

The Beauty of 'Sourcing with Respect'

*Biodiversity is
the variety of life
on Earth and the
natural patterns
it forms.*

Whether it is luxurious skin creams, essential oils or even wild gourmet chocolate, goods that come from the Earth's wide range of flora and fauna are in high demand. Creating these products can be a beautiful marriage of native biodiversity and modern science. But, like many exciting new relationships, it is a complex one. The question of who has access to the biodiversity – and who benefits from its use – is central to the issue.

The various stages needed to get a product to the shelf can involve several different businesses – and different countries. This means that companies wanting to meet the growing demand for products sourced in an environmentally and socially ethical way must learn to navigate a veritable minefield of different rules and regulations.

Natural extracts often come from native biodiversity in developing countries. To find them, prospectors may rely on local communities for their knowledge of species and their uses. Scientific researchers work to pinpoint the active ingredients, which are then used to create recipes for new products. Cultivating or collecting biological sources entails accessing land and employing local harvesters. And finally, manufacturing and marketing the final goods often involves another set of actors. This means that a company's responsibilities may differ with each ingredient, at each stage of production and in each country it operates.

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Prospection



R&D



Collection



Processing



Formulation



Sales

Development Phase

Production Phase

Marketing

'Sourcing with Respect' implies that at each of these stages, the companies involved need to make every effort to conserve biodiversity, respect traditional knowledge, and ensure that everyone concerned is paid a fair wage and shares in the benefits generated from the products.

If companies do not make this effort, they may face charges of biopiracy – using materials derived from biodiversity or indigenous knowledge without compensating the source community. Or, unless they can prove their claims to environmentally responsible practices, they may be accused of 'greenwashing' their products in order to access market share. Both accusations are extremely difficult to shake off, even if they are undeserved.

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The Convention on Biological Diversity recently found that a wide range of companies that use biodiversity are genuinely ignorant when it comes to sharing the associated benefits with the source community. Although some are clearly reluctant to comply with the guidelines of the Convention, many are simply unaware of the issues.

So, how can companies help protect countries' biodiversity and ensure that local communities – who are often its guardians – share in the benefits that come from its use? By asking key questions at each point along the supply chain.

Development Phase		Production Phase			Marketing
Prospection	R&D	Collection	Processing	Formulation	Sales
<p>Is there an access permit to conduct research?</p> <p>Has consent been gained from the local community for the use of its traditional knowledge?</p> <p>Has benefit sharing been agreed?</p>	<p>Are there biopiracy concerns?</p> <p>Do patents recognize the origin of resources and knowledge?</p>	<p>Are the wages and prices fair?</p> <p>Are human rights respected?</p> <p>What is done to conserve biodiversity?</p> <p>Does this contribute to local development?</p>	<p>How are the ingredients sourced?</p> <p>Do patents recognize all contributions along the supply chain?</p>	<p>Is there a tracking system in place?</p> <p>Are we confident that the ingredients were sourced according to Ethical BioTrade Principles? (buying policy and due diligence)</p>	<p>Is there conservation, sustainable use and benefit sharing all along the supply chain?</p>

The Union for Ethical BioTrade is non-profit association that promotes the 'Sourcing with Respect' of ingredients that come from native biodiversity. By requiring its members to commit to gradually bringing their practices in line with Ethical BioTrade Principles, it aims to help companies negotiate the regulatory minefield of trading with local producers all over the world, while ensuring that benefits reach all of those involved.

Consumers have strong expectations that companies will engage in trading practices that both protect biodiversity and respect human rights. In truth, businesses that produce goods sourced from biodiversity in developing countries can act as catalysts for ethical biotrade, promoting conservation and creating sustainable development in local communities.

By following the Union for Ethical BioTrade's principles and criteria for 'Sourcing with Respect', these companies can reassure their customers and set themselves apart in the world market.