

Ministerial Conference: Nature Protection in the Caucasus
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**Sustainable harvesting and economic potential of medicinal plants and
herbs in the Southern Caucasus**

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Sustainable Harvesting of Medicinal Plants and Herbs and their Economic Potential in the Southern Caucasus

CUNA Georgia Society in Support of Culture and Nature in Georgia Tbilisi, Georgia

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I. Protected Areas in the Caucasus

- The establishment of protected area networks is the main tool for safeguarding biodiversity in the Caucasus.
Governments, international agencies and NGO's, in particular WWF, support this process.
- Many of these areas are zoned for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, with the objective to maintain biodiversity by regulating use which helps to ensure long term benefits for the local people.
- Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, are situated in the heart of the Caucasus. They play a key role in conserving the natural resources of the region.

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II. Support Zones of Protected Areas and People

- Support zones of Protected Areas include rural areas with limited possibilities for economic development.
- Most inhabitants of support zones are subsistence farmers. They own small gardens where they grow the basic food for their daily needs.
- Traditional use of wild plants, fruits and forest products is an important additional source for supporting their living.
- Tourism and (illegal) timber cutting may, in some cases, provide some income in cash

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- **Products from the Caucasus and their Chances for Marketing**

- Agricultural products from the Caucasus have hardly any chance on the European market.
- Caucasian products from organic agriculture have lost their market in Europe due to cheaper and better products from eastern EU countries.
- However there is an important niche in Europe for certified wild plant products from sustainable harvesting which are processed, packed and labelled according to EU regulations and certified by leading European organisations with “BIO” or “ECO” labels.
- There are also promising markets for high quality and certified products from the Caucasus in Russia and the Caucasian countries themselves.

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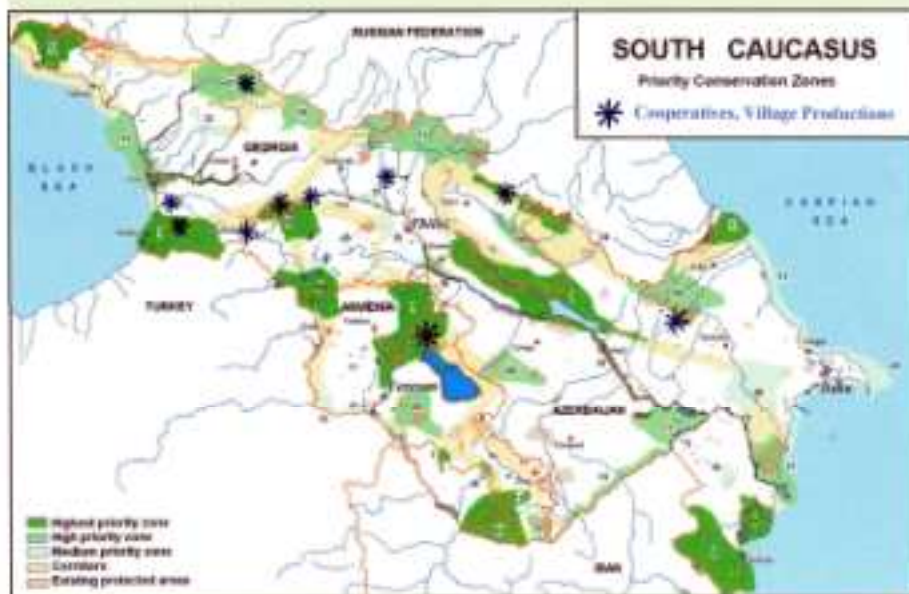
IV. Production and Marketing of Products from Wild Collections

Villagers and small scale producers have limited possibilities to produce and to market high quality products.

- CAUCASAN Ltd. has been established to overcome this problem. This organisation serves as a central processing and marketing unit for producers from support zones of protected areas.
- A mail order house has been established in Germany for marketing about 120 different CAUCASAN products in Western Europe.
- The Caucasus Wild Plant Certification Center (CWC) has been created in Georgia, supported by WWF, CUNA Georgica and the German eco-certifier “Naturland e.V.”
- The production of products from the support zones of protected areas in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia has started. Collectors and inspectors have received a first introduction and basic training. The whole training process will take 3 years and needs additional funding.

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V. Cooperatives, Village Productions in the Caucasus



VI. Our Strategy

- 10 years of successful marketing experience of CAUCASAN products provided the basis for our cost effective production and marketing strategy, and for maintaining close cooperation and a strong network of all involved.
- One precondition for success is the exclusivity and high quality of our products, which are marketed under the slogan:
“From protected areas of the Caucasus - For ecological rural development”
- Another precondition, which we are about to fulfil, is a recognized certification programme, which guarantees that the entire process from harvesting, processing, packing, labelling and marketing follows accepted international standards for “BIO” or “ECO” products.
- We are building partnership with “Naturland” one of Europe’s leading eco –co certifier in the organic food market.
- We do not just sell a product we also promote the country, the culture and the people behind. **“Our products have a story to tell”.**

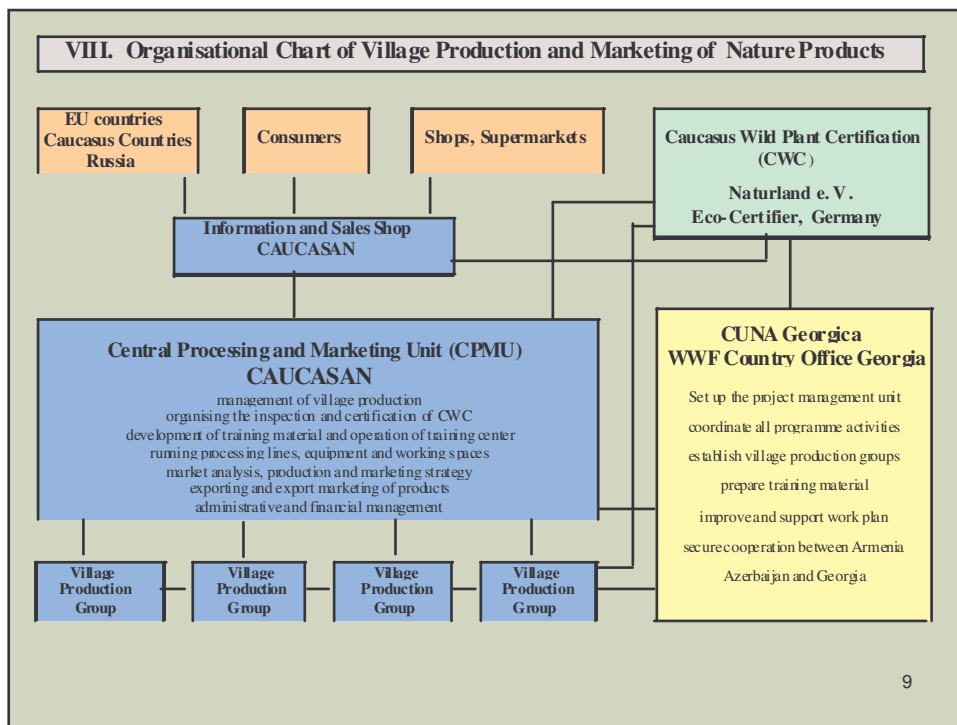
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VII. Our Future: Sustainable Harvesting, Controlled Processing, Marketing

- The sustainable harvesting of natural resources from support zones of protected areas has to be supported by skilled marketing of the final products.
- Collectors, producers and cooperatives are organised and trained in the sustainable use and processing of wild plant products.

Producers and cooperatives are operating under the name CAUCASAN and participate in processing, packaging, labelling, branding and marketing of their products.
- Staff of CWC will be trained by Naturland. e.V. CWC will use “Naturland” certification standards and act on “Naturland’s” behalf in the beginning. At a later stage CWC’s will become a certification organisation with accreditation at the European level.
- The final objective for CAUCASAN is, to market certified products from wild collections with support from “Naturland e.V.” by using Naturland’s labels and their partners.
- New producers from support zones of protected areas can be integrated into this structure at any time.

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