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MCC in Action

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MCC Links Namibian Women with International Markets

Like countless Namibian women before her, Emilia Kambonde learned from her mother how to extract the kernel from the marula seed and process its oil in the traditional fashion.

For years, selling the seeds for local use barely allowed Emilia to get by. But thanks to the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Emilia and other members of her cooperative are boosting their income by selling marula kernels and oil for use in a variety of products sold worldwide, from cosmetics to liqueur.

Namibia's indigenous natural products (INP) sector benefits from considerable public and private investment, which enables it to produce goods, set up supply chains and build links with the private sector—but limited local demand, a lack of economies of scale and underdeveloped export opportunities have hindered sales. Most of the products are exported to Europe, where the majority of added-value transformation takes place.

Through its five-year, \$304 million compact with Namibia, MCC is helping to further develop the country's INP industry by investing almost \$7 million to improve local producer and processor capacity to better compete in the global economy.

Technical assistance and small grants are beginning to show positive results—particularly for Namibian women, who are the main participants in the harvesting of INPs for both commercial and personal purposes. The INP activity aims to benefit 7,000 households and approximately 35,000 individuals.

Most rural Namibian women's livelihoods depend substantially on harvesting and processing INPs—such as marula, Ximenia, Devil's Claw, Commiphora resin, and Kalahari melon seed. Women often perform the work because production and harvesting require very little start-up capital, resources are accessible to all and the work can be combined with other household tasks.



The MCC compact with Namibia is helping Emilia Kambonde, pictured here, and other women in her community export indigenous natural products to global markets.

Big benefits from a little seed

Emilia, a grandmother and one of 15 people living in her house in Olukango in the north-central Oshana region, began selling marula products 40 years ago. Because every household in the region produced their own oil, she often did not make much money.

Ten years ago, Emilia joined the Eudafano Women's Cooperative (EWC) as a marula kernel producer with six trees and limited market access. Since then, the cooperative has helped Emilia and other members increase their access to markets.

MCA-Namibia, the government entity implementing the compact, is providing institutional support to the sector by strengthening the organizational and technical capacity of producer and processor organizations like EWC.

The cooperative began in 1999 as a women-only marketing cooperative and has since developed into a marketing cooperative of 24 producer associations representing 1,300 people, and a factory that processes INPs for international export. Since 2005, EWC's factory has been supplying marula and Kalahari melon seed oil for use in cosmetics to global firms like The Body Shop and Aldivia.

INP Innovation Fund

MCA-Namibia created the INP (Indigenous Natural Products) Innovation Fund to provide grants in support of research, testing and application of INP-related innovations, as well as providing new services critical to the industry's competitiveness.

The findings from this research feed into training and technical assistance to primary producers and processors of INPs, increasing the quality of their products and improving their ability to capture more of the value generated through product grading and transformation.

Research and training create new INP diversification opportunities of particular interest to rural Namibian women.

Benefits lead to opportunities

Emilia's hard work brings a more consistent paycheck to complement her government pension. But she believes the benefit of being a cooperative member goes well beyond the increased earnings; it enables her to be more independent and confident. Her income ensures she can pay for food, household items, school fees, school uniforms, and hospital fees for her children and grandchildren. Her husband also appreciates the income she receives.

The international demand for marula continues to be firm. The tree's tart fruit is an ingredient in the now-famous Amarula liqueur. International firms are purchasing marula oil for use in cosmetics. During the 2011 season, the cooperative purchased nearly nine metric tons of kernels from producers like Emilia. By November 2011 it had exported more than six tons of oil, generating nearly \$120,000.

"I hope EWC continues its work," Emilia said, "so future generations of members can also benefit from the income they receive."