trade		Sale		Use and consumptio	
															
Land tenure	N	N		N		N									
Forest		EU	N	EU	N	EU	N								
Biodiversity and nature conservation		EU*	N*	EU*	N*	EU*	N*								
Agriculture (EU CAP and RDP; national rural development programmes)**		EU	N	EU	N	EU	N								
Harvesting rights		N		N		N								N	
Fiscal				N		N				EU	N	N			
Food safety						EU	N	EU	N					EU	N
Product labelling and packaging						EU	N	EU	N			EU	N	EU	N
Trade and movement of products										EU		EU			
Plant health						EU				EU					
EU certification schemes (e.g.organic production)						EU		EU				EU		EU	
Green public procurement						EU						EU		EU	

Notes: Harvesting= collection for purposes different from the sale; Production= harvesting for the purpose of sale

-  Binding
-  Not binding, voluntary instrument/economic incentive
-  Not binding, but influence national policies and laws which are binding

* In some lands and for some species

** Agriculture and rural development policies can be both set at EU level (Common Agriculture Policy- CAP and Rural Development Policies-RDP) and at national or sub-national level, and are then implemented at national and subnational level. These policies can both provide binding rules to follow and set a not binding framework in which economic incentives are provided, such as direct payments for producers that comply to defined rules on a voluntary basis.



Include NWFPs in forest management plans. The ability of forest owners to determine management goals for forests on their property is crucial for encouraging production of NWFPs and promoting product domestication and innovation. In most (but not all) European countries, forest owners are legally allowed to transform a forest stand to favour NWFP production for commercial use, with the prior approval of the appropriate authorities, based on a management plan or felling licence, as long as the land is not deforested or the stand clear felled. In practice, however, in many countries NWFP production is not a specific goal of forest management plans. It is less common for owners to prioritize NWFPs over timber production (with a few exceptions such as cork and chestnut producers).

Develop financial instruments to support NWFP production. Existing financial instruments mainly support domestication and cultivation of NWFPs (e.g. grants for domestication and high quality production, subsidies for improvement of stand productivity). Some support is also available through broader subsidies for multifunctional management, although these measures affect NWFP production only indirectly. Harvesting regulations that include provisions for harvesting licenses, permits or concessions can generate considerable income for forest owners/managers or the public administration. Reinvesting these revenues in improvement of NWFP production could make a positive contribution to rural development and promote sustainable use of NWFPs.

Ensure clear definition of rights, and harmonize policy with customary rights and informal traditions. Sustainable use of NWFP resources is strongly linked to a clear definition of ownership, access and NWFP use rights. Informal institutions and unwritten traditions shape people's collection practices, places, times and species and frequently have a stronger impact on the value chain than formal rules. Formal and informal norms may complement or contradict each other; discrepancies between them may lead to clashes and illegal harvesting activities, especially in areas where pressure on the resource is high. To avoid disengagement of the local community, formal regulations should take into account the local needs expressed in traditional practices or even be based on pre-existing informal norms, ideally supported by ecological studies on sustainable collection.

Involve stakeholders in policymaking processes. Involving a wide range of affected stakeholders in policymaking processes is key for developing more effective and widely accepted policies that reflect real needs and priorities and are tailored to local circumstances. This is particularly important for products with significant market value and importance for local livelihoods, as well as to safeguard personal use rights.

Create an enabling environment for advocacy groups in the NWFP sector. NWFP harvesters and producers frequently lack the organizational capacity or institutional vehicles to ensure their voice is heard. Advocacy organizations for some NWFPs, such as cork, at both national and European levels represent the interests of producers and processors in policymaking and bring visibility to these products. For most other products, advocacy groups are only beginning to emerge, examples being Arctic Flavours in Finland and the Association of Foragers and the Scottish Wild Harvests Association in the United Kingdom.

Encourage innovation, and link NWFPs to the bio-based economy. NWFPs carry strong traditional connotations. While this is an asset, innovative production and marketing concepts must be explored to render these products a vital component of modern society. NWFPs have increasing potential, for example, in green infrastructure and green health, in light of current trends favouring organic products and nature-based



solutions for basic materials. Care needs to be taken that steps towards a bioeconomy support the multipurpose use of forests rather than a single use, and sustainability must be assessed to avoid overexploitation of the resource.

Improve definitions to optimize the economic, ecological and social valuation of NWFPs. Policy and legal documents use inconsistent terminology for NWFPs, which allows for many interpretations of the range of products in question. Defining these products as “secondary”, “minor” or “other” undermines their importance and stands in the way of a truly strategic approach to their management and use. At the same, the acronym NWFPs is not very well known and recognized by the civil society. The StarTree project suggests a more incisive term, “Wild Forest Product (WFPs)”, for its power to immediately invoke the intrinsic nature of these products. WFP are “ products other than wood derived from wild and semi-wild forests, as well as from sources in early stages of domestication, such as fruit trees, bushes, and orchards”.

Collect better information on NWFPs. The significance of NWFPs in Europe is underestimated because monitoring of their production, consumption and trade is inadequate and statistics are lacking or incomplete as a result of fragmented value chains, complex trade patterns and use of these products outside the formal sector. Similarly, their importance in maintaining local and regional identities is insufficiently documented. A new product classification scheme for NWFP product groups (raw and processed) is needed so as to better represent the diversity of products and help to rectify the sectoral fragmentation which has kept NWFPs invisible in the bioeconomy.

