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## Research Article

# PRODUCTION/EXPORT TRADE OF GUM ARABIC IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focus on the production /export trade of gum arabic in Nigeria , it is one of the area improve economic of a nation , Nigeria share of the world gum arabic trade. Available statistics indicate that Nigeria remained the second world's largest producer of gum Arabic after Sudan until 1996. The Table 1 below indicates that Nigeria crashed to the third position as from 1998 even though the export of gum Arabic from Nigerian ports continues to rise every year. Table No. 3 and 4 show the export data of gum Arabic.

## KEYWORDS

Export, Production, Trade, Gum Arabic, Nigeria, Import.

## INTRODUCTION

Gum Arabic as an important forest and economic resource was noticed in Nigeria as early as 1904 when the then northern Nigeria forest officer, Mr. W.R. Elliot stated as follows: “from what I saw in Borno in 1904 and from information I picked at odd times afterwards.

I can safely state that there is a large tract of country bordering gongola River, covered thickly with gum acacia..... “By the early 1950’s commercial gum Arabic activities had already started in Nigerian with Arabs trading on gum Arabic through the trans Saharan

trade routes to Egypt where it was largely used in hieroglyphic writing and the rest shipped to Europe. Since then, Nigeria remained the world’s second most important player in the global gum Arabic business until it ceded its second position to Chad as a result of the neglect of agriculture by successive government at all levels since the advent of the oil boom in Nigeria.

**GUMARABIC: THE DESERT GOLD**

Gum Arabic, otherwise called the “Desert Gold” is an environmental product and a complex polysaccharide with unique environmental and chemical properties which make it versatile and user friendly in various industry application and environmental management. Estimated to cover about 300,000 square kilometers (about 30% of Nigeria’s land mass) within the Sahel ecological zones, it is believed to be a key source of livelihood for about 3 million Nigerians living within this fragile Sahel economic zone of Nigeria. Because of its

unique technical properties, gum Arabic is used in the food, confectionary, chemical, beverage and pharmaceutical industries. It is also used in sustainable land management (SLM), in erosion and desertification control and in the recovery of degraded lands for Agro-Silvo-Pastoral applications. In medicine, it is now popular in the rehabilitation of kidney disorders.

PASTORALS: Pasture for animals

ENERGY: Fossil fuels

**WORLD TRADE IN GUMARABIC**

Like most other agro commodities, world trade in gum Arabic has been very unstable over the years. This is so because as an environmental product, the annual production of natural gums in Africa depends on the operating environmental factors for that year. Tables 1 and 2 below show the world’s export and import figures for gum Arabic between 1991 and 2001.

**TABLE 1**  
**WORLD EXPORT OF GUM ARABIC 1991 – 2002**

**SOURCE: international trade Centre**

YEAR	SUDAN	CHAD	NIGERIA	AFRICA (OTHERS)	SUB TOTAL	ASIAN COUNTRIES	GRAND TOTAL
1991	25909	2228	6706	1463	36306	809	37115
1992	17,061	2,450	8,358	3,073	30,942	726	31668
1993	13,475	3,701	7,042	2,243	26,461	756	27,217
1994	23,341	4,558	9,822	3,751	41,472	684	42,156
1995	18,143	7,001	9,914	2,821	37,879	814	38,693
1996	17,671	7,365	12,164	3,349	40,549	435	40,984
1997	17,342	8,527	10,199	5,301	41,369	696	42,065

1998	25,053	12,584	8,166	2,296	48,099	384	48,483
1999	19,305	11,312	8,598	3,399	42,614	912	43,526
2000	21,916	11,682	8,239	4,009	45,846	2,251	48,97
2001	26,105	12,881	8,747	2,137	49,870	471	50,341
2002	34,162	10,664	6,556	2,724	54,106	258	54,364

TABLE 2

WORLD IMPROT OF GUM ARABIC BY THE EIGHT LEADING MAJOR IMPORTERS OF GUM ARABIC: 1991 -2001

SOURCE: international Trade Center Geneva.

YEAR	FRANCE	BRITAIN	USA	INDIA	GERMANY	ITALY	JAPAN	AUSTRIA	TOTAL (MT)
1991	9,781	6,810	5,479	3,311	3,251	3,451	1,983	2,998	37,064
1992	9,691	7,402	2,681	2,668	4,114	1,095	1,682	2,570	31,903
1993	10,560	4,724	2,035	2,573	2,957	2,058	782	1,746	27,435
1994	12,009	4,653	6,916	3,763	4,371	5,201	1,447	3,362	41,722
1995	10,675	4,247	5,364	7,547	4,518	2,169	1,072	2,740	38,332
1996	12,450	4,079	6,454	8,334	2,528	1,735	1,220	3,987	40,787
1997	15,931	4,836	6,078	6,095	3,252	699	1,379	3,371	41,641
1998	20,075	5,137	9,028	5,621	3,058	644	1,599	4,081	49,243
1999	15,631	1,829	6,563	6,574	3,672	2,096	1,265	5,730	43,360
2000	19,202	3,744	6,835	5,638	4,405	1,147	1,717	5,307	47,995
2001	20,738	3,310	7,780	4,777	5,398	2,040	1,724	3,810	49,577

Source: international trade centre geneva. (comtrade)

From the tables above, the volume of international trade in gum Arabic has remained within the range of 50,000 to 60,000mts up to 2008. The volume of trade recorded by the international trade centre in geneva is an understatement because some countries do not post all their import/export trade transaction in the world trade template. Atypical example is India which

hardly reflects its imports of Nigeria gum Arabic in the world trade statistics.

In financial terms, the international trade centre based on COMTRADE statistics, estimated the world trade in gum Arabic in 2001 at US\$ 18,382 million. This is an understatement considering that most gum Arabic trade statistics are not posted on the COMTRADE template. A more realistic figure would be about \$10

million. With the approval by the European Union last year of the use of world trade for gum Arabic would triple in the next 5 years to about 150,000mts per annum or about \$450million (about N68 billion) in financial terms.

With the current world production of about 50,000-60,000mts, a gap of about 100,000mts may exist in the next five years by the year 2013, Nigeria has a great opportunity to rapidly increase its production and share of the world trade in gum Arabic to about 50,000mts within the next five years.

#### NIGERIA'S SHARE OF THE WORLD GUMARABIC TRADE.

Available statistics indicate that Nigeria remained the second world's largest producer of gum Arabic after Sudan until 1996. The Table 1 above indicates that

Nigeria crashed to the third position as from 1998 even though the export of gum Arabic from Nigerian ports continues to rise every year. Table Nos 3 and 4 show the export data of gum Arabic from the Nigerian ports up to 2003 and the share of Nigerian from the export of gum Arabic from the Nigerian ports. The international trade centre puts Nigeria's earning from the export of gum Arabic in 2001 at USD4, 113 million while Sudan and Chad earned \$31,244 million and \$13,200 million respectively. However, we believe that Nigeria's export to India has not been recognized by ITC. Primary computation by NAGAPPEN/COMMODITY Networks indicates that Nigeria earned about US\$20 million in 2001 from the export of about 16,454mts of gum Arabic. Indeed it is estimated that between 1999 and 2003 (5 years), Nigerian earned about US\$121,846 million from the sale of 81,231mts of raw gum Arabic using an average FOB price of \$1500pmt.

TABLE: 3

TON NAGE OF GUM ARABIC EXPORTED AT NIGERIAN SEA PORTS: 1994 – 2003 (MTS)

YEAR	APAPA PORT	CONTAINER TERMINAL	TIN CAN PORT	RORO PORT	TOTAL
1994	-	9775	1653	2139	13,567
1995	12	9,920	1,914	1543	13,389
1996	15	10,115	3,009	1,595	14,735
1997	5	10,932	4,117	1,387	16,441
1998	15	9,459	2,485	761	12,720
1999	98	21,163	2,295	791	24,311
2000	-	31,163	961	598	32,524
2001	-	26,818	4,499	1,207	32,524
2002	5	25,118	4,325	389	29,837

2003	-	19,047	4,935	1,386	25,368
TOTAL	150	173,774	30,157	11,797	215,878

Source: Nigerian Ports Authority, Statistics Department

TABLE 4

PRODUCTION/EXPORT OF GUM ARABIC IN NIGERIA (MTS): 1999 -2003

YEAR	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	OTHERS	TOTAL (MTS)
1999	1640	6720	3,500	-	11,860
2000	2,060	6,880	4,600	-	13,540
2001	3,140	9,324	3990	-	16,454
2002	3,410	9,800	4,400	-	17,610
2003	4,486	11,305	5,303	673	21,767
TOTAL	14,736	44,029	21,793	673	81,231

SOURCE: COMMODITY NETWORKS, LAGOS

PRODUCTION OF GUM ARABIC IN NIGERIA: THE FALL OF NIGERIA

Table 4 above shows the production/export of gum Arabic in Nigeria between 1999 and 2003. The data translates to an average growth rate of about 9.1%. This compares unfavorably the annual growth rate of about 25% in Chad.

However, unpublished reports and field information reveal that between 2004 and now, there has been a very disturbing and rapid decrease in the volume of production of Gum Arabic in Nigeria while other competing countries' product continues to rise. By last year 2008, it was feared that Nigeria's total

production has nosedived to as low as about 12,000mts down from 21,767mts recorded in 2003.

Various reasons account for the fall of Nigeria's gum Arabic production. They include:

- Absence of a national action plan by the federal government on gum Arabic development
- Failure of the major producing states of Borno, Yobe, etc to accord gum Arabic any importance in their development programs.
- Neglect of agriculture and the environment by successive governments of Nigeria at the federal, state and local government levels.
- Failure to establish new plantations, reforest old forests, mitigate bush burning and prohibit



the cutting down of gum Arabic trees for firewood.

Regrettably, neither the federal government of Nigeria nor the key producing states of Borno and Yobe states are doing any substantial work to sustain or increase the production of gum Arabic in Nigeria: a product which holds the livelihood of about 3 million Nigerians.

### **FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS IN GUM ARABIC PRODUCTION**

#### **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

Information is not available from either the federal ministry of agriculture or environment on any concrete and sustainable plan to develop gum Arabic as a cash crop or as an environmental product.

#### **BORNO STATE**

Apart from the routine yearly plan of wanting to develop thousands of acres of gum Arabic farm developed by the government of His Excellency, Mallam Kachala, Borno State is not known to have gone beyond this yearly plan. Borno state was the largest producer of gum Arabic but due to the neglect of this sector by the state government, it is no longer clear if Borno state is the largest producer of gum Arabic in Nigeria. Unless the government of Borno state rises up to the challenges of this commodity, her leadership in the production of gum Arabic will become a thing of the past.

### **GUM ARABIC IN DESERT CONTROL AND SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT:**

#### **THE AGRO-SILVO-PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

The food & agricultural organization of the United Nation (FAO), the African Union (AU) and the United

nations convention for combating desertification (UNCCD) have recognized the use of gum Arabic in sustainable land management to ensure food security, reclaim degraded lands and reduce poverty in the fragile Sahel ecological zones of Africa. FAO, UNCCD and AU understand clearly that gum Arabic can be used to reclaim degraded lands thereby putting back into agricultural use, land which otherwise would have been lost to desertification. In addition, the forest which accompanies land reclamation would also provide fodder for pastoralists since a large percentage of the people living within the Sahel region are also pastoralists. The deployment of gum Arabic in the Sahel region therefore provides a triple point benefit in sustainable land management. The use of the Valeriani system of water harvesting has proved to be very efficient in reclaiming degraded lands in Sudan, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mali.

Only recently, FAO and the AU held an international workshop in Addis Ababa where it was agreed that gum Arabic will be used as a key product in the Green Wall (Shelter Belt) project being promoted by the African Union and designed to build a shelter belt across the Sahel region of Africa from Mauritania through Nigeria to Tanzania.

### **SECTOR INCENTIVES IN THE GUM ARABIC INDUSTRY**

There does not seem to be any special sector incentive for gum Arabic as is the case for other important commodities like Cocoa, Palm, Rubber, Cotton and groundnut either in the federal ministry of agriculture, the central bank of Nigeria, the federal ministry of environment or the federal ministry of commerce & industry.

Most of the commodities mentioned above enjoy special federal/central bank interventions in the form

of either a presidential initiative or development fund like the cocoa or Palm development fund. The stark reality is that the government does not realize the United States banned imports from Sudan, gum Arabic was the only commodity exempted because America may be able to produce Coca-Cola without gum Arabic. Few years ago, the government of Saudi Arabia was reported as having spent over \$1 billion planting gum Arabic not because of the gum Arabic to be harvested from it but primarily to reclaim degraded lands for sustainable land management.

### CONCLUSIONS

From the above reports we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Gum Arabic is a utility commodity with applications in industry, environment, agriculture and livestock production.
2. It is a product that has a long term future because of its unique environmental and chemical properties which make its substitution by other commodities very difficult.
3. It has a very high foreign exchange earning potential and the source of livelihood for about 3 million Nigerians living within the fragile Sahel ecological zones of Nigeria.
4. It can be used to reclaim degraded lands which can be put back to used in agriculture, forestry and pastoral programs.
5. It is also the most potent weapon in the fight against desertification which is threatening to sack the frontline states in northern Nigeria.
6. Nigeria has fallen from grace to grass in the world production of gum Arabic losing its second position as a result of insensitivity and lack of commitment by national and state

political leaders in the development of gum Arabic.

7. An emergency, presidential three pronged intervention by the federal, state/local government and private sector stakeholders is now required in order to reposition gum Arabic as a key economic and environmental product.

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