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NON-DETRIMENT FINDINGS REPORT ON *PRUNUS AFRICANA* (ROSACEAE) IN CAMEROON

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Prunus africana is a species of the Rosaceae family, known under its trade/pilot name as pygeum or African chery. It is a montane tree species of the tropical Africa including the Côte d'Ivoire, Bioko, Sao Tome, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Madagascar, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cameroon.

Prunus africana is classified by the World Alliance for Nature (IUCN) as a vulnerable plant species in Cameroon. This led to its listing in the Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). The annual quota of export volume used in Cameroon is 2000 tons.

Prunus grows well in the sub-montane and montane forests at an altitude of 1500 – 3000 m. In Cameroon, the plant can be found in some 64 sites, distributed in 23 divisions and 6 provinces. North west (27 sites), west (15), South west (8) and Adamaoua (7) are in this order, the most important provinces in terms of number of sites of occurrence. In its distribution area the natural range of *P. africana* is discontinued. Pygium forests appear fragmented in several isolated sub-stands distributed in afro-montane forests.

Natural populations of *Prunus africana* are continuously declining in Cameroon due to over-harvesting and inadequate techniques practised. Several reports confirmed the fact that the natural population has suffered major damage from both legal and illegal exploitation, reducing the population from all previous inventory estimates by up to 50% in a short period.

As one of management measure, *Prunus* has been recognized as a "special product with particular interest". To promote its conservation, some initiatives have assisted local people in the process of community forests. The problem is that, the harvesting campaigns were not monitored in good manner. Many of those community forests were totally debarked, before their simple management plans have been approved by the forest administration.

A prediction of the sustainable yield of *Prunus* bark is often made from estimates of the natural population, the average yield per tree and the length of time between successive debarkings required to allow total recovery of the bark. Results tend to show that, the exploitation of *Prunus* has never been conducted in sustainable manner in Cameroon, in spite of the effort made by the forest administration.

Since 2007, the forest administration took some important measures to alleviate poaching in the exploitation of *Prunus* including: the restoration of the field book for the harvesters, the instauration of specific way bills for the circulation of Special products, the erection of an important part of the Mount Cameroon in national park, and the reduction of quotas granted for *Prunus*. But many problems still remain in the monitoring of the exploitation and exportation of *Prunus* in Cameroon. Problems are observed at all levels of the control, from the forest till the points of exports, and from the central administration to the external services.

Data discussed in this report tend to confirm that *Prunus* is a threatened plant species in Cameroon, which explained the ban pronounced by the European Commission on Cameroon's products. We can even consider that *Prunus africana* is at least an endangered plant species in Cameroon according to the IUCN check list for NDFs, and due to the level of exploitation and the monitoring measures currently used by the forest administration.

The elaboration and implementation of simple development plans for the sustainable harvesting and trade of *Prunus* and other special products remains the gap and the challenge for the Cameroon Government.