

Empowerment, mobilization and future growth of a community driven project: women and the Marula.

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Abstract

Bulilimamangwe is one of the poorest, most marginalized areas of Zimbabwe. Bordering Botswana it has a high level of emigration of working age men and to a lesser extent women. Those left caring for the family and homesteads tend to be women and the elderly. In 2001 a community driven project was started under the Kellogg funded Integrated Rural Development Programme, to utilize the indigenous Marula trees found in the area. From the onset project members were mostly elderly women.

This paper documents the progress of the project to date. Achievements of the project are listed and problems faced, examined and possible solutions put forward. Challenges, opportunities and conflicts are discussed. Present and future partnerships between the Marula project, the IRDP, government agencies, Non-governmental Organisations, the university, the youth and the elderly are presented.

As the project grows, and simple hand operated machines are introduced to simplify and speed up the extraction of the kernel and oil, higher returns may mean that there is a danger that women currently involved in the project may lose their ownership of it and become further marginalized. To offset this possibility, research will be needed to select members for further training and to focus a basic literacy project for interested members the direction this may take is discussed..

Introduction

Africa is full of so-called ‘development projects’ purporting to be catering for community needs. While empowerment is very much the word and concept of the moment, often it is more of a lip service to the people than an actuality. The Kellogg funded Integrated Rural Development Project has tried to take the ideas of empowerment and community mobilization into the field and to assist the local people in formulating their own directions for development of their communities. The overall objective of the I.R.D.P. is to reduce poverty, where poverty is seen from a broad multi-dimensional perspective, encompassing inadequate food, poor health, and lack of access to knowledge and skills. In order to attempt to combat poverty, the I.R.D.P. has four core objectives

- increasing civic participation
- developing human capacity
- increasing economic opportunities
- enhancing health and well being.

All project activities are expected to achieve in some way all or most of these objectives.

However the nature of such projects is long term and not always clear sailing. The Marula project in Bulilimamangwe district of Zimbabwe illustrates some of the strengths that can be built on, and weaknesses that have to be overcome, in order to achieve a viable, self-sustaining project in many poor and marginalized rural areas.

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Background to the area

Bulilimamangwe is situated in the South West of Zimbabwe , along the border with Botswana as shown in Figure 1 (I.R.D.P. Plumtree office), see Annexure 1.

The population of the District is around 180 000 (C.S.O. 2002). It is a highly rural district with most of the population living in villages often with fairly dispersed and scattered homesteads. Outside Plumtree- the only urban settlement within the district- economic activities are mainly confined to agriculture and wildlife utilization with very minor service provision. Agriculturally most of the district falls into Natural Region IV of Zimbabwe, a region most suitable for semi-extensive farming as it experiences annual rainfall totals of between 450 and 650 mm of rainfall and is subject to periodic seasonal droughts. Rainfall is too low and uncertain for any significant cash cropping and traditionally most of the population rely on livestock production and the growing of a few drought resistant crops. Wildlife is of some importance in the district, particularly to those wards on the periphery. The Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) operates within the district.

While unemployment figures are difficult to gauge in an area of this nature, the 1992 Census (Central Statistics Office, Zimbabwe 1993) puts unemployment at around 43% of the economically active. The Rural District Council (RDC 1999) believes that real levels have since risen, due in part to the annual release of school leavers onto the job market.

There are high levels of out migration to urban centers in Zimbabwe and to neighbouring countries of South Africa and Botswana. Greatest numbers of emigrants come from the male, economically active age groups, resulting in a population structure skewed strongly in favour of females.

The establishment of the Marula project

It is against this background that the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was set up in the area in 2001. The programme targeted 8 of the 35 wards in the district, choosing wards representative of the different land ownership patterns found within the area. After meetings with members of the community from the eight wards it was decided to set up an Implementation Committee with 2 community facilitators from each ward. This committee meets monthly and produces a quarterly Implementation Plan. Two traditional leaders rotate on this committee. The community also felt that the activities of the programme should be monitored and set up a monitoring and Evaluation Committee who are engaged in ongoing monitoring of programme activities and conduct field visits every 3 months.

The Marula Project was started in 2002 by women in the IRDP wards. It was the result of consultation with the community who identified the Marula as an abundant natural resource found through most of the Wards and with the potential to be harnessed to assist economic growth.

Traditionally the Marula has many uses. Most women are aware of a variety of uses for the tree and its products, ranging from utilization of the fruits for direct consumption and alcohol, to the

use of the Kernels for oil and crushed to mix with vegetables, to medicinal uses and even for use as a termite poison. (group verbal reports, project workshop 2003). Similar uses are documented throughout Southern Africa (Marula Organisation, S.A. 2003). Therefore this project in effect sought to build on the traditional significance of the Marula in order to make it a vehicle for economic empowerment. The majority of traditional uses of the tree involve utilisation by women so this choice of project had, and has, high potential to involve and better the lives of the most disadvantaged rural women and started from an existing knowledge base.

Economic benefits to the community can only be sustainable if women can control and direct the development of the project and be at the forefront of engineering its growth. From the onset women were directly involved in formulating the project. In July 2002 ten representatives of beneficiary wards went on a 'look and learn' tour to a women's project in the Tswapong hills of Botswana. Here they were able to observe and interact with women who were engaged in a similar project to theirs and to share in their experiences. The 'look and learn' concept has been widely used in the IRDP, involving a chance for interaction by and between ordinary project members and a less theoretically approach to those of traditional instruction.

In April 2003 a 'Marula Project awareness and planning workshop for IRDP sites' was held at Plumtree. Representatives from all the IRDP wards and from related stakeholders attended. Of the 25 participants 22 were female. This is reflective of the grassroots attendance at the workshop where the key participants were Marula kernel chairladies. Ndebele was the language throughout, acting as a unifying language in an area where wards have different dominant languages (Kalanga, Tswana and so on). It is also worth noting that most participants had further roles in the community, including home based care givers, adult literacy tutors, pre-school teachers, church leaders, a nutrition garden chairperson as well as mothers and grandmothers with their critical roles of caring for families. These additional village community roles reflect the level to which project members are active members of their communities and the ability of the project to integrate into all facets of community life. Those present at the workshop drew up an implementation plan for the project for 2003, which was taken back to the communities.

Project development and progress

For the two years during which the project has been operational, activities have been confined to extracting Marula nuts which are collected by IRDP vehicle from ward collection points monthly during the production period (July to October) and taken to sell to a more established women's project in Botswana (Kgetsi ya Tsie). In Botswana the oil is extracted from the nut and sold on. Figures 2. to 4. Annex 2, show the collection process taking place.

The IRDP has acted as a facilitator in setting up the project. It brought people together from different communities within the District and helped provide a vehicle for ideas that could be used to reduce poverty within the community. The IRDP provides the communities with a grant through the Kellogg Foundation.

'The grant was tailor made to provide a pseudo loan scheme in the form of a revolving fund. The loan from a separate bank account is used to buy the Marula nuts from the women involved in the cracking. After selling the nuts the money is then deposited back into the account as a revolving fund. Profits

generated thereafter are ploughed back to the beneficiary communities to assist in the implementation of any identified development project.’ (Ngwenya and Tshuma, 2002)

The IRDP has therefore enabled the community to access funds to initiate the project in a situation where loans would not be forthcoming from formal money lending institutions.

Total production for each of the initial years has been remarkably similar, however there can be seen to be significant differences in monthly totals.

Fig. 5. Monthly and yearly total of nuts collected

Month	2002	2003
	Kgs	kgs
July	82	199
August	89	178
September	102	28
October	121	no collection
Total	394	395

Source: IRDP Bulilimamangwe reports and collection records 2003

Differences in quantities gathered in particular months from year to year can be attributed to differences in rainfall patterns and in the ability to travel to purchase nuts. Fuel was scarce and difficult to procure in Zimbabwe in 2003, therefore the purchasing team was limited in its ability to visit sites. Only five most productive wards were visited in 2003 because of transport restraints and it is likely that production might have been significantly higher if more groups could have been reached and more frequent visits made. Collections were only made from Izimnyama Communal in August and only the most productive ward- Masendu- was collected from in September.

Fig. 6. Production per ward 2003

Ward	kgs
Masendu	307
Huwana	40
Natane	13
Dombolefu	25
Izimnyama Communal	6.5
Total	391.5*

Source: IRDP Bulilimamangwe 2003

* Disparity from figure in Fig 5. due to slight differences in records

Masendu can be seen to be by far the most productive ward. This reflects both the abundance of the resource and the poverty of the community which provides a motivation towards any income generation available. Masendu is the poorest of the eight wards in terms of economic base and infrastructure. There are high levels of motivation within Masendu and this is where there is most commitment to the project. Masendu is also the home area of one of the only men involved in project organization, who has done a great deal to organize the groups in the area. The IRDP has acted as a facilitator in setting up the project. It brought people together from different communities within the District and helped provide a vehicle for ideas that could be used

Fig. 7. Production by village, Masendu ward 2003

Total	Village	Month		
		July	August	September
kgs		kgs	kgs	kgs
143.6	Makumbi	81	49.1	13.5
53.6	Mambo	22.4	26.4	4.8
4.7	Tshoboroma	1.7	1.5	1.5
24.1	Thanda One	9.6	13.4	1.1
78.5	Masendu Central	28.8	42.6	7.1
2.8	Luvuluma	2.8	—	—
307.3	Total	146.3	133.0	28.0

Source: IRDP Bulilimamangwe collection record sheets 2003

As can be seen in Figure 7. above, most production occurs in one village within Masendu ward, namely Makumbi which produced 46.7% of Masendu's total 2003 production and 36.4% of nut kernels produced for the whole project in 2003 . Both Masendu Central and Mambo villages also produced significant amounts. Overall Masendu ward produced 77.8% of the total project output for 2003 and the three top producing villages 69.8% of the total.

Commitment to the project is reflected in both the numbers of women involved and their consistent production over the three months of the season. Only indications can be arrived at for the 2003 season as inconsistent ability to collect nuts from the villages may have lowered some women's returns and been a deterrent to production. However an indication of involvement can be arrived at and is reflected in Figure 8. below.

Fig. 8. Number of months individual women delivered nuts to collection points

Ward and village	Number of months women delivered		
	Three months	Two months	One month
Total			
<u>Masendu Ward</u>			
Makumbi	9	17	28
54			
Mambo	3	12	21
36			
Masendu Central	1	11	16
28			
Thanda One	1	7	4
12			
Tshoboroma	2	—	—
2			
Luvuluma	only collected in one month		4
4			
Total for ward	16	47	73
136			
% of ward group	11.8%	34.5%	53.7%
<u>Huwana ward</u>		only collected over two months	
Ndutswa		3	10
13			
Ngwala		3	4
7			
Mabhulani		1	3
4			
Huwana Village 2			2
2			
Zuzaphi			2
2			
Tambana			2
2			
Total for ward		7	23
30			
% of ward group		23.3%	76.7%
<u>Dombolefu ward</u>		only collected over two months	
Mbwena		1	5
6			
Dombolefu			3
3			
Ndadza			3
3			

5	Makhwa			5
17	Total for ward		1	16
	% of ward group		5.9%	94.1%
	<u>Natane Ward</u>		only collected in July	
	Ntunungwe South			2
	2			
	Ntunungwe North			8
	8			
	Mbila			2
	2			
	Total for ward			12
	12			
	<u>Izinyama Communal Ward</u>		only collected in August	
	Magingwana			3
	3			
	Total for ward			3
	3			
	Overall totals	16	55	127
	198			
	% of overall group	8%	27.8%	64.1%
	100%			

A total number of 198 women were directly involved in Marula kernel production in 2003. While some of these women produced very low totals they were still actively involved and have the potential to increase production and involvement as the project develops in the future. Masendu ward contained the core of most committed women, the 8% who produced kernels in each month of collection.

Fig. 9. Individual women's 2003 production levels

Ward Kgs	Frequency of women in each production category							
	<0.9	1 - 1.9	2 - 2.9	3 - 3.9	4 - 4.9	5 - 5.9	6 - 6.9	7 - 7.9
Masendu	34	37	23	17	7	5	0	2
Huwana	10	13	2	1	3			
Dombolefu	7	7	1					
Natane	6	6						
Izinyama Com.	0	2			1			
Total	57	65	26	18	11	5	0	2

8 - 8.9 9 - 9.9 14 - 14.9 **Total**

Masendu	2		1	128
Huwana		1		30
Dombolefu	1			16
Natane				12
Izinyama Com.				3
Total	3	1	1	189

Source: IRDP Bulilimamangwe Marula collection record sheets 2003

Most women achieved fairly low production levels, the largest number falling into the 1 – 1.9 kgs. category, followed by the even lower category of less than 1 kg. Mean production was 2.07 kgs. However a few women achieved much higher totals one reaching a total of over 14kgs in the season. Production totals may be misleading as some women work alone and others along with other members of the family. However low production levels are of concern and may be attributed to the laborious task of cracking the Marula nut to extract the kernel.

Achievements

The project has survived the first two years with a significant number of women involved. This is some achievement given the difficulties involved in physically extracting the kernels and in operating during abnormal conditions of fuel shortage and economic stress during the 2003 season.

In terms of IRDP objectives, while the project brings very low financial returns to the women producers, it has opened a door for the further development of economic opportunity. Some of the women involved in the project have had the opportunities to interact with other women engaged in similar activities beyond Zimbabwe's borders and have also participated in an interactive workshop situation. This has served to build on local women's knowledge base and to break away from a situation where academic experts from outside the community decide upon the direction of the project. Sharing of information by women in similar situations and environments in adjoining countries is important in building a knowledge base that is rooted in indigenous knowledge and hands on experience, rather than in theories. Project members are participating directly and this is in line with the IRDP objective of increasing civic participation. Marula groups have developed capacities of organization, and shared skills of kernel extraction and Marula use. In the short term the project has provided a small amount of financial return that can be used to enhance the family or individual well-being, in the long term the project has the potential to allow members a more significant income and involvement.

Problems faced and some solutions

At present most women are producing quite low totals (see Fig. 6.), one of the main reasons for this lies in the labour involved in cracking the Marula nuts in order to extract the kernels. This was the greatest concern of women attending the 2002 workshop and is voiced as the limiting factor in raising production. Most projects elsewhere in the Southern African Region have machines to help extract the kernels from the nut, but to import the technology from neighbouring countries is expensive. In the light of this the local Intermediate Technology

Development Group have been working to develop a decortication machine to assist with the removal of the oil bearing kernels from the nut. Testing is about to take place in the field. It is anticipated that the use of this machine will significantly reduce the labour involved in extracting the kernels, will make the task less arduous and will allow women to increase production to much higher levels.

Monetary returns from production have been very low. During the 2003 season the IRDP were buying nuts at a rate of Zimbabwean \$1000 to the kilogram. This could buy very little. The low returns can mostly be attributed to the primary production nature of the project to date, profits that result from extracting oil from the kernels are being realized by the group that is buying the kernels in Botswana. They are also able to add further value by making soaps and other cosmetic products using the oil. In order for real return to be realized by the Bulilimangwe Marula Project they need to add value at the Project site. The Intermediate Technology Development Group have produced an oil pressing machine that can be used within the rural environment and with this the oil can be extracted within the area and either sold or marketed within other products like soaps. Already there are other projects in Zimbabwe that are producing soaps utilizing natural plant and tree oils and these have the potential to be marketed locally and outside the country.

Challenges

At present the project members are predominately elderly women. Figure 10, Annexure 3 shows a very old mother who was top producer in 2002 with her adult daughter who also produces nuts. This is in part because older women have more time available to crack nuts. The extraction may also be assisted by children and youth (Ngwenya and Tsuma 2002). While these women have a wealth of experience and traditional skills, they lack the skills of business management that will be needed if the project is to expand. In order to build on existing skills and control their own project women will need to be selected to learn the new skills needed. This may result in marginalisation of some of the most enthusiastic project members as they lack basic literacy. Literacy levels in Bulilimangwe as a whole are low, with an illiteracy rate of around 25% (Rural District Council 1999). The Zimbabwe Government census of 1992 records a literacy rate of 72.06% of females over the age of fifteen. There is a steep decline in literacy as one reaches the older generations and the 1992 census shows 76% of the population of over sixty-five as illiterate. Records of Marula Kernel buying where women are asked to sign their names on receipt of payment show the following picture

Fig. 11. Project members unable to write name by ward 2003

Ward	% unable to sign
Masendu	35.4
Huwana	53.3
Natane	41.6
Dombolefu	23.5
Overall	37.6

Source: IRDP Bulilimangwe, Marula collection records 2003

Of the top ten percent of producers, 42.1% cannot sign their name. Many of the women who could sign their name did so in a very shaky manner and could probably do little further writing (observation July 2003 and analysis of records). Before the project really takes off it will be necessary to identify those with the potential for further training and to offer basic literacy skills to the majority of members.

Opportunities

The ability of IRTG to produce decortication and oil extraction machines that can be sourced relatively cheaply and operated on site will open many opportunities for the project. Once testing has taken place decortication machines may be placed in the productive wards. Masendu and Huwana, the two most productive and involved wards, may be the starting point and trial the machines in the 2004 season. Machines have the advantage of being relatively simple and manually operated and can be set up at a central point within the ward. The oil press ram machine will probably be sited within Masendu ward, this being by far the most productive ward and kernels can be collected and brought here for pressing into oil.

There is already a significant knowledge base within the community and this may be harnessed in order to expand the project into marketing other products derived from the Marula. The most obvious product to market is jam made from the Marula fruit; this has already been produced by other projects within Zimbabwe (Safire) and other countries within the Region. Jam is relatively easy to produce and market. More imaginative products may stem from more traditional uses and their production could go some way to ensuring that women retain control not only of the resource, but also of their indigenous knowledge.

Bulilimangwe is adjacent to a main international border and is therefore in a good position to export to adjoining countries of Botswana and South Africa. Export would allow the project to access foreign currency, which could assist the community and the country as a whole. Once the project is established it is in a good position to attempt to source foreign markets and look at international Fair Trade markets. If reliable markets can be found that can consume 80% of project output, the project can apply for 'Export Processing Zone' status, with the incentives that accompany it. This is in line with Zimbabwe Government policy where small and medium scale enterprises are now being targeted for E.P.Z. status.

There is much expertise within the community that can be harnessed to the benefit of the project and the community at large. A few adult literacy tutors are already part of the project membership and the IRDP youth associates and research assistants many of whom have completed 'O' and 'A' level could be given the basic skills to teach adult literacy to interested project members. This would give the youth a further role in the community where many are already active and have proved their organizational capabilities in organizing field days and visits. Youth would be equipped with further useful skills while at the same time performing a critical role in community development.

Funding for some initiatives could come from members of the community who are at present resident outside the country. There is already evidence that these absent community members are

funding initiatives in their home wards and have set up development associations where they decide on projects to initiate (Dube 2003, Ndlovu 2003)

The Marula project could be expanded to involve use of other wild tree products such as the *Jatropha*, which produces seeds in the months preceding the Marula. Similar equipment is needed for oil extraction and it may be possible to combine production of the two species. *Jatropha* has been used in making soap in some areas of Zimbabwe and for oil for leather making (Pratt et al, 2002).

Bulilimangwe is a highly mobilized community. Many Non-Government Organisations operate within the District and a number of reports in the media have featured NGO representatives praising the co-operation and togetherness of the people (Various reports in printed and television media 2003). This makes it a rewarding but critical community to work with. The wards have little time for projects and agencies that they feel are not actively assisting them in developing their communities. This means that programmes are highly accountable.

The more established Marula producers in Southern Africa have established a network where ideas and experiences can be shared. This also has the potential to act as a joint marketing agency. The Bulilimangwe would benefit from partnerships within this network.

Partnerships within the community and between the community and the IRDP

The programme operates within a closely-knit community where various Government and non-government agencies exist. These have been involved in various IRDP activities where appropriate. The Marula Project has worked closely with Government Extension Personnel, in particular the local Forestry Commission Officer and the Department of Natural Resources. The local CAMPFIRE officer has also been involved at various stages of the project.

IRDP wards and villages hold regular field days where members of other wards visit to observe and learn about developments taking place. These are organized by the communities themselves and provide opportunities to share good ideas and spread initiatives. They also breed pride within communities. Such a field day in 2003 to visit water harvesting taking place in villages in Dombofu ward was organized by the villagers, with food provided partly through CAMPFIRE, entertainment by the youth and demonstrations of how to construct harvesting tanks by the women.

Unlike many Non-Government Organisations working in Zimbabwe today, the IRDP is non-partisan in its approach. The Rural District Council is closely involved in the project but so are any other organizations based in the area. While there was initially some distrust of the programme it has managed to be transparent and is now generally accepted and understood.

Youth, research and the University

The overall objectives of the Research Unit of the IRDP are as follows:

- To identify, prioritise, facilitate and co-ordinate multi-disciplinary research programmes;
- To facilitate participation of rural communities in the identification of research themes, conducting research and disseminating research outputs;

- To enhance and develop the capacity of university graduate students to conduct participatory research in rural communities;
 - To appropriately document and disseminate research outputs to a diverse range of clientele such as rural people, academics and policy makers, among others.
- (Francis 2002)

In Bulilimamangwe a multi-disciplinary team of some Zimbabwe Open University academic staff from Bulawayo have entered into partnership with the IRDP to undertake participatory research within the community. The main role of the University members has been in line with the second of the IRDP research objectives listed, that of training members of the community to identify and conduct their own research. A group of school leaver youth within the community have been identified as 'Youth Research Associates' and attended two workshops in 2003 aimed at helping them identify suitable areas for research, formulate research gathering instruments, collect data in the field and analyse collected data. Research therefore, serves the dual function of collecting valuable data to document project progress and to chart ways forward, and as a means to directly impart research skills within the community.

There is a need for greater research into the background of the members of the Marula Project in order to identify strengths and weaknesses, those suitable for particular training, and the current internal patterns of production taking place. An initial background questionnaire was formulated and discussed and criticised as part of a workshop session on designing questionnaires that was held with the 'Research Associates' in October 2003. This should have been taken into the field for data collection by Research Associates in November 2003 but at this time the IRDP programme was completing its initial phase and all projects were being reviewed, funds for subsistence and for dispatch of questionnaires into the wards were unavailable and so the exercise was put on hold. Phase 2 of the programme is about to start and the Marula Project is one of those that will continue into this phase, so data will now become necessary for planning the future and to document developments of the project. In this Phase all research is being viewed as integral to particular projects or training programmes rather than as a divorced as a programme of its own. This will hopefully ensure that research is only taking place where it can be justified as useful to the community and will mean justification and accountability of research taking place.

The University can therefore, be seen as just another partner in the community and is in a position to justify its existence by serving to help facilitate community driven research. Ultimately it may be a medium to devolve skills to the community.

Conflicts

A number of conflicts have already emerged and have been identified by the women themselves (discussion with women and reports from groups during 2003 Plumtree workshop). The Marula is traditionally a communal resource, while women may harvest from trees immediately adjacent to their homesteads some trees are harvested or used by the whole community and even those within a member's field are not seen as a private resource. Traditional fruit tree tenure can be complex and seemingly contradictory, with verbal information given by women not always tallying. This situation is mirrored elsewhere in the Southern African Region and has at times been confused by colonial ideas of ownership that have been superimposed on the traditional (Kreike,2003).

The season for harvesting of Marula nuts falls in the Zimbabwe dry season when traditionally livestock are allowed to roam, fodder at this time is scarce and animals tend to congregate around Marula trees and feast on the fruit. This puts them in direct competition with the women who wish to harvest the nuts.

Further conflict has been experienced between women engaged in the project and men who wish to cut down the non fruit bearing trees to use for timber. This is because the trees are perceived as being useless for project needs. The women now understand that these male trees are necessary in order that the other trees bear fruit, but they are having trouble in convincing the men of this.

Solutions in both cases may lie in education and increased involvement of the whole community. Men need to be made aware of the need for the presence of male trees and be therefore encouraged to preserve them. Efforts need to be made to protect the trees from livestock. Awareness of the value of the Marula is likely to result when it is seen to generate significant monetary returns. However to enable this to happen it is necessary to impose some sort of management strategy to ensure that it is utilized to maximum benefit of the project members and of the community as a whole. The onus is on the women involved in the project to present a case for control to the community. Support from the traditional leadership is essential in this. The presence of members of the traditional leadership on the Implementation Committee of the Bulilimamange IRDP should assist but there is still a need to convince the community that it is in all their interests to ensure that the Marula can be used to maximum benefit. This means that women have to acquire the capacity to make their voices and concerns heard in a mainly male dominated situation

There is an additional long-term concern regarding the sustainability of Marula usage as the project grows. Studies elsewhere show concerns over Marula regeneration where intensive fruit collection prior to nut processing resulted in unavailability of seeds for dispersal and germination (Mosesane 2003). This can happen when large quantities of fruit are harvested prior to nut processing so that decortication can continue between harvest seasons. Women in Bulilimamangwe do not seem concerned about this, as at the moment they only extract kernels during the three or four months of the harvest season and the project is too small for them to envisage depletion. However it may become a very real concern should the project take off, once machines to enable decortication to take place easily are in place, and if value is added locally thereby making participation in the project a lucrative option.

Conclusion

While the IRDP Marula Project has faced a number of problems in its first two years, it has remained active and women from the poorest wards continue to support it most. The hard labour of cracking nuts has in part led to a relatively low output per person, but this is likely to change if machines for decortication of nuts designed locally are made available in the field. Financial returns and greater empowerment and capacity building is likely to result if an oil press machine is introduced and oil can be extracted locally. This will also eliminate the transport difficulties and costs of taking nuts to Botswana to sell in their unprocessed form. Members of the project will now be faced with the challenge of looking for markets and developing marketing and

business skills. This will mean building and strengthening existing partnerships and acquiring new ones.

While the majority of existing project members are elderly women, the youth are also involved in the project through research as part of developing their own skills and may be increasingly involved in training project members in basic literacy and recording skills. Partnerships within the community itself can therefore be observed, both between the age groups, and between the formally educated and less formally educated.

Conflicts over the use of the tree will need to be resolved and this may eventually lead to a need to examine its status as a communal resource. The sustainability of the Marula resources will also need to be planned for as the project grows. There is also a pressing need to empower as many project members with skills to enable them to retain hold of the project as it develops.

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