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**Exploring the Potentials and Pitfalls for NTFP (Non Timber
Forest Product) Related Tourism**

The Case of the Bituri Forest in Brazil

by

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Introduction

The most important problem inherent to past and currently approaches of forest conservation is that these approaches have not been directly tied to local conservation attitudes and behaviour and do not provide rural communities who live in proximity to forests with incentive to conserve these forest resources (Salafsky & Wollenberg 2000). A major misconception guiding these (preservationist) approaches has been that conservation of forests could be achieved through lowering forest dependence of local livelihoods. The recently developed linked incentives model overcomes the limitation of past approaches in that it assumes a direct linkage between livelihoods and conservation. Livelihood activities are made dependent on and therefore directly linked to forests. This dependence on forests may provide increased incentive for changed conservation attitudes and behaviour (Angelsen & Wunder 2003). In this approach, where in essence, forests have become the providers, conservation is made economically competitive. Two possible sustainable forest contributions to poverty alleviation that have been brought forward (see also Salafsky & Wollenberg 2000) are Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP's) and ecotourism. It would seem then, that these two livelihood activities which are dependent on forest resources and provide local income should provide incentive for changed conservation attitudes and behaviour. The success of forests in contributing to poverty alleviation through NTFP's and ecotourism has however been limited due to weaknesses in both strategies. Existing overviews suggest that most NTFP's are economically marginal sources of income for rural communities and are primarily used for subsistence to fill income gaps (Byron & Arnold 1999; Neumann & Hirsch 2000). A second issue is that locals generally have little autonomy and decision-making power over tourism operations and profits. This usually coincides with low local tourism derived income. The inevitable result of low local incomes from forest resources through NTFP's and tourism is insufficient incentive for changed conservation attitudes and behaviour (Wunder 1999). In accordance with the Millennium declaration, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) has placed central importance to poverty alleviation and has put forward pro-poor tourism as a tool of enacting this objective. Pro-poor tourism does not yet provide effective mechanisms to raise NTFP's out of economic marginality,

nor does it provide effective mechanisms to enforce higher levels of local autonomy in forest based tourism operations.

This study has two main purposes, the first of which is to introduce NTFP related tourism as a possible new strategy in uniting poverty alleviation and forest conservation objectives. This integrated approach synchronically addresses the economic marginality of NTFP's, and the low local autonomy in forest based tourism operations, making NTFP's and tourism work for each other, rural communities and forest conservation. The second purpose of this study is to assess the potential for development of NTFP based tourism for and by rural, agricultural communities in a particular context: The Bituri forest in Brazil. Through this assessment, this case study exposes some of the potentials and the obstacles which development of NTFP related tourism faces. The issues examined which influence development potential for NTFP related tourism relate to forest and community characteristics, the scale and nature of community involvement in NTFP extraction, the scale and nature of the local tourism industry and institutional support for product development and marketing.

Towards NTFP Related Tourism: A theoretical construction

This study argues that higher levels of local income from forest resources through NTFP's and tourism could contribute to changing local conservation attitudes and behaviour but that the economic marginality of NTFP's and low local autonomy over tourism products limit their ability to do so. Pro-poor tourism has been presented as recognizing the need to generate higher levels of local income, but to the specific purpose of this study, as failing to address the issues of economic marginality of NTFP's, low local autonomy over tourism profits and integration of the two entities. Instead of dismissing pro-poor as a 'dead end' to this cause, this study aims to provide pro-poor tourism with an integrated approach, which addresses the economic marginality of NTFP's and the low degree of local autonomy in current forest based tourism. Through such an approach this study intends to enforce pro-poor tourism's ability to increase local incomes from forest through integration of tourism with NTFP based livelihoods. It is envisioned that this leads to more effective change of local conservation attitudes and practices. It follows to say that one of the main assumptions of this study has been that:

“If communities can benefit economically from the forest resources that they manage and control, then they will take action to counter internal and external threats to these resources”.

In working towards an integrated approach, this study argues that NTFP's and tourism are compatible and they have the ability to supplement each other's shortcomings-they can be made to work for each other. This study puts new tourism and especially ecotourism, cultural tourism and rural tourism forward as a suitable tool to raise NTFP based livelihood activities out of economic marginality, making them more pro-poor. Ecotourism should not be seen as simply another Non Timber forest product as Sven Wunder suggests or for that matter has been portrayed to be by of Nick Salafsky and Eva Wollenberg. This study argues that what sets tourism (and its ramifications) aside from other NTFP's is its ability to interconnect and place additional value on NTFP's. Much more attention should be paid to developing ways in which tourism can be linked to all processes involved in livelihood activities related to Non Timber Forest Products in order to increase economic benefit derived from NTFP's. A way of doing this is by developing NTFP related tourism products. By compounding the value of NTFP livelihood activities in their entirety, tourism has the ability to considerably raise biodiversity value above that which would be achieved through the sale of NTFP's on conventional markets. Raising the economic value of NTFP's through tourism may be achieved through:

- Sale of NTFP gathering/harvesting processes through educative guided tours and walks led by local community members engaged in NTFP extraction in which tourists can actively participate in the search and gathering practices of NTFP's.
- Sale of consumable NTFP's to tourists at higher price level than conventional market.
- Sale of NTFP use processes. Certain applications of NTFPs such as prepared NTFP meals may be sold directly to tourists. The educative process of preparation may in itself be sold as a product. Certain NTFP's may be used and sold as traditional medicines. Others NTFP's are used for building. The building process,

- or the products hereof (such as baskets, pots etc.) may be sold directly to tourists, as well as the educative production process may appeal to certain tourists.
- Sale of NTFP management processes by communities or external experts involved in conservation programs of certain bird or mammal species. The opportunity to participate in this process by tourists can be sold as a product. Management and conservation practices are seen as livelihood practices in that they ensure indefinite supply of forest resources used for livelihood).

NTFP related tourism products are defined as tourism products, such as forest tours or purchasable items, in which the harvest, preparation or sale of Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP's) form the principle tourist attractions of the product. NTFP related tourism products are educational in nature, and have a high dependency on local knowledge systems. Making tourism products dependent on local knowledge and participation, acts as a mechanism, which enhances the negotiating power of the local communities over product development and profits. Incorporating this approach into pro-poor tourism will enable pro-poor tourism to facilitate generation of higher levels of local income from forest resources. According to the linked incentives model (Salafsky & Wollenberg 2000) this will lead to more effective change of local conservation attitudes and practices. The concept of NTFP related tourism products therefore seeks to integrate socio-economic development and conservation. This equates them to some degree with the 'integrated conservation and development projects' that were first carried out in African countries (Wells and Brandon 1992; Hannah 1992). A repercussion of the by this study integration of NTFP based livelihood activities into the tourism market is that this relationship promotes a higher degree of local autonomy in the tourism operation. Basing tourism products on livelihood activities related to NTFP's which are executed by and depend on knowledge systems of local communities', places higher levels of autonomy over these products in the hands of these communities. Local knowledge and local insight is essential in the further development and execution of NTFP based livelihood activities and consequently the further development of NTFP related tourism products. It follows that 'Outsiders' will act as facilitators and interpreters for these products, playing a more reserved role, whilst locals will play more central and determining roles in product development, provision and profits. In essence therefore, the above reasoning leads to the final argument of this section that local (community) knowledge-dependent tourism products are more liable to producing local income. It is assumed in this study, that the extreme diversity and size of the tourism industry should provide a large enough market segment to act as a viable market for these tourism products (Ray & Anderson 2000). One of the underlying principles is that it is the authenticity of the above processes, the question of how they are carried out and the opportunity to directly help forest dependent communities that has become appealing to a fast growing 'New tourism' (Mowforth & Munt 1997) sector. By piecing this unique character of tourism into the linked incentives model adopted in (Salafsky & Wollenberg 2000) and (Wunder 1999) local incomes from forests through tourism can be considerably enhanced and consequently, according

to the model, more effectively change conservation attitudes and practices of people engaged in NTFP related livelihood practices.

Assessing the potentials and pitfalls for development of NTFP Related Tourism for and by rural communities of the Bituri Forest in Brazil

Design of the Study

The second part of this study has assessed the potential for NTFP related tourism products for and by the local communities of the Bituri forest in the State of Pernambuco in Brazil. The assessment is approached from 2 perspectives: a producer perspective and a consumer perspective. From a *producer perspective*, the potential for NTFP based tourism products depends on the potential of the Bituri forest and its local communities to engage in the provision of NTFP related tourism products. Assessing this potential has involved studying 4 factors:

- Characteristics of the forest environment.
- Characteristics of the local communities of the Bituri forest
- The scale and nature of community involvement in NTFP extraction.
- Potential institutional support for product development

From a *consumer perspective*, the potential for NTFP related tourism products depends on the characteristics of the local tourism industry for which the following factors are assessed:

- The scale of the local tourism industry
- The nature of the local tourism industry and their interest in NTFP related tourism products.
- Potential institutional support for product promotion and marketing.

Data collection for this study has been conducted within a period of 8 months in the field. The vast majority of data has been collected and triangulated by means of questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews and participative observations. Respondent groups included key individuals from 5 rural communities, locally operating tourism enterprises such as hotels (6) and tour operators (5), associations (4) and governmental institutions (2). Community engagement in agriculture was assessed by means of a questionnaire survey and 100 respondents. Content analysis of relevant literature served as complimentary sources of information.

Reviewing the findings of the assessment

From a *producer perspective*, the abundance and diversity of the NTFP's of the Bituri forest as well as the varied processes involved in their extraction are well suited for incorporation into NTFP related tourism products. Over sixty NTFP's have been recorded, some of which involve elaborate harvesting and use processes. Noteworthy is that the large NTFP market in the town of Caruaru may also be a suitable tourist attraction. Hundreds of NTFP's are sold here from far and wide, many of which also

occur in the Bituri forest. As for NTFP's that are suitable for sale to tourists as consumable products, the Bituri forest boasts a wealth of NTFPs that can be transported and stored over long periods of time (such as honey, oils, bark and dried herbs for making a variety of teas). The vast majority of Bituri's NTFP's may be sold in this way. From this perspective, there is definitely potential for NTFP related tourism products in the Bituri forest. In conclusion, through tourism, local knowledge and practices play a just as important, if not more important role in assuring the marketability of NTFPs than the value of the NTFP's on other consumer markets. It doesn't have to be a Brazil nut, latex or palm heart to generate revenue. To the tourist, a locally used herbal tea or bark concoction with an appealing cultural link may be just as interesting and worth purchasing. However, the potential for NTFP related tourism products (either involving tours or ready, prepared actual NTFP products ready for use or consumption by tourists) for and by communities of the Bituri forest is limited by a number of crucial limitations:

- Despite the scenic beauty of the Bituri forest, its ability to attract and receive tourists is seriously hampered by a near total lack of management and funding, minimal infrastructure and no tourist facilities.
- Current institutional support (active support) for increasing the capacity of the Bituri forest environment for attracting and receiving tourists is minimal. Legislation largely prohibits the extraction of NTFP's and the Bituri forest is a privatized resource, owned and controlled by one wealthy family and this could seriously undermine NTFP related tourism's contribution to poverty alleviation and forest conservation.
- Engagement into provision of NTFP related tourism will signify a major shift in livelihoods for Bituri's farming communities and will require considerable reorganization and capacity building.
- Community involvement in NTFP extraction is irregular and infrequent. Knowledge of NTFP's is largely fragmented across the communities.
- No clear cooperatives or associations exist within the communities of the Bituri forest. More importantly, internal conflict and power relations within the communities may be one of the greatest obstacles to the formation of community organizations that fairly channel and distribute tourism profits.

If these deficiencies in the capacity of the Bituri forest and its communities to attract and receive tourists cannot be repaired by the communities and supporting institutions, then it is inadvisable to develop NTFP related tourism products for these communities. Also, it is essential that the development of NTFP related tourism is paralleled with coordinated conservation and management of the Bituri forest as well as its NTFP's.

Nonetheless, NTFP's and especially the relationship between rural communities and NTFP's offer the tourism industry a potentially profitable opportunity to expand and unify cultural and ecological tourism. To that end, it doesn't only make ecological sense to relate NTFP's to tourism, it also makes economic sense to relate NTFP's to tourism. Reasons enough one would think, to develop NTFP related tourism in the Bituri forest from a *consumer perspective*. The region has a number of events which attract tourists and has a number of touristic attractions and hotels. However on closer inspection, the

scale and nature of the local tourism industry limits the potential for development of NTFP related tourism products for a number of reasons:

- The current nature and scale of the local tourism industry is characterized by an overall lack in a regular influx of tourists, a lack in the right type of tourists and a lack of currently operational enterprises which are capable of bringing in and receiving tourists that could be interested in NTFP related tourism products.
- Due to the regions secluded location, away from the main tourism hotspots and main roads leading into the interior of Brazil, the bulk of tourists who visit the north east of Brazil need to go out of their way to visit the Bituri Forest. The regions touristic sites lack basic tourist facilities such as on site accommodation, tourist information, ablution blocks, well kept trails and signage. The lack of these basic facilities makes the region less attractive from a tourist's perspective.
- Just as other tourism products, NTFP related tourism products will need to be of considerable quality and variety, be readily accessible on call, and comply with safety standards in addition to sharing profits in order to receive support from tourism operators. The product is therefore to a large degree, at the mercy of these organs and their demands need to be respected.

It is therefore concluded that from a perspective of the nature and scale of the local tourism industry, it can therefore be concluded that there is currently not enough potential for NTFP related tourism products in the region

Future research and development of NTFP related tourism.

This research has introduced NTFP related tourism as a new concept and the Bituri case study has shown that the concept faces many challenges and obstacles. It is hoped however, that the arguments which this report makes in favour of NTFP related tourism development and the theoretical reasoning which underpin them have succeeded in exposing the possible rewards of taking on these challenges.

This report has been largely explorative. It has therefore not been the intention of this case study to deliver a complete and sound procedure for investors and planners on which to base development decisions. Rather, this case highlights some of the potentials and pitfalls to development of NTFP related tourism in a specific context which may or may not apply in other contexts. This research and case study should be regarded as a pathfinder to future research and experimental projects concerning the development of NTFP related tourism. So too should the theoretical framework and methodology which lies behind this research be treated. Only practice will reveal the actual impact which NTFP related tourism has on poverty and conservation levels in particular contexts (see also Rondinelli 1993). Initial NTFP related tourism development should proceed through numerous experimental stages. Developing NTFP related tourism as an additional/optional component to pre-existing ecotourism packages seems a likely starting point. Subsequent popularity of NTFP related tourism will reveal whether NTFP related tourism (tours/consumable products) can be developed as specialized tourism products at a particular location.

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