

# Wild Harvests



## Target 12: All wild-harvested plant-based products sourced sustainably

*“Pluck not the wayside flower; it is the traveler’s dower.”*

William Allingham



Plants harvested directly from the wild are probably of greatest importance in rural areas of the developing world, where they provide food, fuel, timber and medicines. However, there is also a large and growing demand for wild plants and products derived from them in the global food, cosmetics and medicinal market sectors. As a result of this increasing trade, many plant species are at risk from over-harvesting. The decline in wild plant populations has serious consequences for the livelihoods of the people these plants support.

### The case of medicinal plants

Medicinal plants have been used by humankind for millennia. The range of species used and their scope for healing is vast. It is estimated that more than 50,000 plant species are used worldwide for medicinal purposes.

The World Health Organization estimates that 80 per cent of people in developing countries rely on traditional medicine for their primary healthcare. Demand for traditional remedies and a desire for healing through natural products is also increasing in so-called developed countries. Collecting medicinal plants for sale is an important income source for poor rural communities around the world. Unfortunately, commercial demand now exceeds supply in many cases, and the unregulated collection of these plants has the potential to endanger plant species’ survival in the wild.

### Cultivation versus wild harvest

Cultivation has long been suggested as a possible mitigation to the unsustainable wild harvest of plants, simultaneously taking the pressure off wild stock, whilst boosting commerce.



However, cultivation often requires major inputs for a far-off return and there is little incentive to bring into cultivation species that are required in relatively small volumes, are slow growing, are believed to be more potent in their wild form, or do not command sufficiently high prices. Moreover, there are social, economic and ecological benefits to wild harvesting. Since much of it is carried out in low-wage countries, by low income, underprivileged groups, it often provides a chance for the poorest people to earn some income, despite

having no land. Wild harvest also gives an economic value to ecosystems and habitats, therefore providing an incentive for the protection of something larger than just the plant itself.

### Where are we now?

In response to the decline in wild plant resources, the FairWild Foundation was established in 2008. It promotes the sustainable use of wild-collected ingredients, with a fair deal for all those involved



### Case study: Prunus africana

*Prunus africana* (Pygeum, African cherry) is found in mountainous tropical forests in central and southern Africa and Madagascar. It has been harvested for centuries for its hard and durable timber as well as for the medicinal properties of its bark, which is used to treat malaria, fevers, kidney disease, urinary tract infections and more recently prostate enlargement (benign prostatic hyperplasia). As long as the tree is not completely girdled it can bear repeated harvests and has been used sustainably for hundreds of years. Indigenous knowledge maintained that, post-harvest, bark grows back more quickly on the side of the tree that faces the sunrise and it was also believed that medicine made from this east-facing bark will heal a patient faster. Thus, traditionally, only one side of the tree was stripped, yielding about 55kg of bark. But when completely stripped, a large tree may yield up to a metric ton of bark – worth considerably more to the collector. Harvest limits and protective folklore have therefore given way to market demand and wild *Prunus africana* populations now appear to be in steep decline. This species is included in CITES Appendix II (see Target 11).



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