



The use of palm leaves for basket-making in the Kavango East Region of Namibia - is it sustainable?

Makalani Palm (*Hyphaene petersiana*) is an important resource in basket making in Namibia and baskets are an important contributor to the livelihoods of women in many of the northern regions. It is important therefore that this resource is monitored and managed to ensure that it is being used sustainably.



The Omba Arts Trust embarked on a palm survey in the Kavango region at the end of 2017 and in early 2018, where they have been working since 1992. They also supported the planting of more than 1,000 Makalani Palm nuts in five community gardens and 40 Bird Plum (*Berchemia discolor*) tree seedlings, an important dye source, planted at the homestead gardens of basket weavers. This project was supported financially via the Namibian Chamber of Environment (NCE) by B2Gold Namibia and Total.

Weavers were interviewed and palm gardens from an earlier initiative in the mid 90's were inspected. Whilst these gardens have continued to supply some of the

raw materials to weavers, results of the survey indicated that weavers were having to walk further to gather their palm and, in some instances, they had to buy the raw materials.



Production of baskets in the Kavango as a source of livelihood started shortly after independence when the Rössing Foundation was operating in the area. ‘We started with fifteen weavers, assisting them to improve the quality of their baskets and helping to find alternative plant dyes’, said Omba Arts Trust Director, Karin le Roux. ‘Today there are many more weavers making baskets for commercial purposes throughout the year,’ she added. The baskets have transformed from functional utility items used to harvest mahango (pearl millet) and other foods, to smaller decorative baskets with complex patterns in an array of colours, popular with collectors and tourists.

Omba Arts Trust training has always included methods to harvest palm sustainably. However, the sheer quantity of baskets produced each year has begun to affect the availability of palm leaves for some of the weavers. As a member of the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) Omba needs to ensure that there is minimal impact on the environment. ‘This will be an ongoing initiative in the region and we will need to continue assessing the resource’, le Roux added. ‘Omba’s mission is to ensure sustainable livelihoods and the availability of the raw materials is critical to this.’

‘Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Namibia focuses a lot on wildlife’, said NCE CEO Dr Chris Brown. ‘The support to sustainably

managed plant resources in the craft sector, which support the livelihoods of rural women and their families, were important considerations when awarding the Omba Arts Trust the Grant,' he added.



Healthy palm gardens planted in the 1990's, now providing weavers with ready access to leaves for making baskets.



Weavers planting Makalani Palm nuts in communal gardens, to reduce long-term pressure on wild palms and to improve access to palm leaves.



Weavers preparing to plant their Bird Plum (*Berchemia discolor*) saplings in their home gardens. The bark of this tree is used as a dye for the palm leaves.

The full project report can be viewed on the NCE website at www.n-c-e.org

For more information please contact:

Karin le Roux
Director, Omba Arts Trust
Cell: 081 128 1321
Karin.leroux@omba.org.na

This project was supported by:

