

A NEW BROOM SWEEPS CLEAN: THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL VALUE OF GRASS BROOMS IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

In southern Africa over the last twenty years, much attention has been given to the importance of NTFPs for rural livelihoods through their household consumption and sale. They have been classified as having either subsistence consumption or commercial values. These values are mostly related to their utilitarian functions, but recent studies show that NTFPs also hold strong cultural functions. Such cultural functions can play a role in both rural and urban livelihoods; consequently the values of NTFPs may be related to both utilitarian and cultural functions. This paper demonstrates the cultural functions of grass brooms in urban areas in South Africa and the impact of their trade on income generation in rural areas, and discusses the concept of culture as a significant factor in the understanding of the role of NTFPs in livelihoods, and their values.

Keywords: Non-timber forest products (NTFPs), utilitarian and cultural values, Xhosa people.

INTRODUCTION

Recently in southern Africa, much attention has been given to the importance of wild plants for rural livelihoods, both through their household consumption and sale (Campbell and Luckett 2002, Shackleton *et al.* 2002a). Wild harvested plant products are normally classified as having either a subsistence consumption value or a commercial value (Goebel *et al.* 2000, Campbell and Luckett 2002). Wild plants may also have cultural functions, but the significance of these has been poorly documented. The majority of studies that address cultural functions focus on areas or units of vegetation, such as sacred forests, rainmaking sites, land marks etc. (Posey 1999, Goebel *et al.* 2000). The cultural functions of harvested plants have for the most part been ignored. In South Africa this has largely been a result of the domination of a neo-marxist political paradigm within anthropology over the last two decades (McAllister 1997). This has meant that there was virtually no place for in-depth analyses of critical concepts such as *culture* and *tradition* (Spiegel and

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