



Georgia Employment and Infrastructure Initiative  
საქართველოს ახალგაზრდათა და ინვესტიციების ინიციატივა

# COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENTS

## Managing Non Timber Forest Product Resources for Sustainable Livelihoods



*"I want to emphasize the fact that finally, we, the producers, came together at this roundtable. I personally have been working in this field for 13 years and it is the first case of our meeting with each other."*

Said: Rodam Okropiridze

In Georgia, resources of non timber forest products are often over utilized and improperly exploited, threatening biodiversity and already lucrative industry. On July 3, 2009 at Georgia's seaside resort of Kobuleti, CHF International's USAID funded Georgian Employment and Infrastructure Initiative hosted the first ever roundtable meeting for producers of non-traditional forest products to focus on managing value chains of products produced in fragile ecological environments.

The roundtable was attended by those who use forest resources as their main source of income and included collectors of raw materials, processors, international buyers and representatives of various organizations.

The collection of medicinal herbs and berries is not a new industry for Georgia. There are 43 varieties of medicinal herbs and wild berries in Georgia, with many highly prized specimens found only in the country's high mountain regions.

In the two years that CHF has assisted this forestry sub-sector, many benefits have already been realized, which include community mobilization and improvements in the sourcing of quality raw materials. As the businesspersons discussed, there have been problems with quality provision, and especially concerns of the raw materials from remote areas. Prolonged transport time and distance are especially detrimental to quality, aside from added costs.

CHF and local stakeholder have emphasized the need to understand how people use non-traditional forest resources, cultural traditions and to seek ways to improve the contribution that these products make to the livelihoods of rural communities.

However, much more is needed in developing many existing opportunities. Those taking part in the roundtable used the opportunity to discuss their problems openly. This interaction helped to facilitate new and expanded business linkages, as they talked about current and evolving opportunities, as well as the many constraints facing the sector. High on their agenda included new and existing technologies that are more appropriate to the Georgian industry.

This industry is slowly evolving in Georgia, and as the value chain actors learned, there are effective ways to increase both quality and profits. The medicinal herb business has provided significant income to many families in the high mountain areas where there is little income generating opportunities. Collecting herbs and berries accounts for 25 – 100 percent of many families' income, and the range of incomes was between \$120 and \$2,100 per year, as was learned from interviews conducted during this conference.

Representatives of Ukrainian importer "Sumipitoparmacia" shared their experience with their Georgian partners, placing special emphasis on the need for quality standards and consistency of product. They told that it was impossible to attract and provide for discriminating buyers without such preconditions. In addition, environmental regulations are required in maintaining quality and consistency of product, especially in guaranteeing the continuity of a stable supply.

As one environment expert noted, currently there is no system of permits and licenses worked out in Georgia as an effective control measure for this valuable sector. Consequently, as CHF has emphasized in its assistance, it is the collective responsibility of the community to be guardians of their own sustainable livelihoods. Ultimately, lasting solutions and new opportunities are left up to locals, as they decide ways of managing their natural resources for now and into the future, and in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Rodam Okropiridze, a producer said "It is impossible to work effectively without cooperating with each other. We are small scale producers and really need to join our resources in order to access big markets. I want to emphasize the fact that finally, we, the producers, came together at this roundtable. I personally have been working in this field for 13 years and it is the first case of our meeting with each other."

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