

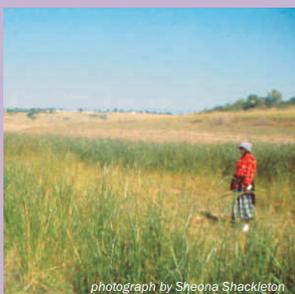


Ameliorating poverty in South Africa through natural resource commercialisation **HOW CAN GOVERNMENT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

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photograph by Saskia den Adel



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Some of the poorest rural people in South Africa are turning to the natural resource base for income generation. Using traditional skills they are converting a variety of wild resources into commodities that are sold in the market place. Wood and woven craft, medicines, fresh and processed wild foods, alcoholic beverages, building materials, fuelwood, dried mopane worms, cultural artefacts and brooms are just some examples of the array of natural resource products increasingly seen for sale in local and external markets. The majority of participants in this trade have minimal education, few assets to draw on, and little access to alternative sources of income or jobs. A significant proportion are women, with more than half heading their own households. Many come from homes devastated by HIV/AIDS. *The cash earned from selling natural resource products, however small, is of critical importance, preventing producers and their families from slipping deeper into poverty. "Since I have been making brooms my children no longer go to bed crying of hunger," observed one broom producer.* The State has an obligation, in terms of its commitment to reducing poverty and developing the so-called 'second economy', to support producers and traders who are desperately trying to make a living for themselves.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

National and Provincial Departments

- ◆ Incorporate risk reducing natural resource trading into pro-poor development policies and strategies (for example, Sustainable Development Strategy, Rural Development Strategy, Provincial Growth and Development Strategies, National Forest Action Programme, etc.).
- ◆ Recognise that natural resource commercialisation is just one of several strategies households use to make ends meet. Work across sectors, departments and with lower spheres of government to ensure an integrated approach to tackling rural poverty.
- ◆ Recognise the contribution that the trade in natural resources makes to the poorest sectors of society and don't dismiss it because of its local nature.
- ◆ Provide a framework for institutional support to the natural resource trade, which may include new forms of micro-credit access, training, marketing support, etc. that can be implemented at a local government level.
- ◆ Provide the policy and legal environment to facilitate access to natural resources on State land and to minimise barriers to trading.
- ◆ Support research into new products, new markets and systems for sustainable management of the resource.
- ◆ Develop campaigns to promote traditional natural resource based-products for their cultural value that will help expand domestic markets.
- ◆ Develop incentives for the private sector to get more involved in the natural resource product trade, whether it be providing access to raw material or markets.

Government Conservation Agencies

- ◆ Support access to sustainable harvesting of key natural resources on State land.
- ◆ Institute systems for the regulation and sustainable management of these resources that involve local producers and take cognisance of local knowledge and harvesting practices.
- ◆ Provide support and expertise for the management of these resources on neighbouring private, municipal and communal land.
- ◆ Undertake relevant research to assess sustainable harvesting levels for key resources, but do this in a proactive and adaptive way rather than using it as an excuse to keep harvesters out.
- ◆ Develop means for communicating with producers and inform them of any management activities (for example, fire management) that may impact on areas used for resource harvesting.
- ◆ Explore alternatives for making the resource available, such as cultivation.
- ◆ Support the marketing of products produced from natural resources at a policy and practical level (for example, some parks have craft marketing policies designed to support local producers).
- ◆ Work with producers to increase their awareness of resource management issues and train them in any special harvesting techniques.

Local Government and Municipalities

- ◆ Make the trade in natural resource products an integral component of any Local Economic Development Plan (LED) and Local Environmental Action Plan (LEAP), and develop specific support strategies, e.g. the integrated crafts support strategy of the uThungula District Municipality.
- ◆ Support traders in the markets by developing policies that favour informal, often seasonal, producers and traders and by providing appropriate space and infrastructure at favourable locations.
- ◆ Work with local producers to build their capacity and develop the trade.
- ◆ Provide access to resources on municipal land and develop appropriate arrangements, with local producers, to manage this. Ensure clear communication of permitting requirements and the conditions for harvesting.
- ◆ Work with the private sector, the tourism industry and other local stakeholders to promote their involvement in the development and marketing of natural resource products within municipal boundaries.

This policy brief is based on the original brief made available for a workshop in August 2006. It draws on, amongst other sources, the results of several case studies of natural resource commercialisation undertaken across South Africa. The project was funded by the South Africa-Netherlands Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD), BP South Africa and the National Research Foundation (NRF). The Center for International Forestry Research, with support from SIDA, provided the funding to share these findings with key stakeholders including government policy and decision makers.

