



World Mountain Forum

Mountains for our future

Mbale, Uganda, 17-20 October 2016



SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN AGRICULTURE



The World Mountain Forum (WMF) is a platform for mountain stakeholders (scientists, civil society, private sector, communities and policy makers) to discuss Sustainable Mountain Development issues and drive action that helps harness the potential of mountains as pillars of sustainable development and at the same time increasing the mountain communities' capacity to adapt to the various environmental, economic and social changes that are happening around the world.

1. Mountain are world's food baskets

Mountain communities' livelihoods have traditionally relied on farming which is essentially family-based. Indeed, mountain characteristics in terms of slope, accessibility, etc. are not conducive to large-scale commodity production and the agriculture sector in these areas has largely been dominated by small-scale, family-based and subsistence systems.

Mountains are also host to diverse agro-environments, retaining niches for many unique and high-value products. They also host a big diversity of local crop varieties. For example, farmers in the Andes know of as many as 200 different varieties of indigenous potatoes and in the mountains of Nepal, they farm approximately 2000 varieties of rice.

This unprecedented richness of varieties of crops farmed in mountains make mountain agricultural products unique and some of them now bear a truly global brand with tangible benefits for the mountain producers of the product. Examples of such brands abounds such as the Zgornjesavinjski Želodec from Slovenia which is a renown certified "mountain product".

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Event hashtag: #WMF_2016

2. Mountain products- Potential to become a world brand



Rangamati, Bangladesh. by Alex Treadway

In 2003-2008, FAO run a “mountain products programme” which sought to assess and analyse promising mountain products in different regions of the world and undertake some pilot projects to promote such products through the strengthening of their value chains for the benefit of the mountain producers. Through the programme, many high-quality niche products were identified which offer comparative advantages for economic development in mountain areas. Many of these products happened to be speciality farm products such as fruits, vegetables, off-season products, cheeses and wool. Other identified products which are not directly related to agriculture are handicrafts as well as non-timber forest products such as medicinal plants, herbs and native spices.

3. Mountain Agriculture in global changes



Traditional farming in Rwanda. Photo: ARCOS

Today, family farming in mountain regions is undergoing rapid transformation due to both internal and external drivers.

These include population growth, economic globalization and market integration, penetration of urban lifestyles, outmigration of men and youth, and the resulting increased workload for women who remain behind, and increasing claims on land for conservation

and large-scale resource extraction projects, such as mining. These have contributed to higher pressure on local resources, unsustainable practices in land use, disintegration of local customs and traditions, and increased vulnerability to global change.

At the same time, however, these drivers of transformation can also provide opportunities for local development, enhancing the role of family farming and improving the quality of life of mountain farmers. For example, they offer opportunities for increasing farm production sustainably and for diversifying livelihoods by engaging in non-farm activities such as tourism and marketing of local handicrafts (Wymann S, et al (eds). 2013). This session will discuss the foundation of developing the mountain brand as a key to sustainable mountain development and explore the requirements to enhance this brand and empower local mountain communities to take advantage of it as an opportunity to integrate in the global markets.

4. Mountains need support to harness their potential for agriculture

It is true that mountain agriculture cannot compete with the prices and volumes of lowland production given the higher production costs in mountains but mountain farmers can concentrate on high-value, low-volume products which are abundant in these regions.

To achieve this goal, mountain people need to be supported to get the much needed initial capital to modernize their production system so they align with international market standards and to brand their products so they can access those markets. A part from this direct support, there is also a need for policies and regulations for the protection, promotion, and development of quality mountain products and this can only achieved through continued advocacy by all mountain stakeholders.

5. Key question to Discuss during the session

- What can be the key drivers in enabling mountain agriculture to produce a sufficient amount of diverse and nutritious food in a changing climate while preserving natural resources and ecosystem services?
- How can agriculture maintain its traditional function in mountainous areas being the engine of inclusive and sustainable development of rural communities?
- How can sustainable market-based food systems be developed, scaled up and mainstreamed in mountain regions when food production is becoming more globalized and economically concentrated?