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Poverty Alleviation of Rural Communities in South-Eastern Kenya with the Help of Baobab, the “Candy Tree”?

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Abstract

The baobab (*Adansonia digitata* L.) is a wild fruit tree occurring in the savannahs of sub-Saharan Africa and providing several products including food, medicine, fodder and handicrafts to rural communities. A growing demand for the highly nutritious baobab fruit pulp from Europe and North America raised the question whether the marketing of baobab fruits would be an opportunity for income diversification and poverty alleviation of rural communities in semi-arid areas of Kenya. A value chain analysis of edible baobab products was performed in south-eastern Kenya and identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threads of the baobab business. By using a non-probability sampling, 134 baobab value chain actors from producing farmers to retailers were interviewed on baobab sales data, profits and bottlenecks of their business. The main actors of the baobab value network were farmer traders, collectors, wholesalers, processors and retailers; 72 % of the respondents were female. The products most traded were unprocessed pulp-covered seeds and mabuyu, a candy made out of baobab pulp-covered seeds, sugar and food colour. The average value of the product along the mabuyu value chain increased from 0.07 USD per kg of raw pulp-covered seeds paid to the farmer up to 1.50 USD per kg paid by the end consumer for the mabuyu candy. Depending on the marketing channel the farmers chose, their share of the total value addition was 7–12 % per kg pulp-covered seeds. The processors held the highest share of the total value addition with 45 %. The net profit margins (value addition minus costs) of the farmers were 11 %, of the processors 18 % and of the retailers, who held the largest share, 52 %. Farmers often engage in trading and processing of baobab products during times of scarcity, thus the baobab business can be seen as an important emergency coping mechanism for rural communities. The main weaknesses of the baobab business were insufficient storage practices leading to low product quality, lack of partnership along the value chain and high transportation costs. Increased commercialisation of baobab products and better integration of farmers into value chains could contribute to enhancing rural livelihoods in Kenya, particularly of women.

Keywords: Fruit tree, income diversification, mabuyu, net profit margin, value chain analysis