

## **The Role of Indigenous Fruit Trees in Rural Livelihoods: The Case of Communities around the Mwekera Area, Copperbelt Province, Zambia**

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### **Abstract**

The utilization and commercialization of indigenous fruit trees have in the past been overlooked by extension agencies due to the misconception that they do not play a major role in contributing to rural livelihoods. There is new and increasing emphasis on the contribution of non-timber forest products in improving livelihoods and the sustainable management of forest ecosystems of the *Miombo* woodlands. This study was conducted in the Mwekera area in the Copperbelt province, Zambia to determine the role of indigenous fruit trees in rural livelihoods, using a variety of participatory rural appraisal techniques and a household survey to collect data on the use of indigenous fruits. The study revealed that 99 per cent of the respondents experience hunger every year during the rainy season from November to April. Almost all (97%) of the rural people in the area collect indigenous fruit (IFs), in particular (ranked in order of importance) *Uapaca kirkiana*, *Anisophyllea boehmii* and *Parinari curatellifolia*. Relatively few households (31%) sell IFs; *Uapaca kirkiana* and *Anisophyllea boehmii* account for 95% of the fruits sold. Almost half (46%) of the rural people in the area process IFTs, with the same top-ranked species mentioned above being processed into juice and or porridge. Sixty-five per cent (65%) of the respondents use IFTs for medicinal purposes, citing *Anisophyllea boehmii* as an important medicinal tree species. The rural people report a loss of forest cover in the area resulting in the scarcity of some IFT species. It is concluded that the major contribution of IFTs in the study area is in relieving hunger, rather than as a source of income through selling. It is recommended that domestication of IFTs and sustainable forestry and agricultural management practices be employed to ensure that future generations continue to benefit from the forest resource.