

A photograph of a lush green forest with tall, thin trees. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy, creating a dappled light effect on the forest floor. The overall scene is vibrant and natural.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

AND PERCEPTIONS

ON BARK HARVESTING

BACKGROUND

- Indigenous knowledge combined with scientific input was seen as an important principle underlying the project
- Studies were undertaken in Malawi, Zambia and South Africa
- Interviews, semi-structured interactions and mini workshops were held with healers, harvesters, users, medical personnel and regulators

OBJECTIVE

- To investigate the perceptions of bark harvesters on sustainable practices in bark removal for medicinal use

CONTEXT

- On the African continent up to 40% of traditional medicine is derived from bark
- Despite growing urbanisation levels and increasing education levels – there is no indication that the demand is decreasing
- On the contrary the pressure on existing resources is rapidly escalating
- Cultivated resources are not making any significant impact on supply and demand

WHAT IS IK

- **Locally bound, indigenous to a specific area**
- **Culture- and context-specific**
- **Non-formal knowledge**
- **Orally transmitted, and generally not documented**
- **Dynamic and adaptive**
- **Holistic in nature**
- **Closely related to survival and subsistence for many people worldwide**

DEMAND FOR MEDICINAL PLANTS

- ✓ Increase due to HIV/AIDS and TB
- ✓ Decrease due to economic constraints
- ✓ Difficult to get due to scarcity as a result of greater number of harvesters.
- ✓ Overall in all the three countries demand has increased.

PRIMARY SPECIES

MALAWI	SOUTH AFRICA	ZAMBIA
<i>Erythropterum suaveolens</i>	<i>Curtisia dentata</i>	<i>Parinari curatelifolia</i>
<i>Pterocarpis angolensis</i>	<i>Ocotea bullata</i>	<i>Pericopsis angolensis</i>
<i>Erythrina abyssinica</i>	<i>Cassine papillosa</i>	<i>Anisohyllea boehmii</i>
<i>Khaya anthotheca</i>	<i>Bursama tysoniana</i>	<i>Cassia abbreviata</i>
<i>Afzelia quanzensis</i>	<i>Rapanea melanophloeos</i>	<i>Julbernadia paniculata</i>

KEY FINDINGS

While there is good knowledge of sustainable practices among healers, commercial harvesting is leading to unsustainable practices, these include:

- Large pieces of bark removed by cutting through the bark into the wood
- Total stripping of trees
- Ring-barking or cutting the bark horizontally
- Large trees felled to harvest the bark on higher parts of the tree
- Felling neighbouring trees onto standing trees to enable harvesters to climb higher into a tree to harvest bark
- Harvesting bark from immature or juvenile trees

KEY FINDINGS – Best practice

- **Bark harvesting more frequent during rainy season – especially in Malawi and SA – Zambia throughout the year**
- **Only removing narrow, vertical strips of bark at a time, proportionate to the size of the tree**
- **Strip barking on the shaded side of the tree**
- **Covering the wound with earth to aid recovery**
- **Not cutting into the wood**
- **Sparing young or juvenile trees**
- **Observing harvest cycles that allow trees time to recover**
- **Taking care not to damage the surrounding vegetation during bark harvesting**

ALSO TABOOS AND RITUALS

- Ancestor invocation prior to harvesting
- Harvesting with a clean body
- Harvesting from eastern and western sides of the tree
- Harvesting only from trees without prior evidence of harvesting
- Some tree only harvested at night
- Some trees harvested while the harvester is naked
- And many more.....

KEY FINDINGS

- **A big difference in harvesting practices by healers and harvesting by commercial traders**
- **Commercial harvesters harvest for the volume and sell at low prices**
- **Healers either purchase from traders or harvest small volumes themselves – they often condemn traders**
- **Law enforcement is not effective**

KEY FINDINGS

- **Commercial traders/harvesters are often women**
- **Whether women or men, they are economically marginalized and come from the poorest sector of society**
- **Education levels are often low**
- **Both groups are aware of the impact of irresponsible harvesting on the resource**

AN ALARMING QUOTATION

“We are supposed to cut a line at the top of the place we want and then we cut lines down the length of the piece we want. Then we are supposed to loosen the piece by knocking it with the blunt side of the axe then we cut the bottom and lift it out. But sometimes we just cut it any way because we are rushing and need to get as much as we can”

ONE GOOD APPROACH



THE STATE OF THE RESOURCE

- In all three countries, it was clear that certain species are becoming rare threatened and sometimes almost extinct
- Rare threatened and endangered species differ across the region, and during the study a list of species was generated that could form the basis of a management and cultivation initiative – but it would be premature to publicise this until further studies have been conducted

CONCLUSION

- **Indigenous knowledge needs to be synthesized with scientific knowledge**
- **Traditional healers are aware of some optimal and sustainable harvesting practices and are in a position to self regulate**
- **Self regulation is occurring more successfully in Zambia and Malawi**
- **Concentrated demand from increased urbanization has led to the growth of commercial traders/harvesters who are perpetrating unsustainable practices**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Formulation of bark harvesting practices as discovered in the bark harvesting project. These should address protection of trees and forests and embrace IK.
- Government to have a clear policy on the bark harvesting practices including harvesting of other herbal medicines, that protect the tree and forests in order to save the communities in improving their health which in turn will equip them to fight poverty and by achieve the millennium developmental goals by 2015.
- The donor community is requested to support the widening of the bark project to include root based medicines which are of greater significance than bark in miombo areas.

OUR GOAL!

TREES FOR HEALTH FOREVER

THANK YOU