

Reframing the PPP Unit

This section is based on a presentation by Guido Masé, Head Formulator for Traditional Medicinals, on Strategic Formulations. It is written as a guidance document for developing more equitable relationships between brands and suppliers.



Buyers from Martin Bauer and Yogi meet with educators from the Himalayan Permaculture Center and partners at Organic Valley, Pvt Ltd, Nepal to discuss a joint regenerative farming project.

The PPP (People–Plants–Place) unit is the foundation of sustainable herbal sourcing. Instead of viewing herbs simply as commodities, this approach treats the health of the PPP unit as THE "product." When the people, plants, and place are thriving together, the herbs they produce are believed to be potent, traceable, and regenerative.

"By beginning here, we make a subtle shift: letting the PPP unit lead the market, rather than always only bending it to fit market demands."

GUIDO MASÉ • HEAD FORMULATOR, TRADITIONAL MEDICINALS

Purpose

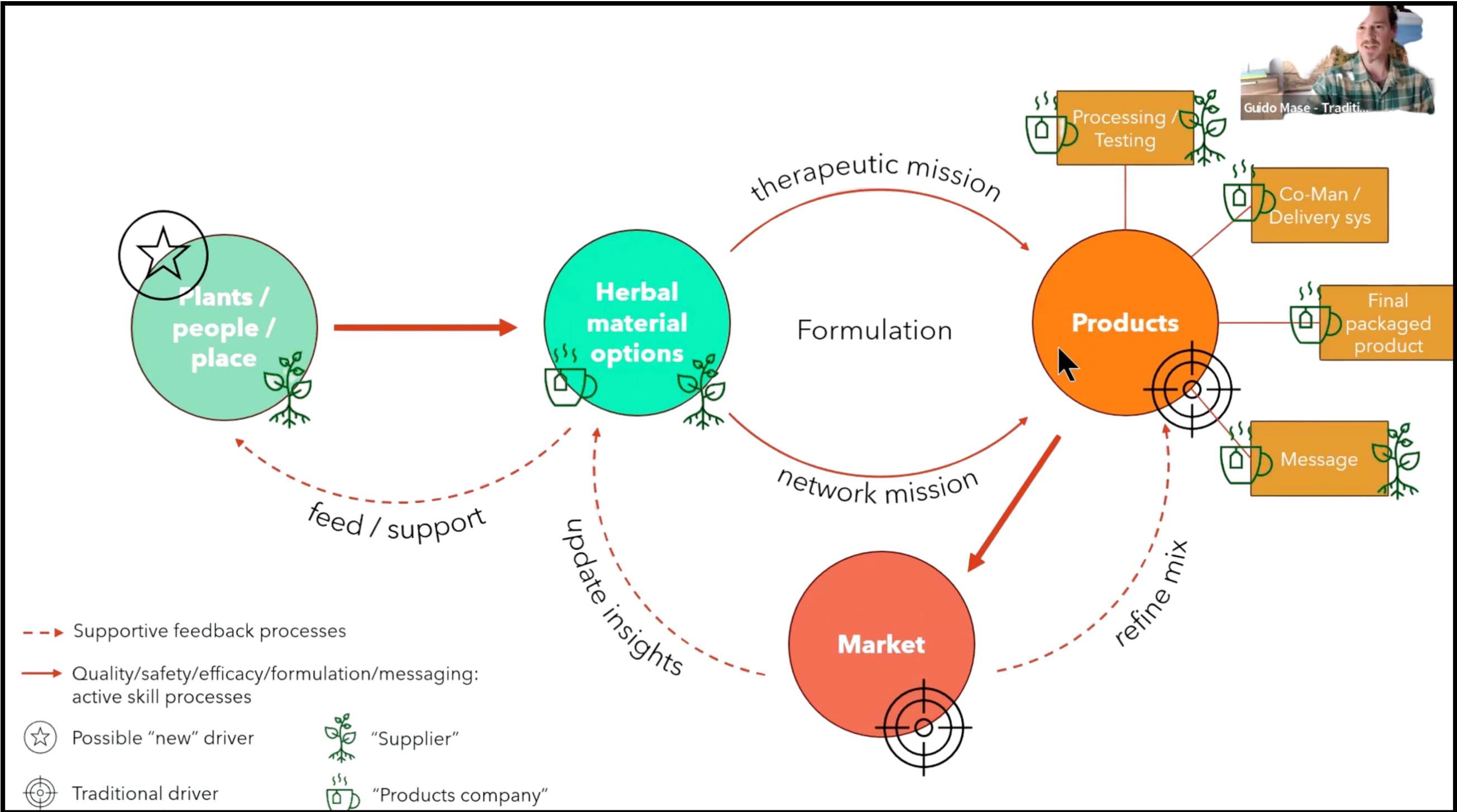
This model shifts the focus from short-term outputs (your products viz. capsules, teas, or extracts) to long-term relationships. Brands, buyers and suppliers all have a role in supporting the unit's ecological, socio-economic, and cultural well-being.

What success looks like

Products and the market are the typical drivers in product formulation. This model proposes instead that the health of the PPP unit drives, or at least informs, formulation and market development and that both the brand/buyer and the farmer/aggregator are responsible for supporting and nourishing that PPP unit.

Success means shifting the lens from "inputs and outputs" to relationships. The PPP unit is understood as a living socio-ecological organism and not as a mere link in the chain. Success looks like:

- Metrics capture ecological vitality and cultural continuity at the source, alongside income and volume at the "sink" (the retail market).
- Buyers and suppliers in continuous dialogue, adjusting together as conditions change.
- Start to think about farmer and vendor retention the same way we think about employee and customer retention: crucial for herbal raw materials that are very sensitive to context, climate, and expert growing / processing.
- Value flowing back into soils, families, and cultural life, and not only to the markets and end consumer. Building, feeding and supporting the source can give a voice to the PPP unit. Help guarantee safe, consistent products.
- Reactive to plants and not reactive to the market.
- Distribute risk in a new way: Instead of focusing on multiple suppliers for one ingredient to maintain product outflow, focus also on sourcing a diversity of ingredients for the same supplier to maintain source inflow. For the brand/buyer, this elevates the sustainability of the PPP unit to the same level as the sustainable production of the final product.



The PPP Unit as a Living Organism

A PPP unit should not be viewed as land or labor. It represents the people, plants, and place as a collective. Folded into this collective are elements such as traditional ecological knowledge (growing, harvesting, processing), multi-modal sustainability (financial, agronomic, but also educational, ecological, entrepreneurial, sociocultural), and external connections (government and NGOs, buyers and marketplace, research).

- People bring traditional knowledge, stewardship, and stories. People can help in understanding where the potency is and where it might not be. Plants contribute their phytoconstituents, biodiversity, and ecological services.
- Place is the context that grounds the work. It is how plants express their chemical profiles, how people maintain creative livelihoods, and how cultural and ecological patterns evolve. In turn, the activities of people and plants feed back onto place, over time contributing to a co-evolved whole.

People in the places where plants belong are part of the forces that have shaped the cultural practices, the medicinal applications of plants, and the landscape itself. People can be the link between local stewardship of place and the journey of the plant to the market. Health comes when all three are considered and respected.

PEOPLE	Traditional knowledge, stewardship, and stories
PLANTS	Phytoconstituents, biodiversity, and ecological services
PLACE	Context that grounds the work; chemical profiles, livelihoods, cultural patterns

Formulating with the PPP Unit in Mind

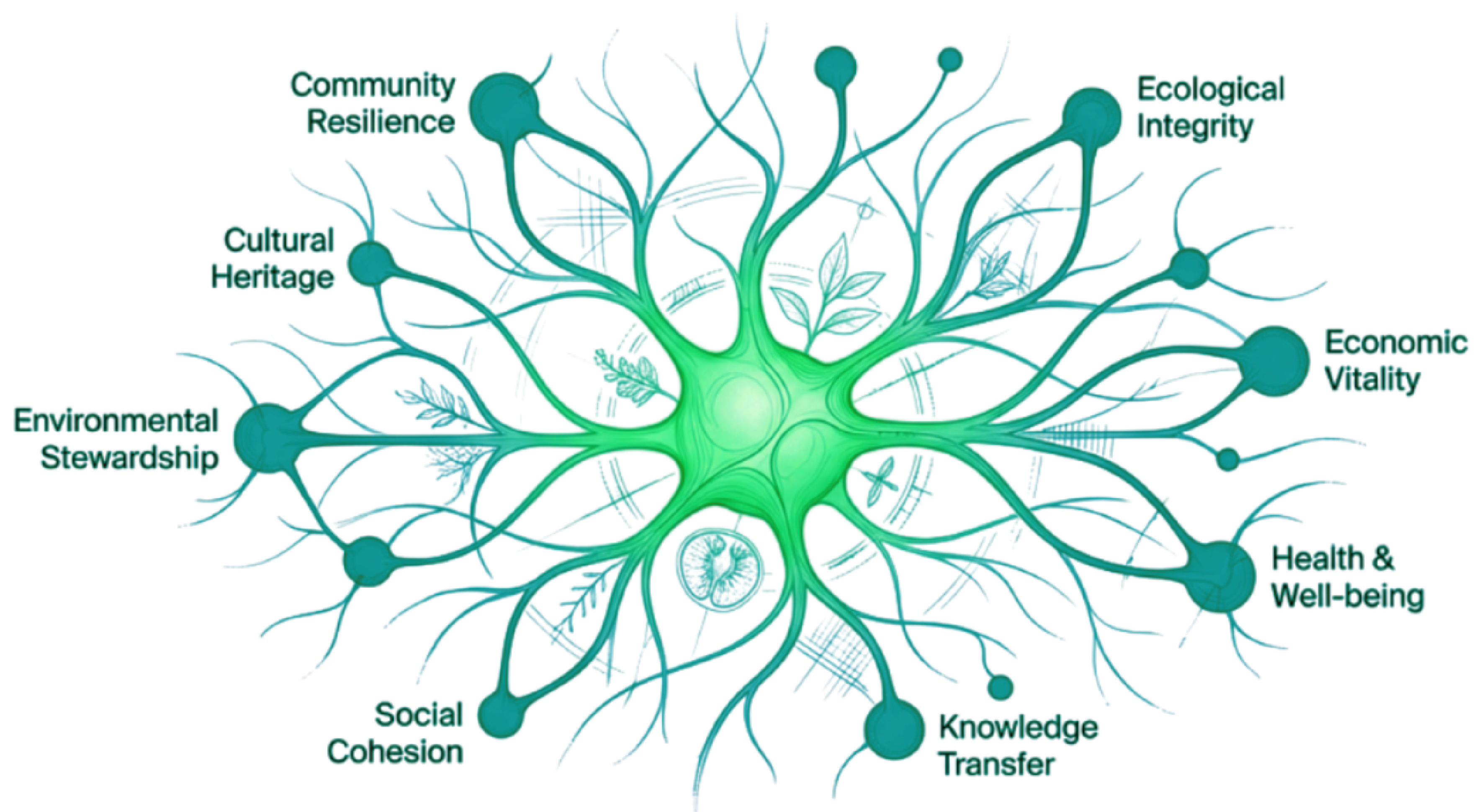
Formulation decisions shape relationships across the supply chain. A PPP-informed approach still begins with safety and efficacy, but it also considers the origin of each ingredient and the people and landscapes that produce it. This often means designing formulas that strengthen supplier networks—working with a hub of farms or processors and building continuity through the ingredients chosen. It may also mean thinking therapeutically at the level of ecoregions, where plants that grow well together in a landscape become part of a shared formulation strategy.

In practice, this requires longer timelines and closer collaboration. New ingredients may need 18–24 months for growing, harvesting, processing, and testing. Starting early with specifications and testing methods helps reduce complexity later. Technical support can also make a difference—site visits, equipment investment, and consultation with local teams. At the same time, data sharing becomes part of the relationship. Social, environmental, and market information can help everyone adapt, but requests for data should be respectful, transparent, and useful to the people providing it. And internally, this work only succeeds when teams across R&D, quality, marketing, sales, and sourcing understand and support the approach.

How to Apply

This work begins by mapping the PPP unit and documenting ecological, economic, social, and cultural assets. This could be done using a tool like the Community Capitals Framework (see this [SHI case study](#) where we applied this framework to Doselva's work in Nicaragua).

- Collaborate with partners by drafting MOUs that outline agreements around harvest timelines, pricing, use of stories, and other mutual benefits.
- Resource the loop through pre-financing, funding seed banks, creating youth apprenticeships, or other mutually agreed upon investments.
- Identify, based on shared values and competence in sustainable production, who are key supply partners and work to increase volume and ingredient diversity with them. This can mean flexing formulation to emphasize ingredients this supplier has in stock, but which a brand/buyer is not yet purchasing.
- Embed reciprocity into the company's Key Performance Indicators — i.e. see how key supplier volume increases, biodiversity indices change, wages improve, and women's leadership grows.



**“Not a mere link in the chain.
A living socio-ecological organism.”**

Gemini (Google-AI) generated image used to explain the concept (2026)

Pick a Plant

"Pick a plant."

JOSEF BRINCKMANN, WHEN ASKED BY HERB BUYERS WHAT THEY SHOULD DO



When asked by herb buyers what they should do, Josef Brinckmann said he tells them, "Pick a plant." Start with one herb that matters most to your company — maybe it's high volume, high risk, or central to your brand. Learn everything about it: where it grows, who collects or cultivates it, what pressures it faces, and why it matters. Make someone in your company the subject-matter expert who can answer those questions.

Then, go to the source. Visit the fields, meet the harvesters, see the conditions firsthand. Once you're there, you'll see what needs support — whether it's pre-financing, organic transition, or community investment. Act on it, even at a small scale. And then tell the story, honestly, so others in your company and in the industry can learn from it.

Starting with one herb shifts the frame. Ask one question: "What keeps this PPP unit well?" Write down the answers. Those words become the first set of KPIs for the unit. From there, small actions can be taken to support them.

By beginning here, we make a subtle shift: letting the PPP unit lead the market, rather than always only bending it to fit market demands. **This is the leadership shift that Guido Masé calls for — trade shaped by the living health of people, plants, and place.**

Strategic Formulation

- **Formulate to safety and efficacy:** traditional approach, but informed by plants / people / place: origin paradigm, consumer therapeutic journey to tonic herbalism
- **Formulate to support commitment:**
 - Hub / farm catalog, building ties through formula ingredients*
 - Therapeutic paradigm / ecoregion formulation*
- **Distribute risk in a new way:**
 - Especially for new ingredients, multiple products / delivery formats*
 - Accessible formulations, clear highlight of important ingredients*
- **Respectful timelines:** multi-year growing and processing cycles
 - Especially for new ingredients, 18-24 months. Start early.*
 - Specifications: minimize complexity, start early with testing methods for important ingredients*
 - Technical support: site visits, equipment investment, personnel consulting*
- **Building / sharing data:** social, environmental, market monitoring tools
 - Respectful and supportive data requests and transparency*
 - Internal (products company) information and buy-in: R&D, Quality, Marketing, Sales Strategic Sourcing*



This summary doesn't nearly do justice to the depth and nuance of Guido's presentation. SHI members can watch the full presentation.