

International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (ISSC-MAP)

Side event to the 1st IFOAM International Conference on Organic Wild
Production

Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Workshop on potential implementation strategies for the International Standard

05 May 2006

Banja Vrucica, Teslic, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Sponsored by Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung, Bremen
Organised by WWF Germany and TRAFFIC

Minutes

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STEERING GROUP
for the development of an
International Standard
for the Sustainable Wild Collection
of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants



TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

IUCN
The World Conservation Union



MEDICINAL
PLANT
SPECIALIST
GROUP

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Background

Trade in “organic” wild products is becoming more and more important for a diversity of end-uses and markets, mainly the food sector, but also the personal health care and the medicinal herb sectors. Often these sectors overlap as one species is used for several end products.

The 1st International IFOAM Conference on Organic Wild Production, held in Bosnia and Herzegovina from May 03-04-2006 addressed this global trend providing a discussion forum for international experts. The present document summarises the results of an expert workshop on potential implementation scenarios for the International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (ISSC-MAP), organised as a side event immediately following this Conference.

Between 50,000 and 70,000 plant species are known to be used in traditional and modern medicine systems throughout the world. Uncounted additional species are used in the growing cosmetics and botanicals industries. The great majority of MAP species in trade is wild-collected. Wild collection secures valuable income for many rural households, especially in developing countries, and is an important factor in the source countries' local economies. Sustainable wild-collection of MAP species is therefore an important economic, social, health, and conservation priority. But over-harvesting, land conversion, and habitat loss increasingly threaten a considerable portion (approximately 15,000 species, or 21 per cent) of the world's MAP species and populations (Schippmann *et al.* in press).

Approaches to sustainable MAP wild collection that engage local, regional and international collection enterprises and markets are urgently needed to provide specific guidance for industry, collectors, and other stakeholders on sustainable sourcing practices. Currently available certification criteria or standards addressing wild collection, for example organic certification schemes, often do not provide sufficient guidance to ensure the long-term survival of wild plant populations.

A joint initiative of the German Bundesamt für Naturschutz (BfN), WWF Germany and TRAFFIC, IUCN Canada, and the IUCN Medicinal Plant Specialist Group (MPSG) is underway to meet this gap by developing principles and criteria defining an international standard for good practice in the sustainable wild collection of medicinal and aromatic plants. An international, interdisciplinary advisory group has been formed to involve relevant stakeholders from ecological, socio-economic and fair-trade sectors in the process of developing and testing a standard for sustainable wild collection of MAP. So far two drafts of the ISSC-MAP have been circulated for discussion. Field consultations of the 2nd version were conducted in autumn 2005 to test the standard's relevance and applicability. A third draft of the ISSC-MAP is currently in preparation and will be available for further comment and development of implementation trials in 2006.

With the third and final working draft of this standard approaching completion in the near future, the discussion and development of potential implementation scenarios and strategies has become a priority for the ISSC-MAP process.

1. Overview

1.1 Objectives of the workshop

The main objectives of the workshop were to:

- Deepen the discussion on principles and criteria for a sustainable wild collection of medicinal and aromatic plants in the context of the 1st IFOAM International Conference on Organic Wild Production
- Inform a wider audience, especially representatives from the Balkan states, about the ISSC-MAP project with the aim of actively involving them in the further process
- Exchange experiences between different players active in the sourcing, processing, trade and use of medicinal and aromatic plants and elicit their needs, expectations and visions with regard to a wild collection standard
- Discuss different potential implementation strategies for the ISSC-MAP, related chances/risks, potential combinations with other scenarios and further proceedings
- Initiate contacts for further involvement and cooperation in the ISSC-MAP process

1.2 Participants

Over 50 people participated in the workshop. They represented:

- Certifiers
- Companies and business associations
- Donors
- Government conservation agencies
- Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)
- Non-government organisations (NGOs)
- Practitioners
- Scientists
- Harvesters

(participants list, see Annex II)

2. Summary

2.1 Introduction

The workshop opened with presentations on the medicinal and aromatic plants sector in general, sustainability criteria for wild collection in the organic sector and detailed information on the ISSC-MAP content and the history of the standard's development thus far:

- Medicinal Plants in the cosmetic, health care and food sector: Ecological, economic and social value of a sustainable use (Dr. D. Lange, University of Koblenz-Landau)
- The organic sector: Sustainability criteria for wild collection and potential links to the ISSC-MAP (S. Winkler, IMO)
- The International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of MAP (ISSC-MAP): Process and Outlook (B. Pätzold, WWF Germany and TRAFFIC)
- The International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of MAP (ISSC-MAP): Contents (Dr. D. Leaman, MPSG IUCN Canada)
- Study on implementation strategies and opportunities for pilot implementation of ISSC-MAP: Overview of results (Dr. W. Kathe, Manfred-Hermsen Stiftung)

(Presentations, see Annex V; Excerpt of study on ISSC-MAP implementation strategies, see Annex III)

2.2 Discussion: Potential for ISSC-MAP implementation in South Eastern Europe/East Europe

The second part of the workshop was reserved to discuss the ISSC-MAP content and process in detail, to benefit from sharing experiences within the group, to discuss opportunities and obstacles regarding different potential implementation strategies for the ISSC-MAP and to discuss further proceedings.

Individual participants reflecting diverse perspectives provided an introduction to the discussion. The main points of their contributions are summarized below:

2.2.1 A scientific perspective - DR. UWE SCHIPPMANN (Federal Agency for Nature Conservation Germany)

- Many existing guidelines on good harvesting practice focus on product quality. The novel aspect of ISSC-MAP is its focus on the ecological aspects of a sustainable use of MAP, as mainly reflected in its principles 1 and 5.
- For the first time the crucial aspects of sustainable yield, regeneration rates, assessments and monitoring, adaptive management, taxonomic accuracy and genetic variability are being addressed.
- Resource assessments (required by ISSC-MAP) are generally costly, therefore minimum requirements have to be defined and a simple, yet effective and reliable methodology has to be developed to allow a reliable assessment of the plant populations and collection impacts.

2.2.2 A projects' perspective - Giridhar A. Kinhal (Foundation for the Revitalization of Local Health Care Traditions, India)

- Conservation needs to be assimilated into participatory resource planning and management.
- Ban on collection from the wild is not going to help conservation as it only leads to withdrawal of management.
- Similarly cultivation is not necessarily going to help conservation.
- Rather than negative lists it is useful to have action lists of MAPs with clear cut actions for conservation and sustainable use.
- Well resourced community institutions are the best agencies for implementations.
- FRLHT has developed a CTCT (community-to-community-training) programme within the framework of joint forest management (forest user groups) including clarification of tenure and adaptive forest management with simple harvest-control practices and monitoring resulting in experimental treatments with monitoring of the impacts and regular monitoring on the basis of discussion and inspection. ISSC-MAP principles and criteria could be included in training programmes.

2.2.3 A certifiers' perspective - Rainer Bächli (Insitute for Market Ecology, Switzerland)

- The role of certification is to bridge the gap between consumer and producer, and business and science, on a global scale with the aim to ensure transparency and provide the basis for trust-building
- The ISSC-MAP provides a way to find a compromise and its pragmatic implementation, acceptable for all actors involved.
- The pragmatic implementation of ISSC-MAP provides a potential compromise that could be acceptable for all actors involved.
- At present no adequate standards for sustainability are available. Therefore tools have to be developed urgently.

2.2.4 An authorities' perspective - Zrinka Domazetovic (Nature Protection Directorate, Ministry of Culture, Croatia)

- Croatia's legal framework stipulates protection measures and conditions to collect protected wild plants as well as the amounts and manner of use of protected wild plants. It applies to collecting for processing, trading and other types of traffic, not for personal needs. Non-protected species can be collected without a permit. An expert board reviews the list of protected species annually to include species that are threatened through over-harvesting.
- Legal procedure: collectors apply for a collection license to the Ministry of Culture (Nature protection directorate). Once the permission is issued the collector has to submit an annual report to the State Institute for Nature Protection. The Ministry of Culture, Nature Protection Inspection supervises the collection activities and revises the guidelines for collection permissions annually. Quotas for each species, collecting areas, means of permit, protection measures and assessments are determined by the State Institute for Nature Protection ("Expert Basis"). The ministry may cut short the collecting season, decrease the permitted amount or completely prohibit the collecting of particular sorts of wild plants in some areas for a certain period of time.
- Potential links for the ISSC-MAP:
 - ISSC-MAP resource management practices could be incorporated into the existing protection measures for the collection of wild plants
 - Generally quotas only apply to species already listed as threatened, ISSC-MAP could give guidance on how to maintain spp that are not listed
 - Information and awareness raising would be helpful in terms of on-the-ground implementation of both the standard and the existing legislation
 - Technical training and capacity building could help to include ISSC-MAP standards in legislation framework
 - Secondary Implementation scenarios: ISSC-MAP principles could be incorporated in the Expert Basis which is being revised and updated every year

2.2.5 A companies' perspective - Josef Brinckmann (Traditional Medicinals Inc., USA)

- Organic Certification of wild MAP is an increasingly important natural products market requirement and therefore sustainability practices are integral
- Up to this point companies have had to rely on their own ethical wildcrafting and sustainable sourcing policies to guide them with help of multiple relevant independent certifications: Biodynamic, Fair Trade, Organic Kosher, GACP. But no single certification system has been sufficient
- The ISSC-MAP appears to be a useful resource for organic certifiers to utilize in their determination of meeting the principles of sustainability under the organic regulations for wild crops
- However each organic certifier presently uses their own interpretation and discretion for issuance of organic certification for wild MAPs
- Natural consumers believe in the integrity and quality of the organic standards and for that reason it is imperative that the standards used in the case of wild MAP certification be strengthened and supported consistently by all certifiers so that the organic symbol maintains strong consumer confidence

2.3 Results of discussion

2.3.1 General recommendations

General recommendations from the workshop participants mostly aimed at the scope and focus of the ISSC-MAP:

- Widen the scope of the standard, beyond the sourcing of medicinal plants to include edible plants and plants for use in cosmetics
- Focus on commercial use of MAP, as traditional use is generally not creating a comparable pressure on plant resources
- Discuss the wording of the ISSC-MAP again, as the term “international” might give a strong impression of a top-down approach. Also discuss the acronym again
- Introduce more awareness raising directed at the consumer to help provide momentum for implementation by the commercial sector

2.3.2 General expectations towards the ISSC-MAP and its implementation

- Accurate definition of the major threats and impacts besides collection (e.g. habitat loss)
- Analysis of the impact of ISSC-MAP on socio-economic issues e.g. the availability of MAP for local use
- Analysis of the potential costs to the actors in a supply chain to implement, achieve and maintain the applicable international standard of wild collection
- Establishment of a widely accepted board of experts for the standard providing the respective expertise as well as technical know-how (similar to FLO in the case of the fair trade label).
- Incorporation of social aspects into the standard as these will be crucial for its successful implementation and plant conservation in general. Value adding at source level is essential in respect of poverty alleviation. Only a reasonable price will persuade collectors to collect in a sustainable manner. In some countries prices will determine whether collectors can afford to stay in the collecting regions and continue collecting.
- Addressing local empowerment, as local control mechanisms are often more feasible than voluntary or legal implementation
- Development of a methodology to incorporate lessons learnt from case studies and best practices.
- Quality assurance included in the standard as quality and prices are the most important market parameters.

2.3.3 Implementation scenarios

The discussion concentrated on different implementation scenarios for the ISSC-MAP

- Stand-alone standard versus integration into existing systems
- Voluntary versus mandatory implementation
- Open use of ISSC-MAP versus a closed/registered or compulsory system

The discussion also explored potential links to already existing initiatives, as for example organic certification. Moreover crucial crosscutting issues were identified. These included information, awareness raising and training.

In the following a summary of the main discussion points is given.

2.3.3.1. Commercial/market oriented implementation

The private sector was seen as one of the major players in MAP use and trade and therefore an important target group for the implementation of the ISSC-MAP. While several

companies are already aware of the need for sustainability criteria but are still looking for adequate guidance, others will have to be persuaded or even forced to adopt the ISSC-MAP. Different markets are of interest for the standard, as for example the organic sector and the pharmaceutical sector. These have different needs, for example marketing possibilities that have to be addressed. Companies have been and will be involved in the development of the ISSC-MAP at an early stage to make sure their expectations and needs are considered in an adequate manner.

Workshop participants expressed the strong need for an equal binding of ISSC-MAP for all levels of the supply chain. In particular many small producers (e.g. in Bulgaria) hope that ISSC-MAP will assure transparency along the supply chain. In many European countries successful implementation of the ISSC-MAP depends not only on support from the national governments but also from bigger buyer companies. Low prices for plant raw material were seen as the main obstacle for the implementation of the ISSC-MAP, as especially small companies and collectors will only refer to the standard if they can expect a benefit from it.

Harvesters play an important role in the future application and implementation of the ISSC-MAP. They often represent the very poorest sections of society, for example the gypsy families in Bulgaria. Long-term survival of wild plant populations often depends on the harvesters' standard of living in the source countries. Experience and interviews made in Bulgaria show that the international market puts considerable pressure on harvesters. The dried MAP products have to meet high international quality standards and requirements of the European Pharmacopoeia. Big import companies in consumer countries and big export companies in the source countries dictate the prices. Due to high competition on the international market prices paid to the harvesters are generally very low. Some workshop participants emphasised that ISSC-MAP implementation will have to recognise market rules and that the important players at the international level will have to be involved for a successful implementation. Financial support from companies and states will be essential. Improving the harvesters' livelihoods should be an important aim of ISSC-MAP implementation.

Another point of discussion was the relevance of ISSC-MAP to local level producers and how the ground level could realistically be reached. One suggestion was the handling of ISSC-MAP by wholesalers to support the chain of custody and to enable traceability to individual producers.

Certification

Certifiers were regarded as one of the main customers of the ISSC-MAP, linking the standard to industry and consumers. For certification a selection of indicator sets relevant for specific situations would have to be provided by the Steering Group. Certifiers could then select appropriate indicators, modify them according to their needs, and then develop control methods and training material as well as methods to develop certification checklists. In the further proceedings a project able/willing to work on requirements for collectors and certification bodies would be needed (organic certified projects give good starting situation), as would adequate funds.

Costs and fundraising

Higher product costs resulting from the implementation of the ISSC-MAP criteria were regarded as a considerable risk for ISSC-MAP implementation. Costs vary with the implementation scenario, but would be higher in case of a new stand-alone standard. Consequently incorporation into existing frameworks appears to be a more promising option. End-customers can influence the market through wholesalers and by supporting sustainable harvesting methods, but in the end consumers will have to pay premium prices. Education and awareness rising will play an essential role in order to create a caring market for these higher priced products.

The promise of higher prices, together with the commitment of wholesalers to buy their raw material, will be the prerequisite and incentive for many collectors and small companies to embark on the implementation of the ISSC-MAP.

A crucial point in this context is the expected costs of implementation. An analysis of how much consumers are willing to pay for the end products will offer key information in the ultimate success of the standard.

Availability of funding will be an essential question for the implementation of the ISSC-MAP, therefore strategies how to attract donor funds have to be developed soon.

2.3.3.2. Potential links to strategic partners and existing scenarios

There is undoubtedly a strong overlap between ISSC-MAP and the organic sector. This makes a strategic link to already existing standards interesting. Potentially advantageous is the fact that within the organic sector itself, an increasing demand to strengthen the organic labels can be observed due to the fear of great negative impact on the market if organic loses, due to whatever reason, its reputation.

The ISSC-MAP could be a mandatory supplement to e.g. IFOAM norms and be an international, equal baseline for all relevant operations.

There was positive feedback in the discussion suggesting that ISSC-MAP could go with organic certification but that an independent use of ISSC-MAP shall be possible in situations where no organic certification exists or where organic certification is not currently recognised, such as the pharmaceutical sector.

One recognised problem of implementation through organic, is the confusion of consumer information for the additional elements of ISSC-MAP will not be visible through a label.

2.3.3.3. Resource management oriented implementation

Adequate resource management was seen as a corner stone of a successful ISSC-MAP implementation. It was discussed how the assessment and monitoring criteria could be included in on-the-ground projects and community based projects. Technical guidance will have to be provided. Local knowledge of the resources and harvesting practices can often provide a basis to develop and adapt management and monitoring activities.

The question was raised if ISSC-MAP could help to make meeting national conservation and sustainable use objectives more accessible/feasible. As suggested in the case of Croatia ISSC-MAP could be used to define collection quotas. In Bosnia and Herzegovina for example there is a significant lack of infrastructure and money available for resource assessments and effective monitoring. Here the ISSC-MAP could provide simple guidelines for resource assessments.

2.3.3.4. Legal implementation

Governments will be informed about the ISSC-MAP process and will be involved in the discussion at an early stage. Governments need to be aware of the ISSC-MAP as they are responsible for national resource assessments. They need the factual information to enforce the law, and people's respect for it. A more specialized approach to single governmental authorities will have to be developed with regard to potential legal implementation scenarios once the ISSC-MAP implementation strategies are clearer. In most countries, strong political lobbying for ISSC-MAP will be required prior to considering legal adoption of the standard. Workshop participants agreed that Government involvement at an early stage is important, but mandatory implementation of principles and criteria has to be approached carefully, for changes to a document are very difficult once it is accepted by an agency. Although the involvement of governmental authorities was seen as crucial, several risks of a legal implementation of the ISSC-MAP were pointed out. These included reduction of flexibility in local management and trade barriers or bans for producers that cannot meet the requirements, often to the disadvantage of smaller companies and the poor.

Many countries, as e.g. Bulgaria, already have a well elaborated legal framework for the wild collection of plants but law implementation and enforcement are poor. The question was raised as to whether it makes sense to have legal standards with which the companies have to comply, if there is no actual market demand for the products. A more promising alternative could be to activate and push the private sector, which would probably have to be accompanied by raising consumer awareness.

2.3.3.5. Awareness raising, information and training

Information and training was identified as an important element of any ISSC-MAP implementation strategy, with high potential to reach all main players along the supply chain from the collector to the industry and the end-product consumer.

Technical support on the ground levels (collection and resource management) will be essential for enabling implementation. Farmer to Farmer Training and Community to Community Training were recommended as quite effective methods.

On the other hand education and awareness raising among industry, consumer and public institutions will be important not only to correct mis-messages related to wild collection but also to create the market demand for higher priced products. Education will be the first step as people have to understand why they need to ask for sustainably harvested material. According to several workshop participants, the companies' awareness of the consequences of pressure on plant resources is increasing. They depend on securing a sustainable and high quality supply of wild plants collected in a way that also meets the needs of the consumer, but they need guidance. This offers a good opportunity for the ISSC-MAP to link with this sector. Parallel awareness raising activities (e.g. organised by WWF) within the consumer market could trigger strong incentives for cooperation.

A strategic opportunity for information activities mentioned by participants was the revision of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation revision (GSPC) during CBD CoP9 2008 in Germany. If implemented, ISSC-MAP would contribute significantly to the targets of the GSPC. As countries will need to report on progress this might be a good opportunity to highlight the ISSC-MAP. It could also offer an excellent opportunity for developing cooperation with national governments.

2.4 Conclusion

- There is an urgent need for and interest in the Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants. Timing for the project meets the expectations of potential users and partners.
- The three implementation scenarios rated as most important by the workshop participants are voluntary implementation, information provision and regulation.
- Linking ISSC-MAP with organic certification seems to be a promising strategy; opportunities for potential links have to be further analysed.
- Main challenges for potential certification are to identify adequate actors along the supply chain. Should smaller or bigger companies be addressed? How can the local level be reached?
- Information provision was identified as a crucial part of any ISSC-MAP implementation strategy and shall be, depending on the country and the target market, one of the first steps
- Sufficient technical support on the ground has to be provided to enable the implementation of the ISSC-MAP.
- Legal implementation was regarded as an appropriate tool for ISSC-MAP implementation by many workshop participants. The responsible authorities have to be addressed. As in many countries strong lobbying will be required prior to considering legal adoption of the standard, this may be a secondary implementation strategy.

- A fundraising strategy for the implementation of ISSC-MAP has to be developed. Several different pilot situations will be needed to develop the standard and test/measure sustainable collection, social and economic factors. Pilot situations have to be selected in a way to use available funds in a very effective way with regard to potential reach, strategic opportunities and time and cost considerations.
- More awareness raising directed at the public/consumers is needed.