Muong women act for biodiversity conservation and better lives through organic farming

Description of the project: CECAD empowers over 300 ethnic Muong women of the Hoa Binh province in Northern Vietnam to switch to organic agriculture and improve their climate resilience. Trainings focus on identifying and protecting native plant species, reducing chemical inputs and setting up a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-certification) via an organic farmer support group, in order to ensure customer trust. Start-up Clubs were set up to train 30 women on entrepreneurship skills and build up small organic food businesses with a web portal to access new retail and markets. Muong women worked with local authorities on local policy development, raising their democratic rights. In total 10,000 people in 20 communities benefit from improved rights, resilience and livelihoods.

Climate impact: Shifting to organic farming practices has greatly reduced GHG emissions and pesticide use (4,800 liters since 2013). This reduced the pollution of underground water and soil as well as living organisms in the environment. Protecting these ecosystems contribute to increased climate resilience for land and people. Organic and traditional farming practices have been an important part of agriculture in Vietnam for centuries. Rehabilitating ancestral knowledge combined with agricultural innovation with worldwide recognition (PGS) is appropriate, especially for isolated ethnic minorities who have to rely on local adapted means.

Gender impact: Participatory needs assessment and adapted training programmes have increased the agency of over 300 Muong women. The Start-up Clubs enabled them to create and lead their own enterprises, using modern internet technologies to reach out to more customers. Working with Women’s Union and local authorities, they are actively contributing to local decision-making processes. This has promoted their status at home and in their communities, improving their democratic and socio-economic rights.

Scalability / replicability: CECAD has worked to establish a quality assurance system for organic products, applying participatory monitoring throughout the value chain and involving farmers, customers and local authorities. While national policies on gender equality and sustainable agriculture support scalability throughout the province and other regions, local expertise and resources are also required. By involving women farmers, along with Women’s Union and District People’s Committees as major stakeholders, the project demonstrates decentralized, feasible and sustainable practices.

Mayombe’s mamas produce banana chips to fight deforestation and protect great apes

Description of the project: ESI Congo works on improving women’s livelihoods in the villages of Loaka and Magne in southwestern Congo while preserving the Mayombe forest. An agroforestry platform was created and is managed by a women’s group; the processing of plantains into banana chips and their sales provide new income to the wives of former hunters, offering a sustainable alternative to poaching. Plantains are provided by former hunters converted to agroforestry in order to curb traditional slash-and-burn farming practices in the forest. The responsible and ethical banana chips’ manufacturing provides a new value chain for plantains that are cultivated by 90% of the households of this area.

Climate impact: The project is promoting products from local agroforestry in order to avoid felling trees over large areas (25 ha since 2017) for other agricultural purposes. Preserving the forest ensures a reduction in CO2 emissions and protects vital ecological niches, natural home of the great apes. The chip’s manufacturing process follows a comprehensive and environmentally friendly approach including low water consumption (50 l. of water for 15 kg of chips) and efficient firewood use of bamboo, an invasive species in this area.

Gender impact: Women are given the opportunity to access jobs, which are rare for them in this region. They gain financial independence and a place in the local economy. This brings social, economic and environmental benefits for the whole community. Eleven women have received technical and entrepreneurship training; they are consulted in all strategic orientations thanks to horizontal decision-making processes. Their self-confidence is being raised and they are encouraged to make active proposals so they can eventually manage the production unit independently.

Scalability / replicability: Local authorities provided political support for this new economic activity, as well as logistical assistance through the donation of land for the chips production unit. The villagers want to increase the production rate in order to integrate more women. This local economic development model, based on ecosystem protection, is replicable in all countries where banana trees are grown and where the socio-cultural context allows to upgrade plantains products.