INTEGRATING CUSTOMARY AND STATUTORY SYSTEMS: POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR EQUITABLE TRADE OF PRUNUS AFRICANA IN CAMEROON

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The tropical rain forest of the Congo basin is endowed with abundant high value indigenous tree species. Many rural household depend on these resources for their food, medicine, and construction needs. More over some of these products are traded internationally, significantly contributing to the economy of the countries of the region. *Prunus africana* is a major Non Timber Forest Product (NTFP) identified in Cameroon. Its bark is also the raw material in health supplements and drugs used to treat prostate problems. It is a major income source for forest based communities and enterprises (Laird et al. in press; Franzel et al, 2009). However Prunus africana has been subject to special attention because of its inclusion in Annex II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The NTFPs including *Prunus africana* have always been governed by customary and statutory laws (Laird et al. 2010; Ndibi et al., 1997). Information's were collected using field survey, field observations, group discussion, interviews and reviewing literature from Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF). The benefits to local communities from involvement in *Prunus africana activities* are a significant incentive for their commitment to the conservation of these species (Ndam et al, 2008). The income earned from the trade could be increased if communities reviewed their internal organization and partnerships with exporters or processing industries and the legislatives and regulatory frame work as well as adding value to their product in order to meet industrial or international trade standards.

Mount Cameroun Prunus Management (MOCAP), a Community Based Company has realized the high importance of *Prunus africana* in poverty alleviation (Nkuinkeu, 1999). Nowadays the tendency is to get more involved in sustainable bark harvesting activities in general and the production to marketing in particular. A Memorandum of understanding (MOU) commissioned by the forest authorities is aimed at authorizing the local population represented and organized by MOCAP to exercise theirs user's right by collecting the bark of *Prunus africana* in the Mount Cameroon National Park. This paper will address policies and strategies that can enable communities based organizations to reap greater benefits from their forest resources for improved livelihoods

Key Words: *Prunus africana*, Mount Cameroon, MOCAP, trade, Regulatory framework