

PRACTICING SUSTAINABILITY: PRINCIPLES FOR NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS

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While there is no universal definition, most natural resource managers agree that sustainability has socio-cultural, economic, and ecological dimensions. This paper considers the broad attributes of sustainability but focuses on the ecological basis for sustainable management of non-timber forest products. This review of principles follows Peters (1994) and is intended for application by Extension Officers and other field personnel within the Sri Lanka Community Forestry Program to support expanded options for sustainable, forest-based livelihoods within that program.

Population biology is the core of the approach to the question of how we can remove products, whether they be fruits and seeds, plant exudates, or vegetative structures, on an on-going basis without diminishing supply. The steps in the process are species selection, forest inventory, yield estimates, regeneration surveys, harvest assessments, and harvest adjustments. A regular flow of diagnostic information about the ecological response of the species or resources to varying degrees of exploitation enables on-going adjustment to maintain population structures. Tending and enrichment can be used to protect and augment populations of economic species.

Almost any form of resource harvest affects the structure and function of tropical plant populations. If nothing is done to mitigate the impacts, continued harvesting will deplete the resource. If practiced on a sustainable basis, the exploitation of non-timber forest products provides a way to use tropical forests for profit while conserving their biological diversity and ecosystem functions. Expanded, sustainable, forest-based livelihoods improve prospects for forest retention and protection.

Key words: *Sustainability, Non-timber forest products, Silviculture, Population biology*





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