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PROMOTING MOUNTAIN PRODUCTS FOR BETTER LIVELIHOODS

Mountains cover 22 percent of the world's land surface and are home to some 915 million people, representing 13 percent of global population. Yet 1 out of 3 mountain people in developing countries is vulnerable to food insecurity and faces poverty and isolation.

Mountain peoples, who are largely family farmers, base their livelihoods on highly diversified activities. Over generations they have developed unique, resilient and sustainable production systems adapted to their local environments which favour the production of niche and mountain-specific products and services.

Worldwide demand for quality, high-value and traditional foods and crafts produced in mountain areas, such as coffee, cheese, herbs and spices, as well as handicrafts and medicines is on the rise. Small-scale mountain agriculture cannot compete with the volumes of lowland production, but it has the potential to tap into niche markets such as organic, fair trade, or high-end quality ones, and fetch premium prices.

Commercial and sustainable harnessing of high-value products and services presents a significant opportunity for mountain communities to improve their livelihoods generating additional employment and income. Mountain women in particular who are left to manage farms and households as men migrate to lowland areas or abroad in search of a higher income, can increase their income through the trade of their traditional mountain products.

Access to markets, extension services, credit and information is crucial for supporting mountain producers. The potential for exploiting niche and unique products is strongly affected by the remoteness and isolation of mountain areas and lack of key services. In addition the high number of middlemen in the value chain of most mountain products means that producers do not always obtain fair compensation.

Romanian cheese producers enter new markets

In the Eastern Carpathian Mountains of Romania, shepherding is a central part of village life. Summer cheese production remains traditional and small scale, and the products are free of chemicals and appreciated locally for their refined taste. A Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme implemented by several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is improving the sustainability of livestock-based agriculture by strengthening the production and marketing chain and opening market opportunities for these high-quality mountain products. The NGOs have worked with six local shepherds' associations to implement more sustainable land management practices and to construct new sheepfold structures that conform to European Union (EU) sanitary requirements. A collective umbrella brand "De la Munte," (meaning "Of the Mountains") has been created and although production is small scale and seasonal, the farmers' associations are ensuring that traditional cheese production finds a way to thrive in the modern marketplace.



Since markets are often distant and transportation is costly, interventions should focus on high-value and low-volume products, better organization in cooperatives or farmers organizations, support in all the steps of the value chain, including production, processing, packaging and marketing. Mountain specific policies and laws should be put in place to provide an enabling environment to unlock the potential of mountain peoples.

For services such as tourism, mountain communities with their traditional and diverse lifestyles may represent a major attraction, in the form of uniquely preserved ecosystems or traditional way of life. If sustainably managed and if benefits reach the local communities, tourism-related services such as skiing, climbing, cultural heritage or nature trails can provide an opportunity for development in mountain regions.

Indigenous peoples in the Philippines get connected

For centuries, mountain forest-based, indigenous communities in the Philippines have sustainably harvested honey both for subsistence use and as a source of income. However due to lack of knowledge about the market, pricing and quality standards, the honey is often sold at a low price. The quality may also be low as there is a lack of knowledge on proper honey processing and packaging. In 2012, The Philippine Forest Honey Network, a network of mountain-based honey enterprises that established harvesting protocols and quality standards for honey processing at the national level, formulated pricing systems adopted by indigenous peoples; it also approached branding, product development for honey-based products and formulated a marketing strategy. After two years, forest honey became one of the major mountain forest products. Meanwhile, the NGO Veritas e-Trading Network, signed an agreement with the telecommunications company Smart Communications for the free use of its Infoboard, a communications platform where thousands of text messages can be managed and broadcast in real time to link producers, traders and consumers. The NGO provided tablets and few mobile phones, allowing indigenous peoples to link their honey production to urban retailers.



Weaving a future for women in Peru

Andean rural areas are home to ancient native groups such as Quechuas, Aymaras and Huancas, custodians of the Andean cultural heritage, through their biodiversity in crops and local knowledge. The Sunimarca community, located at 4 150 metres above sea level in the southern Peruvian Andes, is one such case. Since 2007, IKA Germany, Oberle Perú, and Mountain Partnership member Red de Agroindustria Rural del Perú (REDAR Perú) have developed several activities in Sunimarca including the promotion of textile production among women. Local knowledge has been innovated through ongoing training: the women now master shearing, washing, dyeing with natural colours and preparing of alpaca and sheep wool. Although initially geared for family use, the products are now promoted at national level. Results include a 100 percent increase of the family income at the community level and the establishment of an artisan association allowing small producers to work collectively. A cooperative bank managed by the women has been created with the purpose of assisting the community to save common capital and promote access to credit.



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