

Natural Futures Case Study: Marula in Swaziland

Khelina is a Swazi woman who harvests and sells marula destined for local and overseas cosmetics from Hlane village in southern Swaziland. Khelina and neighbours say that their lives have changed completely as a result of their involvement in the natural product trade.

Like many in her community, Khelina's income needs to provide for a large household. In Khelina's case, she is the sole provider for the five of her nine children that are still at home, including two grandchildren. Since she started supplying marula kernels to a local natural product enterprise almost 3 years ago, she says that the income she earns 'takes care of her family' or is "*iyasiwondla lokusisiza kakhulu*". Her income is used not only to purchase household necessities like food and soap, but also provides the cash – as opposed to goods for trading - necessary to pay for her children's school fees and uniforms.

In 2005, seeing an opportunity in the newly established local enterprise, Swazi Indigenous Products, Khelina began her work in sourcing and supplying marula from wild trees in Hlane's communal lands. She was familiar with the trees and fruits because of her experience in the local production and sale of marula beer from the fruit's flesh. Now, her work would involve accessing the kernel inside the fruit's nut for its production into a cosmetic oil. By doing so, Khelina now earns 20% more than she did as a mat weaver. More importantly however, the collection and cracking of marula kernels does not require as much time away from home as the mat weaving did, which included a week's travel for reed harvesting each month.

Recently and with the support of IUCN's Natural Futures Programme, Swazi Indigenous Products adapted part of their supply chain and production to meet international organic certification standards. Khelina also participated in this process and as a result, is earning an additional 8% over the conventional price for her marula – a price that is expected to increase with market demand over time. There are also non-monetary benefits of Khelina's training. She now has more information about appropriate areas to collect the fruits, ways to avoid contamination (including in her home), how to grade the kernels and ensure the maintenance of high quality products. Furthermore, Khelina now keeps records of the trees that she has harvested so that the marula can be traced back to her if necessary. Thus, in addition to meeting organic standards, Khelina's efforts also help to ensure that the supply chain is in line with international traceability requirements.

In Hlane, the rise in value of marula has resulted in the community taking greater care of trees and renewed interest in organic farming. Residents of the community have also begun a new and regular market that coincides with marula procurement days to take advantage of the increased income flowing through the community.

Khelina says that she could not imagine how her family and other community members could have managed without income from natural products, especially in times of drought (2006/7). She now qualifies as a member of credit and savings schemes that offer loans to community members, has greater independence to spend her cash income and ability to both provide for and spend time with her loved ones.

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