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Building Opportunities for Small Holder Farmers to Commoditize Indigenous Fruit Trees and Products in Southern Africa: Processing, Rural Pilot Enterprises and Marketing

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Abstract

Tree products, especially indigenous fruits products provide avenues for millions of small-holder farmers to improve their livelihoods in developing countries. This paper synthesizes our research and development experiences in understanding market constraints and opportunities, potential impacts of fresh fruits, and feasibilities of rural enterprises to set up pilot sites in four countries (Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania). The domestic market opportunities and strategies for smallholder farmers and forest dwellers to commercialise indigenous fruit trees (IFTs) were explored along the entire supply chain — production, marketing and utilisation. Experience on processing and enterprise development ventures by rural women groups are analysed. Product prioritisation with stakeholders showed that preference of rural processors varied between countries depending on the markets and the availability of raw materials. Feasibility assessments of pilot enterprises reveal that the development of partnerships between producer community and private entrepreneurs is critical. Product viability varied between countries. The Zimbabwe fruit jam and bars enterprise was viable, and it has potential to spread its risks across local and export markets, but investment was largely threatened by unstable economy, and must hedge against imported costs. The Malawi jam and juice concentrates enterprise was also viable and is a key opportunity for import substitution with regard to imported fruit juice concentrates, provided that the local consumer market is known. A large market share (29%) is expected to be replaced by local production, and breakeven volume is 76 t. Efficient input, processing and distribution networks need to be in place within constraints of the developing economy. The results suggest that the most promising opportunity for rural processors of indigenous fruits, is to focus on the local markets of fruit concentrates as an export substitute. Establishment of partnerships between producer communities and private entrepreneurs is essential. Holistic farm plans are needed to promote cultivation, to ensure product quality and to maximise competitiveness at the farm gate and throughout the supply chain.

Keywords: Feasibility assessment, impact assessment, fruits, marketing, food processing