



Constraints in the Cameroonian Eru chain

There are many consequences and limits for a viable, long term of trade in Eru:

The increasing demand for Eru combined with the largely uncontrolled harvest using unsustainable techniques has led to high pressure on the resource in the wild. This pressure has resulted in an increase in the distances and times taken to harvest: Collectors spend 3 hours to obtain a 10 kg bundle in the main production zones. Only 16% of harvesters have ever tried domesticating Eru and the quantity planted to date does not match market demand.

The harvest and trade of Eru faces many obstacles. From the production zones around Lekie to the border market of Idenau, about 50 illegal barriers and controls by police and forestry agents cost traders an estimated 265 000 FCFA (US\$589) for a 1.5 tonnes busload, even when they possess all official permits. On average 14% of costs are associated with illegal levies.

The current allocation of quotas is discriminatory and untransparent, hindering trade for a large proportion of actors in the chain and rendering it generally illegal and open to corruption. Permits are allocated to the few who control trade in licences and freight bills. Around 50% of Eru traded is unlicensed.

Eru leaves perish quickly: About 5% of production is lost during harvest, increasing to 26% in the markets.

Priority actions for a sustainable Eru value chain

Train harvesters and raise their awareness of techniques and tools for profitable and sustainable management of Eru in the wild, in both the current and potential production zones.

Revise and make transparent a legal framework that guarantees and delineates rights to all actors in the chain;

Inventory the amount of Eru the forest can sustainably provide, to enable better control by the state and calculate quantities actually available in Cameroon, to ensure a more accurate permitting process and control;

Add to the national plan for Eru domestication with sufficient financing by the State and the private sector;

Distinguish wild from cultivated Eru to allow more accurate quota setting and to exempt domesticated Eru from the regeneration tax, in order to stimulate cultivation;

Enhance processing methods, such as currently practiced small scale drying and packaging, to prolong the life of the product and reduce losses during transport and storage.

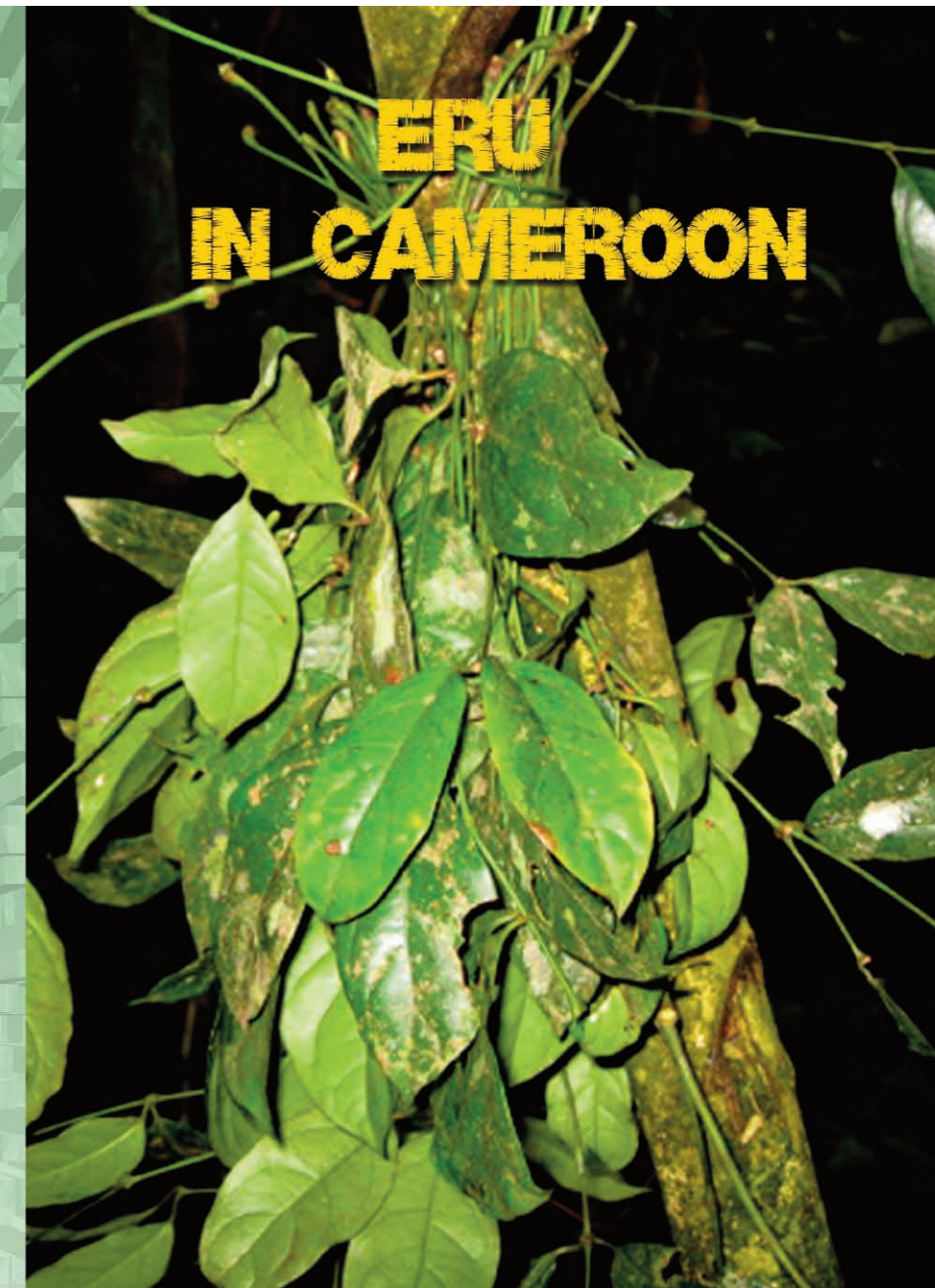
Endnotes

1 Ministry of Forests and Fauna 2006 Decision No 0009/D/MINFOR/SG/DF/SDAF of 13 January 2006 Concerning Exploitation Quotas for Special Forestry Products

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ERU IN CAMEROON



Mobilization and capacity building of Small and Medium Enterprises in Non-Wood Forest Products Value Chains in Central Africa



Eru in Cameroon

Eru has multiple uses for forest-based and rural communities and urban populations. It is one of the highest value non-timber forest products traded in and from Cameroon. When ecological, legal, economic and social aspects are taken into account, the chain from harvester to consumer can be more effective, sustainable and profitable.

What is *eru*?

This leafy liana from the forest is known as *eru* in Anglophone areas of Cameroon, *okok* in Beti and *koko* in the East. There are about 30 species of *Gnetum* in the world, but only two are present in Africa: one has shiny, larger and broader leaves and is less common (*Gnetum buchholzianum*), and the other has narrower leaves (*Gnetum africanum*). The Centre, Southwest and Littoral regions are the main production zones in Cameroon, where *Eru* leaves are eaten as a popular vegetable. In the South and East Cameroon, it is less commonly used in local cuisine and less exploited.

Uses and trade

There is also a national, regional and international trade in *eru* that generates substantial incomes for households, thanks to its high commercial value. From harvesters to traders, our studies show that Nigerians wholesalers make the highest profit margins compared to Cameroonian wholesalers, at 425 FCFA (US\$0.94) compared to 232 FCFA (US\$0.52) per kilogram. Families use income from selling *eru* to pay for education, health and nutrition and other basic needs, contributing to the reduction of poverty in rural populations. *Eru* leaves have a high nutritional value and provide an important source of protein, essential amino-acids and minerals. Used in the local pharmacopeia, they also have medicinal virtues and are used in a range of treatments, including for nerves, to stop bleeding, during pregnancy, as an anti-diuretic and for severe coughs and spleen problems.



Actors in the *eru* chain in Cameroon

Harvesters. In the principal production zones of Cameroon such as the Centre, Southwest and Littoral respectively, households collect on average 3.3 and 2.6 tons of *Eru* annually, equivalent to 318 500 FCFA (US\$637) and 562 798 FCFA (US\$1125). The difference in the income levels is due to the unit price, which is higher in the Southwest (220 FCFA compared to 110 FCFA per kg) because that region is closer to the large consumer market in Nigeria. In Littoral for example, approximately 92% of the production is sold, only 2.3% is consumed directly by the collectors, and the rest is lost due to damage by rain or rot. During holidays, the quantity collected increases because children join the harvest to finance their return to school. The rainy season signals the start of work in the fields and production consequently decreases.

Traders. Incomes from the *eru* trade are often unequally distributed across the country and actors in the chain. At least 1120 people are active in the chain in the Southwest and Littoral, where the average revenue per month is 450 000 FCFA for a permanent trader in Idenau market, compared to 60 000 FCFA in the other markets. The average monthly income for traders in other regions is around 108 000 FCFA. Entrepreneurs who have purchased exploitation permits from the Ministry of Forests and Fauna to trade in *eru* sometimes sell these (in the form of weigh bills) for a high price, which makes tracking trade difficult. *Eru* wholesalers in the Nigerian markets of Oron, Ikom, Iking and Calabar have an average monthly income of 255 000 FCFA.

Government administration. Because *eru* is classified as a Special Forestry Product,¹ the Ministry of Forests and Fauna is responsible for allocating annual trade quotas. Without an inventory, the quota is arbitrary depending upon the demand by enterprises. The state charges 10 FCFA per kg. However, less than 50% of *eru* harvested in the Southwest and Littoral is licensed. Even with a permit, traders and transporters usually have to pay 'informal taxes' at often-mixed checkpoints of militia, police, forest guards and custom agents who make the oversight roles ambiguous. These add on average 14% of the overall cost, and are compensated for by increasing the retail selling price and lowering the purchase price for farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is also involved in the chain, having recently initiated a national plan to promote domestication of *eru*.

Consumers. At the last stage in the chain, urban and rural restaurants and families are the main consumers of *eru*. They are a barometer of how much *eru* is exploited, being a favourite national dish. On average 2324 tonnes were harvested annually from 14 villages in the Southwest and Littoral from 2007 to 2009. Annually 3338 tonnes were traded throughout Southwest and Littoral markets during the same period. In 2009, 3698 tonnes were exported to the four main markets in Nigeria. An estimated 50 tonnes is exported to Europe annually, mainly to the African diaspora.

| Harvest Calendar | Janv | Feb | Mar | Apr | Ma | Jun | Jul | Ag | Se | oc | Nov | Dec |
|------------------------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|------------|-----|-----|----|-------------|----|-----|-----|
| Southwest and Littoral | Peak period | | | | Low period | | | | Peak period | | | |

Resources

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CIFOR
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Websites

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