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Collaborative Product Development to Enhance Local Food Security and Livelihoods in Eastern Africa

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Abstract

Processing of primary agricultural and forestry food products by rural producers or community-based enterprises can considerably contribute to local food security, employment, alternative household income and improved livelihoods. The development and launching of new products by firms has key influence in achieving such objectives since it contributes to continuous business success and growth of the involved companies. The development of new, marketable products has primarily been approached from the perspective of the companies involved in production and sale of such products. However, it is increasingly recognised that successful product innovations is the outcome of a collective effort rather than the achievement of a single person or firm. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that collaboration and stakeholder involvement in the new product development process has positive effects on its market success.

Such considerations are currently being addressed and put into practice within the BAO-FOOD project. The project aims to promote the domestication, production, market development, processing and consumption of baobab for the improvement of food security, nutrition and rural livelihoods in Kenya and the Sudan. The project's ultimate goal is to establish a community-based processing unit to produce and supply highly nutritious baobab products for home consumption and local and regional markets. Local baobab producers and processors, often characterised by limited resources and expertise for product and business development, are given the opportunity to collaborate with a variety

of stakeholders including members across the baobab value chain, research institutions, or regulatory bodies as well as benefit from the project and the insights it generates in customer needs and expectations, technology development and optimisation, or value chain setups. The development of marketable products requires local producers and processors to understand demand and consumer preferences at various markets, and mobilise the technical and economic expertise required to meet these demands in a competitive environment. This approach gives the opportunity to not only contribute to food security and improved livelihood objectives but also to help build local entrepreneurial skills and verify the applicability of this more unconventional product development pathway. The paper presents the approach in more detail as applied by the BAOFOOD project.

Keywords: Baobab (*Adansonia digitata* L.), food security, product development