Wild food foraging accounts for nearly 250,000 cubic meters of produce consumed annually in Zambia

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The authors were able to estimate that rural households in Zambia collect at least 12 million large (20 liter) collecting buckets of wild forest foods per year, which is the equivalent of 238,000 m$^3$—and 125% of the volume of sawn wood produced in the country.

The survey addressed traditional challenges in quantifying amounts of wild foods collected and consumed—including the informal nature of collection, seasonal differences in collection patterns, and collection using buckets and pails without standard units—by conducting focus groups and household surveys in addition to measuring collecting containers used by each household.

"The results of the study highlight that forests play a key role not only for biodiversity, climate change mitigation, energy and timber, but also for food and nutrition security," said FAO Forestry Officer Ashley Steel, project co-lead.

Implications for forests, food, and nutrition security

The survey indicated that the poorest and most food insecure households were collecting large volumes of wild forest foods, although there was no strong correlation between the amount collected and household wealth.

The results underscore the need to consider wild food collected from forests and local patterns of collection when designing forest policy and management strategies, the authors say.

"On a global scale, if all 1.6 billion people who live near forests were to collect similar quantities of wild forest foods, that would mean 2.65 billion buckets of food would be collected in forests each year, or 53 million cubic meters," said Steel.
Earlier results from this same study estimate that the amount of wild fruits consumed from forests would be enough, on average, to meet 25% of international recommendations on fruit intake in Zambia.

Zambia has one of the highest proportions of forest area globally, with just over 60 percent of land area designated as forest. However, the availability of wild forest foods in Zambia is under threat from unsustainable harvest methods, forest degradation, deforestation and agricultural expansion.


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