

# Folk Classification, Perception, and Preferences of Baobab Products in West Africa: Consequences for Species Conservation and Improvement<sup>1</sup>

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## Folk Classification, Perception, and Preferences of Baobab Products in West Africa: Consequences for Species Conservation and Improvement.

The present study is a component of a baobab (*Adansonia digitata* L.) domestication research program being undertaken in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Senegal. Surveys conducted on a total of 129 women and 281 men of different ages included questions on perceptions and human/cultural meaning of morphological variation, use forms, preferences (desirable/undesirable traits), and links between traits. Local people in the four countries use 21 criteria to differentiate baobab individuals *in situ*. According to them, the easier the bark harvesting, the tastier the pulp and leaves; the slimier the pulp, the less tasty it is; the more closely longitudinally marked the fruit capsules, the tastier the pulp. This study shows that farmers are able to use preferred combinations of traits as a guide in collecting germplasm from trees. This can allow the selection of trees that would be candidates for propagation, and planning for a domestication program based on the indigenous knowledge.

**Key Words:** Baobab, indigenous knowledge, preferences, domestication, ethnobotanical survey, agroforestry, West Africa.

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## Introduction

Millions of the world's poor rely on a wide variety of forest products to sustain their livelihoods. At the same time, most agricultural crops have been domesticated over a long period of time, while few of the tens of thousands of forest tree species can be considered to be domesticated. Among the nondomesticated agroforestry species, the baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata* L.) is a key economic species used daily in the diet of rural communities in West Africa (Assogbadjo et al. 2006a; Codjia et al. 2001; Sidibé and Williams 2002). The species contributes to rural incomes (Diop et al. 2005) and has various important medicinal and food uses (Assogbadjo et al. 2006a;

Delisle et al. 1997; Diop et al. 2005; Sena et al. 1998; Sidibé et al. 1996; Sidibé and Williams 2002; Yazzie et al. 1994). Within the species, there is evidence indicating the existence of a number of local forms differing in habit, vigor, size, quality of the fruits, and foliar vitamin content (Assogbadjo et al. 2005a; Gebauer et al. 2002; Sidibé and Williams 2002).

Regional consultations organized by the International Centre for Underutilised Crops have accorded high priority to the enhancement of research and development of *Adansonia digitata* (Sidibé and Williams 2002). Baobab has been identified as among the top ten agroforestry tree species to be conserved and domesticated in West Africa (Eyog Matig et al. 2002). National research efforts, especially in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal, have provided data on food

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<sup>1</sup> Received 7 May 2007; accepted 10 September 2007; published online 1 May 2008.