

Title Underutilized plant products and market access: Challenges and opportunities
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Abstract

There is growing interest worldwide in how farmers can benefit from emerging market opportunities, particularly in how they can access complex value chains associated with changes in the global agricultural economy. In the case of underutilized plant products, market access is seen as an opportunity both to reduce poverty and contribute to in situ conservation. However, farmers seeking access to markets for underutilized products face high transaction costs. They often cannot meet food safety standards particularly in international markets. In addition, there may be no existing product grades that facilitate long distance trade. In cases where standards and grades do exist, producers may not be able to meet them. All smallholders face high transaction costs, but producers of underutilized products (and those engaged in value-adding activities such as agro-processing) face additional challenges of poorly-defined markets and weak demand because their products are not very well known. This paper identifies the challenges and opportunities in marketing underutilized plant products (seen here as a subset of high value agricultural products) and how these differ from usual commodities. This paper addresses two key issues: a) facilitating access to markets for large numbers of producers, and b) identifying the role of the public and private sectors in ensuring the economic viability of market access. Success depends on the structure of value chains, the relationships between chain actors (including collective action), the perishable nature of the products, availability of infrastructure, product certification, and the identification of appropriate markets. Demand for high value agricultural products is expected to grow faster in domestic and regional markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America than in export markets. Access to these markets is also likely to lead to greater poverty reduction and conservation through use among smallholder producers of underutilized products.