



Information Note No. 7 (October 2012)
*Toolbox on how to integrate the right to food
in the central African NWFP sector*



**Enhancing the Contribution of Non-Wood Forest Products to Poverty Alleviation
and Food Security in Central African Countries (GCP/RAF/441/GER)**

1. Introduction

Given the huge potential of natural resources in the Congo Basin, food insecurity can be considered as a result of inappropriate policies and strategies as well as structural problems. Sustainably used, the sub-region's biodiversity, including non-wood forest products (NWFP), represent a tremendous source for economic growth.

Until now, stakeholders at different levels have not fully perceived the linkages between NWFP, food security and the right to food. For a long time, the potential contribution of NWFP to food security and poverty alleviation has often been underestimated.

The moment has come to create a new dynamic for the central African NWFP sector; an orientation towards a sustainable use of forest resources is needed to contribute to national economic growth as well as to the realization of people's right to food.

2. Objectives of the toolbox

Based on various guidelines of COMIFAC and FAO (see box), the toolbox presents different tools aiming for a better governance of the central African NWFP sector. Application of these tools in practice will contribute to the respect, protection and fulfilment of the right to food within an environment of economic and structural development of the NWFP sector and the sustainable management of NWFP resources.

The toolbox aims to give a new drive to the development of the NWFP sector. Therefore it shows in a practical way how to integrate the right to food and the human rights principles in existing approaches in support of the NWFP sector.

The Right to Adequate Food

The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The implementation of this right is a daily challenge and contributes to fight poverty and food insecurity.

3. Target groups

The idea of the toolbox is to provide stakeholders with a number of tools out of which each group chooses the most pertinent tools for its role and tasks in a rights-based environment. Stakeholders can then adapt chosen tools to their needs. The toolbox addresses the following stakeholders:

- States (duty bearers) are guided in their steps towards the realisation of the right to food through its integration in the NWFP sector.
- Citizens (rights holders) and grass-root organisations are supported in awareness raising activities related to the right to food (e.g. how to claim a right) and NWFP (technical knowledge).

- Civil society organisations learn how to strengthen citizen in organizing their voices and increasing valuable technical NWFP knowledge.
- Technical and financial development partners, including private enterprises, and the international community are geared to integrate right to food principles in their own strategies and activities while supporting COMIFAC members in their respective policy and implementation tasks.

4. A multi-stakeholders approach for the development of the toolbox

Including a various number of stakeholders, several steps led to the development of the toolbox as sub-regional guiding instrument towards a sustainable utilization of NWFP based on the application of human rights principles.

Sub-regional training on the right to food

The training was organized in October 2010 in Libreville (Gabon); State as well as non-State participants learned about the relevance of the right to food for the NWFP sector in Central Africa and its contribution to food security.

In addition, participant's reflections on the toolbox as a sub-regional instrument for the realisation of the right to food based on NWFP in national policies and programs helped to enrich the toolbox.

Following fruitful exchanges, the participants of the training proposed five strategic dimensions for the Toolbox (i) capacity development, (ii) sustainable resource management, (iii) institutional and legal framework, (iv) market and value chain promotion, and (v) partnerships and research.

National right to food awareness raising workshops

In the frame of National NWFP advisory groups in Gabon, Congo and Central African Republic, three awareness raising workshops have been organized between July and November 2011. With the help of these forums, national contexts in regard to the right to food and the NWFP sector were discussed and fed into the toolbox.

Training for the integration of COMIFAC's NWFP guidelines and FAO's right to food guidelines in national legal and institutional frameworks

In December 2011 in Douala (Cameroon), jurists from Gabon, Congo and Central African Republic were trained on a practical approach for the integration of COMIFAC's NWFP guidelines and FAO's right to food guidelines and the application of human rights principles while analysing and reviewing legal and institutional frameworks in the above mentioned countries. The experiences and results of the training further enriched the toolbox.

Elaboration and presentation of the toolbox for refinement and validation

Based on substantial input from different stakeholders, the first draft of the toolbox was elaborated and presented at the second meeting of COMIFAC's Experts sub-working group on NWFP organized in April 2012 in Brazzaville (Congo) under the umbrella of the Working group on biodiversity in central Africa, known by its French acronym GTBAC.

During this expert's meeting, discussions revealed the need to integrate in the document further aspects such as women's rights and indigenous people's rights. The exchanges and contribution allowed to better take into account common challenges and opportunities of the COMIFAC sub-region as well as national experiences of some countries in regard to the violation or strengthening of human rights. The fruitful discussions of State and non-State stakeholders with their specific right to food or NWFP expertise greatly improved the toolbox.

Following an awareness raising session on the right to food, the toolbox was approved by the experts of COMIFAC's Working group on biodiversity in central Africa (GTBAC) present at its fifteenth session held in September 2012 in Libreville (Gabon).

5. How to use the toolbox

The toolbox features six chapters and evolves from (i) thematic overviews about the NWFP sector, (ii) analysis of political, legal and institutional frameworks, NWFP value chains and markets and their sustainable management from a human-rights based view, (iii) actions and tools for the realization of the right to food in the NWFP sector, and (iv) opportunities for partnerships, research and capacity development for the different topics mentioned above.

The tools can be used for:

- decision-making processes,
- design of policies, strategies and projects/programs,
- set-up of appropriate policy, institutional and legal frameworks,
- awareness raising and capacity building of different stakeholders and target groups,
- research and partnership development promoting the development of the NWFP sector.

Case studies complete the proposed actions and tools with lessons learned or to try. As the right to food is widely unknown in central Africa and its vulgarization indispensable for its realisation, its concept is explained allowing all toolbox users to have the same level of understanding.



Figure: Human rights – give a voice to the most vulnerable.

COMIFAC's sub-regional guidelines on NWFP

In 2008, the Council of Ministers of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) endorsed the *Sub-regional guidelines for sustainable use of NWFP of plant origin in Central Africa* and recommended them to its member countries for implementation.

The guidelines form the mutual base for the governments of central African countries and propose how national policies and legal, fiscal and institutional frameworks could integrate NWFP of plant origin to allow a sustainable use of forest resources. The right to adequate food is an integral part of these guidelines.

Voluntary guidelines on the right to food

In 2004, FAO's member countries adopted the *Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security*, providing practical guidance to States in their implementation of the right to adequate food.

The right to food guidelines translate the content of the human right to adequate food and the human rights principles into concrete recommendations for action for States; they touch upon political and development issues, tracing possible strategies and priority fields of action to overcome hunger and malnutrition by implementing the right to food.

Guidelines on tenure governance

In May 2012, the Committee on World Food Security officially endorsed the *Voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security*.

These guidelines set out principles and standards for administration of tenure, taxation of the use of natural resources and conflict management in regard to land consolidation or expropriation. The governance of tenure with regard to the legal recognition of tenure rights of indigenous people and other communities is particularly addressed by the guidelines.

The guidelines on tenure governance are of practical importance for the integration of the right to food in national legal frameworks and for the development of NWFP value chains and markets in central Africa embedded in international trade networks.

6. Conclusion

Decisions on access, control and management of forest resources as well as rights and interests of populations, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups, need to be of fundamental interest for all stakeholders and decision makers involved in the promotion of value chains and markets of NWFP of plant origin and their sustainable management in central Africa.

This toolbox provides relevant tools, amongst others, to facilitate access of target groups to information, to recourse mechanisms, to decision making processes as well as to create poverty-sensitive taxation schemes, to eliminate unnecessary and uncalled-for controls.

State and non-State stakeholders that use the suggested tools will succeed in bringing forward the economic and sustainable use of NWFP of plant origin in central Africa.