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SUSTAINABLE SOURCING OF WILD PLANTS

Wild plant collection in CE has good potential for supporting the livelihoods of local communities, through generation of income as well as providing a source of food, and ingredients for medicines, as well as other uses. It is important to ensure, however, that where wild collection is carried out it is based on the principles of sustainable harvesting and equitable trade, providing incentives to ensure the long-term survival of plants and preservation of traditions of wild harvesting.



Dog Rose *Rosa canina*, one of the project target plants, CREDIT: Corvinus University/Peter Radacsi

In 2011, TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary, together with partners, finalized a set of sustainability principles for wild plant collection drawn from the FairWild Standard. The principles were further translated into national languages and used by partners while training local communities. These principles can be applied in different resource management contexts, and are supported by the detailed list of criteria and indicators included in the FairWild Standard, which are recommended for adherence and implementation in all wild-collection situations.

Reviving the traditions of wild plant collection in Central Europe

BACKGROUND Central Europe (CE) has been an important region for the sourcing of wild plants for medicinal, aromatic and culinary use since ancient times. Currently, approximately 2000 wild plant species are traded commercially, of which 60-70% are native to CE. Up to 90% of these species are still collected from the wild. From the middle of the 20th century to the present day, traditional knowledge concerning the properties and use of many of these wild plants has been in decline due to urbanization, changes in land ownership, and ever-changing lifestyle choices. Nowadays, wild plant collection is sometimes performed in an unsustainable manner, leading to the further decline of wild harvesting as an important source of employment and income for vulnerable groups in the long-term.

TRADITIONAL AND WILD PROJECT The following case study describes the experience of the 'Traditional and wild' project which aimed to support pilot initiatives to promote sustainable use and management of wild-collected plants and associated capacity-building for local wild plant collectors in CE. The project's main objective was to protect the cultural heritage of collecting and processing useful wild plants, and to foster the sustainable use of this traditional knowledge and expertise among rural populations in CE. The three-year project (May 2011 - April 2014) co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), was implemented by nine organizations from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Poland. TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary have been involved from the project outset, promoting the uptake of the principles of the FairWild Standard through the pilot sites to ensure sustainability of harvesting and trade in wild plants. TRAFFIC was among the organizations which developed the FairWild Standard, and continues to promote its use through partnership with the FairWild Foundation.

Throughout the project lifespan, various communication and educational tools were developed by TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary, including the training materials for collectors of wild plants, and an online toolbox about wild plant resources.

TRAINING MATERIALS In 2012, the partnership developed the '*Training materials on plant collection and utilization, building entrepreneurial skills, and providing employment opportunities*'. Included within these materials was a training course on aspects of sustainable wild plant collection based on the FairWild Standard that was prepared by TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary. The course contains an overview of the medicinal plants sector in CE, the main principles of good collection practices (based on Good and Agricultural Collection Practices (GACP)), aspects of sustainable wild plant collection (based on principles of the FairWild Standard), including collection instructions, and the handling of plant material before and after collection. Based on the training materials developed, training courses were delivered to 1035 people in six project target areas between April and August 2013. Among the people trained in the pilot areas, 200 were specifically trained in sustainable wild plant collection and processing practices. The training courses demonstrated the importance of plants collected from the wild in CE and helped trainees to improve sustainable wild plant harvesting and processing techniques. The training also built up their entrepreneurial and marketing skills required for improving their employment opportunities and thus increasing the opportunity for earning potential additional income.



A field training course in Kemes, the Ormánság region, Hungary, CREDIT: Rózsa Takács Petrovicsné



PROJECT IMPACT

The project contributed to ensuring the sustainable harvesting and use of plants collected from the wild in the pilot areas through implementation of FairWild Standard principles. Moreover, the project helped foster the sustainable use of traditional knowledge and expertise among vulnerable groups in rural parts of Central Europe via a wide range of communication and educational tools developed within the project framework.

The project contributed to building the local capacity among marginalized target groups so that in the long term, they may also better contribute to the local and regional economy. Furthermore, the project developed a network of regions that collect and use wild plants for future co-operation.



Introduction page of 'Traditional and wild' toolbox, CREDIT: TRAFFIC

Replication of the toolbox and trainings could be possible in other regions because it contains universal and appropriate information about wild plant resources. The information is appropriate for use in a range of contexts, training and in workshops to enrich knowledge about wild plants.

POST TRAINING IMPACT As a result of the training undertaken in South Moravia (Poland) in 2013, a business woman from the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands was interested in establishing her own wild plant purchasing centre, including fruits and medicinal plants. Her objective was to provide work to the most financially disadvantaged people in the community as well as selling raw materials to processing companies. She already had some of her own financial resources, and was seeking suitable premises for the centre. She was also in contact with Mendel University with a view to developing her business plan further, of which the main focus would be on calculating the right quantity of collected species required to make the business viable.

TOOLBOX A 'Traditional and wild' online toolbox was developed as an online suite of tools and learning resources about wild plants specifically designed for the general public, and also for scientific and educational institutions, as well as any other stakeholders working with or interested in wild plant resources. The toolbox comprises eight sections including comprehensive information about 30 commonly used wild-collected plants, such as Wolf's Bane *Arnica montana* and Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*. Also included is an overview of worldwide projects incorporating the use of the FairWild Standard including those producing FairWild-certified Frankincense (*Commiphora* and *Boswellia* species) from Kenya and Liquorice root *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* from Kazakhstan. An associated online cartoon has also been developed within the toolbox to explain and promote the use of the FairWild Standard. Also included within the online toolbox is a Resource section, intended for use by users of wild harvested plants, companies seeking information about sustainable harvesting and trade, government bodies charged with regulating such trade and those looking for a better understanding of the sector.

The toolbox is already in use. For example, Pukka Herbs, a UK-based organic herbal tea and supplement company, embedded a FairWild online cartoon in their own website, educating about sustainable trade chains for wild plants. In 2014, the toolbox has won "Site of the Day" for its innovative creative design and ease of use from the prestigious theFWA.com and cssdesignawards.com websites.

EXCHANGING EXPERIENCE BETWEEN EUROPE AND CHINA The experience from CE can prove of great value in informing approaches taken elsewhere in the world, for example in the project "Engaging China's private sector in sustainable management of medicinal plants" (EGP-MAPs), which aims to create green supply chains in the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) industry, achieving sustainable management of medicinal plants and improving rural livelihoods through generating income and environmental governance in China. Similar to the situation in Central Europe, the wild plant collection in China is sometimes performed in an unsustainable manner, leading to the further decline of an important source of employment and income for vulnerable groups.

In addition, wild medicinal plant resources are under threat in large part owing to unsustainable and over-harvesting to meet high demand from the TCM and herbal products industry. Cultural traditions and knowledge on sustainable wild collection and use should be maintained as well in order to keep rural communities being involved into wild plant activities and improve their rural livelihoods. Projects such as 'Traditional and wild' and 'EGP-MAPs' bring together stakeholders involved along the entire supply chain—harvesters, nature conservation NGOs, industry associations, academia, government departments, and of course the TCM industry and traders to address these issues.



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This factsheet is compiled by Kristina Rodina, TRAFFIC, based on the "Traditional and wild" final lesson learnt report (April 2014).

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