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Title Variable status of access right for non-timber forest products Japan

Track 2 - Issues of exclusion and control in the formation, defence, and governance of commons

Abstract Collecting Non-timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as berries or mushrooms is an easy and popular recreational activity, and it may provide its actor a precious opportunity to understand importance of conserving natural environment. Some northern European countries have regarded such activity as basement of environmental conservation, and allowed rights of public access for some NTFPs in their system of law. On the other hand, as NTFPs may have high rivalness, overuse or conflict among people should be considered, especially in high population density region. This study investigates variable status of access for edible wild plants (EWPs) and mushrooms in Japan on the basis of field survey at nine mountain villages. As an initial status, all of the villages used to not exclude anyone's access to for NTFPs and they used to be de facto ownerless property. It is considered that scarcity or significance in villagers' livelihood is not serious because EWPs and mushrooms are low calorie and low protein content. However, it could be confirmed in eight villages that some social changes since modern times have triggered exclusion of access to the resources. Four factors which may occur exclusion on access rights could be extracted, and some of them related each other. 1) Change of resource value; when an EWP or mushroom had gotten highly praised in the market, these could be important resources with scarcity. 2) Rising of harvesting pressure; The first factor described above and increasing visitor caused by development of motorization and demand for recreational activity could raise harvesting pressure. 3) Investment; The first factor may further effect villagers' investment such as maintenance work for habitat of the resources or cultivating them. 4) Cognition of territory; Introduction of modern law and visitors from outside of village may make villagers conscious of their area where they should appropriate to access. On the other side, two factors which may liberalize exclusion status could be pointed out. 1) Cost of exclusion; cost invested for exclusion such as establishing guardian or setting signboard may be excess cost for villagers. 2) Negative image of exclusion; if tourism is fundamental industry, signboard to exclude outsiders' access may give visitors negative image of that area. According to these factors, villages have controlled access to the resources over time.