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Assessing the Market Potential of Local Agrobiodiversity Products in the Tajik Pamirs

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Abstract

The Tajik Pamir Mountains is a very harsh environment and its agriculture is characterised by a tremendous diversity of unique fruit varieties, at the basis of local food culture and food security. Fruits like mulberry, apricot, and apple, are important for their adaptability to sloping surfaces. Particular traits give local varieties advantage over introduced ones. However, soviet agricultural reform and recent efforts by development organisations to create markets introducing exotic varieties, are having a profound effect on the loss of agrobiodiversity, increasing the vulnerability of households.

This pilot study carried out in 2009 aims to investigate the market potential of local products derived from apple, apricot, mulberry and how to exploit it to benefit the community livelihoods and the agrobiodiversity maintenance.

An household-level survey was conducted in 3 valleys of the Tajik Pamir, on 78 households cultivating apple, mulberry and apricot varieties. A participatory multi-stakeholder workshop attended by market chain actors working with these fruit species - and with local researchers and developers - was organised to identify and discuss opportunities and bottleneck of the market chains of these crops.

The results show that farmers cultivating these species own very little land (ca. 0.3 ha). These crops represent their main cultivation, used for food and income generation. They cultivate a great number of different varieties (33 apple, 40 apricot and 37 mulberry). Apart from a number of introduced apple varieties, cultivated because of their market appeal, a great number of local mulberry and apricot, but also apple, varieties are maintained for different reasons (early-ripening, good taste and quality, easy to store and to dry).

Most promising products derived by this local agrobiodiversity were identified. Looking at the market chains, a number of problems and opportunities have been classified (such as trainings for pest management, processing and packaging; farmers' cooperatives for marketing).

Exploiting the identified opportunities and, at the same time, raising public awareness about the nutritional qualities of local crop varieties among the producers and consumers is a way to proceed to enhance the market potential of these local species and maintain the local agrobiodiversity.

Keywords: Agrobiodiversity, livelihoods, market chain, market potential, mountainous areas, Pamir mountains, participatory market approach