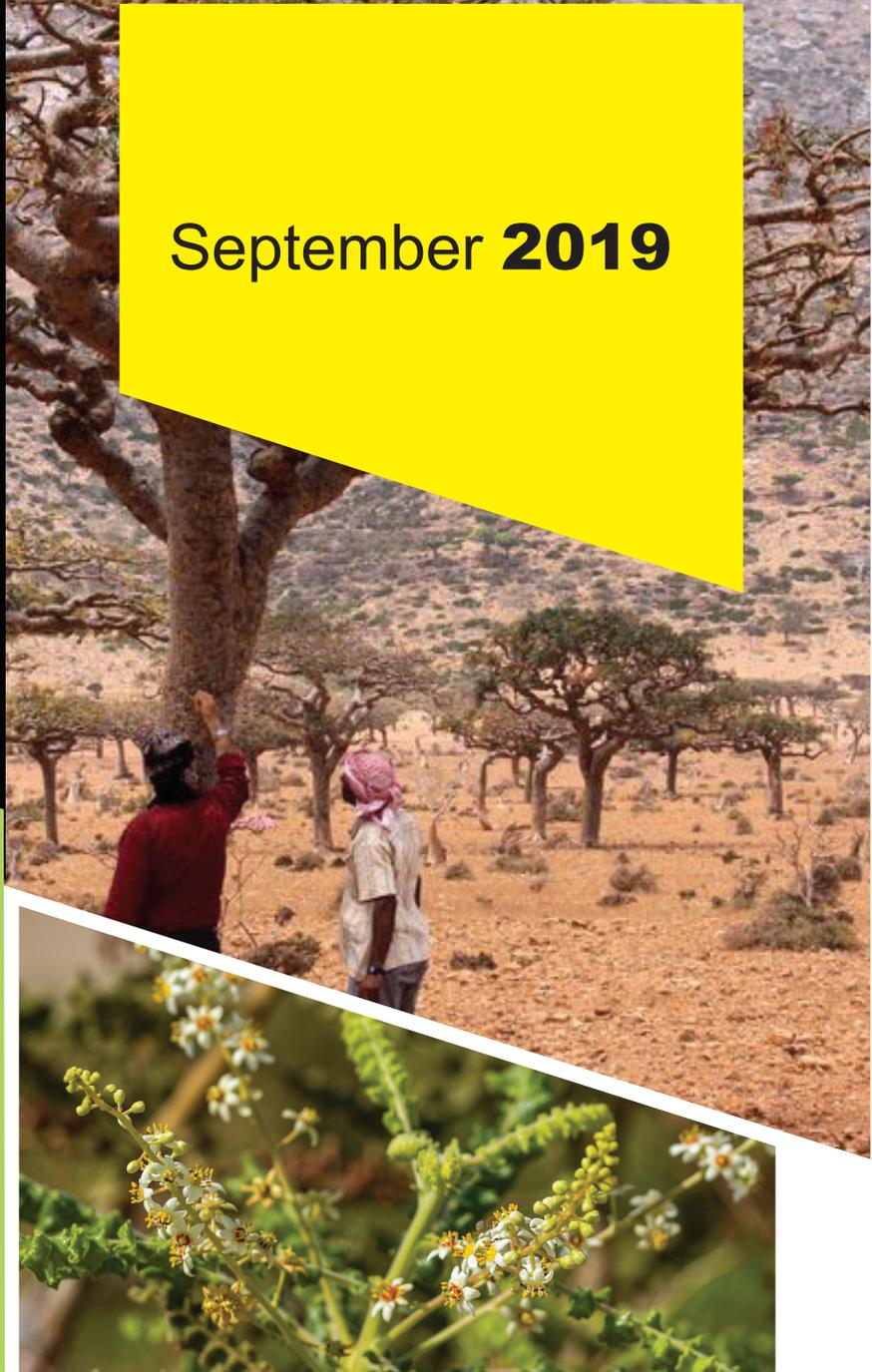


POLICY BRIEF

September 2019

Somaliland Gold under threat of extinction! Frankincense Trees!



Key Messages

- Over exploitation of frankincense through over tapping has critically reduced the trees population in Somaliland endangering producers livelihoods and loss of biodiversity
- Loss of frankincense trees means loss of export income for Somaliland governments to a tune of \$7.3 million
- The communities producing frankincense have limited skills and knowledge on propagation technologies and sustainable management of the trees

Policy Recommendations

- The Ministry of Environment should increased awareness on effects of over harvesting on tree productivity and future effects on the community livelihoods
- The government of Somaliland should develop legislations and implement in line with communities cultural regulations and laws to protect the trees from over harvesting
- The Ministry of Environment and partners should train communities on sustainable tapping regimes and grading for better quality frankincense
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Environment should institute propagation strategies within the community producer groups and consider extension of propagation technologies for adoption
- Analyze and strengthen sustainable value chains that ensure fair trade for the benefit of producer communities
- The Ministry of Trade should consider establishment of producer groups for economies of scale in production and marketing

What is Frankincense?

Frankincense trees produce a product called Frankincense or Olibanum, a dried resin exudate obtained from the tree bark by “tapping”, a process of making incisions on the barks for exudates. Two species are found in Somaliland; *Boswellia sacra* and *Boswellia frereana*. The two produce resins locally known as beeyo and meydi, respectively. The trees grow wild in vast regions and are owned by clans who have control over production and marketing.

Why is Frankincense a disappearing Somaliland’s Gold?

Frankincense trees are very crucial to Somaliland’s economy, producing gum and resins that support over 70% of households incomes in producing areas along the value chain. The annual export value is estimated at \$7.3 million. In an interview by the Voice of Africa on December 23, 2016, Shukri Ismail, Somaliland’s Minister of Environment reported, “people cut the trees too much and tap them year-round.” Tapping quite a lot will kill the trees,” she said, “and that is what they are doing at the moment in order to earn. They used to tap it twice a year, or once a year, but it became frequent now, and now that kills the trees and kills the frankincense forest in general.”

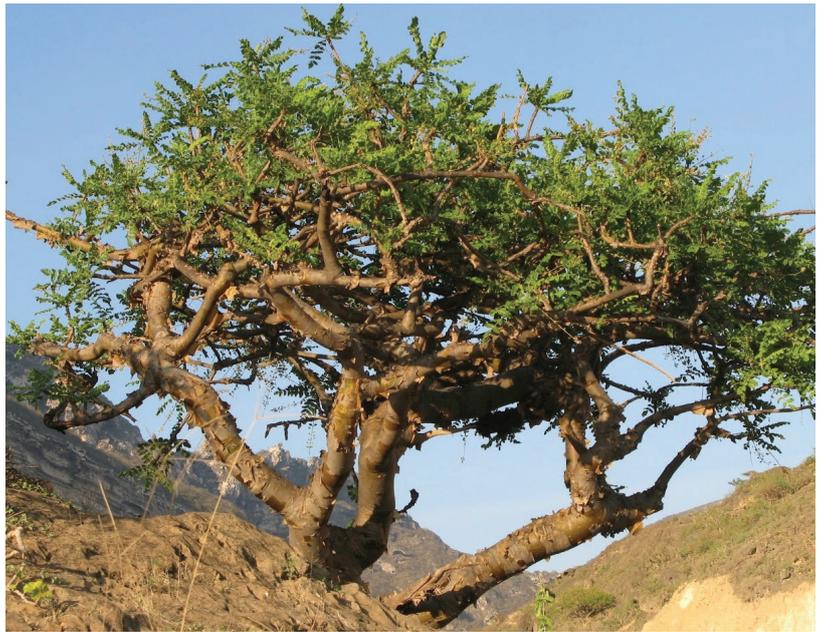


Figure 1. Frankincense tree growing in Sanaag region, Somaliland



Figure 2. Over tapped Frankincense tree

What are Challenges facing Frankincense production in Somaliland?

Over-exploitation from unsustainable tapping (Fig 2) greatly affects existing Frankincense trees in Somalia. The high demand and poverty has increased tapping rates reducing regeneration of tree with increased rates of tree mortality. The trees natural low regeneration from seeds greatly affects new trees growing, hence low population. These factors coupled with the frequent droughts and harsh climatic conditions, have led to the decline in population of Frankincense trees, nearly getting to extinction, classified as threatened. The present situation is no efforts by the community to propagate the trees, greatly threatening their major source of livelihood.

The economic, social, cultural and religious functions of Frankincense

What can be done to protect the ancient tree species from extinction in Somaliland?

There is urgent need to protect the tree from over exploitation and put in place measures for propagation to increase the population. To ensure that the tree is protected by community, interventions on sustainable harvesting and community propagation are needed.

Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacture of cosmetics and perfumes • Medical as anti-inflammatory and anticarcinogenic • Employment for producers, traders and processor • Second export product after livestock in Somaliland
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An important sacred plant by the somali people and part of their culture • Clan ownership and inheritance practice • Can be used for dowry payment
Religious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christians: Religious rituals buy burning incense in the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Buddhist • Muslim: Used in many mosques around the world

Figure3. The economic, cultural and religious function of Frankincense



Figure 4. Fig 4. Frankincense processed oil products

What is the Contribution of Frankincense to Somaliland's Economy?

The export of gums and resins has been a major income earner for Somaliland, which was the world's largest producer and exporter in 1980s earning about \$7.1 million. By 2014, the export value exceeded the value of the late 1980s, reaching about \$7.3 million (figure 6), with wide fluctuations partly due to overexploitation and poor harvesting practices (World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2018). The plant provides employment to about 70% of pastoralist in the growing areas (Fig 7).



Figure 5. Frankincense gum harvested ready for trade/sale

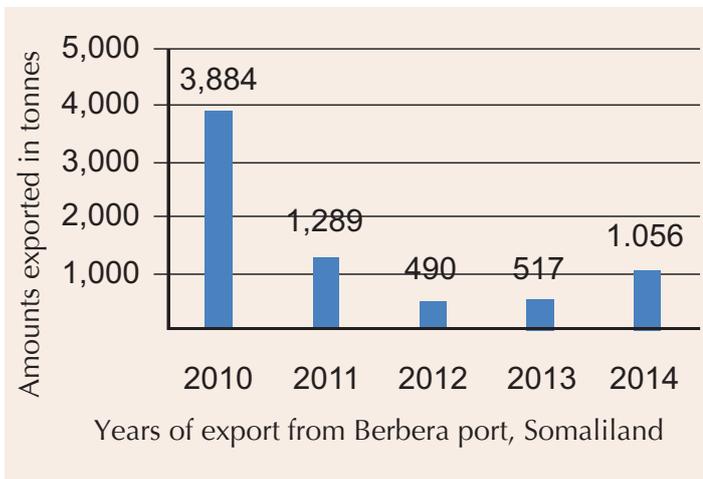


Figure 6. The contribution of Frankincense to Economy of Somaliland from 2010-2014. Source: DeCarlo and Ali (2014)

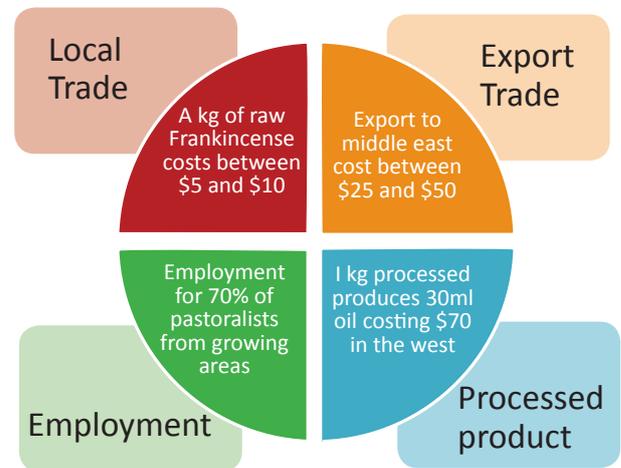


Figure 7. The contribution of Frankincense to local trade, export, employment. Source: Svoboda et al. 2001).

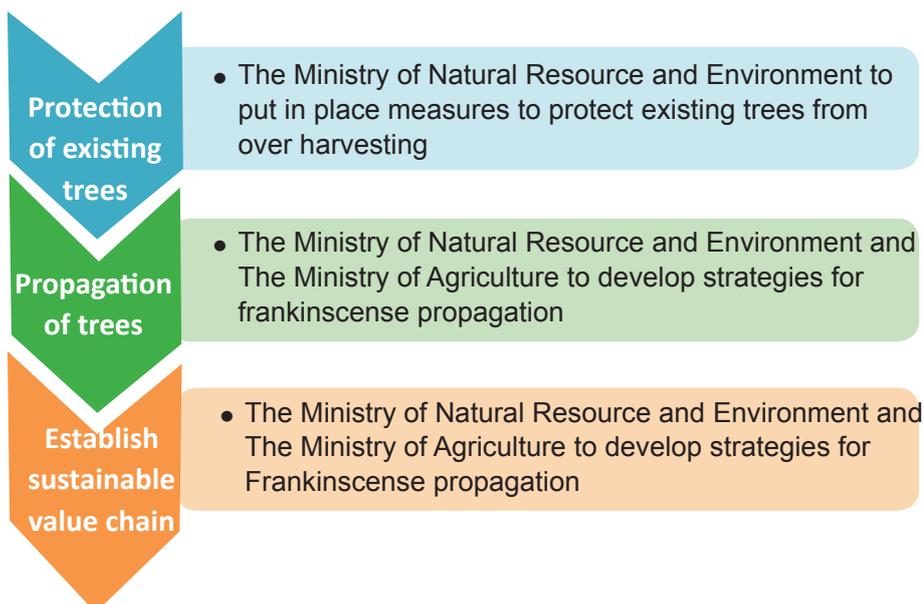


Figure 8. Approaches to ensure Frankincense trees are protected



Figure 9. Commercialized Frankincense product



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