



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
BRAULIO F. DE SOUZA DIAS
on the occasion of
INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY
11 DECEMBER 2015**

“Promoting mountain products for better livelihoods”

Covering some 22 per cent of the world’s land surface, mountains are home to spectacular landscapes, a wide variety of ecosystems, a great diversity of species, and distinctive human communities, with approximately 955 million people, or 13 percent of the global population residing in mountain areas. The world’s principal biome types—from hyper-arid hot deserts and tropical forests, to arid polar icecaps—all occur in mountains. Almost every area that is jointly important for plants, amphibians and endemic birds is located within mountains.

Ninety percent of mountain-dwellers live in developing countries where most are dependent on subsistence agriculture. In fact, of the 20 plant species that supply 80 per cent of the world’s food, six (maize, potatoes, barley, sorghum, tomatoes and apples) originated in mountains.

One out of three mountain people in these countries are vulnerable to food insecurity and face poverty and isolation. In fact, according to a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report released today, while global hunger figures are declining, the number of food insecure people in mountain areas rose 30 per cent over 12 years to nearly 330 million. Crop failure and loss of livestock are an increasing reality with fragile ecosystems easily affected by climate change. In addition, greater incidences of storms, avalanches, landslides and floods from glacial lakes are taking lives and destroying infrastructures, disrupting mountain communities' access to roads, schools, markets and health services.

Mountain peoples, who are largely family farmers, have historically based their livelihoods on highly diversified activities. Over generations they have developed unique, resilient and sustainable production systems adapted to their local environments which favour the production of niche and mountain-specific products and services. These unique products and services can increasingly form the basis for sustainable livelihoods. Many of these are directly based on biodiversity, including agricultural biodiversity; and the services that biodiversity provides, including the stabilization of mountain slopes, are crucial to maintaining productivity and to the safety and wellbeing of mountain communities.



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Worldwide demand for quality, high-value and traditional foods and crafts produced in mountain areas, such as coffee, cheese, herbs and spices, as well as handicrafts and medicines is on the rise. While small-scale mountain agriculture cannot compete with the volumes of lowland production, it has the potential to tap into niche markets such as organic, fair trade, or high-end quality ones, and fetch premium prices.

Commercial and sustainable harnessing of high-value products and services presents a significant opportunity for mountain communities to improve their livelihoods, generating additional employment and income. Mountain women in particular who are left to manage farms and households as men migrate to lowland areas or abroad in search of a higher income can increase their income through the trade of their traditional mountain products.

Trade in such products represents an opportunity for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources. By ensuring that the production and harvesting of biodiversity is done sustainably, mountain peoples can enhance their incomes, as well as conserve and restore the resources which will allow them to build a sustainable future, a future of life in harmony with nature. Ensuring this will also help contribute towards the achievement of Aichi Biodiversity Targets 4 (on sustainable production and consumption) and 13 (on ensuring the genetic diversity of cultivated plants and domesticated animals).

As we celebrate International Mountain Day, let us seek to support mountain peoples in maintaining and strengthening their sustainable livelihoods, in a manner that is in keeping with the achievement of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.
