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## Assessment of the Baobab Processing and Exporting Industry in Southern and Eastern Africa

KATHRIN MEINHOLD<sup>1</sup>, MUNTHALI CHIMULEKE<sup>2</sup>, DIETRICH DARR<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences, Fac. of Life Sciences, Germany*

<sup>2</sup>*Mzuzu University, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Malawi*

### Abstract

The pulp from the fruit of the baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata* L.) is getting increasingly popular as a food ingredient on both a local and international scale due to its particular nutritional properties. By adding value to the resource through processing baobab has the potential to generate much needed income and lift rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa out of poverty; however, increased export of the resource may also threaten the livelihoods of local populations and lead to overexploitation of natural baobab stands. More information on the sustainable commercialisation of baobab resources is, therefore, needed. The current paper presents preliminary results of an ongoing research project. Innovation system analysis provides the framework to characterise the developing baobab processing sector in detail, since it encompasses the complex set of relationships amongst different actors in the system (e.g. enterprises, research institutes, authorities, consumers, etc.) as well as influencing factors such as laws, policies, standards or social norms. Analysis focussing on the baobab exporting industry in Southern and Eastern Africa have been conducted to help better understand the structure and boundaries of the sector, involved agents and their interactions, innovation and production processes, sector transformation and the factors at the base of the differential performance of firms in the sector. Baobab processing initiatives from selected countries of Southern and Eastern Africa (Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique, and Tanzania) have been assessed, highlighting small-scale commercial enterprises reaching high-value international markets. These enterprises often derive from development initiatives and feature not only economic but socio-economic goals in their overall strategy and act in an environment characterised by both competition as well cooperation dynamics (co-opetition) to achieve better collective and individual results. This makes them particularly interesting cases on whether and how high-quality products for international markets can be produced while contributing to socioeconomic development across the supply chain.

**Keywords:** Baobab (*Adansonia digitata* L.), co-opetition, commercialisation, food processing, innovation system analysis