Win-wins in forest product value chains? How governance impacts the sustainability of livelihoods based on non-timber forest products from Cameroon

Ingram, V.J.

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Livelihoods context¹

Different histories of habitation, knowledge, institutions, economic and cultural preferences, practices and tastes determine which species are used and become products. This chapter contributes to the first research question concerning the contexts in which the NTFP value chains are embedded and trends, with a focus on the livelihood context. Given the long history and rich and diverse cultural and geographic fabric in which the value chains originate, the chapter concentrates on the social and economic contexts of the livelihoods of people collecting, using and trading NTFPs which influence chain governance. Continuing the bricolage theme, this section weaves the study results – particularly the surveys, stakeholder interviews and workshops (detailed in chapter 3) – with the literature review to present and analyse the contexts. Livelihood aspects specific to the chains are further detailed in Chapters 7 to 10. Livelihoods data is highly temporal, context and location specific and as such, is intended to provide context to the specific chains and locations studied. Where this is generalizable to NTFPs in Cameroon, this is indicated.

Socioeconomic context

Although the term ‘NTFP’ is a couple of decades old (de Beer et al. 1989), Chapter 4 showed that such products have been used and traded for centuries. Many have maintained subsistence; economic, social and cultural values for local people but their values have waxed and waned on national and international markets. Examining the historical and current socio-economic context helps to map swings in value and subsequent shifts in importance to livelihoods across time and societies: from subsistence products to important commodities during colonial periods to secondary resources, and more recently a re-entry

¹This chapter draws on the following, peer-reviewed published work written or contributed to by the author: Beauchamp and Ingram 2011, Cerutti et al. 2009, Ingram 2012, Ingram, Ndoye et al. 2012a and 2012b, Ingram 2012, Ingram et al. 2013, Laird et al. 2010.
in the national and international spotlights concerning their trade, conservation and development. This has led to different regulations, policies and institutions addressing NTFPs (see Chapter 6) and consequently different governance strategies. A more rounded view of the NTFPs, their chains and sustainability can be gained from understanding these spatio-temporal and socio-political aspects.

Historical socioeconomic context
To understand the current context in which the chains operate, it is critical to understand their history. A brief trip through time and across what is now Cameroon reveals how history influences the chains today. Around 2,800 years ago the earliest inhabitants of the Congo Basin (Verdu et al. 2009) were semi-nomadic hunter gatherers. The Mbenga ethnic groups (Geyele, Baka/Baka-aa, BaKola, Aka and Kongo) – often referred to as pygmies – continue to inhabit the lowland humid forests and have intricate knowledge, use and customs associated with the forest (Turnbull 1961; Bahuchet et al. 1991; van Dijk 1999; van Dijk et al. 2003; Hattori 2005). Whilst many of their forest-based traditions have remained unchanged, their contact with market economies, subsistence and cultivation activities and the relationship with Bulu and Bantu-speaking farmers has led to increasing exploitation since the 1950s of NTFPs for cash (Wilkie 1989; Hewlett 1996). The market surveys evidence how bush mango (Irvingia spp.) (see Chapter 10) and Gnetum spp. (see Chapter 7) are increasingly commercialised by the Baka. Movements to defend their traditional rights and counter marginalisation and exclusion respond to the threats posed by agriculture, settlement, large infrastructure projects, mining and timber concessions on their traditional lands (Egbe 1997; Young-Ing 2006; Larson et al. 2010a).

From around 500 BC Bantu people migrated in waves into and across southern Cameroon. By AD 500 Northern Cameroon was gradually inhabited by Arabic, Hamitic and Negroid peoples (Neba 1999). By the end of the 16th century the Fulani, a nomadic, pastoral Islamic people had developed a strong presence in the north and by the mid-18th century they had moved into the Highlands. Portuguese explorers arrived on the River Wouri in 1472. Subsequent adventurers and traders set up sugar plantations and built upon the existing north-south slave trade run by local chiefs, which endured for 400 more years. Heightened demand for ivory, wax, cola and rubber allowed previously subjugated and isolated peoples to rise to economic prominence using the ancient slave routes. These form the foundation for today’s trading routes and explain the preponderance of certain ethnic groups in the cola and gum arabic chains.

Numerous small-scale chiefdoms emerged by the 17th century with ornate and luxurious courtly and funerary arts, these as well as everyday objects feature forest animals and plants as symbols of spiritualism and power (Metropolitan Museum of Art 2010). They remain evident today, particularly in the Highlands. The influence of the Bantu coastal clans grew, extending to Adamaoua by the 16th century but by the late 1770s and early 1800s, Fulanis defeated and displaced many of the largely non-Muslim inhabitants, further developing the

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2 Lobbying and advocacy organisations include the Rainforest Foundation, Rainforest Alliance, Forest People’s Programme, Centre d’accompagnement des Autochtones Pygmées et Minoritaires Vulnérables (CAMV) and Cercle pour la Défense de l’Environnement (CEDEN).
slave trade and creating a powerful feudal empire ruled from Sokoto, Nigeria. From 1844 onwards, starting in the Southwest, missionary centres were established, followed by European settlement and conquest from the late 1870s, aided by quinine (Cinchona spp.) cultivation to combat malaria. Germany signed a treaty with Douala and Bamiléké chiefs in what are now the Littoral and Western areas, encountering strong opposition in parts of Adamaoua, the Southwest and Northwest. The Northwest and West regions however particularly were, and still are, strongholds of highly organised kingdoms (Fondoms) that migrated to the fertile highlands from the North and Nigeria from the 16th century. Among the Fulani, Grassfielder tribes, Bamiléké and Bamoun, social organisation was traditionally based on hierarchical relations between members of groups with different status (royalty, nobility, commoners and slaves). They traded in slaves, ivory, palm oil, kola nuts, salt, oil, iron, cloth, pearls and cowry shells. During the 19th century the Highlands – increasingly known as the Grassfields – were still largely outside the trading networks of the Benue and Adamaoua, although these spread into the Bamenda Highlands at the end of the 19th Century (Chilver 1961). This opened possibilities for differentiation and commodification (Rowlands 1978; Warnier 1985) and the cultivation of the most valuable products, such as cola nuts in the Northwest (Geary 1980). Their cultural and economic value derives from this period.

In the South, Bantu-speaking groups such as the Fang and Beti migrated into southeast Cameroon by the end of the 18th century. They are characterised by a clan-based, societal organisation in which age and gender are the major social stratifiers. The coastal Duala, Bakweri and Bakossi are sedentary, village based, hierarchical clans distinguishing between indigenes and slaves who have different land entitlement rights. There is a high degree of social inequality among some of the northern and Highlands ethnic groups. Adamaoua is a melting pot of Bantu and Fulani origins, with the Gbaya an acephalous, tribal, patrician-based people with dispersed communities with contingent membership and permissive subsistence ecology. Current social inequalities based on access to political power and formal education level now coexist with these indigenous forms of stratification in all the study areas. Although a cosmopolitan lifestyle has developed among the wealthy and intelligentsia, these culturally distinct markers and obligations to kin and ethnic compatriots remain. This affects socio-economic life, with ethnic origins reflected today in customary governance arrangements, the choice of trading partners, food preferences and celebrations and attitudes to forest products.

The exploitation of natural resources initiated by the Germans continued after the World War I handover to Britain and France. Cocoa, coffee, cotton, timber and palm oil were developed into major export revenue sources. The economy remained buoyant until the economic crisis of the late 1980s. This is reflected today in the policy focus on timber and agricultural commodities. The basic road and rail infrastructure present today was developed during the colonial period (USAID 2010). The generally poor state of this infrastructure now presents major problems for harvesters – evidenced by it being ranked as the first or second most major barrier to trade by all actors the chains in the interviews. In 1955 the Union of Cameroonians Peoples commenced an armed struggle for independence that led to self-government for French Cameroon. Ahidjo was the first prime minister of the independent Republic of Cameroon, unifying Francophone Cameroon with the largely Christian, Anglophone Southern Cameroons. On-going political, ethnic, language and
cultural tensions still exist between Francophone and Anglophone regions and peoples as a result of the colonial divide and reunification. Administrative, educational and political systems have been heavily influenced by the colonial systems, imprinting land tenure and state relations with customary authorities. A Beti ethnic coalition gained political dominance as the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) in 1985, with the still ruling President Biya at its helm.

**Ethnicity**

This rich and chequered history is reflected today in Cameroon’s cultural and ethnic diversity, with over 247 ethnolinguistic groups (Ndongo-Semengue *et al.* 1999). In 1987 an estimated 32% of people had migrated intra-nationally in Cameroon (Schrieder *et al.* 2000), mainly outside of their original ethnic areas, to urban areas and to regions offering employment, such as plantations and timber concessions in the Southwest (Diaw 1997; Sunderlin *et al.* 2002). The survey results (see Table 5.1) reflect this diversity and mobility, with 9% of all harvesters not being indigenous to the harvest area. An illustration of this is the blurring of linguistic boundaries such that forest-based gastronomic terms such as eru and achu have become commonplace in Cameroonian French and English (Echu 2002).

**Table 5.1** Ethnic origins of harvesters in value chains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NTFP chain</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% non-indigene harvesters</th>
<th>Origin of immigrant harvesters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Gnetum</em> spp.</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Southwestern, Littoral, Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Littoral</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Northwest, Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture</td>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Southwestern, Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adamaoua</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Adamaoua, North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Prunus africana</em></td>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cola</em> spp.</td>
<td>Northwest &amp; West</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>West, Northwest, Littoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Littoral</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>West, Southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Southwestern, Littoral, Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irvingia</em> spp.</td>
<td>Centre, South &amp; Littoral</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>North, Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Raphia</em> spp.</td>
<td>Northwest &amp; West</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Centre, South, West, Northwest</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>All regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Acacia</em> spp.</td>
<td>North &amp; Extreme North</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Research results*

Another impact has been increased exposure to, and popularity of forest products once used only by specific tribal groups (Poubom Ngundam 1997), such as eru and cola nuts. There has been increasing dissemination (encouraged by academic and development organisations) of rich oral myths, folktales, riddles, and proverbs. Many include accounts of NTFPs use such as ‘Tales of the grasslands and the forest’ (Nzuh 1999), ‘Kola nut

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3 The Bayang term eru signifies a dish of sliced *Gnetum* spp. leaves cooked in palm oil with ground, fermented cassava. Achu originates from the Grassfields and is a yellow soup of palm oil and NTFPs (*Tetrapleura tetraptera*, *Ricinodendron heudelottii*, *Piper guineensis* and *Afrostyrax kamerunensis*), served in a pounded cocoyam and plantain porridge with meat, usually beef or goat.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/State</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Surface area km²</th>
<th>Population¹²</th>
<th>Population density km²</th>
<th>Estimated no. adjacent villages³⁴</th>
<th>Estimated population villages³⁴</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cameroon</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southwest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Southwest</td>
<td>Buea</td>
<td>25,410</td>
<td>1,316,079</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fako</td>
<td>Buea</td>
<td>2,093</td>
<td>46,412</td>
<td>222.8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kupe-Muanengouba</td>
<td>Bangem</td>
<td>3,404</td>
<td>105,579</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meme</td>
<td>Kumba</td>
<td>3,105</td>
<td>326,734</td>
<td>105.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manyu</td>
<td>Mamfe</td>
<td>9,565</td>
<td>181,039</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndian</td>
<td>Mundemba</td>
<td>6,626</td>
<td>122,579</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northwest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Northwest</td>
<td>Bamenda</td>
<td>17,300</td>
<td>1,728,953</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>62,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bui</td>
<td>Kumbo</td>
<td>2,297</td>
<td>321,969</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezam</td>
<td>Bamenda</td>
<td>1,745</td>
<td>524,127</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyo</td>
<td>Fundong</td>
<td>1,592</td>
<td>124,887</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donga Mantung</td>
<td>Nkambe</td>
<td>4,279</td>
<td>269,931</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total West</td>
<td>Bafoussam</td>
<td>13,892</td>
<td>1,720,047</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ménoua</td>
<td>Dschang</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>285,764</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Littoral</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Douala</td>
<td>20,248</td>
<td>2,510,283</td>
<td>124.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mungo</td>
<td>Nkongsamba</td>
<td>3,723</td>
<td>379,241</td>
<td>101.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adamaoua</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Adamaoua</td>
<td>Ngoundéré</td>
<td>63,691</td>
<td>844,289</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo Banyo</td>
<td>Banyo</td>
<td>8,520</td>
<td>187,066</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faro et Déo</td>
<td>Tignere</td>
<td>10,435</td>
<td>82,717</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djerem⁴</td>
<td>Tibati</td>
<td>13,283</td>
<td>82,717</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centre</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Centre</td>
<td>Yaoundé</td>
<td>68,926</td>
<td>3,098,044</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extreme North</strong></td>
<td>Total Ext. North</td>
<td>34,263</td>
<td>3,111,792</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total⁵</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nigeria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/State</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Surface area km²</th>
<th>Population¹²</th>
<th>Population density km²</th>
<th>Estimated no. adjacent villages³⁴</th>
<th>Estimated population villages³⁴</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cross River</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Calabar</td>
<td>20,156</td>
<td>3,104,446</td>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akwa Ibom</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Uyo</td>
<td>7,081</td>
<td>4,805,451</td>
<td>679</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total⁵</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>170,123,740</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

divination’ (Dah 1995) and ‘Rituals in the Grassfields’ (Mzeka 1996). The recognition of tribal affiliation, deference to some customs and maintenance of maternal and paternal languages remains common, although mobility and changing social relations mean that the institutions ensuring adherence to such traditions are weakening. Thus myths upon which customary arrangements governing forest use are founded no longer have the same power to shape or control activities (Paul Mzeka, ANCO, pers. comm. 2008; George Bang, Oku Honey Cooperative pers. comm. 2010). This aspect is ruled by upholders of those traditions (Fon of Oku, pers. comm. 2009; Fon of Pinyin, pers. comm. 2008; Yamma Peter, ASSOKOFOMI, pers. comm. 2007; Bakia Besong, SNV, pers. comm. 2008).

Table 5.3 Average value chain actor’s household size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chain and region of origin</th>
<th>Chain Average</th>
<th>Harvesters</th>
<th>Processors</th>
<th>Wholesalers</th>
<th>Retailers</th>
<th>Exporters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gnetum SW, L</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture NW</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture Ad</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus NW, SW</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola spp. NW</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia spp. SW</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia spp. L</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphia spp.</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo NW</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acacia spp. ExN</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research results. Key: Regions: Ad=Adamaoua L=Littoral S=South SW=Southwest N=North W=West ExN=Extreme North NW=Northwest

Poverty

NTFP’s contribution to livelihoods can be seen in the socioeconomic context of where the chains operate, shown in Table 5.2. The chains all originate in the poorest regions of Cameroon (National Institute of Statistics 2007). Poverty still dominates (see Table 1.1), despite the Government’s plans to create a socially acceptable, middle-income country (Republic of Cameroon 2009). The main vehicle to do this has been the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes, started in 2003 with the second published in 2009 (Premier Minister 2009). Among the indicators used to measure poverty in Cameroon, poverty is defined as less than 738 FCFA/day (1.47 US$/day) (National Institute of Statistics 2007). The last household survey (National Institute of Statistics 2007), indicated that poverty still affects 40% of the population, a slight decrease from 2001 and 1996. Women and children are particularly vulnerable as half of the members of poor households are under 15 years old and the majority of people living in rural areas are women. In urban areas, poverty has declined, particularly in Douala and Yaoundé and increased in rural areas, particularly in the Extreme North (25% of poor), the Northwest (15%) and North (9%). The national average household size was 5.1 persons in 2001 and 4.0 in 2007 (Tandes 2010). Shown in Table 5.3, the average household size of actors in all the NTFP chains was 6.1 persons (SD 1), inferring higher than average chance of poverty.
Table 5.4  Average education level of actors in value chains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chain and region of origin</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>% of total actors attaining education level (N/P/S/U)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harvester</td>
<td>Processors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gnetum spp. SW, L</td>
<td>0/57/43/0</td>
<td>0/68/32/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture NW</td>
<td>10/55/29/02</td>
<td>20/54/24/02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture A</td>
<td>07/77/16/0</td>
<td>07/77/16/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus africana NW</td>
<td>28/53/17/2</td>
<td>28/53/17/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola spp. NW</td>
<td>16/77/05/0</td>
<td>16/77/05/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia SW,C,S,L,E</td>
<td>9/24/52/15</td>
<td>25/44/30/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia spp.E</td>
<td>3/66/30/02</td>
<td>3/66/30/02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphia spp.NW</td>
<td>16/77/05/0</td>
<td>16/77/05/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo NW</td>
<td>01/48/36/10</td>
<td>13/59/26/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acacia spp. ExN</td>
<td>92/08/0/0</td>
<td>92/08/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chain average</td>
<td>19/53/25/4</td>
<td>25/55/22/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research results. Key: Regions: Ad=Adamaoua E=East L=Littoral S=South SW=Southwest N=North W=West ExN=Extreme North NW=Northwest. Schooling: N= None, P= Primary, S= Secondary, U= University.

The empirical results shown in Table 5.4 show that on average 53% of people active in the NTFP chains primary school education, which is comparable to the national average of 55% (National Institute of Statistics 2007). However, chains varies significantly. Acacia spp. harvesters in the extreme North and Prunus Africana harvesters in the Northwest are more likely to have no schooling and few of them have secondary education, as is the case for harvesters of Cola spp.. The highest levels of education were found among Gnetum spp., Irvingia spp. and bamboo harvesters. Some of these trends can be explained by gender, such as women dominating harvesting in the Accacia spp. chain. A high proportion of gum arabic harvesters in the Extreme North are females who, due to their culture and Islamic religion, tend not to be sent to school. According to the ECAM III survey only 18% of rural women have secondary-level education and women in the North and Extreme North regions are the least educated. Education also varies by actor type, with processors and exporters having higher than average levels of schooling. This may be influenced by their urban habitation and thus better access to education, but also generally higher incomes. These figures reflect the 75% average national literacy rate, with 92% and 89% respectively for urban men and women, and 65% and 52% respectively for rural men and women (National Institute of Statistics 2002).

Table 5.5  Contribution of NTFPs to household income per actor and chain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NTFP chain</th>
<th>Harvester</th>
<th>Processor</th>
<th>Wholesaler</th>
<th>Exporter</th>
<th>Retailer</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gnetum spp.</td>
<td>1,276</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,654</td>
<td>1,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,953</td>
<td>2,458</td>
<td>3,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus africana</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,563</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola spp.</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia spp.</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,437</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>3,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphia spp.</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,608</td>
<td>1,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acacia spp.</td>
<td>1,105</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>2,982</td>
<td>10,258</td>
<td>1,585</td>
<td>3,189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research results. Key: - signifies no data.
Table 5.6 Importance ranking of NTFPs in harvesters’ household incomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NTFP chain</th>
<th>% ranking NTFP as primary household source</th>
<th>% ranking farming as primary income source</th>
<th>Average number of years harvesting NTFP</th>
<th>Average number of income sources</th>
<th>NTFP as % of total income from all NTFPs produced</th>
<th>Average number of all NTFPs harvested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gnetum spp.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus africana</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola spp.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia spp.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphia spp.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acacia spp.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research results. Key: - signifies no data collected

Actors’ NTFP incomes present a very mixed picture. Table 5.5 highlights how Gnetum spp. harvesters earn almost double the lowland forest zone average, but Irvingia spp. harvesters earn less. Cola spp., Raphia spp. and Prunus africana harvesters on average earn less than the Highlands average, whilst bamboo actors (see Chapter 10) earn above the average. Honey harvesters in Adamaoua earn slightly less than the savannah average, although gum arabic harvesters earn almost double the average. These differences are related to product value, costs, markets and quantity harvested. The urban based actors in the chains33 – the exporters and wholesalers – all earn significantly more than the average, whilst retailers earn less. The average income for all harvesters is slightly less than the average for rural inhabitants in Cameroon. The wide variations in incomes per chains reflect issues such as demand, product value, scarcity and different market types and access. This highlights that only in specific chains and for specific actors (wholesalers and exporters) who add value, take most risks and earn the highest profit, does trade in NTFPs provide an above national average household income. To interpret these findings, it is necessary to compare with spatially disaggregated data. For example, in 2001, average annual income for households engaged in informal non-agriculture was 931,000 FCFA (1,308 US$) and for informal agriculture 391,000 FCFA (549 US$) (ECAM II). Annual average rural income per adult equivalent was 276,335 FCFA (388 US$) in the humid forest zone, 297,146 FCFA (417 US$) in the Highlands and 283,902 FCFA (399 US$) in the savannah, 565,112 FCFA (794 US$) in Yaoundé and 522,947 FCFA (735 US$) in Douala and 444,292 FCFA (624 US$) in other cities (National Institute of Statistics 2002). By 2005, people based in the rural lowland forest area showed the greatest decreases in poverty (17%), however in the rural savannah zone poverty increased by 1.3%. Average urban incomes per adult were 497,896 FCFA (699 US$) and 280,233 FCFA (393 US$) for rural adult inhabitants (National Institute of Statistics 2007). Actors’ NTFP incomes reflect this pattern of uneven economic growth and activity across the country and social categories, with poverty reducing in urban areas, but remaining high in rural areas.

NTFPs are generally of strategic importance for the livelihoods of harvesters and their households. Shown in Table 5.6, many of the NTFPs studied contribute to a

33 FCFA US$ exchange rate fluctuations in the period 2005 to 2007 were 1.10, making the 2005 and 2007 figures comparable and inflation rates stable at 1 to 2% (Konings 2009).
significant proportion of harvesters’ incomes for long periods of time, with harvesters having been active on average for 8 years. In three chains the NTFP studied was more important than farming. Often the product studied is one of several harvested, indicating the strategic importance of NTFPs to household livelihoods.

**Gender**

Summarised in Table 5.7, the surveys indicate that men dominate chains numerically, compromising 60% of all actors (Ingram et al. 2013). Their presence varies per chain and stage, with processing, retail and wholesale stages generally dominated by women. Gathering forest products in general is gender differentiated. This mirrors other activities, as in most areas, regardless of ethnic background, labour and family duties are strongly segregated by gender (Sunderlin et al. 2002). Women are responsible for feeding the family and growing staple food crops, while men grow cash crops, own trees, clear the land and provide the traditional luxuries of meat, oil, and salt. Such customs have been largely unchanged for centuries at least up to the 1950s (Goheen 1996). This has led to women collecting traditionally low-value products (plant-based and fish) for family use and men focusing on timber and high value, traded species – particularly hunting (Ndoye et al. 2006). Among specific ethnic groups, such as the pastoral Mbororo and Fulani in the Extreme North, Northwest and West, men traditionally herd the livestock and women process dairy products and do not enter the forest or stray far alone from their homes. These practices are both linked to their Islamic traditions (van Santen 1998) and the specific Mbororo and Fulani culture. The male-female ratio of actors in specific chains is determined by the products’ value, physical activity in harvesting and processing, harvest distances and forest type (farm-fallow or ‘black forest’). Women generally, but not always, harvest NTFPs closer to home in farm and fallows. However, for certain products such as bush mango, women will, often with families and in groups, camp in the forest for several days of harvesting. However, perceptions of the suitability of heavy, physical work appear gender-differentiated: it is common to see women in the Highlands carrying traditional rucksacks and head loads of fuelwood, potatoes and maize that at approximately 25 kg (Kaberry 1952; Davis 2001), weigh around the same as the pygeum barks and full beehives that men carry. This observation mirrors observations in other African countries where women still transport most crops and carry similar weights (Calvo 1994; Starkey 2001).

Women often retain informal power within households, enforced by their control of subsistence activities, their role as conduits to female ancestors and their role in cultivating and domesticating species (Brown et al. 2002). However the proportion of women involved in chain activities tends to decrease with commercialisation and increasing product value. This has led to men collecting, for example eru (Chapter 7) and bush mango (Chapter 10). The research findings highlight that women continue to dominate petty NTFP trade, particularly prevalent in markets. This trend has remaining unchanged over the last fifteen years (Ruiz Pérez et al. 2003). Among forest product traders, there is also strong gender differentiation related to business size, product specialisation and market strategies. Gender differences account for half of the variability in profit margins, with family status and age being important factors. Gender disparities however diminish among younger traders, echoing previous research (Ruiz Pérez et al. 2003). Other explanatory factors are that in general, men have higher social status than women. Men generally have more rights with regard to marriage, divorce,
and land tenure within most local systems of social organisation and more access to
government bureaucracy and the courts. The more recent entry of women into retailing,
wholesale and export in contrast to harvesting highlights the changes afoot, despite
increases in farm work associated with the economic crisis of the late 1980s and early
1990s (Fonchingong 1999), with more women entering paid employment. This
corroborates trends of women starting businesses, obtaining higher education levels and
entering traditionally male-dominated sectors (Veuthey et al. 2009). Gender equality
and empowerment of women have been recognised as critical for poverty alleviation,
enshrined in one of the millennium development goals.

Table 5.7 Male-female ratio of actors in value chains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chain and region of origin</th>
<th>Harvesters</th>
<th>Processors</th>
<th>Intermediaries</th>
<th>Retailers</th>
<th>Wholesalers</th>
<th>Exporters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong> Male/female</td>
<td>31:69</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gnetum spp.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture NW</td>
<td>63:37</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apiculture A</td>
<td>71:29</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus africana</td>
<td>99:01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola spp. NW</td>
<td>58:42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola. Littoral</td>
<td>91:09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia SW</td>
<td>51:49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia. CSL</td>
<td>28:72</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvingia. East</td>
<td>59:41</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphia spp.</td>
<td>75:25</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>94:06</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acacia spp.</td>
<td>35:65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>60:40</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research results. Key: Regions: NW=Northwest, SW =Southwest A =Adamaoua CSL= Centre, South & Littoral. Blank = no data.

Entrepreneurial operating context

The challenges in the business environment affect how individuals, groups and
businesses operate (Bowen et al. 2007) and form a significant aspect of the contexts,
influencing governance arrangements in the chains.

Trade

The nature of Cameroon’s international trade has changed dramatically over time,
impacting poverty levels, employment and incomes. Colonial rule saw the rapid
amalgamation of governance and government units, with ‘modernisation’ achieved at
the expense of the indigenous structures and through the exploitation of the African
peoples (Oliver 1999). Despite unification upon independence, the colonial legacy has
left plurality of languages, administrative and government systems, and politics, which
are still apparent today. Cameroon remains a member of both the Commonwealth of
Nations and La Francophonie and associated economic, cultural, social and educational
ties such as the Alliance Française, British Council and Goethe Institute. The EU has
remained Cameroon’s major trade partner since independence (with 41% of imports and
57% of exports). France, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK are the most important
partner countries (DG Trade 2011). Major export products include petroleum oils (48% of
revenues in 2005), followed by timber (14%) and agricultural products (DG Trade
2011). Trade with other members of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central
Africa (CEMAC) appears to be very limited, at around 3.4%. 
However unrecorded, informal regional trade figures are not included and the findings of this study suggest that trade in *Gnetum* spp., *Acacia* spp., *Irvingia* spp. and other NTFPs is substantial, with trade in the eight chains worth an estimated 32 million US$ annually (see Chapter 4). Around 34,227 people are active in different stages of the chains of these products, shown in Figure 5.1. This lack of data is despite Cameroon being a member of the CEMAC and sharing the Central African Franc (FCFA) currency with the five other sub-regional states. Nigeria is officially the third major trade partner (accounting for 7% of all exports and imports). New economic links are also apparent, with China rising from a low position in 2005 to become the second most important partner (12% of imports and exports) by 2010 (DG Trade 2011). Since 2000 China and other emerging economies have been increasingly securing trade and control of chains such as timber and oil palm at source (Roda 2009; Cerutti et al. 2011). These new market entrants shape trade patterns and forest management (Cerutti et al. 2011). This is mirrored in, for example, increasing sales of medicinal NTFPs such as *Prunus africana*, *Voacanga africana* and *Pausinystalia johimbe* to China.

*Figure 5.1 Number of people active in eight NTFP chains*

As 41% of NTFPs have medicinal uses (see Chapter 4), and given the levels of poverty, and poor access to modern health services (Republic of Cameroon, 2009a), their trade has implications for health, and in turn for poverty, with health central to two of the millennium development goals. Traditional practitioners, such as herbalists, *ngambi* (diviners) and ritual specialists, use a wide variety of plant and animals in such treatments, a number of which have been inventoried (see Appendices 3 and 7). Current healthcare systems are typically a mix of biomedical treatment, traditional medicine, witchcraft (closely bound to traditional religion) and Islamic medicine. The combination depends on beliefs, cost, proximity and the advice of family and friends. Traditional practices remain strong, despite shifts in the last century and commonly see power as simultaneously attractive, dangerous and traceable to occult forces, causing both mental and physical health and illness and affecting material success. Over the last two decades there has been a gradual tendency towards herbalists and individual treatment, away from the use of ritual specialists and community-wide treatments. Many practitioners specialise in treating particular afflictions and people often consult practitioners from

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different cultural groups. These practitioners have adapted to societal changes by incorporating new ideas and medicines into their practices and treating modern illnesses such as AIDS. Ethnic groups with reputations for witchcraft, such as the Maka in the south and Oku in the Northwest (Geschiere 1997) continue to draw substantially on forest products for their cultural and medicinal powers. Pharmaceutical enterprises and research organisations35 have been investigating the efficacy of traditional NTFPs. This has resulted in scientific articles and closely guarded local compendiums. The rights to use, maintain and protect traditional knowledge have been debated and guidelines formulated in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This has resulted in Cameroonian cases on access and benefit sharing of traditional knowledge (Laird et al. 2008; Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Central African Forests Commission 2009; Union for Ethical Biotrade 2010).

Informality
Most NTFP commerce, as in other African economies, is informal (Roitman 2005; RRI 2009a). Most NTFP traders are also small scale (Trefon 1994; Ndoye et al. 1997/98; Ladipo 1998). Informal denotes commercial operations not being registered as enterprises (with the Chamber of Commerce or the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts (MINSME) and includes economic activities, enterprises and workers unregulated or protected by the state. In developing countries the informal economy is estimated to comprise between half to three quarters of the non-agricultural labour force (Economic Commission for Africa 2010). The informal economy is also estimated as the main source of job creation in Africa, providing between 20 and 75 % of total employment in most countries (Economic Commission for Africa 2010). It has been viewed positively as a pool of entrepreneurial talent, cushion during economic crises and source of livelihoods for the working poor, and problematically as avoiding regulation and taxation (WIEGO 2011). Links between informality, growth, poverty and inequality have become more apparent (WIEGO 2011). In inter-African trade informality is stimulated by urban development (Portes et al. 1991). Informal institutions can shape political behaviour and outcomes even more strongly than formal rules (Helmke et al. 2004).

Despite such informality, prevailing regulations have some influence on NTFP commerce. Trade is formally regulated by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, and employment by the Ministry of Employment. Discussions indicated that there is little, if any, coordination between them. Trade in physical markets (including traditional country Sunday markets), is generally controlled by the local council, which decrees times, days, location and area of marketplaces, and grants annual and daily permits to sellers. Interviews and workshops (see Appendix 12) indicated that traders make conscious choices whether to work informally or register, with 17% in total being part of a group – the majority (95%) in Common Initiative Groups (CIG). This is the easiest and cheapest form of profit-making organisation. Registered at regional level, they are governed by Law 92/006 of 14 August 1992 related to societies, cooperatives and common initiative groups. Taxation is a major worry for most enterprises, with 95% of actors in the Northwest and Southwest

35 Centre de Naturopathie et d’Action Humanitaire du Cameroun (CENAHC), the Institute de Recherche Médicales & Etudes des Plantes Médicinales (IMPN) and Centre de Recherche en Plantes Médicinales et Medicine Traditionnelle (CRPMT).
indicating that they did not register or formalise their activities to avoid taxation. Registering as a CIG or an NGO provides tax exemption\textsuperscript{36}. However, to obtain a SFP permit, individuals or communities must be registered companies or approved and accredited as forest resource harvesters, which only 14 operators have achieved since 2008. As a result, the majority of SFPs are traded without permits: interviews indicate that over 90\% did not have a permit. Sudano-Saharan inter-African trade networks have a strong ethnic component, providing a social structure and informal institutions. A trader’s ethnic group often reflects a product’s origin or main consumers, such as in the cola chain (see Chapter 10) where traders from the Northwest and Extreme North dominate. These ethnically determined institutions compensate for weak formal institutions, incompetent administrative systems and rampant corruption. Based on trust, they enable trans-national economic exchanges, dispute settlement, financial support, information sharing and trade facilitation (Langbour \textit{et al.} 2010).

\textbf{Business challenges}

The difficulties of launching a business in Cameroon were iterated by the majority of actors in the chains and deterred many from operating formally. These challenges have been confirmed by the World Bank’s Doing Business indicators which measure the strength of legal institutions and procedures required to establish a business, the associated time and cost, and minimum capital requirements. In the study period, Cameroon continued to score poorly on an African and international scale, worsening from a rank of 147 in 2006 to 167 out of 175 in 2009 (World Bank 2007; 2010b). Compared to the average for Sub-Saharan Africa and lower-middle income countries, Cameroon’s performance in the areas of government effectiveness, rule of law and control of corruption was much lower (World Bank 2009c). This is despite significant improvements since the late 1990s and early 2000s. Rigid labour laws make hiring and firing difficult and focus heavily on individual protection and national insurance contributions for pensions, which can be onerous for small enterprises (Jacques Nyam Eben, Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Crafts persons, pers. comm. 2009). As a result, formal employment contracts were not common among the enterprises interviewed.

Obtaining credit is also difficult for the NTFP sector and for women in particular (Awono \textit{et al.} 2010a). The scope, access and quality of credit information available through public organisations or private sector is very low, compared with the region and OECD average and twice as costly (World Bank 2009c). This results in a low uptake of credit though such formal channels and reliance on informal credit, such as tontines, particularly in the NTFP sector (Awono \textit{et al.} 2010a). Whilst finance for micro-entrepreneurs is fairly new, informal financing has a long history (Rogerson 2001). Tontines, njangi\textsuperscript{37}, micro-savings schemes and gifts or informal flexible loans from friends and/or family and own capital are very important for entrepreneurs in the NTFP sector (Awono \textit{et al.} 2010b). Interviews confirmed these as the major sources of capital for traders and retailers who needed to invest in stocks, equipment, premises and transport prior to starting a business.

\textsuperscript{36} Law No. 73 -15 of 7/12/73 relating to the roles and regulations governing cooperative societies and Law No. 92/006 of 14 August 1993 relating to Cooperative societies and CIGs.

\textsuperscript{37} Informal associations of individuals along neighbourhood, professional, age, gender or ethnic lines, often with a cultural and/or credit and saving function.
Taxes levied on NTFP trade include general business duties (profit and VAT) and local council taxes for market traders. Since 1996 traders have been required to pay a flat business tax of 12,000 FCFA (25 US$) per year. The total tax burden for small-scale traders can be significant, adding to the burden of ‘informal’ taxes. Larger traders and companies are also subject to significant taxation, including regeneration taxes for SFP quotas at 10 FCFA (0.02 US$) per kilogram of SFP exploited. Revenues from SFP regeneration taxes are small compared to timber: from 2000 to 2005, the state annually received around 16 million US$ from timber concession area taxes (Cerutti et al. 2006), ten times the value from SFPs. The export of raw, unprocessed SFPs requires payment of another, progressive and volume-based tax. In the mid-1990s, an export tax of 15% was instituted on all NTFPs, but was reduced as it became apparent that the tax pushed the trade underground and forced many companies to close, such as the pharmaceutical NTFP-exporting company Plantecam. Measures to improve the transparency and management of the tax and customs in the Autonomous Port of Douala were not seen as producing improvements by the exporters interviewed. All interviewees indicated that negotiating bribes with officials from customs, tax, agriculture and MINFOF inspection services are part of their daily business.

Collective action has been seen by Macqueen et al. (2006) as a strategy to overcome the bottlenecks of informality and difficult business environments, when few other support structures exist. Successful associations can achieve cost reductions, adapt strategically to new opportunities and lobby for more supportive policies. The interviews confirm this, with 17% of harvesters, 6% of processors, 12% of traders and 14% of retailers working collectively, with variations found in specific chains and regions, partly linked to social culture. For example in the Northwest and parts of the Southwest the traditional cultures encourage and support collective action, with people accustomed to working collectively, dating back to colonially instigated farmer cooperatives. A survey of collective action in the Northwest and Southwest confirms this (Ingram et al. 2007), indicating that collective action and networking helped groups to meet their goals. The less hierarchical societal cultures more common in the Centre, South and Adamaua regions make collective action more uncommon and problematic. On average, 18% of actors surveyed engage in collective action.

Conclusion: Visible for livelihoods – invisible for policy

The social-economic context in which NTFP chains are embedded highlights their ongoing, long-term importance for subsistence and trade. Many NTFPs are everyday items and common sights in households and markets. Trade has been highly dynamic, with booms and busts dependent upon a combination of factors involving supply and demand, as well as changing alternatives, tastes, uses and consumers. Diverse trade and consumption practices by ethnic groups have merged and melted as mobility, urbanisation and globalisation increases, creating further opportunities for new products and markets. The economic benefits of trade are not equally distributed. On average, those involved in NTFPs gain equivalent to average national income. However, certain actors and products provide above average, substantial, highly valuable economic contribution to livelihoods. The unmeasured, non-economic benefits are also apparent – their use in healthcare, as food and their cultural importance. For other people, mainly women, rural harvesters, minority ethnic groups and large households who are more likely to be poor, NTFP trade provides an important economic and social contribution to
their livelihoods but they remain poor. For others, it is a minor contribution, an opportunistic practice, diversification and safety net. The benefits from trade are easily controlled by the actors in the chains with the most economic and/or political power. The poorest, most marginalised and most dependent on NTFPs have less control.

NTFP business is fraught with challenges, many inherent in Cameroonian socio-economic culture and its politics. This has meant that trade has remained largely informal and reliant on family and ethnically based networks. Informality aims to avoid the costs of state interference and corruption, but also means that bribery is rife as there is no formal safeguard. Informality, whilst breeding creativity, is also a barrier to gaining support from the government, research and support organisations that are present or active, albeit uncoordinated, in the chains. It also forms a barrier for people and enterprises in the chains to access financial capital. Collective action is one way that people in the chain have sought to generate more power to counter such practices, but it is not widespread in all chains and segments.

Informality is also equated with lack of policy attention: the importance of the NTFP sector’s contribution to national economies, livelihoods, food security and health has been unknown or under-estimated. Politically it has been almost invisible, except for a handful of economically important and/or threatened products. The formal framework does little to promote or support vibrant NTFP-based entrepreneurship. Corruption adds an unpredictable and often costly layer of arrangements. However, in the last two decades an increasing trend of attention is apparent. Regional and national level discourses, institutions and networks of actors have emerged. However, this has yet to be translated into practices on the ground, in the forest, fields, villages and markets. The lack of harmonisation between government agencies means there is no differentiation between wild and cultivated NTFPs and subsequent policies and practices related to the majority of chains.