



## The Business of Mongongo in Zambia

Mongongo fruits are widely distributed and well known in Southern Africa as an important food source. In Zambia, a local company called **Kalahari Natural Oils** makes products from the rich Mongongo oil to treat dry skin and hair. The business of Kalahari Natural Oils is based on wild harvested natural products supplied by large groups (350+) of primary producers based in western Zambia. Most of them began collecting the fruit for Mongongo kernel production in 2003.

Kalahari Natural Oils is a member of the Southern African Natural Products Trade Association or **PhytoTrade Africa**, partners to the **World Conservation Union (IUCN)** in the delivery of **the Natural Futures Programme**. In 2006, noting a growing interest and demand in Mongongo oil, the company applied to the Natural Futures Programme for assistance in improving the coordination and productivity of their supply chain. As a result of this support, new and expanded groups have been organised and trained to supply Mongongo in an effective, environmentally sustainable and profitable manner.

The impact Natural Futures assistance has been seen at two different levels of the Kalahari Natural Oils supply chain. The factory started operating in October 2006 and is situated about twenty kilometres east of Lusaka. It now employs four full time employees and one manager. The factory is currently efficiently producing 50 kilograms of Mongongo oil per day from about 200 kilograms of kernels using a recently acquired hydraulic press from South Africa. It holds about 7 tonnes of stock of Mongongo kernels. The Kalahari Natural Oils products, hair food and body gel, are packed at the factory. The products have been advertised in the local media and are being sold at a number of retail outlets in Lusaka including Spar, chemists and hair salons. The price of a 100ml of Mongongo hair food in supermarkets is about K6, 000.00 (or US\$1.50).

Changes in the supply chain of Mongongo have made a marked improvement in the livelihoods of the business and primary producers. Nearly 90% of the primary producers are women such as **Bertha Monde**, a primary producer from the Sesheke District:

*My name is Mrs Bertha Monde. I joined the Mongongo project because I need some cash income in order to take care of my family. I look after and pay school fees for three orphans belonging to my late brother in law and my own two children. I have been married for ten years and care for seven in the household including the children, my husband and me. As from January to April this year I have produced 450 kilograms of Mongongo kernels and have sold all of them to Kalahari Natural*

*Oils at a price of K4000.00 per kilogram. I have therefore raised K1, 800, 000.00 from Mongongo during the past three months (approximately US\$450.00).*

Bertha learned to crack Mongongo at the age of seven. She notes the special skill involved in cracking and storing dried nuts and, like the local chief, has made sure to pass this on to her children. In addition to making cooking oil from the nuts, Bertha is also experienced at turning the 'mkuya' or pulp from the fruit into a tasty beer or porridge during times of drought. She is amazed at how much money can be made from the accessible and abundant Mongongo trees. In fact, many say that their involvement in the trade has helped to survive what has been a difficult and dry year in western Zambia. This includes the local chief who has expressed his support for the trade and the participation of his family members who work alongside Bertha in the supply chain. Despite the fact that most of the community women also learned to crack Mongongo from an early age for relish and cooking oil production, it was only recently discovered that a living could be made from natural products like these wild fruits.

The price paid for maize, the main staple food farmed by Betha, her husband and many other community members can fluctuate significantly, but is generally lower than for Mongongo kernels. Last year Betha's family sold little maize because the price was very low and up to three times lower



than Mongongo. This year, during the crop failure brought on by lack of rains, Betha's Mongongo earnings alone provided enough money to cover the major expenses of her large family.

In addition to the food that Bertha has purchased for the family from her work, she and her husband have also invested her earnings towards the family's future. Since 2006, Bertha has purchased two cows to assist with plowing in the coming seasons, two goats and has paid into the local parent teacher association for the ongoing education of her children. After a few more years in the supply chain, Bertha plans to build a larger home for her family. She also says that none of this would have been possible without her involvement in the natural products trade.



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