

PRESS RELEASE

Natural Products = Natural Profits

IUCN-SA and PhytoTrade Africa launch new partnership initiative, NATURAL FUTURES

Take fifty of Southern Africa's leading producers in the natural products industry, pool their collective expertise and resources into a single association, and then team them up with the world's foremost conservation organisation. The result is NATURAL FUTURES: a potent force for change.

The World Conservation Union in South Africa (IUCN) and PhytoTrade Africa, the Southern African Natural Products Trade Association launched Natural Futures at the Natural and Organic Products Expo in Cape Town, 14-16 October, and in Pretoria on 19 October 2005. It's a new partnership aimed at developing the region's natural products industry for the benefit of poor rural people and the environment. "Globally, natural products are a US\$65 billion a year industry. In our region we've been slow to recognise the opportunities, but we're catching up quickly", admits Saleim Fakir, Director of IUCN-SA. "The Natural Futures initiative is intended to stimulate growth and investment in the natural products industry. At the same time we're hoping to channel this growth in a manner that creates meaningful benefits for social and economic upliftment."

"The Wellness Revolution, so visibly represented at the Natural and Organics Expo, isn't just a revolution in healthcare", says Gus Le Breton, CEO of PhytoTrade Africa. "It could also become a revolution in poverty-reduction and better environmental management. The potential for rural people to enter the wellness market as suppliers of sustainably harvested natural ingredients is almost unlimited. It just needs to be unlocked. Natural Futures will do that."

Natural Futures builds on what many observers see as a sustained wave of international interest in natural products from Africa. Experts say the value of trade in natural products - indigenous botanical resources, sustainably wild-harvested by poor, rural people - will exceed US\$250 million a year within the next decade. Cyril Lombard, who heads up PhytoTrade



Africa's European marketing office in London, explains, "The number of products within the EU market that contain African ingredients is growing daily. The world wants what we've got. We just have to figure out how to supply them in a way that maximises the benefits for our producers."

Natural Futures adopts a diverse strategy towards achieving this. At the macro-level, it promotes trade policies and regulations that support natural products, as well as engaging in networking and awareness-raising within and beyond the industry to facilitate a more favourable investment climate. At the local level, it supports producers to enhance their market access through Fair Trade and organic certification, contributes directly to strengthening rural supply chains and provides targeted assistance to low-income producers.

"The low entry costs make natural products an attractive and viable industry in rural areas" says Anthea Stephens, Natural Futures Programme Manager at IUCN SA. "Revenue flows to primary

producers, small enterprises, and large-scale processors," she continues. "The social benefits of Natural Futures include increased incomes in the region; enhanced health, nutrition and food security; improved local skills and knowledge and the empowerment of women. Ecologically, the sector reinforces principles of sustainable use and provides an entry point for environmental restoration".

Key to the success of Natural Futures is the partnership between PhytoTrade Africa and the World Conservation Union. PhytoTrade Africa was established in 2001 to facilitate growth in the region's natural products industry and to stimulate economic growth in rural areas. The Association's 50+ members are drawn from eight different countries in the region. They are united by a common interest in the production, processing and sale of natural products derived from wild-harvested plant resources. IUCN, the World Conservation Union, was founded as a membership-based non-profit organisation in 1948. It brings together governments and NGOs, and provides a common platform for a global network of some 10,000 scientists and experts from around the world. IUCN's vision is for a just world that values and conserves nature, and its work is directed towards empowerment and governance through policy change.

Speaking at the launch, Dr Nigel Gericke, renowned scientific authority on medical ethnobotany, described Natural Futures as "a ground-breaking partnership that is defining a path for industry to engage with the sustainable development of indigenous resources in true, equitable partnership with local communities in Southern Africa."

natural futures

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A partnership initiative of

IUCN
THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION

PhytoTrade
AFRICA

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