



Central African Regional Program
for the Environment

Investigator/Contact
Institutional Affiliation
Contact Information

Abstract

SOS Fund number - # 6c.018

Proposal Title: ***THE TRANSFER OF THE ERU (Gnetum africanum, G. buchholzianum) DOMESTICATION MODEL TO VILLAGE-BASED FARMERS ON AND AROUND MOUNT CAMEROON***

Start date: **2/01/99**
Duration: **10 months**
Total Grant amount: **\$10,625**

Paul Blackmore
Mount Cameroon Project, B.P. 437, Limbe, Cameroon

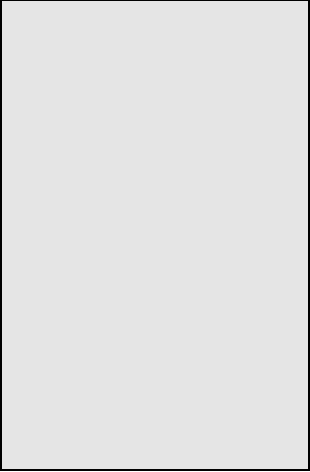
Telephone: 237 43-18-83/85/72/76 ex 381; Fax: 237 43-18-83/85/72/76 ex 381

The non-timber forest product known as "Eru" is an important vegetable crop consumed by people living throughout the forested regions of Central Africa. Originally eaten as a forest food by the Bayangi people, infrastructure improvements and migration have resulted in a demand from other ethnic groups both from Central Africa and abroad. To satisfy local, national, and now international demand, the harvesting pressure on Eru has increased dramatically and in some areas this has pushed the species into regional extinction.

Eru consists of the leaves of two species from the family Gnetaceae; *Gnetum africanum* and *G. buchholzianum*. Both these species occur as vines climbing high into the forest canopy. The crop is destructively harvested by cutting and then pulling the vine from the forest canopy. It is then stripped of its leaves, which are baled for transport. This harvesting method almost always kills the plant.

Currently all the Eru marketed is harvested directly from the wild, with none produced on either plantations or at the village farm level. The combination of increased demand and the destructive harvesting methods used, has resulted in increasing scarcity of the product, together with an increase in market price. This is relevant because for many poor rural people, Eru is the best source of protein available. Unfortunately, as the market prices increase, the people who need it the most are unable to buy the vegetable.

Over the past four years, Limbe Botanic Garden has successfully developed methods for the propagation and domestication of both *Gnetum africanum* and *G. buchholzianum*. Trial cultivation under different soil and light conditions, using a variety of genotypes has resulted in very positive yields and acceptable taste, colour, texture, and quality. A range of cultural techniques have been developed. These include intensive Eru production nurseries, and a semi-wild technique.



The next step is to take this domestication Programme into villages and farm/fallow systems. We have the encouraging results from the cultivation trials, and have been approached by several individuals interested in producing Eru from domesticated *Gnetum spp.* plants. With this in mind, we feel confident that our attempts will be successful.

The work is best considered within the context of a larger time scale. The first part of the work has already taken place with the establishment of initial gene bank material and development of cultivation techniques for Eru. The second part identifies people interested in adopting those cultivation techniques, trains them in the methods in a workshop, and establishes field farm-based plantations. The third part will be to monitor the results of the workshop and subsequent farmer domestication activities, as well as how household consumption and sales of Eru change with respect to wild harvesting.