

Space outside the market: implications of NTFP certification for subsistence use (US)

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'Contrary to much contemporary policy wisdom, leaving social and environmental problems to the market may be better for the market than for the problems' (Nepstad and Schwartzman, 1992).

Introduction

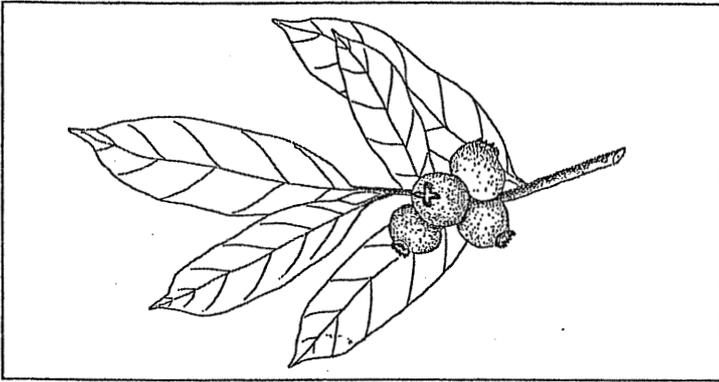


Illustration by Ant3nio Valente da Silva

Blueberry (Vaccinium spp.)

Non-timber forest product (NTFP) certification is a market mechanism that is advanced to attain the dual goals of protecting global forests and promoting economic development (Nepstad and Schwartzman, 1992; Pierce, 1999; Viana et al, 1996). Certification criteria and indicators emphasize the rationalization and control of each step of the NTFP process from forest to consumer. The creation of markets for items produced through such systems is a central focus of the strategy. There is a danger, however, that these very processes may undermine

the achievement of certification goals, particularly those aimed at social equity and the protection of subsistence uses.

Critiques of market-based environment and development initiatives identify inherent contradictions. Schroeder (1995) describes how tree crop programmes introduced to promote environmental restoration and stabilization in the Gambia relied upon women's work while creating economic benefits for men. He notes that 'commodification of nature can lead to the imposition of new forms of property claims and the introduction of

inequitable labour relations' (p337). Crook and Clapp (1998) analyse three market strategies for conserving global forests, including NTFPs. While they focus primarily on the potentially perverse environmental consequences of marketing NTFPs, they also note the social hazards of such an approach: 'The introduction of novel market mechanisms will not alter existing unequal power relations, but provide yet another field in which those inequalities are played out' (p142).

This contention is reinforced by the historical example of the 19th-century gum arabic trade, which consolidated the

power of local elites in Western Africa and led to the increased use of slave labour in the region (Hanson, 1992).

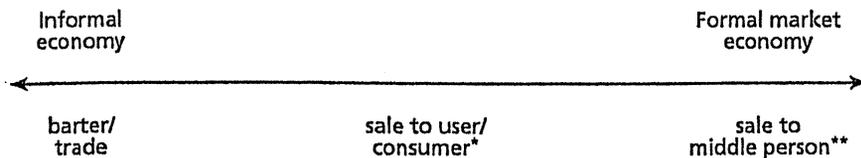
Based upon a Northern profile, this case study examines the potential contradictions lurking in certification efforts to promote NTFPs as 'green' commodities while ensuring equitable access to their benefits, including protection of subsistence uses. The case study draws upon an ethnographic study conducted in the US Upper Great Lakes region and the work of economic anthropologists and historians to explore the implications of certification projects for NTFP subsistence uses.

Subsistence and the market

Subsistence is defined by Webster's dictionary as 'a source or means of obtaining the necessities of life' (Merriam-Webster, 1999). Thus, subsistence refers to the acquisition or production of goods for direct consumption or for use as gifts.² Subsistence also includes limited use of NTFPs for their exchange values. This encompasses their barter or trade for other items and their sale in raw or value-added forms for small amounts of cash that are used to pay for basic necessities.

Subsistence activities principally take place outside of the formal market econ-

omy. However, exchange-value uses may be articulated along a continuum from the strictly informal economy to transactions with agents who transfer products to the formal market (see Figure 28.1). Studies of the informal economy have identified distinctions between its primary motivating and regulating factors and those of the formal economy (see Table 28.1). Transactions in the informal economy are motivated primarily by the desire to satisfy specific needs and are governed by social structures and networks. The logic of the formal market economy emphasizes



* Often as a value-added craft or food stuff, usually within the local area.

** Most frequently in a raw form, often for consumption in a regional, national or international market.

Figure 28.1 NTFP exchange-value continuum. NTFPs contribute to gatherer livelihoods through both use values and exchange values. Exchange values can be thought of as taking place along a continuum from transactions that occur strictly in the informal economy to those that are closely linked to the formal economy

Table 28.1 *Motivational factors in informal and formal economies. The informal and formal economies are motivated and regulated by distinct factors*

	Motivators	Regulators
Informal economy	Satisfaction of needs	Social structures and networks
Formal market economy	Maximization of the utility of scarce needs	Market forces; the state

maximizing the utility of scarce resources in a system where production, distribution and consumption are driven by market forces and regulated by the state (Castells and Portes, 1989; Gaughan and Ferman, 1987; Mingione, 1994; Roberts, 1994; Smith, 1989).

Extending these principles to exchange uses of NTFPs, the closer a use takes place to the informal economy end of the continuum, the more likely it is to be motivated by the desire to satisfy a finite, identified need and to be subject to social norms regarding appropriate prac-

tices. By contrast, the closer a transaction tends towards the formal economy end, the more likely it is that the NTFP will be regarded as a commodity to be maximized in the near term. Once viewed as a commodity, the likelihood of increased capitalization to secure and control the terms of NTFP production, distribution and consumption, using the state or state-like entities if possible, strongly increases. As the following study suggests, these characteristics of the formal market are in potential conflict with subsistence uses of NTFPs.

Gatherers and subsistence in the US Upper Great Lakes

The Upper Peninsula (UP) is located in the north-central United States. Bordered on three sides by Great Lakes – Lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan – it is part of the US state of Michigan, although its only land link is with the state of Wisconsin. Archaeological evidence suggests human occupation of the region since the ‘Woodland’ era (3000 BP to 300 years BP) (Cleland, 1992). However, permanent year-round settlement appears to be relatively recent, dating to the dislocation of the Ojibwa from their eastern territories during the Iroquois War and the efforts of European missionaries during the 1600s to convert and settle the region’s indigenous population (Cleland, 1983).

In addition to providing subsistence resources for resident Native and European Americans, the UP has been a source of furs, timber, copper and iron that fuelled political expansion and economic development elsewhere on the North American continent (Cronon, 1991; Karamanski, 1989; Williams, 1989). Its present-day population includes people of both European and indigenous ancestry. Average human population density in 1990 was less than 18 individuals per square mile (259 hectares) (US Census Bureau, 1990b). Forest cover in 1993 was 3,566,419 hectares (83.9 per cent total land base) of mixed hardwood and coniferous species in largely second- and third-growth stands. Located between 47

degrees and 45 degrees North latitude, average annual growth is comparatively slow at 4.25 million cubic metres during the period of 1980–1992 (Schmidt, Spencer and Bertsch, 1997).

From August 1995 to July 1996, the author conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the UP to learn what NTFPs residents might be gathering in the forests, the social and biophysical processes associated with that gathering, and how this fits into gatherers' household livelihoods. At the conclusion of the year, 139 products were identified from over 100 botanical species. These products can be categorized in two ways in order to help understand the subsistence role of NTFPS in the UP:

- 1 product types; and
- 2 livelihood uses.

Product-type categories emphasize the direct material uses of NTFPs and include ceremonial/cultural, edible, floral/nursery/craft and medicinal. Livelihood uses distinguish between means by which NTFPs contribute to gatherers' household economies, with economics understood as any strategy that provides the material means for meeting human needs (Gudeman, 1986; Halperin, 1988; Polanyi, 1977). In the case of UP NTFPs, these comprise personal consumption, gift-giving, sale in a raw form and sale in a processed form.

Table 28.2 extracts a sub-set of ten products from the UP NTFP database (Emery, 1998) and illustrates the multiple ways in which Upper Peninsula non-timber forest products are used. Blueberries and birch bark provide especially good examples of the multiple products that may be derived from a single species and the diverse livelihood resources that these may provide. Blueberries fall into just one product-type category – edibles – but all four livelihood uses. People pick and con-

sume them directly and they are often given as gifts, freshly picked or preserved as jams and baked goods. Blueberries also provide a modest source of cash income for some gatherers. At the height of the season, makeshift roadside stands displaying small containers of the deep purple berries are a common sight where wild blueberries are plentiful. At least a dozen individuals in the region make and sell blueberry preserves, largely to the local market.

Birch bark also furnishes both multiple-product types and livelihood uses. Its traditional medicinal applications include use as a treatment for blood diseases (Meeker, Elias, and Heim, 1993; Moerman, 1998), with personal consumption and gift-giving being the only reported livelihood uses for birch bark in this product-type category.³ As a ceremonial product, the bark is the primary construction material for long houses, where rituals and other important social functions are performed by individuals trying to observe traditional Native American practices. Finally, birch bark is used to make baskets and other crafts (floral/nursery/craft-product type) that are generally given as gifts or sold.

Figure 28.2 shows patterns in the relationship between the product types and livelihood strategies of UP NTFPs. Both edibles and floral/nursery/craft products contribute to gatherers' domestic economies through all four livelihood strategies. However, the relative proportion of use values (personal consumption and gift-giving) and exchange values (sale in raw and processed forms) are virtual mirror images of each other: use values account for 60 per cent of all mentions of edibles while exchange values constitute 62 per cent of floral/nursery/craft mentions. By contrast, UP gatherers employ medicinals and ceremonials almost exclusively for their use values. From this

Table 28.2 Multiple uses of Michigan NTFPs. A single UP NTFP may provide multiple types of products and contribute to gatherers' household livelihoods in one or more ways

Common name	Botanical name	Product types				Livelihood uses			
		M	C	E	F	PC	GG	SR	SP
Blueberries	<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.			X		X	X	X	X
Birch bark	<i>Betula papyrifera</i>	X	X		X	X	X		X
Cattail, corn	<i>Typha</i> spp.			X		X		X	
Cattail, down*	<i>Typha</i> spp.				X		X		
Cattail, shoots	<i>Typha</i> spp.			X		X			
Cedar, boughs	<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	X	X		X	X		X	X
Gold thread	<i>Coptis trifolia</i>	X				X	X		
Sheep sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>			X		X			
Sketaugen	<i>Inonotus obliquus</i>		X			X			
Wild leek	<i>Allium tricoccum</i>			X		X		X	

* 'Down' is the fluffy filament of mature seed heads.

Key: Product types Livelihood uses
M: medicinal PC: personal consumption
C: ceremonial GG: gift-giving
E: edible SR: sale in a raw form
F: floral/nursery/craft SP: sale in a processed form

breakdown of livelihood strategies it is clear that edible, medicinal and ceremonial products are especially important for their use values while floral/nursery/crafts products are important sources of exchange values, especially cash income. There are also some differences in the patterns of various demographic groups. The women interviewed mentioned use values for the NTFPs they gather 40 per cent more frequently than did the men. 80 per cent of NTFP livelihood strategies of gatherers 60 years of age or over were use values, compared to 58 per cent for people between the ages of 20 and 60.

The UP economy and gatherers' individual and household livelihood strategies shed light on NTFPs' persistent subsistence role in this post-industrial setting. Like resource-based economies throughout the world, the UP has experienced cycles of economic boom and bust. Between 1832 and 1834, John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company virtually eliminated populations of every commer-

cially profitable fur-bearing animal in the region (Catton, 1976). During the ten-year period preceding the fieldwork, annual unemployment rates (see Figure 28.3) and intra-annual unemployment fluctuations were consistently higher (see Figure 28.4) than those for the state of Michigan or the US as a whole. Furthermore, 31 per cent of UP households had no formal earnings whatsoever in 1989 (US Census Bureau, 1990a).

Clearly, the market is not performing well for many in the UP. Given this regional economic profile, it is not surprising that much of UP gatherers' livelihoods are derived outside the formal market. Of the 42 individuals included in the survey on income sources, fewer than half (20) had formal employment and only 9 of these had full-time, year-round jobs. 30 people mentioned informal or self-employment, 10 were on social security (government-administered retirement pensions) and 4 received disability payments from public or private sources.

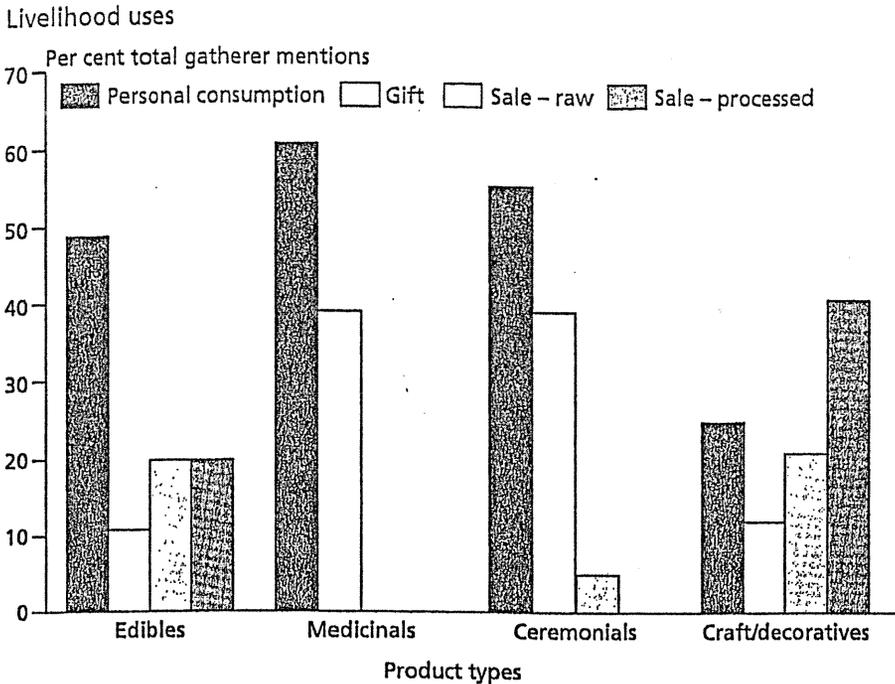


Figure 28.2 *Product types and livelihood uses of Michigan NTFPs. The relative importance of livelihood uses varies for each product type, with edibles, medicinals and ceremonials contributing most heavily to gatherers' domestic economies through their use values (eg personal consumption and gift-giving). Floral/nursery/craft products are turned to most frequently for their exchange values (eg sale in raw and processed forms)*

Additional household strategies shed further light on the flexibility and diversity of livelihoods in the region. 31 gatherers lived in households with one or more additional residents. These individuals contributed income from another 42 sources: 7 full-time, year-round and 2 full-time, seasonal jobs; 3 part-time jobs; 23 informal or self-employment sources; 3 social-security payments; and 4 other types of government-transfer payments. In total, the 42 gatherer households drew upon 108 income sources to meet at least some of their needs. The prevalence of episodic, part-time and low fixed-income sources meant that people simultaneously or sequentially pursued a number of strategies in order to meet their needs

throughout the year. Livelihood strategies were diversified throughout the course of gatherers' lifetimes as well.

NTFPs were one element among many in these diverse livelihood systems. Their proportional contribution to a particular gatherer's material sustenance varied in good part according to need and other available income sources. The stories of four gatherers and the role of NTFPs in their livelihoods illustrate this diversity and temporal flexibility.

*Lorraine*⁴ lives with her two grown sons. Their household income consists of her social security pension (she worked for 22 years in a factory making hood latches and locks for cars) and one son's disability

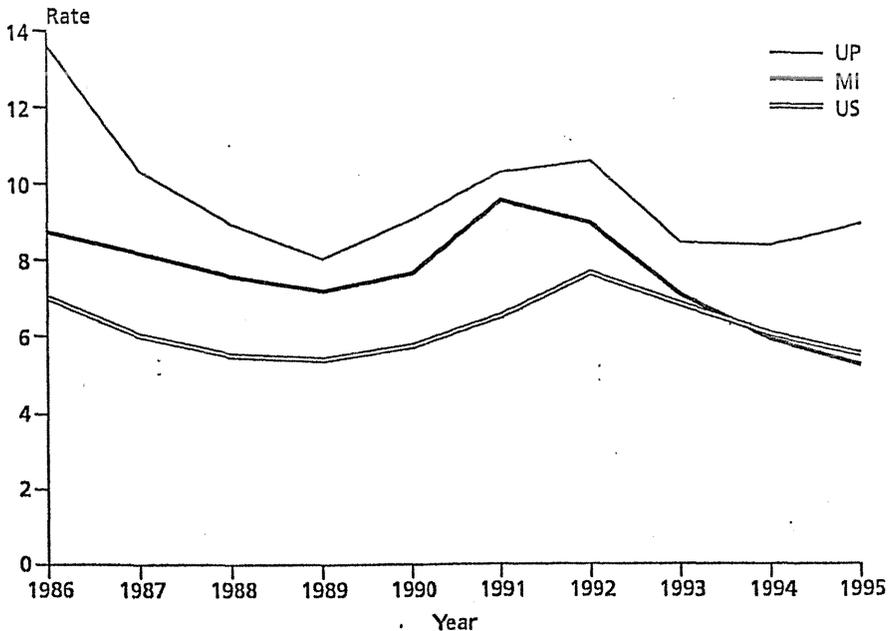


Figure 28.3 1986–1995 average annual unemployment: Upper Peninsula (UP), Michigan (MI) and US rates

payments. These funds are not enough to support three adults, however, and they rely heavily on gathering. Blueberries are a source of both food and income. Lorraine and her sons pick enough to sell more than 300 quarts (600 pints), eat plenty of fresh berries and can a few dozen quarts for personal consumption every year. Lorraine also makes birch-bark baskets according to traditional designs. Income from the sale of these baskets is the single most important supplement to her livelihood. Lorraine indicates that the NTFPs are critical to her survival from month to month.

James grew up on a farm in the UP. As a child he gathered mushrooms, berries and other NTFPs. In the family diet, these complemented the vegetables and animals they raised and staples purchased with income from his father's jobs as a trucker and iron dock worker. As a young man,

James went to work in a large manufacturing plant in the area. There were few alternative employment sources when he and 2000 other labourers lost their jobs. So James turned to the forests, cutting evergreen boughs for the seasonal floral market for two years to help support himself, his wife and daughter. At the time of interview, both he and his wife were employed and had adequate incomes to support themselves. James no longer gathered, although he said that he missed the time in the woods.

Caroline has worked as a journalist, librarian and educator. When her husband, a skilled labourer, suffered an on-the-job accident he was left permanently disabled and they abruptly lost over 50 per cent of their household income. Working with her parents, they began harvesting birch bark, making baskets, and selling the baskets at regional

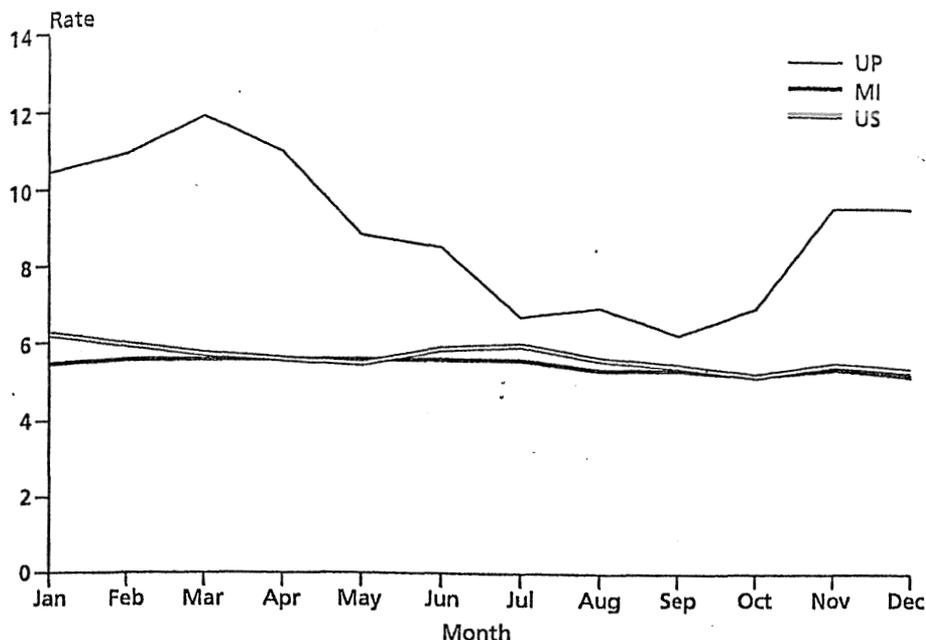


Figure 28.4 1995 unemployment fluctuations: Upper Peninsula (UP), Michigan (MI) and US rates

gatherings of Native Americans. The activity helped to keep Caroline's husband's mind off the chronic pain he was suffering, and the income allowed them to pay their bills for several months until Caroline was able to find a higher-income job. When interviewed, Caroline and her family were still making baskets, but on a much smaller scale than they had before. She indicated that it was important to maintain the skill in case their economic circumstances should take a dramatic downturn again.

Robert remembers camping in blueberry fields with his whole family, especially during the great economic depression of the 1930s. They lived out of a tent and picked from the time the berries ripened until the first hard frost of winter. He has also picked princess pine (*Lycopodium obscurum* complex) almost every year since he was six or seven years' old. As an

adult, he worked primarily as a logger but also did a bit of construction work and spent a couple of years working in a steel mill. At 76 years of age, he was living off social security with his wife in a comfortable new mobile home on family land. With dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Robert indicated that the money he makes gathering and selling princess pine during the years when his health permits makes it possible to buy Christmas presents.

For these individuals, in particular, and for UP gatherers in general, NTFPs serve as a buffer and refuge from the vagaries of the formal market. This is a strategy that can be pursued by workers who find themselves between jobs and by individuals whose employment opportunities are chronically limited by age, gender and/or disability. The independent nature of the activity also makes it suitable for people

who do not fit comfortably with the demands of contemporary wage labour. The primary requirements are knowledge of products, their uses and locations, and the time, energy and mobility to access them.

Four characteristics of NTFP livelihood strategies make them especially valuable for subsistence in a place such as the UP: their temporal flexibility, low-to-no-capital entry costs, their status as *de facto* common property resources, and the gatherer's control over the terms of labour. Gatherers can turn to NTFP livelihood strategies when and as they need them. They may be deployed as part of a suite of seasonal strategies and in the event of sudden or chronic shortfalls. This is possible, in part, because gathering is an activity that requires virtually no cash investment. Harvesting equipment, where this is needed, is generally confined to inexpensive hand tools such as knives or clippers, which are often available as household implements. For gathering that cannot be done within walking distance of home, petrol is frequently the greatest expense. Indeed, NTFP buyers report that they occasionally loan a gatherer petrol money so that the individual can get to the product and bring it back to the buying location.

As a rule, gatherers in the region do not have the means to own land, and loosely formalized usufruct rights facilitate access to NTFPs for subsistence uses. Where products are located on small private holdings, UP gatherer norms dictate that they obtain permission to enter onto the land and harvest.⁵ Often this involves no more than an informal conversation with a neighbour. Large industrial landowners in the region seem largely indifferent to NTFP harvesting provided gatherers stay out of active timber-cutting areas. Michigan state and US national

forests require permits with fees to harvest the few products with developed markets. Although these fees were modest at the time of this case study research, even the small expense and the requirement that permits are purchased in a central location are prohibitive to some individuals.

The flexibility of NTFP livelihood strategies also derives from the fact that UP gatherers are largely in control of the timing, duration and quantity of their harvesting activities. That this is the case for products that will be consumed directly, given as gifts, or used to make crafts and food stuffs for sale may be obvious. However, a similar level of control prevails when a product is being harvested for bulk sale in a raw form. This level of autonomy makes NTFP strategies compatible with other activities and responsibilities, a characteristic that may be especially important for women with children.

Several sources report that, as a rule, gatherers who sell raw NTFPs are seeking to meet a specific need or desire. Frequently mentioned goals were money for holiday celebrations, annual real-estate taxes and vehicle expenses. Once gatherers arrive at their monetary goals they generally stop harvesting. A number of buyers reported that raising the price paid for products resulted in their obtaining less rather than more because gatherers arrived at their goal sooner. In cases where more than one buyer in the region purchases a product, gatherers' status as independent contractors also leaves them free to choose their buyers. Interestingly, more than one individual indicated that price was not the sole determinant of their preferred buyer. Rather, they indicated that they sold to the buyer who treated them with respect and/or with whom they had a long-standing reciprocal relationship.

Market logic, certification programmes and NTFP subsistence uses

As a market-based initiative, NTFP certification relies upon formal economic logic and structures to achieve its environmental and social goals. Not surprisingly, then, proposals for certification programmes dedicate intensive efforts to rationalizing and regulating NTFP production by identifying each step from forest to consumer and specifying measurable ecological and market indicators of compliance. Emphasis is also placed on developing sustained markets for products, as well as guarantees of exclusive access to them that will maximize returns to producers over the long term and, presumably, create disincentives for unsustainable harvests in the short term.

Numerous contradictions lurk in the characteristics of the formal market, NTFP certification programmes and subsistence uses. The drive to specify who has access to products in a given location is likely to privilege those who are identified as gatherers at the time such terms are set and exclude those who are not, thus reducing the temporal flexibility of NTFP subsistence uses. The designation of areas reserved for subsistence gathering may place the resources beyond the reach of individuals with limited mobility and/or concentrate previously extensive activities such that they become unsustainably intensive (McLain and Jones, 1997). The

introduction of market strategies to create demand and produce sustained revenues for both capital investors and the state can be expected to engender efforts to control the terms of labour in order to maximize profits. This process might well convert independent contractors into wage labourers, reducing gatherers' ability and incentive to stop harvesting when they achieve their personal goals or feel that the resource necessitates it. It also raises the specter of previously traditional practices being converted into criminal offenses. Finally, NTFP certification documents generally propose negotiations with local communities to set the terms of programmes in specific areas. Yet, criteria and indicators for assessing local communities and the internal dynamics of NTFP use do not appear to be spelled out with anything approaching the detail devoted to ecological and economic issues, such as chain of custody. As Neumann and others have pointed out, communities are not harmonious, egalitarian units and negotiations with outside entities are often captured by local elites (Neumann, 1996; Peluso, 1992). Given that subsistence gatherers are typically among the least powerful members of their communities, a naive faith in undifferentiated community participation is unlikely to protect their interests.

Certification and subsistence use: conclusion

Even when it involves exchange uses, the most striking feature of NTFP subsistence practices is their location outside of the formal market. It is precisely this position

that makes NTFPs a continuously viable resource for individuals who are let down by the market. The return to their labour has immediate survival benefits. Where

products have not entered the intensive commodity market, there is minimal competition for the resource and little or no investment is required beyond time and effort. Certification programmes introduced to such areas run a high risk of introducing the contradictions between market processes and subsistence uses of NTFPs, to the detriment of the latter. The introduction and/or strengthening of market processes can be reasonably expected to introduce or strengthen market forces, such as the competition for scarce resources. The likely result is the displacement of people from spaces (both geographic and economic) that they had previously occupied.

However, where NTFPs have been heavily commoditized, market processes may already jeopardize subsistence uses, and appropriately designed certification programmes might be used to provide some protection for them. There may be opportunities for certification programmes to do so when focused upon products that have long-standing exchange value and do not have a traditionally important use value where they are harvested (eg many floral/nursery/craft items in the UP). In such instances, programmes may provide some protection for subsistence use by includ-

ing provisions to secure continued access for gatherers without formalized tenure, to reinforce gathering norms and to preserve gatherers' control over the terms of their labour.

Realization of such benefits will require certifiers to value and make space for NTFP uses outside of the formal market. At least one certification initiative (Fairtrade) stresses equity for forest workers in the distribution of NTFP benefits. While this represents an encouraging recognition of social values in relation to ecological and economic considerations, to the extent that it assumes standard labour-capital relationships, this emphasis is unlikely to protect subsistence gatherers' interests. Instead, certification programmes should begin with social inventories that parallel ecological inventories in the depth and vigour with which they seek to document all existing NTFP uses and users. Furthermore, they must specify criteria for monitoring and evaluating the social results of certification programmes with the same level of detail currently dedicated to biophysical and market dynamics. With such additions, certification programmes might counteract some of the inherent contradictions between market forces and subsistence use of NTFPs.

Notes

- 1 The author wishes to thank the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, Northern Global Change Programme for support of the research on which this case study is based.
- 2 Gifts have important survival benefits because they help to create and maintain social networks that may be called upon in times of need.
- 3 Native American gatherers trying to observe traditional practices were the only individuals who reported using birch bark for medicinal purposes. Their norms expressly prohibit the sale of medicines. Thus, their livelihood uses were intentionally confined to personal consumption and gift-giving.
- 4 Fictitious names are used to protect the identity of gatherers.
- 5 However, it is unlikely that this norm, or any norm, is observed at all times by all people.