

Harnessing Rural Radio Networks for Working Forests

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Working forests are only a viable part of the landscape when local populations earn competitive returns from them. While there is enormous policy and academic interest in quantifying the returns from forest management, there are few cases of rural households earning such returns from non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Even within these few cases, there is concern that the rural households capture only a small portion of the profits. The key constraint on engaging and profiting from the NTFP market is the lack of producer information.

To assess this key constraint we developed a radio program to disseminate information via community radios. Prices were first disseminated for key products in different potential markets and any spatial and temporal variation. Next, we disseminated local advice on product use, processing, and marketing. Weekly broadcasts were conducted of prices for 2 products from 5 markets for over 40 weeks, reaching an estimated 30 communities. Following this, interviews were conducted with key informants in 11 communities (114 informants), out of which 4 (37 informants) have access to the local radio broadcasts.

Results show community members do not generally listen to the prices. Although there are further constraints that may limit the immediate impact of the radio program, the majority of the randomly selected families in each community did listen to the broadcasts at least once and think that listening to the prices on the radio benefits them by a) providing a base for negotiation and b) helping them decide where to sell at better prices.

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