



Union for
Ethical
BioTrade

**SOURCING
WITH RESPECT®**

Africa: Rich in biodiversity, rich in opportunity

Africa is rich in biodiversity and this variety of natural resources provides significant innovation opportunities for companies looking to work with natural ingredients. In addition, sourcing from biodiversity provides companies with a new way to engage with their consumers. When asked what would make consumers purchase a product containing natural ingredients from Africa, protecting biodiversity and improving livelihoods of African producers were two of the most popular responses.

While rich in biodiversity, Africa is the poorest continent on the planet, suffering from diverse economic and social problems. Over the last decade ethical sourcing of biodiversity has been recognised as a potential means to alleviate poverty and promote conservation. One of the key aspects of ethical and sustainable sourcing is the sharing of benefits along the supply chain, known in the context of the United Nation's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS).

A number of examples of ethical sourcing in Africa involving stakeholders from both the public and private sectors have been developed. Information on two can be found here, but PhytoTrade Africa and UEBT work with many others.

Sharing the benefits of biodiversity

Equitable benefit sharing is one of the central aims of the ethical sourcing of biodiversity. Only by ensuring that monetary and non-monetary benefits derived from the use of biodiversity reach the local level, can the value of biodiversity be harnessed to advance conservation and sustainable use. Receiving a fair share of the benefits of biodiversity also enables countries and communities rich in biodiversity to incorporate such wealth into sustainable development strategies.



Baobab: the Tree of Life

The baobab tree grows across much of Southern Africa. Its iconic shape, has for many people become a symbol of the African plains. Locally it is known as the tree of life, as the uses of each part of the tree are so diverse. The baobab fruit contains oil-rich seeds packed in a powdery flesh, which is rich in antioxidants, magnesium, calcium and vitamin C. In addition the fruit powder is high in pectin, meaning it can be particularly useful when thickening properties are desired. Furthermore, the oil found in the seeds of the baobab is a useful moisturising ingredient for cosmetics products, as it is high in fatty acids such as palmitic acid, linoleic acid and oleic acid.

The properties of the baobab fruit have led people to believe in its commercial potential. Baobab trees can live up to a thousand years and are not a potential candidate for agricultural production. However, harvesting the fruit of the wild trees can provide income for local populations. According to a report from the UK's Natural Resources Institute, if fully commercialised, baobab can deliver new income to over two and a half million poor families. In addition, giving the trees commercial value, through the sale of ingredients derived from its fruit, will motivate its protection.

While baobab has properties of interest to food and cosmetics formulators, conquering international markets is not easy. PhytoTrade Africa, a trade association representing the natural products industry in Southern Africa, has worked hard to get the baobab fruit accepted for import into the US. In 2009, GRAS (Generally Recognised as Safe) notification was gained, significantly opening up the US market for baobab products. Earlier in 2008 the fruit gained novel foods approval for the European market. PhytoTrade Africa and its partners have also been working to ensure the sustainable harvest of the baobab fruits. As well as paying communities a fair price for their baobab fruit and sharing part of their sales income with communities, PhytoTrade Africa's members also use sustainable forestry practices.

Allanblackia: developing a sustainable supply chain

The Allanblackia tree grows in the humid forests of West, Central and East Africa. The oil from the Allanblackia seeds has been traditionally used by the local population as a cooking oil and in the preparation of soap. More recently, other uses of the oil have been explored. Allanblackia oil is high in stearic and oleic acids and has a melting point higher than room temperature. This means that the oil is a solid at room temperature but melts when ingested, making it an attractive proposition for formulators of margarines and spreads. From a producer standpoint, the Allanblackia tree can provide supplementary income as its harvest period is outside that of the other cash crops. However, if the sale of Allanblackia oil is to have a real impact on local producers' income, its production has to be scaled up.

In 2002, the Novella Partnership was founded to support a project to scale up the production of Allanblackia. The idea of this partnership, which involves public and private actors with Unilever as the largest investor, is to create a supply chain that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. While wild harvesting has always been the traditional mode of collection for Allanblackia oil, the dispersal of the trees over a large area means that domestication is necessary to answer demand. Within the Novella Partnership a number of actors including the World Agroforestry Centre and UEBT member the IUCN are working on developing sustainable forestry practices for both wild and cultivated trees. In addition, UEBT is collaborating with a verification framework that can be applied to wild collection, agroforestry methods and small plantations in order to identify impact. The development of the supply chain also focuses on the equitable sharing of benefits to all actors and consistent prices to producers.

Allanblackia trees are often found in biodiversity rich areas that are also high in poverty, meaning that pressure on the local environment is strong. Developing a sustainable supply chain in these areas, which can promote biodiversity protection and help alleviate poverty is particularly valuable.



African biodiversity: Looking to the future

It is clear that Africa's rich natural heritage can provide companies with significant opportunities to develop new innovative products. Although promising significant rewards, sourcing from biodiversity in an ethical and sustainable way can be challenging. In October 2010 the CBD adopted the Nagoya Protocol which provides more clarity for how to put ABS into practice. The engagement of the private sector in achieving these goals is pivotal. If done well, sourcing from biodiversity will help contribute to the CBD goals on biodiversity conservation, its sustainable use and the sharing of benefits resulting from it. In addition, this will help promote economic development in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals.

UEBT members based in Africa

Aroma Forest
Bio Oleos de Maxixe
Kaite
L'Homme et l'Environnement

Novel Ghana
Novel Tanzania
PhytoTrade Africa
Swazi Indigenous Products
Treecrops

Contact UEBT

For more information please contact UEBT and PhytoTrade Africa. More information on ABS, the Biodiversity Barometer and other related issues can be found on the UEBT website: www.ethicalbiotrade.org

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and Development

Union for Ethical BioTrade

Secretariat
32, Rue de Berne
1201, Geneva, Switzerland
Phone: + 41 22 5661585
Fax: + 41 22 7310340
info@ethicalbiotrade.org

Brazilian
Representation
Sao Paulo, Brazil

Phone: + 55 11 9431 1880
brazil@ethicalbiotrade.org