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## Thanakha Biotrade Market Potential through the Implementation of Access and Benefit Sharing in Myanmar

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### Abstract

The world's demand for biological resources as natural ingredients is growing rapidly, creating new opportunities for investment in natural-based products, but also threats over local biodiversity. The Nagoya Protocol (NP) on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) seeks to safeguards user's access to biological resources and traditional knowledge (TK), in exchange for sharing the benefits derived from their use with the provider country. Myanmar, one of the most rich-biodiversity countries, signed the NP in 2014, but the implementation is still at early stages. Thanakha is an NTFP traditionally grown and used because of its skincare and cosmetic properties in Myanmar. Due to the current interest of global corporates and the cosmetic industry, there is an increasing BioTrade export potential associated with Thanakha.

Through a mixed research design, this study analysed the potential of implementing ABS or other measures to support the development of a sustainable Thanakha Market System (MS) and reduce threats to local biodiversity and TK. In 2018, we collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with key informants involved in the implementation of ABS measures in Myanmar. Quantitative data was collected through structured interviews with Thanakha farmers from Myanmar's Dry Zone.

Results showed a weak ABS regulatory framework in Myanmar. Current R&D activities on Thanakha can trigger ABS obligations, but current deficiencies with benefit-sharing practices raise uncertainties about the potential of ABS implementation (low level of traceability, low farmers' access to relevant information and fair prices, a low commitment of companies with local development, and lack of agreements when sourcing Thanakha for R&D or commercial purpose). Constraints for the development of a sustainable Thanakha MS relates to a lack of farmers' access to finance, low processing capacity at the local level, and deficient traders' fulfilment of international market standards. This study showed the relevance of implementing BioTrade principles and ethical sourcing practices for promoting a sustainable Thanakha MS, as well as for supporting the implementation of ABS requirements in Myanmar. Companies willing to implement BioTrade principles must tackle several challenges in their sourcing practices. Other benefit-sharing possibilities involve rural infrastructure investments, traditional varieties breeder's rights or geographical indications.

**Keywords:** Access and Benefit Sharing, biodiversity, BioTrade, Myanmar, Thanakha

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