

SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILD SPECIES

- **Wild species are used by billions of people** who rely on them for many purposes including for food, medicine, income and energy.
- To conserve biodiversity and to maintain the many benefits it provides to people, **use of wild species must be sustainable**.
- Sustainable use is **a critical tool for both conservation and development**.
- **Action is needed at local, national and international levels** to realise the potential of sustainable use for achieving conservation and development goals.
- Most important is the need for **wider recognition of the role that use of wild species plays in all our lives** and careful consideration to the implications of this use.

What is the issue?

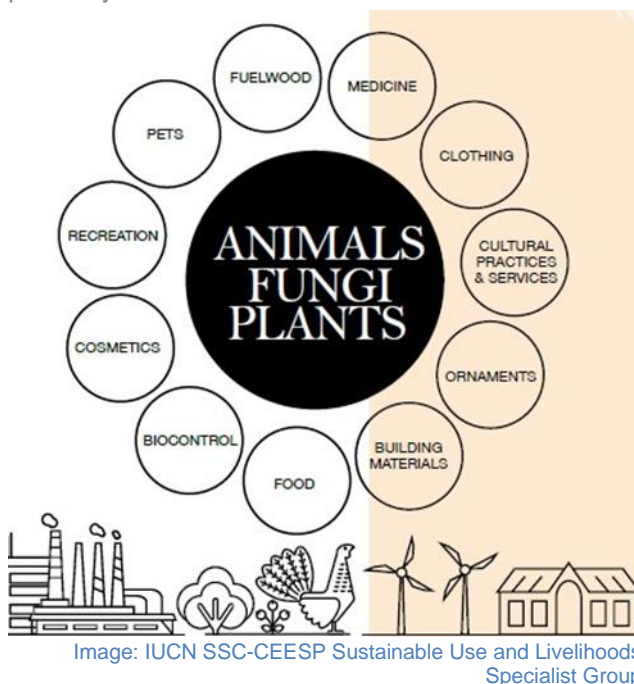
Sustainable use is **a critical tool for supporting both conservation and livelihoods**, yet its role in achieving development goals is often overlooked.

All people depend on nature for nutrition, health and well-being, with billions around the world relying on wild species to support their livelihoods. It has been estimated that [between 3.5 and 5.8 billion people \(between 40 and 70% of the world's population\) use wild natural products](#). The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) notes that this is particularly true of Indigenous peoples and communities in rural areas, who often live in close proximity with wildlife.

The use of wild species can be extractive, where the whole, part or product of an animal, fungus or plant is removed from its natural environment – for example through wild meat hunting, fishing, timber harvesting and honey collection. It can also be non-extractive, where the wild species remains in its natural habitat – for example in wildlife photography and catch-release recreations.

The use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

Definition of sustainable use according to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Rio de Janeiro, 1992.



It is critical that use of wild species is sustainable, as both extractive and non-extractive practices can lead to species population declines if not well-managed. Overexploitation is a major driver of biodiversity loss, according to [analysis of IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™](#) data.

On the other hand, **sustainable use of wild species can serve human needs on an ongoing basis while also contributing to the effective management and conservation of biodiversity**. Revenues from using wild species can contribute to funding further conservation efforts, with the social and economic benefits derived from using wild species providing incentives for people to conserve them.

Why is this important?

Ensuring that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable is a core

objective of IUCN, as outlined in Part II of the [IUCN Statutes and Regulations](#). Sustainable use is recognised by IUCN as an important tool because of the incentives it generates for conservation.

It is **one of the three main objectives of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, alongside conservation and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits that come from utilising genetic resources. The role of sustainable use in contributing to both conservation and development goals is recognised in the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), signed by 196 countries in 2022. Target 5 aims to “ensure sustainable, safe and legal harvesting and trade of wild species”, while Target 9 aims to “manage wild species sustainably to benefit people”. Target 9 emphasises that this is key to “providing social, economic and environmental benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations and those most dependent on biodiversity.”

Sustainable use of wild species is also key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Goal 15 for Life on Land aims to “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”, while Goal 14 for Life Below Water aims to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”. These aims further support other SDGs such as Goal 1 for No Poverty and Goal 2 for Zero Hunger, through enhancing the capacity of ecosystems to support sustainable food production and livelihoods. Overall, sustainable use has significant [potential to contribute more towards all the SDGs](#).

What can be done?

Action is needed at all levels to tackle unsustainable use of wild species and to maximise the potential of sustainable use. At the international level, the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#) aims to ensure that international trade in wild animal and plant specimens does not threaten the survival of species.

It is also **important that sustainable use practices are recognised in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)**, as countries update their approaches to align with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Countries can include practices such as sustainable wildlife tourism, sustainable hunting and wild product trade amongst

the activities for delivering their NBSAPs. Some countries are increasingly recognising the importance of a diverse “wildlife economy” or “biodiversity economy” as a key driver of local and national economic growth as well contributing to conservation and climate resilience. [For example](#), Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) harvest and trade provides significant direct and indirect employment and foreign exchange to the national economy of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.



Queen conch © Alexander Girvan

At the local level, there are numerous good examples demonstrating how **sustainable use schemes have helped with species conservation and supported livelihoods**. [For example](#), in the Amazon, community management and sustainable harvest of the giant pirarucu fish (*Arapaima gigas*) has resulted in dramatic population recoveries and significant income for communities who sell the fish leather for luxury handbags and boots.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for ensuring that people use wild species sustainably, as many social, economic and ecological contextual factors must be taken into account. [Evidence](#) shows that **interventions are most effective when tailored to the social and ecological contexts in which wild species are used and support fairness, rights and equity for local people**. Broader recognition of the role that wild species play in all our lives and careful consideration to the implications of this use is imperative if more balanced perspectives are to be brought into conversations on the use of wild species and its value for conservation and development worldwide.

Where can I get more information?

[IUCN Sustainable Use of Wild Living Resources Policy Statement](#) (IUCN, 2000)

IUCN SSC-CEESP Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group: iucnsuli.org

[Species Use Database](#)

[Assessment report on the sustainable use of wild species | IPBES secretariat](#)