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MEDICINAL AND AROMATIC PLANTS OF MOROCCO—NATIONAL STRATEGY PUTS FAIRWILD INTO ACTION

Morocco is blessed with a rich Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) flora, its diversity (some 4200 species of which over 800 are endemic) counting nearly 400 species recognized for medicinal and/or aromatic uses. Many of these species are harvested from the wild, and offer good potential for sustainable rural development and exports. As the sector continues to grow, the government entities responsible for the protection of national forests and water are faced with a daunting challenge—how to conserve biodiversity and protect Morocco’s natural resources while creating an environment in which rural populations can participate in economic growth activities to improve their livelihoods.

In 2012, UNDP launched a three-year project for the implementation of the National Strategy for the Sustainable Management and Development of Medicinal & Aromatic Plants (MAPs). Hosted by the Moroccan High Commission for Water and Forests and Fight against Desertification (HCEFLCD), and with financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the project aims to strengthen the capacity of Moroccan Government institutions, non-governmental organizations and concerned private sector actors and citizens to contribute to biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation, through increasing the value of wild-collected MAPs, improving market access, and ensuring resource production sustainability.

By strengthening co-operation among national and local pioneers, the project aims to create an environment of transformation, skills development, and technological advancement for MAPs value chain actors. The ultimate aim is to integrate biodiversity conservation concerns into the value chain of the entire sector, fostering an attitude of responsible stewardship on the part of all stakeholders. Following this approach, implementation of the FairWild Standard for sustainable harvest and fair trade is central to the project (www.FairWild.org). Target MAP species selected include rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis*, thyme *Thymus saturejoides*, pyrethrum *Anacyclus pyrethrum* and oregano *Origanum elongatum* and *Origanum compactum*.

Technical support on FairWild aspects will be led by FairWild Foundation partner ‘ProFound - Advisers In Development’ (based in The Netherlands). Such assistance includes helping the project team and stakeholders (co-operatives, associations, government institutions, private sector enterprises) to meet the FairWild Standard criteria, through developing situation analyses; conservation status assessments; management planning; and establishing appropriate resource assessment and monitoring strategies for each species/collection location.

The general aim of the project is to follow principles of sustainable use and trade through the establishment of national and local resource management schemes and adoption of voluntary guidelines by industry partners. Where FairWild certification is appropriate and feasible, support is also anticipated for market development, trade fair participation and business-to-business facilitation. Such activities will follow analysis of market demand, and identification of species, products and sites with potential for sustainable sourcing efforts.

Project activities are now under way, convening a wide range of different stakeholder groups. Regional connections on conservation and sustainable use were built through participation at the specialist workshop on “Mediterranean Biodiversity and Livelihoods” (22–23 November 2012, Tunisia), organized by the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Co-operation. MAPs are an essential resource across the North Africa region, and the present project can learn from previous conservation and sustainable use initiatives, besides offering a platform for sharing and discussing outcomes. On the industry side, connections are also being made, recognizing that strong market links and early identification of species of industry interest will be critical to success. An important venue for this is the BioFach organic trade fair, held annually in Nuremberg, Germany. The fair was visited by the project partners in February this year, during which a number of interesting business links were already established (see page 13). Situation analyses are also being undertaken to understand the specific conservation and use issues for the species, sites and value chains concerned.

Beyond the duration of the present project, the aim is to support development of a network of local experts who can drive the further uptake of the FairWild Standard principles in Morocco. With this in mind, the project is initiating a programme of training and capacity building, to ensure that sufficient technical expertise will be available in Morocco over the longer term.

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