

# Baobab – Africa's multipurpose upside-down tree to improve rural livelihoods

*A briefing paper for non-governmental and community based organisations (NGOs and CBOs).*

## The problem

Growing populations, urbanisation and increasing industrial production in Africa are combining to raise the demand for food and other agricultural commodities. Yet the capacity of available resources and technologies to secure this provision and to achieve the goal of improved livelihoods for all remain uncertain.

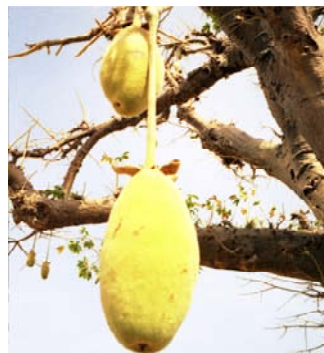
## The solution: baobab - the multipurpose tree from the dry areas of Africa

Harvesting from the baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata* L.) enables rural people to have a balanced diet. Marketing of baobab products is an important means of income generation for many people and can provide a much needed buffer in times of drought and famine thus helping to reduce hunger and alleviate poverty. The baobab is therefore one of the most valuable resources in the dry lands of Africa:

- ✦ the fruits are rich in vitamin C and are used to prepare beverages,
- ✦ the leaves are used fresh or dried as vegetables and as forage,
- ✦ the seeds are used to extract oil,
- ✦ all parts of the tree have medicinal properties,
- ✦ the bark provides strong and durable fibres,
- ✦ the tree is fire resistant and can survive severe droughts,
- ✦ it is easy and cheap to cultivate and free from any serious pests and diseases and
- ✦ it provides shade and protects the soil against erosion.



Baobab tree. ICUC.



Baobab fruits. M. Sidibe.



Urban market in Bouaké, Ivory Coast. E. Peiler.

## The “Fruits for the Future” project

The DFID-FRP funded “Fruits for the Future” project has led to the production of a monograph, an extension manual, a factsheet and a reference database on the baobab. The monograph details the problems and potential benefits of the tree, and identifies numerous major limitations for further development which will require local, national and international approaches if they are to be overcome. We expect that this work will encourage further production, processing and marketing of baobab particularly at the village level.

## What could be done to make the baobab tree more widely used?

Despite its wide distribution and multi-purpose uses the potential of baobab has not been fully realised. The following steps should be taken to overcome the limitations:

1. the availability of quality planting material should be increased,
2. improved propagation and management techniques should be developed and adopted,
3. processing technologies should be developed and adopted,
4. market chains and infrastructure for baobab products should be developed.

# The way forward – overcoming the limitations and steps to a better use of baobab

## 1. Increase the availability of quality planting material



Two different varieties: one fruiting with and one without leaves. M. Sidibe.

**Organisations involved in conservation and utilisation of dry land genetic resources should support:**

- ✦ Survey and collection of seed
- ✦ Identification of suitable varieties and their field testing
- ✦ Mapping the tree diversity in different ecosystems
- ✦ Selection and vegetative propagation of appropriate varieties in relation to utilisation objectives

## 2. Application of improved propagation and management techniques



Young baobab trees intercropped with pearl millet. M. Sidibe.

**Organisations involved with rural development and tree planting should support:**

- ✦ Establishment of tree nurseries
- ✦ Multiplication through vegetative propagation of desired types
- ✦ Development and adoption of improved field establishment and tree management techniques

## 3. Development and application of processing technologies



Pulping machine, Zimbabwe. SAFIRE.

**Collaboration between industry and NGOs and CBOs should be promoted. Attention needs to be paid to:**

- ✦ Improvement of storage and processing technology (e.g. to retain high levels of vitamin C in drinks and pro-vitamin A in dried leaves)
- ✦ Standardisation of methods for the preparation of medicinal products
- ✦ Knowledge transfer and technical support
- ✦ Promotion of local small-scale industries for baobab products

## 4. Marketing of baobab tree products



Baobab products. A. Hughes.

**Collaboration between eco- and fair trade associations and partner NGOs and CBOs should be supported. The priorities are:**

- ✦ Adoption of international standards for products
- ✦ Development of locally-made products for local markets
- ✦ Development of market chains and infrastructure for baobab products
- ✦ Promotion of the baobab fruit as a healthy fruit and for cosmetic use for export markets
- ✦ Information collection on the market value of products, and supply and demand estimates
- ✦ Collection of data on income derived from the production to consumption chain

**For more information:** ICUC, Lanchester Building, University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ, UK, [icuc@soton.ac.uk](mailto:icuc@soton.ac.uk). This policy brief was prepared by Elke Peiler, based on the project “Fruits for the Future – Baobab and other underutilised fruit species: a monograph, database and extension manual”. It is an output from a research project funded by the United Kingdom Department for International development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID [R7187 Forestry Research Programme] and ICUC.