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Forests can feed world's hungry and over-exploitation for timber must be curbed – UN



Millions of people depend on forests

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Forests can play an even greater role in feeding the world with products ranging from vitamin-rich leaves to fruits and roots, a United Nations-backed international consortium said today, calling on governments to invest more in sustainable forest management and rehabilitation.

With 1 billion people suffering from chronic hunger, the role of forests for timber must not overshadow their important contribution to feeding many of the world's poorest communities, and their over-exploitation for wood must be curbed, according to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), a 14-member group which includes several UN agencies.

“Forests and trees on farms are a direct source of food and cash income for more than a billion of the world’s poorest people,” Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) Assistant Director-General for Forestry Eduardo Rojas-Briaies [said](#).

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“They provide both staple foods and supplemental foods. To enhance these benefits, governments and development partners should increase investments in support of sustainable forest management and rehabilitation of degraded forest lands,” he added, noting that in India, more than 50 million people depend directly on forests for subsistence, while in Laos wild foods are consumed by 80 per cent of its 6.4 million people on a daily basis.

Forest foods and wild animals form a small but critical contribution to otherwise bland and nutritionally poor diets of rural people. Wild leaves can be an excellent source of vitamins A and C, protein and micronutrients such as calcium and iron, fruits are especially rich in minerals and vitamins and contribute significant quantities of calories, while a variety of forest plants have edible roots and tubers, which provide carbohydrates and minerals.

But forest-dependent wildlife and forest foods are increasingly threatened by over-exploitation in many developing countries, causing biodiversity loss and putting food security at risk.

Women also play an important part in processing tree and forest products, the income from which helps their families achieve food security. For instance, women use shea butter, extracted from the nut of the shea tree, as a cooking fat and food accompaniment in West Africa. The harvesting and processing of shea, which is an important ingredient in chocolate and other confectionery, provides rural women with nearly 80 per cent of their income.

Apart from FAO, the CPF includes the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), the UN Environmental Programme ([UNEP](#)), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the UN-backed on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Other members include the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF).

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