

Indigenous Use of Nontimber Forest Products by the Guidar of Northern Cameroon¹

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Plant species, especially trees, have played an essential role in the livelihood of mankind throughout their history. Cultures develop in association with plants as the uses of particular plant species become understood, through trial and error, and as knowledge of the plants becomes dispersed among the neighboring human populations. In northern Cameroon, the rural Guidar people use a wide range of plant species for fuelwood, medicine, food, poles and various appliances and tools. Woody species are particularly important in the Guidar culture. To understand the significance of trees to the Guidar, meetings were held with three social groups (men, women and children) in a small Guidar village. Additionally, informal and formal surveys were conducted to determine the most

important tree species for the village as a whole. At the meetings, all social groups listed poles, fuelwood, fruit and medicine most frequently for uses of trees. Men listed twelve tree species and nine uses. They pointed out the division of labor where women collect fuelwood while men cut poles. The women noted uses connected to their specific gender roles, such as for child birth. In all, women listed 17 uses and 24 tree species. Of the three groups, the children were the most interested in the assignment and consequently came up with the most species and the most uses. They listed 48 species and 18 uses. This study indicates that indigenous tree species of northern Cameroon play an integral and important role in the lives of the Guidar.

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