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## Contribution of Non-Timber Forest Products to Poverty Alleviation in Benin: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies

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### Abstract

It is widely demonstrated and recognised today that Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) play a major role in the food security and the subsistence strategies of the rural populations everywhere in the world and thus can be integrated into the struggle against poverty.

A national survey conducted in different localities of the country and an inventory of the diversity has revealed 190 species collected and used as food either for their fruits, seeds, roots, tubers, leaves, saps and flowers. Many of these species have also some medicinal uses. Others are processed, and traded providing some important revenues to the population and thus given to them an important economic value. These important species are not collected only in the wild but are for some of them present in the home garden and the traditional agroforestry system.

Based on a set of criteria like the socio-economic and cultural importance, the indigenous knowledge, the presence in the home garden and/or agroforestry system, the existence of traditional processing methods, the existence of national, regional and international market; some 15 keys species have been identified for promotion. The important species in the Northern part of the country (between 8° and 12° N) are *Adansonia digitata*, *Vitex doniana*, *Bombax costatum*, *Blighia sapida*, *Borassus aethiopicum*, *Vitellaria paradoxa*, *Parkia africana*, and *Tamarindus indica*. In the Southern part (between 6°30' N and 8° N), the most important species are *Vitex doniana*, *Dialium guineense*, *Chrysophyllum albidum*, *Uvaria chamae*, *Annona senegalensis*, *Irvingia gabonensis*, *Cyperus esculenta*, and *Corchorus tridens*.

This paper will present those species but also the issues, the challenges and the strategies to their development and how they can contribute to reduce poverty in Benin. The actions to be taken by the different stakeholders for the promotion of these key species will be discussed.

**Keywords:** Agroforestry, Benin, NTFP, poverty alleviation, socio-economy