**Abstract**

There has been increasing interest in the contribution of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) livelihood strategies to rural development and poverty alleviation in recent years. However, community dependence on forest resources for diverse use has high implications for long term management of forests. Due to the increasing population sizes of South African rural communities, both the demand for NTFPs and the pressure for agricultural land are likely to increase, therefore, NTFPs are prone to overexploitation. Sustainable harvesting of NTFPs is considered best feasible strategy for forest conservation in biodiversity rich areas.

This paper examines the factors that influence rural households’ decision to go into the forest to collect mopane worms and the actual quantities that the household who decides to collect mopane worms subsequently obtained from the forest. Using a cross sectional dataset collected from a survey of 120 households in Limpopo province, South Africa. Empirical result of the Double Hurdle Model indicated that age, gender, education, household size, experience, skill, livestock ownership, price, ineffective local institution/law, social capital, insecurity and distance are statistically significant factors influencing households’ decision-making to collect mopane worm as well as the quantity collected. This indicates that high dependency and demand for mopane worms are influence by households’ demographic and socio-economic conditions.

Therefore, there is need for adaptive local management systems that enhance ecological knowledge of users and regulates market structure to favour long-term livelihood securities of these forest-fringe rural people. Undertaking initiatives that provide alternative source of income or parallel support to other type of income generating opportunities would reduce pressure on the forest resources and increase the income of rural people living in close proximity to the forest. The need for government and private stakeholder intervention in providing a more profitable livelihood strategies especially for women cannot be overemphasised, for example, increasing the efficiency of crop production system in order to avoid lean times driving people to overexploit forest resources. Establishing an informal or formal collectors’ cooperatives with the expectation that shared decisions made by members of similar interest can improve the groups’ control of collection and simultaneously advance resource management and forest conservation.

**Keywords:** NTFPs, mopane worm, collection, livelihood, conservation, Double Hurdle, South Africa