



Mongongo fruits are widely distributed and well known in Southern Africa as an important food source. In Zambia, a local company called Kalahari Natural Oils makes products from the rich Mongongo oil to treat dry skin and hair. The business of Kalahari Natural Oils is based on wild harvested natural products

Mongongo oil, the company has been seen at Kalahari Natural Oils supply chain. It now employs 10 people. The factory is processing 100 tons of Mongongo kernels using a traditional method. It holds 100 tons of kernels. The Kalahari Natural Oils products, such as hair oil and skin gel, are packed at the factory and advertised in the local media. They are available at retail outlets in salons. The price of Mongongo oil in the local markets is about K6,

which has made a marked difference in the lives of the women and primary producers. The producers are women such as those in the Sesheke District:

Mongongo project has helped me to take care of my three orphans and my own two children. I have been able to support seven in the household and me. As from 2006, I have been able to supply 150 kilograms of Mongongo oil to Kalahari Natural Oils.

Oils at a price of K4000.00 per kilogram. I have therefore raised K1, 800, 000.00 from Mongongo during the past three months (approximately US\$450.00).

Bertha learned to crack Mongongo at the age of seven. She notes the special skill involved in cracking and storing dried nuts and, like the local chief, has made sure to pass this on to her children. In addition to making cooking oil from the nuts, Bertha is also experienced at turning the 'mkuya' or pulp from the fruit into a tasty beer or porridge during times of drought. She is amazed at how much money can be made from the accessible and abundant Mongongo trees. In fact, many say that their involvement in the trade has helped to survive what has been a difficult and dry year in western Zambia. This includes the local chief who has expressed his support for the trade and the participation of his family members who work alongside Bertha in the supply chain. Despite the fact that most of the community women also learned to crack Mongongo from an early age for relish and cooking oil production, it was only recently discovered that a living could be made from natural products like these wild fruits.

The price paid for maize, the main staple food farmed by Betha, her husband and many other community members can fluctuate significantly, but is generally lower than for Mongongo kernels. Last year Betha's family sold little maize because the price was very low and up to three times lower



than Mongongo. This year, during the crop failure brought on by lack of rains, Betha's Mongongo earnings alone provided enough money to cover the major expenses of her large family.

In addition to the food that Bertha has purchased for the family from her work, she and her husband have also invested her earnings towards the family's future. Since 2006, Bertha has purchased two cows to assist with plowing in the coming seasons, two goats and has paid into the local parent teacher association for the ongoing education of her children. After a few more years in the supply chain, Bertha plans to build a larger home for her family. She also says that none of this would have been possible without her involvement in the natural products trade.

