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Supporting agribusiness development in the Tigray region of Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA, 29 August 2013 – UNIDO has launched an agribusiness development project to help rural communities in Tigray establish a stable source of income. The project focuses on Beles, a type of cactus which provides a highly nutritious food source that can be processed into a diverse range of food products.

In June, UNIDO and the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) signed an agreement on a USD 600,000 grant in support of the Beles-based agribusiness development project in the Tigray region.

The project was launched today with a two-day workshop, organized by the Ministry of Industry of Ethiopia and UNIDO, which will raise awareness of key stakeholders, particularly policymakers and practitioners, of the importance of Beles.

The project will help establish a modern processing plant which will manufacture a stable supply of marketable Beles-based products. Beles is the Amharic name for *Opuntia ficus-indica* (also known as Nopales or prickly pear cactus). It provides highly nutritious food, with low levels of saturated fatty acids and very low levels of cholesterol. Beles fruits and pads can be used for the production of numerous processed and fresh products, such as fresh fruits, juices, marmalades, jelly, candies, teas, ice cream and dessert sauces, as well as alcoholic drinks.

Beles can also be utilized as animal feed, especially important during Ethiopia's dry season, as well as in pharmaceutical and cosmetic products.

During the workshop, representatives of the Universities of Adigrat, Mekelle and Bahir Dar, as well as the Tigray Agricultural Marketing and Promotion Agency (TAMPA), Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, the Adigrat Diocesan Catholic Secretariat (ADCS), the Tigray Agricultural Research Institute and the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, identified areas for cooperation and agreed to develop a joint plan of action.

State Ministers of Industry, Mebrahtu Meles and Tadesse Haile, who took part in the workshop, said that the UNIDO project will help rural communities in Tigray, especially women and young people, to develop a stable source of income, and contribute to achieving the agribusiness sector targets defined under the country's Growth and Transformation Plan. They also noted that Beles plants help prevent soil erosion and this will contribute to Ethiopia's green economy agenda.

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The project will help establish a modern processing plant that will manufacture a stable supply of marketable Beles-based products, a highly nutritious food that can be processed into a diverse range of food products. Photo by UNIDO