Introduction

Farmers in Cameroon find it difficult to achieve good returns from their tree products despite national, regional and international market potential. Failure to exploit these growing markets is often attributed to product seasonality, weak infrastructure, limited and conflicting market knowledge, lack of networks and associations and inadequate processing and storage methods.

In response, a team of researchers, extensionists, traders and producers developed an innovative approach to assist smallholder farmers develop marketing skills and knowledge, while also assisting them to increase on-farm production of agroforestry products.

We highlight major achievements under this project using the experience of the Association pour le Développement Intégral des Exploitations Agricoles du Centre (ADEAC) in Akonolinga area (Nyang and Mfoumou division, Cameroon) in selling njansang (Ricinodendron heudelotii).

The Sub-Sector Approach

The project follows a sub-sector approach which consists of examining and developing farmers’ capacities in various functions along the chain of a chosen sub-sector, starting from production, through post-harvest technologies to marketing and finally, consumption.

Group strengthening

Capacity building is crucial to the project. Therefore, training modules to help producers form consolidated and dynamic organisations, acquire entrepreneurial skills and develop appropriate marketing strategies, were developed.

Market research

The development of marketing strategies for njansang is backed up by thorough market chain analysis, market data on volumes and prices, and information on consumer preferences.

Development of marketing strategies

The njansang marketing strategy chosen by ADEAC is group sales. Therefore, farmers are trained in negotiation skills to increase their bargaining power. To raise interest among traders product availability (quantity and quantity) in advance of sales is assessed. Meanwhile, trust relationships are built between producers and traders during stakeholder meetings. These encounters permit to recognize major bottlenecks in the existing marketing system and to negotiate the conditions and terms of future transactions. In some villages this strategy was reinforced by a guarantee fund set aside to meet up with urgent needs while waiting for group sales.

Harvest and post-harvest technologies

A survey to inventory local knowledge and identify bottlenecks on harvest and post-harvest techniques has identified njansang extraction techniques that enable farmers to save time and fuel used in boiling the process. These techniques have been shared, though the problem of opening the shells after boiling remains crucial.

Therefore, designing a cracking machine appeared necessary to reduce the time and effort of njansang kernel extraction, so that more farmers could be encouraged to increase quantities gathered.

Increase on-farm production

So far, njansang has been collected mainly from trees in forests and fallows. However, the development of marketing strategies requires sufficient supply of produce. Therefore, the project also focuses on the dissemination of improved propagation methods to assist farmers in planting more njansang trees on their farms.

Achievements

Training

A total of 71 female and 88 male njansang producers have been trained in at least one of the aspects related to enterprise development.

Group sales

Average income generated by household involved in the njansang enterprise increased from 16,882 FCFA in 2005 to 23,364 FCFA in 2006.

As a result of increased bargaining power from group action, prices per cup rose from 150 FCFA when farmers sold individually, to 250 FCFA per cup during group sales.

Because of trust relationships, traders agreed to change their measuring units from cups to kilogramme, which should avoid current disparities between quantities measured by producers and traders.

Post harvest technologies

Collaboration with an entrepreneur has permitted to design a prototype of a njansang cracking machine, powered by a diesel motor. The machine has an average efficiency of 65% unbroken kernels. It is envisaged that broken kernels could be milled into powder or pressed into njansang cubes. The new product could be sold in super markets.

Implications for poverty alleviation

Experiences so far indicate that household’s income from marketing agroforestry tree products can be significantly increased using the sub-sector approach, in combination with development of post-harvest technologies and on-farm production methods. We also believe that the approach can be scaled-up to other locations and to other products, because it is a step-wise procedure that can be adapted to emerging needs and opportunities. To this effect, a complete training and dissemination package will soon be available for use by development partners, NGOs and producer organizations who wish to develop marketing strategies for AFTPs.

Recommendations for policy makers

The important contribution that agroforestry products make to farmer livelihoods and the national economy is rarely acknowledged. This leads to confused legislation concerning their exploitation and a lack of appropriate support to farmers and traders.

We therefore recommend that the Government should provide a favourable context for the further development of agroforestry enterprises.

- Include production data for agroforestry products in official statistics and existing market information systems.
- Incorporate agroforestry enterprise development in poverty reduction strategies.
- Create an enabling environment for agribusiness development, including investment-friendly policies and road and market infrastructure development.
- Clarify permit requirements and eliminate unnecessary road-blocks.
- Regulate exploitation, transport and import/export of agroforestry products like agricultural produce, rather than as non-timber forest products.
- Stimulate regional trade by harmonising policies related to the exploitation and trade of agroforestry products.