

A landscape photograph showing a mountain range in the background under a cloudy sky. The foreground is a field of diverse, colorful flowers, including many bright orange and yellow proteas, interspersed with green and brown shrubs and grasses. A white rectangular box with a thin red border is centered in the upper half of the image, containing the title text.

A Whole Bunch of Ethics

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Introducing our Project

‘Ethical Production in South Africa: Advancing a Cultural Economy Approach’,
funded by the Leverhulme Trust

Case studies:

- Sustainable wild flower harvesting on the Agulhas Plain.
- Eksteenskuil Agricultural Co-operative, Fairtrade raisin producers



Key Research Questions

- What ethical schemes and policies are involved in each supply chain?
- Whose values are represented in each of the supply chains?
- Are concerns about environmental conservation converging or competing with socio- economic development in ethical supply chains?

Aims of Presentation

To examine the ethicality of wild fynbos harvesting through the eyes of different stakeholders:

- implementation of the Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice
- social/labour standards within the fynbos industry

Methodology

- Interviews conducted with:
15 pickers, 12 packshed workers, 8 suppliers, 2 CapeNature employees, 12 corporate reps (in UK and SA), 4 with FVCT Trustees, 4 FV staff and various others.
- Attendance at meetings and events:
SH Review Day, ABI Review, suppliers meetings, SH Certificate Awards Ceremony...
- Picking observations, field study visits, tours of packsheds, consumer/store display observation...
- Reviews of published articles, reports, blogs, web-pages.



Key benefits from SH supply chain

- Some evidence of (stable) employment creation
- Working conditions better than in mainstream industry
- SH concept respected by suppliers and broadly by workers
- On-going growth in market (i) increased volumes via M&S; (ii) more retailers interested
- Gaining voice in the fynbos industry
- Ahead of the game in terms of ethical standards in SA protea industry
- Increase in land subject to sustainable harvesting



Issues

- Implementation of SH is not consistent, even in SH supply chain
- Constraints imposed by weak regulation, inappropriate market practices, economic pressures and insufficient training
- Empowerment outcomes have been limited
- Social upliftment has been restricted. Some people feel disempowered and exploited
- Linguistic and cultural differences are barriers to progress and place the Xhosa workforce in particular at a disadvantage.



Attitudes to Sustainable Harvesting

- **Suppliers very positive – all of them!**
 - ‘...part of the whole business from the beginning.’
 - ‘...code is brilliant.’
 - ‘Such a sensible thing.’
 - ‘A good thing, something like that must be in place.’
- **Pickers positive too**
 - ‘It is important to conserve.’
 - ‘It must be protected down the generations.’

Code of Practice for the Sustainable Harvesting of wild Fynbos



Compiled by:

Sustainable Harvesting Working Group as part of the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative

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Why is Sustainable Harvesting important?

- **Why is SH important?**

Suppliers:

- ‘If you take everything in 2 years and there is a fire you will have nothing!’
- ‘You cannot just take something out of the nature and not put something back.’
- ‘By doing SH and having good credentials it helps get access to other lands.’



Pickers:

- ‘It puts bread on the table.’
- ‘We must not over pick the flowers or there will be no flowers to pick next year.’
- ‘It is not just about earning money, it is very special.’

Harvesting Beyond the SH Core

- **Beyond the SH supply chain harvesting practice is often not sustainable**
 - ‘We learned that they must leave 2 or 3 flowers on the plant for the next year.’ *So, if there are 12 flowers, you would take 9 or 10? ‘Yes.’*
 - ‘I am saddened by the fact that I now realise I have done damage as I did not know, maybe I am part of the reason why the veld is neglected, dry and barren.’
 - ‘We strip it.’
 - ‘You should leave the majority. You cannot take everything, but people do not do this.’
 - ‘When I worked for another supplier we just picked them. We did not think about things like stem length. It was a surprise to work here to start with.’

Is all harvesting sustainable in the SHSC?

- **Training not widespread amongst all pickers**
 - ‘Last year, before the training we would have cut the bush and when we come this year the bush is dead already.’
- **Practice not always sustainable**
 - ‘You don’t have any choice, you have to grab anything that is there.’ *Does that happen a lot?* ‘Every day.’
- **Contradictions of picking for dual markets – fresh and dry**



Challenges of SH Rollout

- **Sustainable harvesting needs to be rolled out to more suppliers**
 - ‘They should be up-scaling and rolling out, they have enough experience in testing behind it.’
- **Current suppliers are reticent about increasing the supply of accredited product via more suppliers**
 - ‘...the market is not big enough. We have been through all the teething pains. Would be great for more people to do this sort of thing but the market is not there yet.’
 - **Can the market be grown to make space for more accredited suppliers?**
 - **CapeNature lack resources to drive rollout via regulation**

Worker Knowledge 1

- Knowledge of sustainable harvesting typically reduced to: angle of cut, 50% rule and no litter.
- Xhosa people have no prior knowledge of fynbos!
 - ‘I wondered what the word ‘fynbos’ on road signs meant.’
- Coloured workers generally have a greater knowledge of fynbos ecology although often limited.



The Market

- **M&S deal has been vital**
 - ‘Marks and Spencer have given us, through Fynsa, a good opportunity for us to stay alive, they have bought a lot of product that no-one else bought.’
 - ‘This deal has saved us.’
- **Benefits of Fynsa/M&S market**
 - ‘Bigger orders and there is quite a range of stuff’
- **Challenges**
 - ‘Fynsa’s prices for 3 or 4 years have been the same.’
 - ‘We have not had an income increase for three years but our staff has!’



Sustainable Ethics

- **Constructing and re-constructing the ethics: wild v. cultivated**
 - ‘The conservation side they are about the wild not the cultivated but you cannot make a sustainable product based solely on the wild.’
 - ‘We had a scenario where if you add a % of cultivated then you can sell the sustainably harvested greens for 12 months of the year, which of course sustainable harvesters are saying yes, yes, yes, we cannot survive on 3 months money.’
 - ‘When they saw how big this can get and the money they can get they have bent the rules. The cultivated product is selling the greens is now the story.’
- **Wild and cultivated: volume v. value in the bouquet**



Retailer attitudes to FVCT

- **Very positive attitudes to FVCT**

- ‘We are lucky to have FVCT and Fynsa as partners. It’s as good as it gets really, they are local and been through the thick and thin of it. I don’t think there is anyone who is the equivalent of those guys.’



- **Lack of clarity as to exactly what role FVCT plays**

Retailer standards

- The desire for 'perfect specimens' leads to pack shed rejects



- *Are the standards are too harsh?....., 'oh ja, the compacta!', 'oh don't even go that topic. It's wild fynbos the whole story is wild fynbos, it cannot compare to greenhouse flowers, those marks are there, they are part of the wild, it is not ugly, it's not that its dead or brown, it is still a pretty thing, the marks are part of the flower, how we recognise the flower.'*

Retailers

- **Shifts in market tastes can be problematic**
 - ‘One of the worst things that happens in fresh produce is when a new buyer comes in and says , “I want to shake things up a bit”.’
 - ‘No pincushions anymore. They don’t like it, the colour that we get here.’
- **Inflexible corporate systems lead to concentration on a small range of species**
 - ‘You have 20 species that are being used year in year out.’
 - ‘They want to know everything that goes in a bouquet and does that fit their brand values. That can slow the process down. M&S and Sainsbury’s (have strict) adherence to tight grower bases, well accredited and well controlled technically.’

Supply chain flows

Orders

- **‘Just in time’ delivery system imposes pressures on environment and workers.**
- **‘This morning Fynsa’s order came at 6am for today. With Fynsa I try to get it to them between 11 and 1pm..’**
- **Technical Knowledge**
- **Flows of technical knowledge are limited both up and down the supply chain.**

The Sustainable Harvesting Story

- **Retailers have been slow to promote ‘the story’**



Ethical Audits

- **Value of Ethical Audits is accepted BUT needs to be rolled out in flower industry**
 - ‘Wieta – a lot of work; a lot paperwork! But it is good thing, when everything is finished you understand why everything is necessary.’
 - ‘Everyone who harvests fynbos must be audited. If there are only 5 suppliers doing it right then what’s the use?’
- **Who pays for ethics???**
 - ‘Everybody told us they told us that we must be ethical but they don’t pay us to be ethical!’



Working Lives: Pickers and Packers

- **Workers in the ‘SH supply chain’ experience better working conditions than those in the mainstream industry and probably within the agricultural sector as a whole.**
- **But variations exist.**

Wages

- **‘R630 this week. In a good week R800-900, in a bad week R300-350. Last year we got a R500 bonus for working 3 months without a break.’**
- **‘In a good week we get R400-500 but a bad week R200-300 a week. We may work sometimes until 9pm and still earn R80-90 for the day.’**
- **Reports of earnings as low as R30 a day in the ‘mainstream’ industry.**



Workers: Sources of Discontent

- **Typical issues: overtime, physical hardship, pay...**
- 'I quit as they did not want to give us better wages than minimum wages. We also work overtime.'
- 'I used to love fynbos but now I do not like it as this job is starting to stress me.'
- 'I get very angry when I see a bouquet in town selling for R25 each when I only got R1.50 for that one bouquet.'



Workers: The upside

- **Workers who have been promoted most likely to be content: better pay, greater respect, wider range of duties. However, opportunities to be promoted are rare.**
- **Limited success stories in terms of empowerment, i.e. contractors.**



- **Coloured workers generally more likely to be content**
 - 'I love this work, it is my bread and butter. If there is no other job I would just sit at home.'
 - 'I really like fynbos and feel very privileged to work in nature. Not everybody does that.'

Language, culture and communication

- **There can be tensions *within* multi-cultural workforces**
 - ‘Sometimes it feels like they are swearing at you in their language. Friction is caused when people interfere with each other’s work.’
 - ‘Yeah, in the language. The Xhosa do not understand Afrikaans and the Afrikaans do not understand Xhosa. So, the Afrikaans want them to speak their language and they want the Afrikaans to speak theirs.’
- **Inadequate communication triggers disempowerment**
 - ‘They did not have a translator from the Afrikaans, so they translated it into English and it was very hard for them to understand. It was not good enough for them the Xhosa speakers. They only enjoyed the practicals.’

Recommendations

- Further recognition of the linguistic and cultural challenges faced by workers
- Need to develop training materials and improve workplace practices
- Identification of potential 'career' routes for workers
- Effective auditing/monitoring of harvesting practice
- Further rollout of SH and better ethical practice in the industry. Identifying the drivers...



Thank you!

