



# Forest Livelihood Briefs

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## Regulatory policies and *Gnetum spp.* trade in Cameroon

### Challenge

*Gnetum* trade in Cameroon is marred by many constraints that come in the way of producers and traders as they try to get products through to consumers. Removing these 'tracasseries' can improve national and local income.

After the decline of cocoa and coffee prices in the mid 1980s and the devaluation of the CFA Francs in 1994, rural and urban populations of Cameroon turned, among others, to *Gnetum spp.* for their livelihood and nutritional needs.

The trade of *Gnetum* in Cameroon is officially restricted to holders of quotas. An interministerial committee led by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife –MINFOF, allocates quotas to traders. In general, these traders are not the real exploiters, consequently those who would like to trade the product legally in border markets between Cameroon and Nigeria are obliged to purchase part of the quotas in the form of way bills (*lettre de voiture*), paying prices above the unit acquisition cost of the quotas. This situation in addition to amounts paid at roadblocks lessens the benefit of traders and in turn results in lower prices for producers and higher prices for consumers. This brings about government and societal financial loss, increasing transaction costs and making the transportation of *Gnetum* more difficult. To achieve the dual objective of improving the livelihoods of forest dwellers and preserving this valuable resource, these constraints need to be tackled.



### Major constraints

*Gnetum* is a leafy vegetable with leaves rich in protein. It is found in West and Central Africa, mostly in fallows and secondary forests as a climbing vine. It has several roles in farmers' livelihoods. *Gnetum* provides employment and incomes for poor rural dwellers, especially women who are mostly involved in the gathering, processing and marketing of the forest product. The growth of local markets is due to increased awareness of local communities on its economic value and increased urbanization resulting in higher demand for the product.

A number of constraints prevent farmers and traders from getting more benefits from the trade of *Gnetum*.



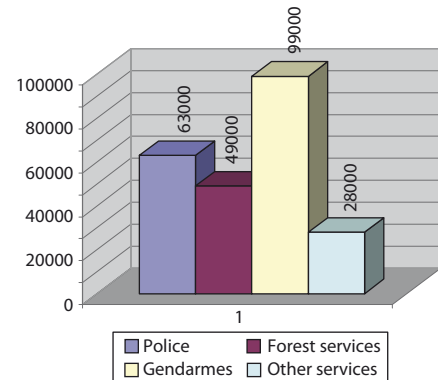


### 1. System of quotas

- Quotas are allocated without good understanding of the resource base as no inventory has been carried out to evaluate the potential at the national level;
- Quotas are allocated in an inequitable way to few individuals, which does not allow traders and rural communities to officially participate in *Gnetum* export;
- Companies or individuals who get the quotas are not directly involved in the value chain development of the product. Consequently they sell them to traders through *way bills* or "*lettre de voiture*" at a much higher price than the taxes they pay to the government;
- There is no established procedure for monitoring if quotas are respected, which implies there are no procedures to control for abuse.

### 2. Checkpoints and informal tax

- Too many check points from the supply zones to the different main markets;
- Payment of "informal taxes" at each checkpoint (Traders compensate for these "informal tax" payments by increasing sales prices to consumers and lowering purchase prices to farmers);
- Mixed controls with Gendarmes, police, forest guards, custom agents etc., make the roles of each difficult to determine.



### 3. Collecting, gathering and conditioning of *Gnetum*

- Farmers are sometimes obliged to walk long distances to get sufficient quantities of *Gnetum*;
- Because the vine grows around trees, many farmers are obliged to fall the trees before harvesting the leaves.

Total amount in CFA paid by traders per car carrying 2500 bundles to different agencies from the production zone Sa'a to Idenau.

## Recommendations

To improve the regulatory policy of *Gnetum spp.*, the following suggestions should be taken into consideration:

- Disseminate domestication techniques in rural areas. This will enable farmers to plant *Gnetum* in home gardens and to increase production;
- Adapt the legislation to the context of domesticated *Gnetum* grown on farms, not to be confused with wild harvest;
- Promote group marketing. It enables rural producers to integrate several marketing strategies and to get higher prices along the commodity chain if the quality of the product is guaranteed;
- Initiate processing of *Gnetum* so as to improve and encourage international trade;
- Develop cost-effective inventories to know the resource base in order to allocate yearly quotas;
- Make allocations of quotas more transparent through a system of bidding. This will allow more competition among market participants and will increase the amount of tax revenues for the government;
- Prevent quota holders to sell part of their quotas through *way bills*;
- Eliminate unnecessary road controls to improve the efficiency of the marketing systems and the welfare of farmers, traders and consumers.

