

# Africa Deserves Bigger Benefits From Its Bio-resources - Minister

By F T M

The Minister of the Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development, Hele Pierre, has said that Africa, in the wake of the 2010 Nagoya Protocol on Access Benefit Sharing, ABS, has got much more to benefit from its abundant biological resources.

THE significance of this workshop no longer lies in demonstrating when we already know that the ABS Protocol is focused on biodiversity. Africa tends to be extremely rich in this. And from this bio-

diversity, Africa stands to gain much in terms of accruing benefits," said Hele Pierre.

The Minister was speaking in Limbe recently at the opening of the sixth edition of the Pan-African Workshop on the ABS Protocol attended by well over 100 participants, among them researchers, indigenous stakeholders, traditional doctors and others.

The workshop was aimed at putting in place appropriate mechanisms to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the exploitation and use of Africa's plant and animal resources, especially by the West as sources for making medicines, cosmetics, furniture and other products.

Hele Pierre noted that Cameroon, for instance, was ranked fifth in Africa, in terms of its endowment in valuable plants and animal species.

"Genetic and biological agents tapped from plants and animals contribute enormously to the well-being of the people and the development of many nations," the Minister said.

But the Nagoya Convention in its point three had come to the conclusion that there was need for countries and the people whose natural resources are tapped as raw materials by pharmaceutical companies, gene banks and others, to enjoy a fair share of the benefits that are derive from these resources.

## Prunus Africana Case

The workshop participants later visited Bokwoango in Buea on the eastern slope of Mt. Cameroon.

Led by Thomas Elive, Director of the Mount Cameroon Prunus Africana Management CIG, MOCAP, in Buea, the participants were lectured on how the CIG was trying to implement the ABS policy.

First, participants were taken to MOCAP's prunus africana farms where they witnessed how the members, sustainably, harvest prunus tree barks without cutting the trees down as hitherto was done.

They then, visited the MOCAP's warehouse where the barks are pre-crushed before they are sold to a Douala-based buyer, AFRIMED Sarl.

In a bid put to practise the ABS requirements, MOCAP told the participants that they were a CIG made of 60 representatives covering the 30 village communities that border the Mt. Cameroon area in Buea.

They said from the proceeds they get from the prunus barks, harvesters benefit 43 percent, the largest quota. Meantime, 16 percent shall go to the village development fund, 20 percent to the Mt. Cameroon National Park, seven percent to the chiefs for libation purposes, four percent for the transporters and five for the warehouse storage.

## European Union Uplifts Ban

Prunus, locally known as pygeum, is known for its therapeutic potency on ailments like prostate cancer, malaria and so on. The ABS workshop participants were also thrilled to find out that prunus africana also possesses enormous viagra-like powers.

But the exploitation of this African tree

ical gem was banned some few years back by the European Union following the chaotic manner and disrespect of international norms by those who were dealing in it.

With the Nagoya Protocol, the European Union, in 2011, went on to uplift their ban.

Following the re-opening of the EU market, MOCAP's Joseph Ekati Etoma said they will by mid-February, this year, begin trading again.

"We have already had a business understanding with AFRIMED Sarl in Douala, which, for now, tends to be the highest bidder ready to pay FCFA 350 for a kilogramme of prunus," he said.

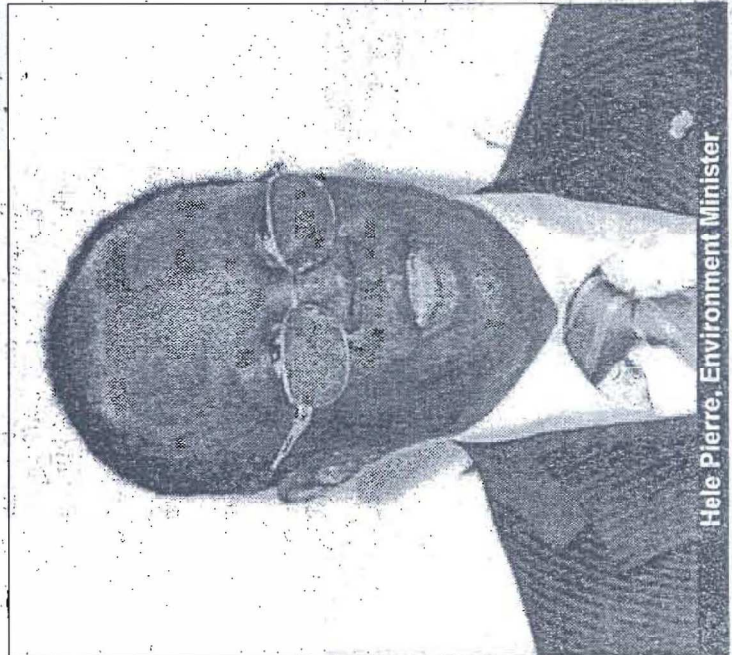
Meantime, Prudence Galega, who is the African Coordinator for ABS, there was need for greater sensitization of the population on what the ABS was all about.

She added that there was also need for a legislative framework to define and protect the interests of all stakeholders involved.

Talking on behalf of the traditional healers, Dr. Edward Fai Fominyen Ngu, said the healers were, foremost, those to be recognized because they are the ones who, through their traditional knowledge of trees or herbs that are medicinal, help the rest of the communities to know.

In this light, Dr. Fai urged that there was need for them to be more organised because they won't, certainly, tap benefits as individuals.

"It is the dawn of a new era and we healers, now, feel we will no longer be cheated. This is so because most researchers, in the past, had never at any one point in time been honest to quote or make any reference that I got the resource for my medicine from this or that healer," he said.



Hele Pierre, Environment Minister