

Review of Some Unconventional Tree Seed Oils from Africa for Application in Cosmetics

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Introduction

We should strive for enhancing individual beauty without threatening the beauty of our planet. In recent years natural products have grown from a niche segment to one of the fastest growing categories in personal care. In fact, natural personal care (NPC) has outperformed other natural product segments such as functional foods and supplements. Growth of NPC will continue following the growth of the nutraceutical market.

Undoubtedly one of the fastest growing sectors in the global skin care market is in natural, organic and Fair Trade cosmetics, which is predicted to reach a staggering 80% in the next year. Prompted by consumer lifestyle decisions that increasingly reject synthetic and chemical ingredients in favour of natural alternatives, so-called 'ethical consumers' demand cosmetics that are Fairly Traded, aren't tested on animals and don't harm the environment.

Oil crops have been cultivated since antiquity. For the past half century the cultivation of oil bearing plants has increased considerably. There are several species of plants in the world whose oil can be utilised for human consumption. In human nutrition plant lipids and seed oils are preferable to animal fat, due to their low content of cholesterol and their generally high proportion of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA).

Several earlier studies⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ reported the fatty acid composition of newer seeds oils. Several underexploited or unexploited trees are found in tropical ecosystems. Some of these have already proved their importance for the industrialised world. The present paper deals with the evaluation of 4 different naturally occurring seed oils from Africa.

Most people working with cosmetics are by now very familiar with Shea butter, a fat which is collected in the Sahel countries

in Western Africa and now widely used as a key emollient in numerous cosmetics products. It is now hardly imaginable that until some 15 years ago Shea butter was hardly known.

Yet Africa has much more to offer and there are countless other oils and fats with very interesting properties which have hardly been explored, let alone are being used in Western cosmetic products.

In the following section we will make a selection of a few oils and butters which we believe have the potency to become important and regular constituents of Western cosmetics because of their undeniable benefits and, above all, increased availability due to better organised collection and quality control programmes.

Trichilia Emetica (Meliaceae)

Common Name: Mafura

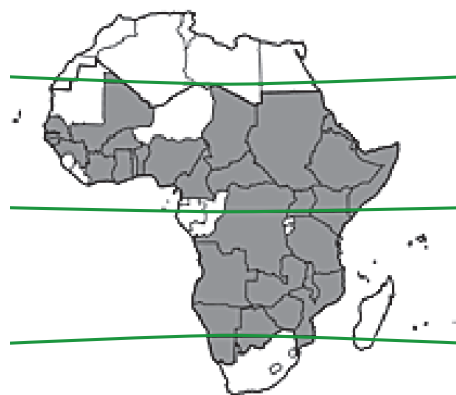


Figure 1. Geographical distribution of *T. Emetica*

This tree is known all over Africa for its healing properties. It is found all the way up from the Sahel countries down to Southern Africa. In South Africa it is called Natal mahogany, but the local people in Southern Africa call it Mafura. In Mozambique a special 'white' variety is widely used as an