



## Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica share knowledge on non-timber forest products

**“In Benin we identified that they eat insects. In Costa Rica we don’t eat insects...But it turns out that Costa Rica has a strong capacity in turning traditional knowledge into scientific knowledge.”**

**– Marianella Feoli, Head of Partners in South-South Cooperation Secretariat and Managing Director of Costa Rican chapter**

As part of the programme of Partners in South-South Cooperation, experts from Benin taught Costa Rican and Bhutanese technicians about the value of edible insects as a source of nutrition and income. The Costa Ricans adapted Benin’s nutritious snack into a cattle-feed supplement, reducing feed costs for livestock farmers, and is looking at using them for human consumption. In exchange, Benin and Bhutan learnt from Costa Rica how to organise their traditional knowledge (on fungi and insects) into scientific knowledge so that it can be passed on to future generations. Bhutan also taught the Costa Ricans and Beninese how to treat edible fungi.

The project was jointly run by the National Mushroom Center in Bhutan, the National Biodiversity Institute (INBio) in Costa Rica and the Département Aménagement et Gestion de l’Environnement de la Faculté des Sciences Agronomiques de l’Université d’Abomey-Calavi in Benin to share experiences and jointly develop the information base through research on valuable non-timber forest products such as mushrooms and insects.

### Partners in South-South Cooperation

Partners in South-South Cooperation (formerly Programme for South-South Cooperation) between Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica is a strategic partnership for cooperation on sustainable development initiated and funded by the Netherlands. Cooperation between Costa Rica in Central America, Benin in West Africa, and Bhutan in South Asia has already led to 36 separate programmes delivering thousands of jobs and hundreds of new businesses and products. The focus of the programme rests on four intertwined pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development, environmental protection and gender equity. One of the amazing results of the programme is that the sectors developed through the programme are being sustained without further intervention after just three years. Programme costs are kept low by making use of the expertise of those directly benefiting: local farmers and entrepreneurs.

### Reciprocity of the project

South-South Cooperation is a form of development assistance that makes developing countries equal partners in their development. By breaking away from North-South development stereotypes, it is able to tackle global development issues such as poverty, hunger and global warming. South-South Cooperation ensures greater empathy between southern countries and a better understanding of realistic strategies for problem resolution. The closeness of southern countries to the identification of main problems



can increase the cost effectiveness of technical cooperation; promote the transfer of appropriate technology; and enhance ownership, leadership and capacity building among southern countries.

This approach enabled mushroom cultivation experiences to be applied in the three countries. The exchange led to the development of an insects' inventory, the establishment of an insectarium, the construction of non-timber forest products laboratories, and the institution of collection management activities for insects.

**“These insect are very nutritious and can be produced economically. That was a success. There are lots of cultural aspects to what people are willing to eat.”**

– Prof Mirjam van Reizen, Chair of International Social Responsibility at Tilburg University, the Netherlands

**“The programme set the tone for a balanced and mature relationship; it fits well for both our nations. Our relations evolve through the promotion of international legal order and trade, not aid.”**

– Matthijs van Bonzel, Dutch Ambassador to Costa Rica

## Achievements

The programme has brought significant economic, social and environmental benefits to the participating countries.

### Economic

- Insects' inventory established and collection management activities initiated
- Information and technology shared for the development of insects as cattle feed
- New laboratory established for research on insects at Benin University
- Insectariums established at National Biodiversity Institute in Costa Rica to disseminate information to students, professors and tourists
- Bhutanese trainers trained in Benin on breeding economically important insect species
- Alternative food source developed, inspired by practices in Africa, where insects have long been part of the diet
- Local market for mushrooms developed in Bhutan (Ura and Chasilakha)
- Bhutanese technicians trained people in Benin and Costa Rica on collection, identification and maintenance of mushroom specimens
- Infrastructure and capacity at the National Mushroom Centre in Bhutan strengthened to carry out identification and study of mushrooms
- New mushroom cultivation laboratory equipped with new technologies for parataxonomy and taxonomy

### Social

- Public awareness strengthened about ways of sustainably using biodiversity and the importance of biodiversity conservation
- New cultural links created through the exchange of tips on nutrition

### Environmental

- Promoted the sustainable use of non-traditional components of biological diversity, especially for public-private cooperation
- Developed capacity for biological research
- Exchanged technical information to facilitate the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity
- Producers are applying new technologies and products for sustainable production

## Award winning programme

In 2010, Partners in South-South Cooperation was awarded the prestigious UNDP South-South Cooperation Award in the categories of 'Partnership' and 'Climate Change Solutions'.

**To read more about the project: [www.southsouthcooperation.net](http://www.southsouthcooperation.net)**

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