

Appendix 5.13

Policy Briefing Note

Title: Winners and Losers in Forest Product Commercialisation: The importance of forest products for poverty alleviation

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POLICY BRIEFING NOTE

Winners and Losers in Forest Product Commercialisation

The importance of forest products for poverty alleviation

Pursuing Models of Commercialisation that Meet the Needs of the Rural Poor

To ensure that local people capture a greater share of benefits from NTFP commercialisation, basic management, financial, and institutional capacities must be in place. Models of commercialisation should build upon these attributes and emphasise meeting the needs of the rural poor.

A wide variety of results can emerge from different NTFP commercialisation models that are adopted by the state, non-governmental organisations, producer communities, and the private sector. The quality of information that the producer and/or agent has about markets, and the efforts placed on creating and promoting markets are both crucial for success. Access to transport by the producer, credit availability, bargaining skills, quality and consistency of product, and networking and coordination in marketing are also important, if the poor are to benefit.

Clarifying Ownership And User Rights In Communal Areas

Governments should make every effort to clarify land and usufruct rights to facilitate the successful and effective commercial development of marula, and NTFPs in general. In South Africa, the draft Communal Land Rights Bill should recognise that Western approaches to titling may not be appropriate for indigenous resource tenure systems.

Tenure security is a critical component of any strategy that aims to deliver fair and equitable benefits to communities from the commercialisation of NTFPs. In study sites in South Africa, this issue is especially pertinent given that the main source of marula fruit and other products is from communal lands. Threats to access to this communal resource are likely to arise from:

- lack of resolution on the allocation of resources for subsistence purposes versus those needed for commercialisation;
- a tendency to 'privatise' and 'enclose' communal areas and resources through adoption of Western titling approaches to tenure,
- an erosion of indigenous resource tenure systems; and
- an *ad hoc* and potentially conflict-ridden approach to controlling and managing natural resources.

Industrial-Scale Cultivation or Farmer-Led Domestication?

Governments, NGOs and other relevant service organisations should establish participatory domestication programmes among marula-producing communities to select superior trees, develop cultivars, and grow them locally. This should be done through a process that leaves the germplasm and knowledge with the community, and empowers them to determine their own commercial opportunities and glean appropriate benefits.

The granting of Plant Breeders Rights (PBRs), combined with large-scale industrial demand, could lead to a scenario whereby the benefits of commercialisation shift from poorer groups of farmers to richer ones, or to multi-national companies. Without assistance and support to protect their rights, those gathering wild marula may not be best suited to undertake large-scale domestication.

Does Scaling Up Mean More Or Less Benefits?

Efforts to increase the commercialisation of marula need to balance the benefits derived by producer communities through increased income, with the potential negative impacts of scaling up, including shifts in benefits away from the most marginalised producers.

The increased commercialisation of NTFPs inevitably entails a shift from small-scale to large-scale activities. Because of the seasonal nature of marula, scaling up is unlikely to increase monetary benefits at the household level, but will increase the spread of benefits amongst the community, with the involvement of more households.

Technology and its Impacts on Women

Those introducing new processing technologies for marula need to balance carefully the efficiency benefits this will bring against potential impacts on the most marginalised groups, and women in particular.

The introduction of new mechanised technologies arising from increased commercialisation of NTFPs can attract men to the enterprise and further marginalise women in the process. Already, men control marula-processing technologies such as fruit and oil presses in many cases.

Please turn over ...

Providing Strong Local Governance

Governments should integrate and streamline customary, provincial and national laws concerning marula in places where traditional systems have eroded to a great extent, but minimise intervention in areas where customary law is adequate to deal with the pressures of commercialisation.

Customary law governing marula use and management has greater influence than provincial or national law, both in terms of local knowledge of rules and regulations, and enforcement. Customary laws governing marula use have thus become less rather than more effective in recent years in much of South Africa, although they remain more effective than provincial or national laws. Where tenure is secure, customary laws are strong, and local capacity exists to manage the resource and deal with the pressures of commercialisation, as in north-central Namibia, decentralisation and reliance on customary law is both desirable and essential.

Maintaining Important Traditions

Those embarking on the commercial development of NTFPs must balance carefully the benefits derived from commercialisation, with those derived from subsistence and traditional use, in order to minimise negative impacts on livelihoods and cultures.

The commercialisation of NTFPs often results in trade-offs between subsistence use and the preservation of traditions, cultures and social norms, and the benefits derived from increased income. In the case of marula, annual income from commercialisation averages R500 per household. Moreover, women are the primary producers of marula products, so commercialisation provides benefits to members of the community badly in need of cash income, for themselves and their children.

Intellectual Property Rights: Useful Tool or Potential Threat?

Urgent efforts should be made by relevant government ministries in Namibia and South Africa to develop and implement systems to protect community-based cultivars that do not involve monopoly rights, and which promote poverty alleviation, food security and sustainable agriculture. This should be based upon the 'African Model Law for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders', and done as part of legislative reforms currently underway in these countries for biodiversity management, indigenous knowledge protection, and plant genetic resource conservation and use.

Intellectual property rights (IPRs) can both positively and negatively impact the interests of primary producers. There are several international laws regulating IPRs, including the TRIPS agreement of the World Trade Organisation which requires member states to protect plant varieties, and the UPOV Convention, which protects new varieties of plants. The monopoly nature of UPOV and Plant Breeders Rights makes their application to marula particularly inappropriate given the strong social traditions and culture of marula, which are community rather than individually based.

Sustainability and Commercialisation: Providing Incentives for Protection, or Promoting Degradation of the Marula Resource Base?

Government officials, extension workers, service organisations and communities should take steps to maintain and enhance the marula resource base through improved management and appropriate domestication, including the retention of male trees in the landscape.

By providing an incentive for the cultivation and protection of marula trees, the commercialisation of marula fruits and kernels could positively impact the on the marula resource base.

Securing Political Support For NTFP Based Industries

Policy-makers should translate their theoretical support for marula commercialisation and sustainable use into practice through research, marketing and legal support.

There is growing international, regional and local interest in NTFPs, but their management and influence on local livelihoods often go ignored by policy-makers. This can mean that users may suffer unintended side effects from regulatory policies. For example, despite the value to local economies, women trading marula beer in South Africa encounter legal difficulties associated with selling alcohol.

The Importance of Diversity

Through effective natural resource management, governments, traditional authorities and communities should ensure the continued use of a wide range of NTFPs, including marula, to support rural livelihoods.

Commercial enterprises of all sizes should promote the development of a wide range of marula-based products and markets.

The Wider NTFP Context

Management strategies for marula should be integrated into local and regional-level planning initiatives.

Efforts should be made to communicate these strategies to relevant authorities, to enhance cooperation amongst them, and to increase awareness about the value of marula to all user groups.



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The findings outlined in this policy brief emanate from a series of reports by different members of FRP project R7795. Copies of these reports can be found at: <http://www.ceh-wallingford.ac.uk/research/winners/>

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