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Abstract

Although rattans play an important role in the local economies of most West and Central African countries, they have been almost completely neglected by the scientific community, forestry institutions and official legislation. The taxonomy of African rattans at the species level remains confused and even less is known about their ecology. In addition, little is known about their trade internationally, although it is known to occur, and there have been no recorded attempts at silviculture, in contrast to the industrial development of rattans in SE Asian taxa.

Despite this neglect, the rattan cottage industry in Africa has thrived due to the increased demand for cane products domestically and internationally. Cane furniture can be found in most African cities with the forest zone and some raw cane is subject to export to countries such as China, Japan and the Philippines. However, this use and trade had led to scarce and irregular supplies of the raw material to the point that in Cameroon, for example, cane products are often more expensive than their timber analogues. This situation is a cause for concern, particularly in view of the paucity of information on African rattans.

The overall objective of this component of the research programme is to assess the role West African rattans play in the local economy and to assess the cultivation and silvicultural potential for the sustainable development of rattans in agroforestry systems for the optimisation of their usage.

Specific outputs are:

- The presentation of baseline data on the ecology and regeneration of rattans in natural forest and farm fallows.
- To provide an ethnobotanical survey of African rattans based on extensive field work and interviews.
- The presentation of baseline data on both the existing and potential rattan market, and socio-economic importance.
- The establishment and maintenance of propagation trials and assessment of post-propagation cultivation requirements.
- The establishment and maintenance of field evaluation trials of the most economically-important species of rattan in on-farm agroforestry situations.



- Dissemination of the above findings to farmers groups, NGO's, government agencies and conservation and development initiatives for the increased valorisation of an established NWFP that may contribute to the mitigation of deforestation through alternative income generation and intensive (and diverse) agroforestry systems.
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