

# Indigenous Natural Products (INPs)

Indigenous Natural Products (INPs) offer opportunities to conservancy members to diversify household income streams and contribute significantly to food security. The harvesting of and trade in INPs helps conservancy members to generate much needed cash income. Unfortunately, these benefits are available only for a limited season and are dependent on environmental conditions. IRDNC has been exploring opportunities for expanding the range of INPs harvested in conservancies so that different INPs can be harvested during different seasons and provide longer periods of opportunity for generating cash incomes. Harvesters are often the most marginalised members of the conservancies.

Devil's claw (*Harpagophytum* spp.), known for its effective treatment of arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, probably has the oldest history of the commercialization of any indigenous natural plant product in Namibia with commercial trade already taking place in the 1960's. Devil's Claw grows in many parts of southern Africa but Namibia is by far the largest supplier of Devil's Claw in the world. This has been made possible by the development of reliable supply chains through the organization of groups of registered harvesters in conservancies and community forests. Supporting conservancy members to organize into producer groups so that they can collectively sell directly to an exporter rather than to informal traders has resulted in harvesters earning better income and improved sustainable harvesting techniques.



IRDNC facilitates the negotiation of contracts with registered buyers who pay a fair price for good quality and sustainably harvested material



Training is provided on sustainable harvesting and processing methods



Staff members operating the stills at OPF are from the conservancies and have received training in processing techniques

Until recently, no essential oils were produced in Namibia. However, *Commiphora* species in Kunene region have long been used by Himba women as the major ingredient of their perfumes. In the early 1990's, IRDNC had been considering investigating this genus as a potential source of income for Himba communities but was reluctant to do so until appropriate institutional arrangements were in place for the sustainable management of this resource should it be harvested. With the change in legislation in 1996 and the subsequent registration of conservancies, the necessary community management structures now existed and the research was launched at the end of 2004. At that time, most conservancies derived their income from wildlife and wildlife-based tourism. In Himba communities, the women are the managers of the plant resources and are responsible for the harvesting of the *Commiphora* resins. For these reasons, IRDNC's work initially focused on the women in the two conservancies and later expanded to other neighbouring conservancies.

The first commercial harvest of omumbiri (*Commiphora wildii*) resin took place in October 2007. Since then, the Opuwo Processing Facility (OPF) has been established where essential oil extraction from *Commiphora wildii* resin as well as *Colophospermum mopane* seeds is done. These ingredients are sold to companies who produce cosmetic and fragrance products. Innovative institutional arrangements for the collective ownership of this enterprise have demonstrated realistic options for the implementation of Namibia's new Access and Benefit Sharing legislation.



Registered trademark for OPF products

IRDNC is exploring the development of further INPs to provide benefit-generation opportunities to conservancy members. The leaves of the resurrection plant *Myrothamnus flabelifolius* are harvested to produce an extract marketed as myro. This ingredient is used in anti-aging skin products. Other gums and waxes are being investigated also as potential cosmetic ingredients. The development of INP development is a long-term initiative where issues such as product quality and reliable supply are crucial for success in the market where competition and regulatory requirements can be challenging. However, the impact of this income to households within conservancies justifies the long-term commitment by IRDNC to value chain development.