

POLICY BRIEF

MARCH 2022

Remodelling the intergenerational moringa industry to support local economic development in Binga, Zimbabwe

About the brief

This brief is an overview of the state and potential of the moringa industry in Binga District, Zimbabwe, and seeks to stimulate new discussions and galvanize action around this forgotten plant that has the potential to drive a youth-based, rural green economy. The value and potential of moringa as a multi-purpose plant that can drive meaningful rural economic development in moringa-growing districts such as Binga, is both underestimated and underdeveloped.

Following preliminary research, workshop deliberations and field visits by a group of academics, moringa growers/entrepreneurs, youths, and representatives of local community development and heritage institutions, we here make a case for the remodelling of the moringa industry so that it can contribute fully to local economic development, youth enterprise and general wellbeing.

Although the initial interest in, and public profile of moringa in Zimbabwe might have been dented by the ultimately unrealized claims that it could cure HIV/AIDS, it is our view that the full value and potential of moringa has not been realized. This could be a result of, among other things, low or sporadic research, diminishing intergenerational knowledge transfer, lack of meaningful stakeholder deliberations on natural resource-based community development strategies, and limited public knowledge about the full range of products that can be produced from moringa.

As locally embedded ecological heritage, any remodelling of the moringa industry should, (a) be anchored in Binga, not only because agro-ecologically moringa seems to thrive in Binga mainly, but also as an acknowledgement of the long sustenance of the moringa plant heritage by the people of Binga, (b) seek to galvanize youth participation as part of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Young people in Binga and elsewhere are currently facing challenges such as lack of employment and enterprise opportunities.



Introduction

For all intents and purposes, in the Zimbabwean context, moringa is essentially a “Binga tree”. Not only does it ecologically thrive in Binga mainly, but since this “forgotten” plant was adopted by the nature-

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savvy people of Binga more than hundred years ago, it has found its way into their culinary, medicinal, and linguistic heritage. In addition to its use for a variety of ailments, moringa is also eaten as vegetable relish. Parts of the plant – such as the stem for example – are also used by the local people to produce soda and other products.

Commercially, there is evidence of a fading legacy of family and community level attempts to respond to demand by the now defunct Binga Trees Trust, an initiative started in 1996 by an expatriate doctor at Binga Hospital, to deal with clinical malnutrition caused by the 1990s droughts and food shortages. Currently, there are also middlemen entrepreneurial efforts to connect family producers with demand for moringa leaf by companies such as Tanganda, who use it to produce herbal tea. Some champions of ward development in Sikalenge Ward, in Binga, have also incorporated moringa in their 5-year development strategy (2021-2025), with the aim of developing the moringa value-chain.

Yet, with all this, a great deal more still needs to be done to remodel the moringa industry.



Background

Although the moringa tree, commonly known to the Tonga people in Binga as **Zakalanda**, is gradually gaining global recognition and momentum, it is not a new plant to the people of Binga. Recollection by community elders indicates that it has been in existence in the area since the late 1800s and has been used by families for food and medicinal purposes. Because of its many uses, including its use for food and drink, medicine, stock feed, as well as cosmetics, the moringa tree has the potential to contribute to economic development both, locally and internationally. Commercial figures show that the global value of moringa stood at \$5.5 billion in 2018, and that this figure is expected to double and reach \$10 billion by 2025 (<https://agriexchange.apeda.gov.in/Weekly eReport/Moringa Report.pdf>).

Among other things, this growth is driven by demand for ethically-sourced products, organic certification, the growing food supplements industry, demand for nature-based cosmetics and other consumables, etc.

This sudden regional and international rush on its health and commercial benefits requires new models on how these holistic benefits can be retained for, and by communities in which moringa is an integral part of the ecological heritage. Although communities such as Binga are naturally poised to take advantage of this rapidly emerging green economy, we observed lack of transfer of heritage knowledge from one generation to another. There is also general lack of awareness of the full value chain of moringa which has been driving the

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exponential growth of the global moringa industry.

Building on these initial observations, we set out to explore the potential impact of embedding ecological heritage into community sustainable development through multi-stakeholder workshop deliberations. Key to our deliberations was the involvement of youths as key stakeholders given our prior work with them leading to identification of the current problem. In embarking on this project, we sought to catalyse the uptake of the traditional practice and benefits of moringa farming among the youth in remote rural communities in Zimbabwe, through documenting and showcasing the farming and value-addition processes via intergenerational multi-stakeholder workshops and community research.

Scope of the problem

The diminishing inter-generational ecological knowledge poses a threat to our natural and cultural heritage. Youth unemployment in the context of global recession and the general economic challenges in Zimbabwe also worsen the situation. There is a need to harness the potential of the country's natural heritage to stimulate economic development. While this has been attempted using various models in the recent past, re-modelling the Moringa industry to support inter-generational local economic development has become imperative. The past and current models relating to the Moringa industry have placed less emphasis on increasing youth participation in the industry. In addition, previous approaches have not promoted the expansion of the scales of production, value addition and wider commercialisation of Moringa products in Zimbabwe.

Moreover, the value and potential of moringa is severely under-researched. For example, as compared to other countries in the region (e.g. South Africa) the moringa commercial product range in Zimbabwe is only limited to two products, and these are: moringa tea and powder. Yet moringa can be used in the production of liquid fertilizer, capsules, soda powder, mosquito repellent, lotion creams, cooking oil, energy drinks, pellets for stock feeding, among others.



The existing moringa industry in Binga is a diminishing legacy of previous interest in the plant as result of the influence of the community and NGOs such as the Binga Trees Trust and Carbon Green. We also found that plants such as the tamarind plant (*busikka*) and cashew nuts have not been fully valued and harnessed for local economic development.

In addition, a lack of active youth uptake in the commercialisation of the tree is a threat to what could potentially be an opportunity for youth to create and participate in economic development. These challenges have both social and economic risks. The intergenerational knowledge on the uses of moringa and the practice of its farming could potentially help retain the local

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heritage and promote indigenous knowledge systems and rural green economies.

Recommendations

Although there are state policies that promote youth participation in development, the opportunities and models used to operationalise these are inadequate. For example, the National Youth Policy (2000, revised 2013), Education 5.0 (Ministerial Strategic Plan, 2019-2030) are examples of development focused policies that are germane to youth advancement. However, research has shown that the National Youth Policy's progressive aspiration to "systematically integrate youth issues into all policies, plans, programmes and strategies at all levels and within all sectors and institutions of government, NGOs and the private sector", has not been realised on the ground (see Hlungwani, Masuku and Magidi, 2021). In the moringa production sector in Binga, only elderly women, and a few elderly men participate in the industry, hence our motivation for the re-modelling the entire moringa industry into a thriving green economy attractive to youths.

In view of the above, we strongly recommend the following:

- a) The commissioning of a multi-disciplinary team to conduct a baseline survey and assess the status and full scope of moringa production in Zimbabwe;
- b) As part of the Education 5.0 mandate, we recommend the formation of Research and Development partnerships between local universities and communities in Binga to investigate the full product range and benefits of the moringa value chain;
- c) The setting up of a Binga Trees Research Initiative (BiTRI) dedicated to the

investigation of the full range of plants in Binga (including moringa) that can contribute to sustainable local economic development;

d). The certification of moringa as part of the Binga ecological heritage in recognition of the Binga people's contribution to the local sustenance of moringa.

e). Investigation of the intergenerational features of moringa in order to boost youth uptake and participation;

f). Designation and support of current moringa producers and entrepreneurs as champions and stakeholders in any future moringa development initiatives.

g). The BRDC should create an enabling environment for investment in moringa farming, processing and marketing (for example, access to land, licensing and water, as well as incorporation in the strategic district development plan).



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