



CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2019

Cape Aloe harvesting and trade in South Africa

SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

The Cape (or Bitter) Aloe is a tall, long-lived aloe endemic to southern Africa. Its thick, fleshy leaves are harvested for pharmaceutical and cosmetic purposes. It is South Africa's most heavily wild-harvested and commercially traded indigenous plant. The main product is the bitter juice from the leaves used to make aloe bitters, widely considered to have laxative, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-arthritis and antimicrobial properties. Most (around 95%) remains wild-harvested, with a small amount under cultivation.

Cape Aloe harvesting or "tapping" occurs over a large area of the Eastern and Western Cape Provinces, typically by harvesters who are poor and have low educational levels. Harvesting takes place on communal land, with the agreement

of the Chief, or on private land, in which case a proportion of income is paid to the landowner. Leaves are cut by hand, leaving some on the tree, and stacked in a circle to drain. The sap is then sold to a middleman, processor or exporter.

The bulk of the harvested aloe products are exported, primarily to Europe and North America, although some processing takes place in the country.

Traditional knowledge regarding Cape Aloe harvesting is held in harvesting families and is passed from generation to generation. Women are disproportionately represented among aloe tappers, particularly in the Eastern Cape where most are women.



CAPE ALOE
Aloe ferox



APPENDIX II



NOT ASSESSED

LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

The harvest of Cape Aloe for international trade supports thousands of rural South Africans and their families. Harvesting communities typically have very low employment. A good day's harvesting may produce a 25 litre drum of sap, which may sell for approx. USD 35 (approx. Int\$ 212). In 2007, estimated returns to rural harvesters were estimated at USD 830,000 – USD 1,034,500. Aloe harvest is a particularly important resource for the poorest people, as access barriers are low. For the poorest harvesters, aloe tapping is their only source of income, while others may have other part-time work in agriculture, forestry, or labouring. Some entire rural communities are dependent on aloe tapping. Income is used for basic household needs including school fees and supplies.



Photo: Graeme Pienaar.



In one studied community, 21/22 harvester households were headed by a woman, with an average of 2.8 dependents at home. Few (2/22) had other work. A temporary ban in 2009 led to financial hardship in this community.

Harvest and trade can also contribute to broader livelihoods and development outcomes,

including building community networks, skills and capacities, and strengthening land tenure, resource access, species management and local enterprise development. Cooperatives are a key way that harvesters have sought to gain a larger share of the value of the product, through carrying out some stages of processing and retaining a greater share of the benefits.

CONSERVATION IMPACTS

Cape Aloe in South Africa remains common and abundant throughout its extensive distribution range, and is not threatened by harvest. However, there are signs of localized damage to harvested plants and low flowering occurrences in some harvested areas, indicating a need for greater sustainability safeguards.

Harvest guidelines have been developed, including limiting the number of leaves harvested at

a time and leaving a minimum 12 months between harvests.

Cape Aloe harvest appears to provide some incentives for its conservation, with harvesters being careful to leave some leaves on the plant (in environments where state enforcement would not detect breaches), and landowners maintaining aloe populations due to the income they can derive from them.

LESSONS LEARNT AND DIRECTIONS

Harvest and trade of wild Cape Aloe provides important livelihood benefits to some of South Africa's poorest rural people, and does not threaten its conservation.

KEY CHALLENGES AND DIRECTIONS INCLUDE:

- Increasing the ability of communities to form producer associations and carry out value-adding. This requires financial support, training and capacity building;
- CITES listing of Cape Aloe has strengthened government oversight, but implementation poses barriers to full participation of communities in gaining benefits from trade, as they cannot afford permit fees.
- Some markets avoid purchasing wild-harvested CITES-listed species. For

instance, some countries will not import Cape Aloe due to the fact it is a CITES-listed species; this benefits Cape Aloe's competitor Aloe vera, despite the latter being highly commercialized, with no habitat retention benefits or small-scale livelihood benefits. Increased communication from CITES regarding CITES rules and benefits of well-managed legal trade to rural communities and species conservation may help resolve such misconceptions.

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IN COLLABORATION WITH:



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