

Forest plants rural and peri-urban communities throughout the world with a range of basic needs. Use of plants increases income to rural household indirectly.

The extent to which local communities extract forests products has been assessed for various forests. However it has rarely been shown to what extent their extraction is sustainable and the effects of extraction on the structure and composition of forest are poorly documented. Further, the valuation of resources in forest ecosystems often fails to take account of the full spectrum of forest products and services since many of these are being perceived as insignificant or non-marketable.

This research focuses on resource use and management issues relating to wild plants in Ragati, on the Southwestern side of Mt. Kenya. To assess the exploitation of non-timber forest products and its effects on Mt. Kenya forest plants, activities of 34 households were surveyed in Ragati area. A total of 34 women representative of different user categories and age groups were selected at random. In addition 8 men, 4 for basketry and 4 for herbal medicines, were included in the sampling units. Plant resources used by women in each household were identified in the field and discussions were held with the local people. Scientific names of plants were determined from taxonomic literature and herbarium specimens.

Voucher specimens of all the plants of economic importance were prepared and deposited in the Kenyatta University Herbarium, Nairobi. A total of 186 plant species that were used by Ragati community were collected and identified.

Plant products harvested were quantified by weighing average-sized bundles of material harvested during every visit to the forest. The monetary value for each of the plant products was obtained from average retail prices for each product in the local market. Where this was not available, prices of similar commercial products were used to estimate the value.

The study shows that the so-called minor forest contribute significantly to the household economy. The majority of the plants that contribute to the household economy are indigenous, with the following as the key species for specialized users: *Zanthoxylum gillettii* (Munganga) for treatment of various ailments, *Dalbergia lactea* (mwaritha), *Rourea thomsonii* (Mutaigu) *Hippocratea african* (Mugu wa nyakamwe) for basketry; and *Cyperus* ssp. (Ithanji) for thatching.

The extraction of forest products is not carried out on a sustainable basis. Five plant species are recognized as threatened in Ragati area of Mt. Kenya forest. These are *Ixora scheffleri* ssp.keniensis (feared extinct but rediscovered during the study), *Zanthoxylum gillettii*, *Rhamus prinoidea*, *Dalbergia lactea* and *Vepris glandulosa*.

Recommendations for sustainable harvesting of forest products are given. Resource harvesting where extraction is not sustainable should be prohibited or regulated. It is recommended that self-sufficiency in forest- products is facilitated through development of tree nurseries and supply of seedling to the interested growers. Cultivation of medicinal plants should be encouraged and local tree nurseries should grow and offer these plants.