

The Status of Native Ornamental Plants and Their Potential Utilization in the Floriculture Industry in Kenya

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Abstract

Native ornamental plants have recently gained acceptance in the floriculture markets globally. However, exotic flowers such as roses, carnations, statice and arabicum dominate the floriculture exports in Kenya while native flowers including mobydick, *Gomphocarpus fruticosus* and papyrus reeds, *Cyperus sp.* constitute less than 0.1 percent. Papyrus reeds are bush harvested while the recently cultivated mobydick has had phenomenal growth from 13Kg in 2001 to 288,707Kg in 2006. Because of its minimum production input requirements, mobydick production is dominated by the smallholder growers. A major production challenge is discolouration of the green bolls to brownish and purple colours. A recent survey showed that the problem is widespread in all the major mobydick production areas affecting 87.5% of the crops. Trials carried out have shown relationship of boll discolouration with plant nutrition, boll maturity, soil pH, climatic factors, varietal characteristics, cross pollination or a combination of these factors. The crop also faces pest challenges including viral and bacterial infections that cause blackening of stem and bolls, plant stunting and root rots resulting in plant death. Root knot nematodes, cotton stainers, aphids, mites, thrips and bollworms commonly attack the crop. Tissue culture propagation has been successfully used for rapid multiplication of disease free and true to type progeny with uniform bolls and internode length. Utilization of native ornamental plants from the rich Kenyan flora promotes involvement of resource poor rural communities in the floriculture industry for income generation, thus reducing urban migration in search of jobs. Cultivation of the locally adapted species enhances ex-situ conservation of their constituent genes and raises their public profile from their under-utilized status to commercial cash crops. Participatory development and dissemination of production, postharvest and marketing strategies and strengthened linkages in the floriculture value chain is suggested for sustainable utilization of native ornamentals in Kenya.