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## Chances in Sustainability - Promoting Product Chains of Natural Products in Eastern Africa

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### Abstract

The improvement of natural resource management systems combined with the upgrading of product chains may considerably contribute to a better balance between human development and nature conservation. Although extensive experiences exist about the application of a collaborative management approach, not enough facts are available about potential contributions of natural products and their value chains to rural development. This paper presents a collaborative research project initiated in 2013 for participatory identification and implementation of pilot measures for promotion of bamboo and ‘natural gums and resins’ value chains in eastern Africa. The main focus of the pilot measure is the development of innovative management systems and upgrading product chains for three natural resource based commodities in East Africa (bamboo, gum Arabic, incense). The implementation of the research project follows a participatory approach, integrating all relevant stakeholders along the product chain. At levels of production, processing and marketing the research is focusing on (1) sustainable resource management practices, value adding activities and enabling frame conditions; (2) contributions to livelihoods and rural development; and (3) participation as innovative approach to study and to develop natural resource based product chains. In addition to the scientific objectives the project contributes to strengthen the cooperation between partners from research and practice. The research follows a standardised sequence, which permits to compare the case studies, learn from best practice cases and draw conclusions towards applicability for other production systems and product chains.

Preliminary findings confirm the participatory approach as a successful instrument for stakeholder dialogue, facilitation of common understanding and identification of priority measures for upgrading the chains.

**Keywords:** Bamboo, Ethiopia, natural gums, natural resins, participatory approach, Sudan, sustainability, value chain