



BioTopic

Collection of Wild Plants in the Caucasus - *FairWild* as Alternative Management and Trade Model

Natural resources are not always managed in a sustainable way. The reasons can be found in the current economic, political, social and normative frame in which the countries in the Caucasus are embedded. Poverty is widespread among rural populations of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and local collectors are forced to exploit the wild collected plant resources above sustainable levels. Wild collection is not seen as a profession but as seasonal work although for many people the generated income is the main or only source of income throughout the year. In most cases wild collectors do not work with contracts and are not embedded in social security systems. These conditions lead to a low esteem of wild collected products and their natural habitats, especially outside of protected areas.

The international market for wild collected plants is growing steadily and can potentially open up alternative marketing possibilities for products from the Caucasus:

The increasing demand for wild collected raw materials in the sectors

of food, personal health care, medicinal herbs and horticulture puts the related international industries under pressure. Constant supply of high quality raw material is needed and companies need to give proof that they are acting in a responsible and eco-friendly way. The final consumer is asking for ecologically sound and fair traded products, which can be seen in the rapidly growing international organic and fair trade market.

GTZ and its partner The Institute for Market Ecology (IMO) are supporting the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in implementing the programme “Sustainable Management of Biodiversity”, financed by the German Government. The programme component on wild plant collection aims to:

- Improve the economic situation of local people by establishing value chains for wild collected plant products. These chains begin with the collectors and their communities, continue through workers in processing and export business and can end either on the national or international markets. Value

chains comprise all involved trade partners and shall be fair and transparent.

- Introduce a management system for wild collected plant resources so that the collection is sustainable over long time periods. Management plans need to be developed which define sustainable harvest levels and methods, and which are continuously improved over time in order to monitor the collection activities.





- Institutionalize sustainable collection methods in a normative framework. This framework shall provide a method on how protected as well as not protected areas can be used to generate income through sustainable use of the wild plant resources. This process will be achieved by assisting national and regional governments or private stakeholders to develop adapted standards and procedures for organizing the wild collection activities in each country in a sustainable way.

Why does IMO become involved in wild collection activities in the Caucasus?

IMO has over 20 years of experience in organic certification and development of standards related to quality assurance and sustainably produced products which can easily be adapted to the wild collection sector. IMO created the FairWild Standard together with the FairWild Foundation and other stakeholders and has great expertise in its implementation. At present IMO is the only institution which can offer FairWild as certification scheme.

Activities to be implemented in cooperation with local interested parties are the following:

- Establishment of value chains for selected wild collected products from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

- Implement a series of training sessions and seminars for various target groups along the value chains, such as collectors, workers, managers and exporters. Training will also be provided for building up national consultancies and certification bodies who can independently continue with FairWild after the project has ended.

- Develop area specific management plans together with the resource users which define the collection methods, frequency and limits. The users will be trained in the management of the resources and in using and adapting the management plans.

- Support national stakeholders in developing adapted standards which shall regulate and institutionalize the collection of wild plants.

How can you participate?

If your organization is working in the fields of collection, processing or export of wild collected plants you may become part of the project by contributing to a value chain. If you want to be involved please contact us.

Products included can be any kind of plant, mushroom, moss or lichen, for medicinal and aromatic use, for use as food or food ingredient, as beverage, for seed and bulb horticultural propagation as well as further uses. Cultivated plants as well as trees for timber production and animal products are not included in the project.



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