



Bhutan and Costa Rica work together to cultivate and market mushrooms

“Asians know how to produce, commercialise and consume mushrooms, whereas Latin-Americans do not. So the Bhutanese showed them, helping women to organise and produce a new crop and sell to Asian restaurants in San Jose.”

– Matthijs van Bonzel, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Costa Rica

As part of the programme of Partners in South-South Cooperation, farmers in Costa Rica have learnt from farmers in Bhutan how to commercialise cultivated and wild edible mushrooms to generate income, while benefiting the environment. Mushrooms are well suited to the high altitude zones of Costa Rica and have high economic value, particularly on the international market where shiitake mushrooms are the third-most relevant mushroom.

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 Bhutanese experts to provide technical support and monitor the progress of mushroom microenterprises in Costa Rica, while the Costa Ricans shared skills in the marketing of mushrooms and mushroom products.



Achievements

The programme has brought significant economic, social and environmental benefits to farmers as well as women.

“South-South Cooperation is a visionary idea of the Netherlands that is starting to pay off today. Just to mention a few of its benefits: the discovery of Afro-Caribbean cultural links, music, new agricultural methods, eco-tourism, diversification of diets of rural people, coping with climate change, the development of a happiness index, and the promotion of women micro-entrepreneurship.”
– René Castro, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Costa Rica

Economic

- 154 people trained in edible and medicinal mushroom production/collection in Bhutan and Costa Rica
- Mushroom cultivation established in 4 communities in Costa Rica
- Local sales of US\$ 1,600 generated per monthly; producers are now preparing to sell on a larger scale under their own brand ‘Shiitake Del Cerro’
- Extension packages developed for the identification and collection of wild mushrooms
- Market study conducted on mushrooms produced/cultivated by local communities in Bhutan and Costa Rica
- 3 new products developed (fresh, marinated and dried shiitake) with packaging and labels

Social

- Social fabric improved by creating employment opportunities through mushroom production and marketing projects

Environmental

- 650 families are applying clean technologies
- Skills and awareness of 36 organisations and institutions improved in relation to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity
- Environmental conservation and protection established as a basic requirement for the mushroom industry
- Developed biodegradable trays and food-grade plastic film for packaging
- Forests preserved as mushroom cultivation does not require chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and oak logs used for cultivation are waste wood

Gender

- Women actively involved on all levels from inoculation and cultivation, to post-harvest handling, processing and marketing
- Helped to expand women’s roles in all spheres

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

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