

3rd International Conference on **Biodiversity & Sustainable Energy Development**

June 24-26, 2014 Valencia Conference Centre, Valencia, Spain

Investigating the significance of wild Aloe (*Aloe ferox*) harvesting in the livelihoods of the rural communities of the Eastern Cape, South Africa

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The practice of *Aloe ferox* harvesting for various purposes started more than 300 years ago in South Africa. The communal areas of the Cape region are considered to have developed into hot spots for *Aloe ferox* harvesting in South Africa over the years. In the recent years, increased opportunities for commercial exploitation of *Aloe ferox* rendered its harvesting to be one of the alternative livelihood activities for the poor rural communities inhabiting communal areas of the Cape region. However, paucity of studies focusing on the significance of *Aloe ferox* harvesting in the livelihoods of the rural poor communities still exists. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the significance of *Aloe ferox* harvesting in the livelihoods of the rural poor communities of three villages (Khayamnandi, Pumulani and Jani) in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Questionnaires were used to obtain data on the perceptions of the communities about the significance of *Aloe ferox* harvesting in their livelihoods. Questionnaires were administered through individual interviews and focused group discussions. Preliminary results showed that members of communities who were involved in *Aloe ferox* harvesting generated income through the use of a dealer who appeared to be benefiting more from the practice than the communities. Although the *Aloe ferox* harvesting was considered as a potential poverty alleviation communal activity, the results indicated that it was not immune to challenges. Seasonal changes in weather conditions and some health risks were amongst the challenges identified in this research. To enhance the benefits that the communities could derive from the *Aloe ferox* harvesting, the study advocates for the promotion of sustainable harvesting and effective marketing regulations of the Aloe products in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

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