Role of non-timber forest products in sustaining livelihood of rural people in North-Central Namibia

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Key Words: Land deterioration, non-timber forest products, poverty problem, NTFPs

1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Namibia is located in the southern part of the African continent. Although its GDP is comparably higher in the continent, its GINI coefficient for wealth inequality is among the highest in the world. In this country, the majority of low-income people live in the North-Central part of Namibia. With increasing urbanization in recent years, the influx of emigration to urban area is high. Tentatively, this has affected land management due to shortage of labor in this region. It is indispensable to construct a sustainable livelihood strategy without addressing labor and capital issues. Therefore, focusing on multi purpose use of trees as non - timber forest products (NTFPs) is of crucial importance. In order to propose a sustainable way for improving livelihood, while conserving scarce available resources and environment there was a need to identify, clarify and documenting on ground reality on the use of trees and finally clarify the contribution of NTFPs in sustaining the livelihoods.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Setting a village in North-Central Namibia as study site, the open-semi-structured questionnaire was carried out, whereby all households in the village were interviewed for the consecutive three months. The questionnaire was subdivided into three parts covering (i) the use and sale of NTFPs, (ii) exploration of villagers living standards and (iii) the contribution of the trees as the fodder during the drought period.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are poor households living less than the poverty line of 1.9 $ expenditure per person per day. The average land area owned is smaller for poorer households and the proportion of households holding agricultural inappropriate field is higher. They tended to migrate from the other provinces in more recent years, and there had been no site suitable for agriculture when they reached here. Among 33 species of trees in the village, 28 of them were used for various purposes. The purposes were categorized into 11 in total, and their major use was as timber, and NTFPs such as feed and food. Using trees as timber is considered to be a heavy burden on the environment because it utilizes trees themselves destructively. However, due to the influence of urbanization in recent years, utilization of tin and cement blocks as a substitute for timber is increasing. The study revealed insignificant contribution of the fodder amount collected from the trees. Because only 5.4% of the total fodder amount required by livestock in the village can be contributed from the trees, NTFPs uses for livestock as a fodder would just act as a supplement during the drought events. Villagers plant 6 species of trees and sells NTFPs. The dependence on NTFPs as sales product increased from rich to poor households. With the significant contribution and linkage between villagers and trees, NTFPs play a major role in sustaining poor household`s livelihood. However, some poor households are facing difficulty to access water and people could not give water for young trees. Under these circumstances, the two proposals for poor households for more stable livelihoods are conceivable, (1) cultivating trees in cooperation with adjacent neighboring households who could have access to the water, and (2) selling the obtained NTFPs at the open market of the town.