

1. Background

- The fruit powder of the baobab (*Adansonia digitata* L.) and derived products (Fig 1) are getting increasingly popular on both local and international markets due to particular nutritional properties (e.g. high content in Vitamin C, minerals)
- By adding value to the resource through processing baobab has the potential to generate needed income and improve livelihoods
- So far production levels of baobab fruit powder in Southern Africa are far below its potential [1]
- More information on the sustainable commercialisation of baobab resources in all its facets (social, environmental, economic) is needed
- The current paper presents preliminary results of an ongoing research project on the baobab processing sector development in Southern Africa



Fig 1: Products derived from baobab available on international markets

2. Methods

- The sectoral innovation system approach [2] provided the basic theoretical framework for the analysis, for which concepts have been reviewed
- Data originated from 7 semi-structured interviews from enterprises processing and exporting baobab fruit powder from 5 different countries in Southern Africa (Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique, and Tanzania) as well as experts in the natural products industry in Southern Africa (snowball sampling)
- Interviews were transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis in terms of sector development and structure as well as cooperation dynamics [3] amongst the processing enterprises

3. Selected preliminary results and discussion

- a) Dynamic development of the baobab processing sector in Southern Africa
- The baobab processing and exporting industry is still relatively young, first companies with aim to export baobab founded in the early 2000s
 - 2008/9: Acceptance of baobab fruit pulp as food ingredient by the EU and US
 - increasing export of baobab fruit powder (currently magnitude of several hundred tons per year)
 - this development facilitated due to efforts of Phytotrade Africa (trade association of natural products industry in Southern Africa)
 - Currently production quantities way below the maximum production capacity (demand as limiting factor)
 - Perceptions on future developments:
 - Internationally: despite recent stagnation exporters are positive demand for powder will continue to increase, particular in new markets such as in Asia or the Middle East
 - Locally: particular emphasis is put on potential in local markets (both for powder and consumer products) due to increasing awareness of value of local resources and lower marketing efforts required

3. cont'd

b) Sector overview: Main agents and influencing factors

- The following figure (Fig 2) illustrates key innovation system components and interactions in the baobab processing and exporting industry in Southern Africa

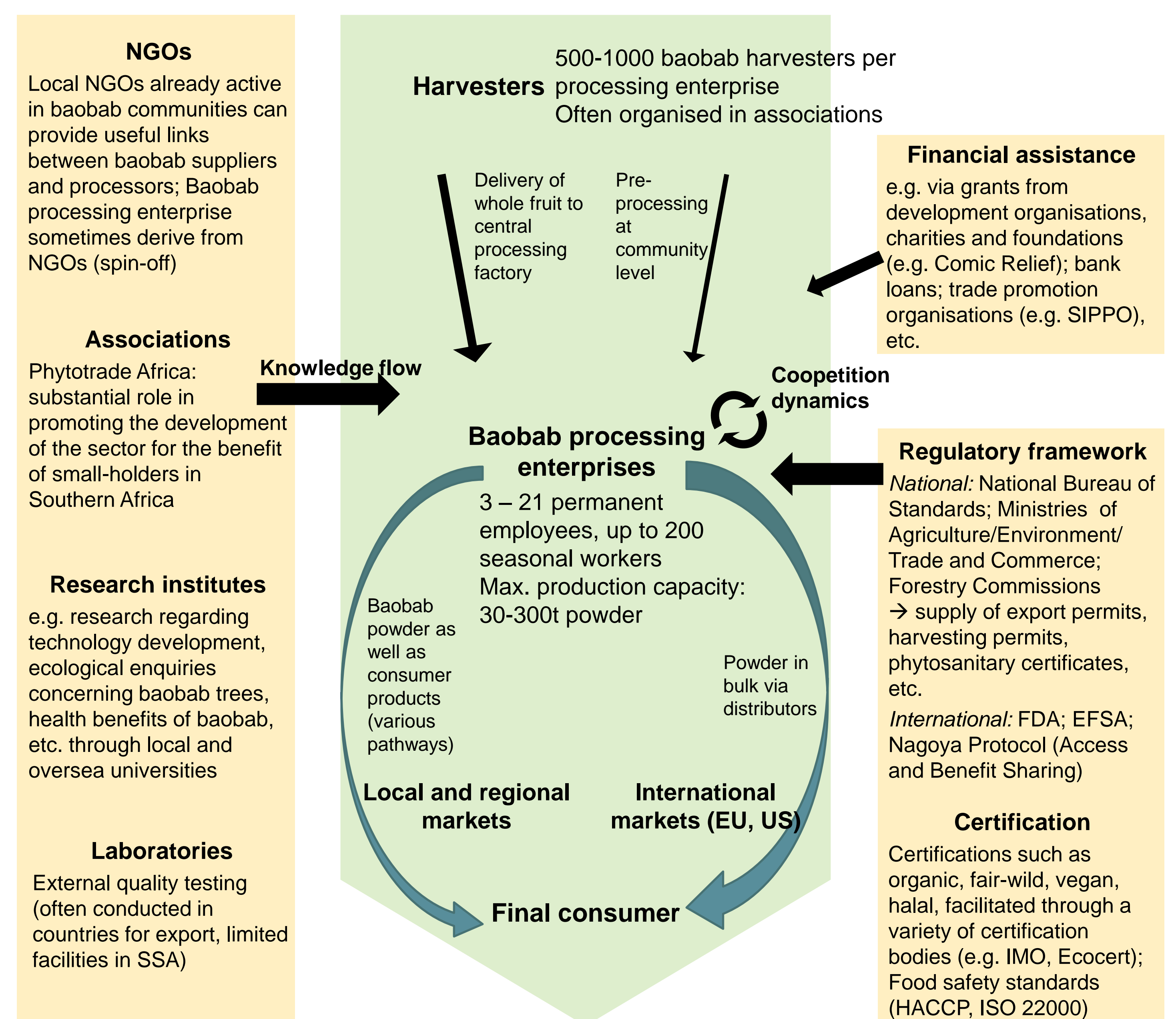


Fig 2: The baobab processing and exporting industry in Southern Africa

c) Cooperation dynamics amongst the baobab processing/exporting enterprises

- Despite being competitors, baobab exporting enterprises extensively and deliberately cooperate with each other (coopetition)
- Basis lies in the common background as members of the natural trade association Phytotrade Africa → building of personal relationships/trust
- Cooperation is judged positively both for
 - Market development, common aim to grow market: "instead of trying to fight against and compete with existing other producers for a very small slice of the cake we would rather focus our attention on creating a bigger slice and promote the entire African baobab industry" [4]
 - The individual businesses themselves: "our business would not exist without this collaboration" [5]
- Nevertheless, caution to not jeopardise individual business operations
 - Cooperation only in selected areas: e.g. in market development, development of standards, but not in technology development
 - Differences amongst the producers: supply of different markets, different business models

5. Conclusion

The baobab processing and exporting industry in Southern Africa is a small, yet highly sophisticated industry with a multitude of different agents involved, including several thousand harvesters. Organic certification as well as quality of the baobab powder (regarding physical, chemical, and biological parameters) are the most important factors for export. The influence of supply chain organisation (from harvesting to processing) as well as processing technologies in use on product qualities are key areas for future investigation. Furthermore, the role of baobab processors and exporters not involved with Phytotrade needs to be assessed, in particular regarding matching quality standards and ethical considerations.

References

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