

## **Marketing Underutilized Crops to Sustain Agrobiodiversity and Improve Livelihoods**

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### **Abstract**

Agricultural households in developing countries maximize utility instead of profit and take consumption and production decisions simultaneously. Their choice to produce a certain set of crops and engage in an array of activities is therefore also based on other interests than profit maximization, resulting in a diverse farming system with a high level of agrobiodiversity, especially among those that are semi-subsistent. Often it is perceived that once farmers become increasingly involved in both demand and supply markets, they will become more specialized with a consequent reduction in agrobiodiversity, both because of substitution of consumption goods formerly produced by the household, by products purchased, and to comply with market demands. Indeed, economic development will be likely to induce changes in decision making, based on rising opportunity costs for labour and cultural changes. A trade-off may take place between income increase and agrobiodiversity maintained on farm. However, if markets are sufficiently diversified and consumers become interested in traits of specific agrobiodiversity it becomes possible to re-govern markets to sustain agrobiodiversity rather than reducing it. If this is the case, this has important implications for underutilized species. Developing markets for these species could have a significant effect on the sustainable preservation of these resources and on the livelihoods of the people maintaining them. In this paper we present a conceptual framework that aims to increase the understanding of the complex relationship between markets and agrobiodiversity. Aspects that are important in the framework include the scale, level and type of agrobiodiversity. The paper will also touch on a few possible tools that could be used to make market chains more sustainable for agrobiodiversity. Four case studies on underutilized species in South, Southeast and Central Asia will be described to illustrate the framework and highlight the impact of underutilized species on people's livelihoods.