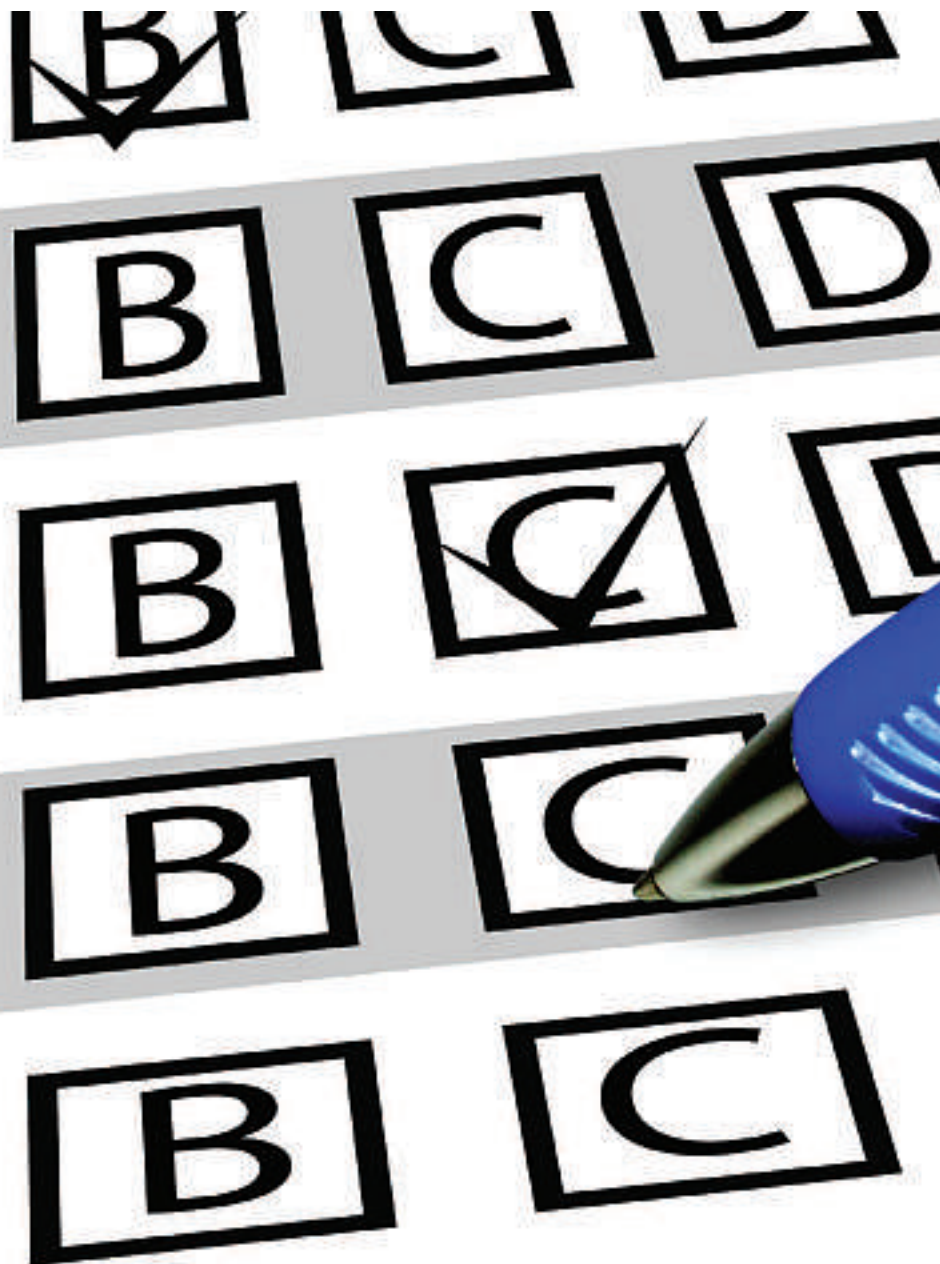


A healthy choice

Ethical and sustainable trade in biodiversity products can bring some indirect health benefits to poor rural communities. Rik Kutsch Lojenga and Pierre Hauselmann explain.



Consumers today are voting with their wallets. They want to know that the products they buy are made from ingredients obtained ethically and sustainably. And a growing number of businesses, including those in the cosmetics, pharmaceutical and complementary medicine sectors want guidance on how to source their materials in biodiversity-friendly ways.

Adhering to the concept of Ethical BioTrade on the supply and demand sides can bring health benefits, both direct and indirect, to thousands of the rural poor.

Ethical BioTrade is a set of trading and management practices related to products derived from biodiversity that contribute to its conservation and sustainable use. It respects traditional knowledge and ensures

the equitable sharing of benefits along supply chains. Although human well-being and the improvement of livelihoods are an integral part of sustainable development, the objectives of Ethical BioTrade are not directly health related. Yet our experience shows that there are several ways in which it can have a positive impact on people's health. It can lead to an increase in living standards from trade of biodiversity products; provide access to medicines, health services and medical assistance to remote populations through the transport of these products; and offer direct health benefits through the use of ingredients derived from biodiversity.

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traditionally. Only a few years ago, Bombon, a remote region in the high Andes, was plagued by high infancy and maternity mortality rates. Then the therapeutic applications of Maca, a root from the high Andes became known and the product began to be traded, providing a source of income for the region. Since then, the farmers have witnessed a significant increase in their income, and mortality rates have fallen significantly.

Once a month a boat arrives at an Afro-colombian community in the Choco area on the Pacific coast of Colombia to pick up fruits of the small tree *Genipa americana* collected by villagers. Ecoflora, a small Colombian BioTrade company, transforms the fruits into a colouring extract used, among other things as a paint for tattoos. The boat has started to come regularly since Ecoflora began buying the fruit to supply

its clients in Europe. Every time the boat travels to the community, the villagers take advantage of it by having all kinds of basic supplies brought in. Basic medicines are always on the cargo list and sometimes the boat carries a doctor or a nurse.

There are many similar examples. Baobab fruits are collected in remote areas of Malawi, and the truck that picks up and transports the fruit carries all types of useful items, including medicines. This happens also in the remote Amazon villages of Ecuador, and probably anywhere such trade is established with remote communities. However modestly, this trade creates a life line for people that depend on, and are guardians of, their natural resources.

The plant *Centella asiatica* is used in the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries

In Colombia, Labfarve, a laboratory that researches medicinal plants, provides affordable medicines to the poorer segments of society.

for its wound-healing and anti-inflammatory properties. Serdex, a division of Bayer HealthCare and a member of the Union for Ethical BioTrade, uses *Centella asiatica* from Madagascar as an ingredient for its products. It sources from about 1,500 peasant families in an area of over 9,000 km² and the collectors receive a 30–50% premium for the species. Serdex also contributes to community projects including supplying electricity to a local hospital.

In Colombia, Labfarve, a laboratory that researches medicinal plants, provides

affordable medicines to the poorer segments of society. It is part of the Corpas Group, which includes a medical school and a hospital, all of which share a strong social commitment. Labfarve uses a wide range of species derived from Colombia's rich biodiversity, from the high Andes to the Amazon region. By implementing the principles of Ethical BioTrade throughout its supply chains, the laboratory links the benefits of affordable and efficient remedies for patients to providing better living conditions for the different actors in the supply chains, up to the producers. Labfarve, a founding member of the Union for Ethical BioTrade, has long-term contracts with its suppliers, provides continuous training and shares 10% of its profits with local communities.

While there are numerous positive impacts of Ethical BioTrade on health and its principles and criteria include safeguards to avoid harmful effects such as threatening the food security of local populations, unintended negative impacts may still occur. That's why the organizations involved in BioTrade are developing an impact assessment system to monitor the changes in areas in which BioTrade activities take place, including in health-related issues. ■

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The Union for Ethical BioTrade promotes the 'sourcing with respect' of ingredients derived from native biodiversity. Members join on the condition that they make a strong commitment to implement the principles of BioTrade developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and inspired by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As this implementation is independently verified, it offers enterprises a way to demonstrate their positive contribution to the objectives of the CBD whilst creating tangible business benefits. IUCN and the International Finance Corporation are among the Union's founding members.

www.ethicalbiotrade.org