



## POLICY BRIEF

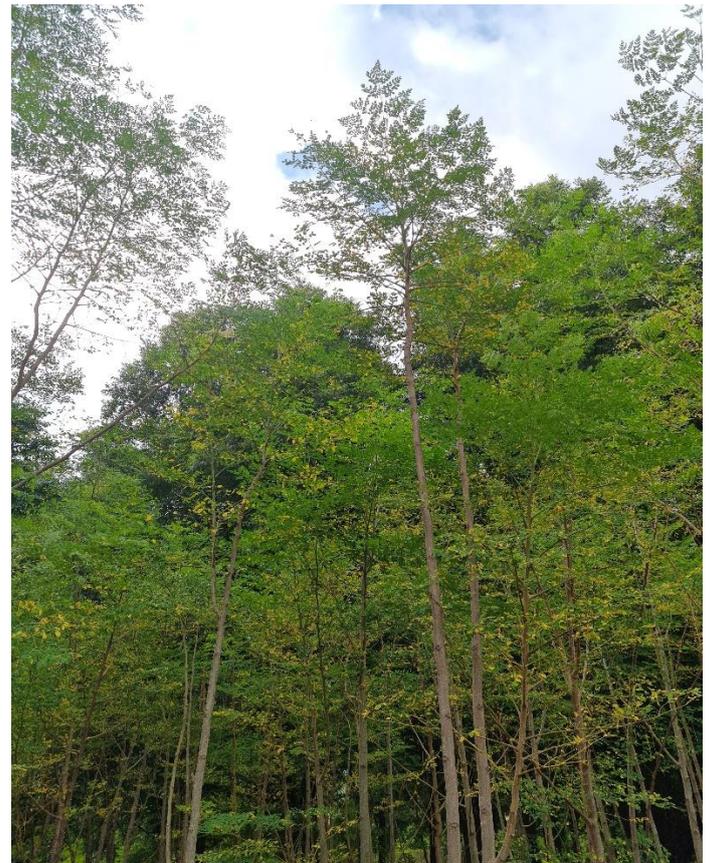
# *The Emerging Moringa Economy: A ground-breaking opportunity to boost rural green economies and youth employment in South Africa (2022)*

### About the brief

Promoting the rural uptake of moringa *oliefera* production has the potential of not only improving the well-being of people, but will also immensely stimulate rural economies, boost youth employment, and ensure the participation of disadvantaged communities in the strongly emerging “green economy”.

However, there doesn't seem to be any policy in this regard; and in the rural areas we studied, moringa is only grown sporadically by families in communities and those involved in traditional healing. Youth ownership of moringa trees is virtually non-existent. Yet moringa is an easy to grow, drought-resistant super plant with many nutritional and medicinal benefits for both people and animals, and therefore presents huge potential for beneficiation.

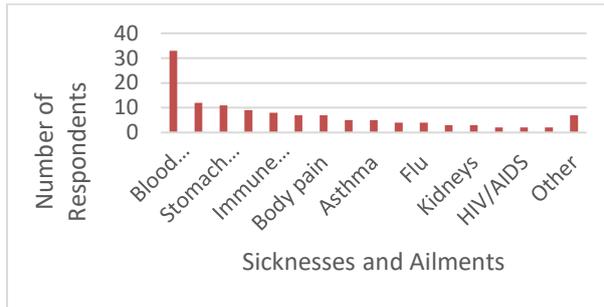
In the context of this state of affairs, there are some urgent questions that need to be addressed: how can we make sure that rural economies do not miss out on this golden opportunity? How can youth – hugely affected as they are by lack of employment opportunities – be galvanised and primed for meaningful participation in what might soon potentially become a “green gold rush”?



### Introduction

Strongly emerging evidence from various studies, including baseline surveys, botanical research, biochemical analysis, and economic studies, shows that *moringa oliefera* (an orphan plant which has naturalised in southern Africa extremely well) is strongly emerging as a potential super-plant. Its nutritional value is extremely high, surpassing other known foods by wide margins. It has

been demonstrated that it can cater for both human and animal nutritional needs. Recently, moringa has demonstrable medicinal qualities, and is fast becoming a dominant feature in homeopathy. Traditional healers also use it a great deal.



**Fig 1: Sicknesses treated with moringa in the surveyed communities**

- Moringa is commonly used by humans as an immune booster, tonic, food supplement, and broad-based vitamin source.



**Table 1: The nutritional value of moringa**

3 times more Protein than eggs
15 times the Potassium of banana
17 times the Calcium of milk
25 times the Iron in spinach

- Moringa is also increasingly being fed to animals either in raw form or as pellets to boost meat quality, reproductive health, and overall animal wellbeing.
- Because of its high nitrogen content, moringa is also being processed into various fertilisers.
- There are also ongoing studies and discussions about the possible incorporation of moringa into school feeding schemes. When this happens, there will be explosive demand for moringa, that rural communities, especially the unemployed youth, can be involved in addressing.

### Opportunities for a green rural economy on the horizon

In South Africa, the moringa specie that is common is the *moringa oleifera*, originally from South Asia. It is a drought resistant plant that requires minimal attention. It is most popular in the lowveld provinces, Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Moringa can grow in yards, in small plots and big plantations and is a good plant for inter-cropping. Together with other emerging valuable plants such as Artemisia, cannabis, hemp, aloe vera, etc, moringa is a strong candidate for a “rural green economy” that is fast emerging on the horizon.

However, there is extremely minimal uptake of moringa production in rural



communities where there are vast opportunities for the planting of moringa trees. Our baseline survey in 14 communities (with 62 respondents) around the Kruger National Park indicated that:

- virtually no youth are involved in the growing and processing of moringa trees into different products;
- on average, each respondent has two trees mainly for family use, therefore very little commercial utilisation of moringa in these communities;
- moringa trees are predominantly used to treat sickness and as a nutritional supplement.

In view of the above, there is a very high likelihood that the rural communities will miss the boat, and therefore miss out on a golden opportunity to ensure meaningful youth participation in newly emerging, once-in-a-lifetime economic opportunities. In a country with very high rates of youth unemployment, missing such golden opportunities is not an option. Youth unemployment in South Africa is a huge cause for concern and a ticking time-bomb.

- 8,6 million youth aged between 15-34 are neither in school nor in employment; 74,7% of 15-24 olds are unemployed.
- In terms of youth unemployment statistics, South Africa is at the top of the 200 surveyed countries by the Global Economy.

### Other considerations

- Very low to non-existent rural community uptake of the emerging moringa economy.
- Lack of intergenerational and intercommunity knowledge transfer on the benefits of moringa and potential of the moringa economy.

- Lack of a plan on youth participation in the emerging “rural green economies”
- Lack of wider multi-stakeholder engagement on the potential of the emerging moringa economy and the general “rural green economy” to boost youth employment and participation.

### Recommendations

- a) Continuous engagement and collaboration with stakeholders (such as the NYDA, DARDLA, DoH, DoBE, Chambers of Business) about the emerging moringa economy and its opportunities for youth participation.
- b) Commission multi-disciplinary teams to urgently explore and advise on the next steps about the incorporation of moringa in school feeding schemes;
- c) Identify and support suitable youth Moringa Ambassadors or Champions who can begin to lead by example in targeted communities.
- d) Explore opportunities for rural moringa out-grower schemes as a first step towards connecting rural producers of moringa to bigger players in the market such as has happened in the timber and sugar industries in South Africa.

For more info contact email: [glen.ncube@up.ac.za](mailto:glen.ncube@up.ac.za)