

# Biodiversity and Access to Affordable Medicines

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Recognizing the importance of medicinal plants offers a unique opportunity to link biodiversity, health and sustainable development. Biodiversity is the source of primary health care for the majority of the world's population. The research and development of medicinal plants is thus a way to safeguard and advance health care, which is essential for much of the population. Moreover, the ethical sourcing of medicinal plants can play an important role in the conservation and sustainable use of these species and their ecosystems, as well as provide a significant avenue for local sustainable development.

For almost 30 years, Labfarve has strived to combine economic, social and environmental objectives in its ethical sourcing of biodiversity in Colombia. Labfarve is a leading research laboratory in the field of medicinal plants. It was founded in Colombia in 1984 by Dr. Jorge Piñeros Corpas, as part of a wider initiative to improve access to health services for the poorest segments of society. Today, Labfarve is recognized throughout Latin America for facilitating access to affordable medicines and advancing the recognition and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The main activities of Labfarve consist of research, development, transformation and commercialization of natural products derived from Colombia's rich biodiversity, including the high Andes and the Amazon rainforest. Labfarve develops phytopharmaceutical, cosmeceutical, and nutraceutical products based on extracts of native species that come from Labfarve's own organic cultivation areas. For example, Labfarve has developed a nutraceutical product based on an extract of "alegría del monte" (*Scutellaria coccinea*) used to treat depression and other ailments of the nervous systems.

## ETHICAL BIOTRADE

Today, Labfarve numbers approximately 170 direct employees, which includes biologists, chemists, pharmacists, doctors, employees and administrative personnel. The company also provides jobs for close to 100 affiliated farmers in charge of the sustainable wild collection of raw materials. Throughout its supply chains, Labfarve implements the principles of Ethical BioTrade. It holds long-term contracts with its suppliers, offers continuous training to its commercial partners, and shares 10% of profits with local communities providing the raw materials. It also respects traditional knowledge, ensures there are numerous positive impacts on health, and its principles and criteria include safeguards to avoid harmful effects such as threatening the food security of local populations.

Labfarve adheres to the concept and practices of Ethical BioTrade for a number of reasons. Ethical BioTrade can bring health benefits, both direct and indirect, to thousands of the rural poor. In Latin America, much of the population is still not connected to a formal health system and relies primarily on natural remedies. As noted by the World Health Organization, it is critical to encourage these practices, incorporating them into primary health care strategies and ensuring that traditional medicines and therapeutic elements of recognized utility are further researched for further pharmacological and clinic uses. In addition to its research and development, Labfarve has also successfully asked the Colombian government to include 20 phyto-medicines in its national health care system.

Ethical BioTrade also ensures that medicinal biodiversity and related ecosystems will be sustainably managed and conserved, and the rights of indigenous and local communities in relation to their lands, resources and knowledge will be protected. Equitable benefit sharing is, in this regard, an adequate recognition of the contribution of biodiversity and traditional knowledge to new products, as well as an essential incentive to protect and integrate such biodiversity and knowledge in sustainable development policies and plans. Indeed, Ethical BioTrade is a critical concept that underlies the partnerships among all participants in the supply chain, key to achieving improved local health care and livelihoods, and for sustainably meeting the international demand for natural health products.

