

## Nature-based approach to mountain farming can improve livelihoods

8 July 2021, New York – Sustainable farming that works in harmony with nature is key to improving the lives of rural mountain populations and helping to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to a new FAO and Mountain Partnership report published today.

Launched during a side event at the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2021 in New York, *Mountain farming systems – Seeds for the future* presents a collection of 28 case studies from around the world highlighting best practices for sustainable agriculture in mountain areas.

The report shows that mountain farmers have significant success when using agroecology, a systemic approach that focuses on the balance of economic and social value of agricultural production with environmental sustainability.

“Agroecology and the conservation of agricultural biodiversity in the mountains results in more resilient agricultural and food systems that can drive progress towards the SDGs, including reducing rural poverty, contributing to zero hunger and safeguarding the livelihoods of mountain communities while maintaining the provision of global ecosystem services,” said Mette Wilkie, Director of FAO’s Forestry Division.

### **Potential to revitalize rural areas**

The publication also stresses the importance of combining traditional farming practices with innovation and research for transforming food systems in mountains.

In addition, with appropriate pro-mountain policies and investments that improve services and infrastructures as well as access to technology, mountain farming systems have the potential to revitalize rural areas, according to the report.

Examples include an organic farming approach in Nepal, promoting drip irrigation, biofertilizers, nurseries and model farms, where local communities can see climate-smart agricultural practices in action. The approach has high-income generation potential in areas around cities, helping to reduce youth migration to cities or abroad.

“Thanks to the project, on our farm our revenues have greatly increased,” Tara Kesi, a woman farmer in Nepal’s Kavre District involved in the project explains in the publication. “Now, we have increased production and the products are qualitatively better than before. My husband didn’t have to leave Nepal in search of a better job and we managed to build a new house.”

In the Philippines, women members of the Pidlisan tribe have set up a cooperative selling organic produce by reviving home gardens and practicing agroforestry (trees on farms) to

grow a diverse range of food crops, herbs and fruits to enhance community livelihoods and reverse a decline in land productivity.

“As more farmers see the successful results of agroecology practices and adopt them for themselves, agricultural production, ecosystems and livelihoods in mountain areas will benefit” said Wilkie.

The publication also demonstrates the important role of women, since they are often the main keepers of indigenous and traditional knowledge. When women are empowered, they become key community facilitators, motivating other women and helping to improve their families’ food security and nutrition.

### **COVID-19 and mountain communities**

A recent study by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, FAO and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification estimated that one in two – or 346 million – rural mountain people living in developing countries are vulnerable to food insecurity.

Mountain people are often marginalized, with limited access to infrastructures, markets, education and capacity building opportunities, or to digitalization. This contributes to inequality, as does mountain people's distance from decision-making processes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further disrupted life in mountain areas and compounded the vulnerabilities of mountain communities, small-scale farmers and pastoralists who are already affected by natural hazards, climate change, conflicts and land degradation.

The High Level Political Forum side event, ‘Towards a road to sustainable and resilient recovery in mountains’, was organized by the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations, with the support of the Mountain Partnership Secretariat. The publication was supported by the Italian Development Cooperation and the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture.

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