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Status quo and intensification of traditional apricot farming and processing in Gilgit-Baltistan, northern Pakistan

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Abstract

Small-scale farmers in developing countries can benefit from intensification and diversification strategies by increasing livelihood security through higher income from various sources. Gilgit-Baltistan in northern Pakistan was selected in this study to reveal the opportunities and limitations of such strategies in rural

mountain areas by studying the status quo of apricot production and the innovative farming practices of producers. Apricot cultivation and processing were documented and then linked to prevailing socio-economic realities. In total, 86 Households (HHs) in six valleys were interviewed. A HH level intensification index, calculated by taking the mean of seven agronomic indicators, was generated, and explanatory farm and farmers’ characteristics, production characteristics, knowledge, and apricot management were tested for their predictive power. The local diversity of apricot varieties was high, while the cultivation was extensive, small-scale, and characterised by low productivity. Well-adapted, local apricot trees were under threat of being neglected and replaced due to a shortage of agricultural workforce, low profits, and consecutive decreasing value attribution. Nevertheless, apricot production can contribute to the provision of nutritious fruits and increased HH earnings, as HHs applying innovative farming practices showed increased apricot incomes. The overall innovative strive among local farmers was low and decreased with remoteness from markets. Age and training were the determining factors for HHs to adopt innovations. A lack of awareness of innovative practices was attributed to slow and limited communication. Rejection of innovation was either due to low-value attribution towards apricot farming or personal objections and risk aversion. Commonly adopted innovations (e.g., sulfur drying) were either well integrated with traditional practices or characterised by low up-front costs while quickly returning benefits. To prevent the abandonment of apricot farming and the consecutive loss of associated benefits, intensively managed apricot stands need to be promoted.

Keywords: Adoption, horticulture, socio-economic, varietal richness

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