

Does international sustainability certification support regional biodiversity conservation objectives?

The case of rooibos production and
Fynbos conservation in South Africa

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Does international sustainability certification support regional biodiversity conservation objectives?

Yuca Waarts, and Michiel Kuit¹

Abstract

This paper addresses the question if mainstream sustainability certification automatically leads to effective biodiversity conservation. Based on experiences that link rooibos produced under the Rooibos and Biodiversity Conservation to international markets, we conclude that mainstream sustainability certification does not necessarily lead to effective biodiversity conservation. Ownership of the Rooibos and Biodiversity Initiative is one limiting issue. Another reason is that effective biodiversity conservation requires region-specific biodiversity conservation criteria, while mainstream sustainability certification systems usually use general criteria, applicable worldwide. Governments and NGOs that support conservation initiatives to connect to mainstream sustainability certification systems, are recommended to i) build knowledge of local stakeholders about international marketing, ii) show regional initiatives the options and consequences of potential decisions and iii) facilitate discussions between regional initiatives, standard-setting bodies and tea buyers, iv) address issue of including proper conservation criteria in Codes of Conduct with standard-setting bodies and tea buyers.

1. Introduction

In this paper we state that mainstream sustainability certification does not necessarily lead to effective biodiversity conservation. We will provide arguments supporting this statement by describing the case of linking the Rooibos and Biodiversity Initiative (RBI) in South Africa to international mainstream certification schemes.²

Regional biodiversity specificity, and the institutional setting in which decisions are taken, are key issues for effective conservation of regionally specific biodiversity of (inter)national importance. These issues, however, are not automatically addressed in international certification system development processes.

The argumentation in this paper will therefore be addressed discussing these two different angles. We will first describe the institutional setting in which decisions were made to initiate the RBI and to connect it to international mainstream certification schemes. After, we give a description of the international marketing possibilities for RBI rooibos tea and the selection criteria for biodiversity conservation in mainstream certification Codes of Conduct, compared to the selection criteria of RBI. Finally, we discuss the potential effects of certifying RBI rooibos tea using already existing tea Codes of Conduct. We draw conclusions and give recommendations on how to effectively support regional biodiversity conservation initiatives in international marketing endeavours.

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² Examples of such schemes are Utz Certified Good Inside and Rainforest Alliance. FairTrade and organic certification of rooibos already takes place, but such certification is beyond of the scope of this paper.

2. Actors and action in Fynbos biodiversity conservation

The need for a Rooibos and Biodiversity Initiative

Rooibos (*Aspalathus linearis*) belongs to the Aspalathus plant group that consists of 278 species.³ Rooibos is endemic to, and exclusively produced in South Africa.

The last two decades have seen a tremendous rise in consumer demand for rooibos tea. This resulted in a quadrupling of rooibos production from 5,000MT in 1997 to around 20,000MT in 2009. Both intensification of production on existing plantations and expansion of plantations into previously under or un-utilised land areas contributed to the growth in volume. Especially the latter phenomenon had a detrimental impact on the Fynbos habitat⁴ where rooibos is mainly grown. Fynbos makes up most of the Cape Floral Kingdom, which is the smallest and most diverse of all plant kingdoms in the world. Its destruction is a pitiful development, which has led to its designation as a global biodiversity hotspot.⁵ As South Africa is a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), rooibos production activities must comply with CBD's objectives⁶, and therefore conservation activities are to be undertaken to conserve the biodiversity in this hotspot.



To comply with CBD's biodiversity conservation objectives and national legislation, the South African Rooibos Council (SARC), a platform that represents interests of rooibos producers and processors, joined forces with conservationists and local government organisations. Together, they launched the Rooibos and Biodiversity Initiative (RBI) in 2007,

³ Malgas, R., N Oetle (2007). *The sustainable harvest of wild rooibos*, Environmental Monitoring Group Trust.

⁴ Hansen, T. (2006). *Sustainable Rooibos Initiative - A Sustainable production strategy for the South African Rooibos Tea Industry*. Report commissioned by Cape Nature and SA Rooibos Council. SARC, Cape Town.

⁵ Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (1998). *Fynbos biome*.

<http://www.environment.gov.za/Enviro-Info/sote/NSOER/Data/vegrsa/fynbinl.htm>. Accessed 31-1-10.

⁶ Gerhard Pretorius, 2008. *Rooibos Biodiversity Initiative (RBI). Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines for the Sustainable Production of Rooibos*. Natura Libra Environmental Consultants, Malmesbury, South Africa.

to 'address the threats to the environment [...] and the rooibos industry and to further national and international environmental and social commitments'.⁷

RBI's biodiversity best practice guidelines

To create an effective biodiversity conservation strategy for the rooibos industry, the RBI firstly focused on developing regionally specific biodiversity best practice guidelines.⁷ These biodiversity best practices were designed in a multi-stakeholder process, with inputs from rooibos industry stakeholders, experts in conservation and the local government. Developing these best practice guidelines, the RBI sought to find the balance between biodiversity concerns and socio-economic concerns, as the RBI is to conserve biodiversity while delivering social and economic benefits to the stakeholders in the region.⁷

What is so special about the RBI biodiversity best practice guidelines?

RBI's biodiversity best practice guidelines present a comprehensive list of topics to be addressed in farm management. Such topics range from general biodiversity best practices such as drawing up and Environmental Management Plan, wetland management, alien species control and veld fire management, to agri-environmental practices such as soil management, fertilization, irrigation and integrated pest management. But also financial planning is included. A chapter also addresses the management of wild rooibos and the rehabilitation of buffer areas. These best practices are set within the international and national contexts of biodiversity conservation, including South African legislation.

The criteria in the best practice guidelines are presented in two levels: minimum legal requirements and best practice. Farmers should at least comply with the minimum legal requirements. Best practice 'is measured against the degree to which a producer demonstrably contributes' to the realization of the conservation objectives.⁷

One of the specific biodiversity conservation objectives of the RBI is 'to promote the establishment of Contract Nature Reserves and other conservation agreements between rooibos producers and government agencies'.⁷ Rooibos producers who are situated in the areas that critically need protection, can set aside natural areas in the Stewardship project implemented by Cape Nature, the Western Cape Province nature conservation authority. Producers who do so, earn bonus points when audited for their implementation of the RBI best practices.

⁷ Gerhard Pretorius, 2008. *Rooibos Biodiversity Initiative (RBI). Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines for the Sustainable Production of Rooibos*. Natura Libra Environmental Consultants, Malmesbury, South Africa



Based on these best practice guidelines, the RBI developed a scorecard, which RBI uses to audit the contribution of the participating farmers to the conservation objectives and other criteria. This scorecard thus functions as a tool to verify the compliance of the farmers with the RBI guidelines, and is filled out by RBI at present. In the future, the best practice guidelines and scorecard could also be used for obtaining 3rd party verification.

For the implementation of the guidelines, the RBI focused first on large farmers who produce rooibos on plantations. Working with large farmers was for RBI the most efficient and effective strategy regarding biodiversity conservation, as their regionally specific biodiversity best practices are then implemented on a large scale, by working with relatively few farmers.

In 2008, the RBI was put into practice: 20 large farmers started a pilot phase of implementing the biodiversity best practices. In 3 years time, from 2008 until 2010, 36 farmers, farming 96,000ha that accounts for 40% of the total rooibos production area, joined the RBI.

RBI: from developing biodiversity best practice to a focus on marketing

Next to biodiversity conservation, the RBI also has the objective to develop economic opportunities and social benefits for the rooibos industry.⁸ In 2009, the RBI started to look into opportunities to sell Rooibos tea produced under the RBI seal as a special product on national and international markets. Linking to an internationally acknowledged mainstream certification scheme could for instance lead to preferred supplier relations with buyers or to a higher price or compliance premiums in the market.

⁸ Gerhard Pretorius, 2008. *Rooibos Biodiversity Initiative (RBI). Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines for the Sustainable Production of Rooibos*. Natura Libra Environmental Consultants, Malmesbury, South Africa

But would it be possible to market RBI rooibos tea as a product in the international market place? And would this generate a premium price? The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality asked Wageningen UR to take up the challenge to answer this question.⁹

3. International marketing of RBI rooibos tea

European tea buyer wishes in sourcing sustainably produced rooibos tea

Are European tea buyers interested in sourcing RBI rooibos tea? Through interviews with six European tea buyers, we learnt about their demand for sustainably produced rooibos tea.¹⁰ European tea buyers expressed an interest to source a sustainably produced mainstream rooibos tea, but only when certain conditions are met: next to implementing biodiversity best practices, also socio-economic criteria need to be properly addressed by the farmers. In addition, a third party auditor needs to verify compliance with the best practices and socio-economic criteria. Preferably, the tea buyers would source such rooibos tea at no or little extra cost.

The tea buyers also preferred that the RBI would connect to internationally recognised certification systems to certify the sustainably produced rooibos, instead of setting up a regional certification system. This would be easier for them as they already work with standard-setting bodies operating such schemes in other products, and have adapted their marketing strategy accordingly. Regional certification systems thus could have a hard time being acknowledged in the international market place.

This buyer preference has an important consequence for the RBI. As multiple certification systems exist, and tea buyers usually have a working relationship with only one standards-setting body, the RBI would then need to be connected to several certification schemes to sell certified rooibos tea to multiple tea buyers.

Actual tea buyer demand for sustainably produced rooibos tea

Due to an increasing competition between tea packers for providing the market with sustainable tea products, tea buyers already became interested in actually sourcing sustainable rooibos tea. Mainstream certification in black tea has shown to be a fairly complex process as nearly all black tea is retailed as blends. Rooibos on the other hand, due to its relatively small size in terms of total volume, number of producers and share of the total tea product range of major tea buyers, offers potential to certify 100% of a particular product with relative ease.¹¹ The complexity with the certification of black tea is that most tea is blended from tea from different estates. With rooibos, it is possible to buy the tea from one certified farm.

⁹ This project was funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands (BO-10-006-078, Rooibos intensification) and by the LNV OS fund of the Ministry of LNV. In this project, Wageningen UR cooperated with Michiel Kuit of Kuit Consultancy.

¹⁰ Four Dutch, one Swiss and one German tea buyer were interviewed.

¹¹ Interview with Stefanie Miltenburg, Director International Corporate Social Responsibility, SaraLee Corporation.

With this in mind, one large tea buyer expressed the wish to us as well as the RBI to source sustainably produced rooibos tea as soon as possible.

This buyer asked the standard-setting body they usually work with to look into the possibility of setting up a rooibos tea Code of Conduct. This led to the fact that the RBI was already having discussions with this standard-setting body before the RBI best practice guidelines were even finalized. An important element of these discussions is how and to what extent the RBI biodiversity best practice criteria will be included in the rooibos tea Code of Conduct.

Is there a difference in the criteria used in Codes of Conducts developed by the standard-setting bodies and the best practice guidelines of the RBI? If so, how do they differ? We will answer this question by describing the finalisation of the RBI best practice criteria including socio-economic criteria and the use of conservation criteria by international standard-setting bodies. Finally, the compatibility of these internationally used criteria with the RBI best practice guidelines is analysed.

4. Use of biodiversity conservation criteria by RBI and standard-setting bodies

RBI to finalise biodiversity best practice guidelines with socio-economic criteria

As has been presented in the text box above, the RBI biodiversity best practice guidelines contain an extensive set of regionally specific conservation best practices as well as agri-environmental practices such as fertilisation and irrigation.

Even though connecting these biodiversity best practice guidelines to international mainstream certification systems seemed a good strategy from the point of international marketing as European tea buyers prefer this route, the South African stakeholders decided first to extend their biodiversity best practices into a comprehensive set of best practices. This comprehensive set of best practices would also include socio-economic best practices, next to the biodiversity conservation best practices that the RBI had already developed.

With support from the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the South African stakeholders conducted a socio-economic baseline study of the rooibos industry in South Africa.¹² Part of the exercise was the screening of socio-economic criteria in internationally recognised mainstream certification systems, to ascertain that the best practices would include socio-economic criteria that are relevant for the local stakeholders as well as for international certification schemes.

The development of comprehensive best practices was a strategic decision. Not only did it increase RBI's knowledge on the socio-economic characteristics of the rooibos industry, also it provides an opportunity to fulfil the demand of European tea buyers in including socio-economic criteria in their best practice guidelines.

¹² This study was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality under the LNV OS funding scheme.

This would lead to the fact that rooibos industry would 'not become subjected to external standards and certification from specific role players in the marketplace such as retailers. If a good system is in place this can be sold to the market at large'.¹³ Ideally, the RBI would like to see that farmers would work with only one set of sustainability criteria, and the final RBI best practice guidelines will make this possible. Having developed the final set of best practices, discussions could be held with standard-setting bodies over the use of criteria.

What is so special about the socio-economic characteristics of the rooibos industry?

As rooibos is exclusively produced in South Africa, the socio-economic criteria must specifically relate to the South African situation. Issues that are specific for South Africa are the following:

- The empowerment of previously disadvantaged people such as Africans, Coloureds and Indians through the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). The BBBEE intends to 'promote the achievement of the constitutional right to equality, increase broad-based and effective participation of black people in the economy and promote a higher growth rate, increased employment and more equitable income distribution.'¹⁴ Specific objectives of the BBBEE include the increase company ownership and company management positions for black people.
- Land Reform policy. This policy has the objectives of increasing the land owned by black people (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) and to contribute to redistribution of about 30% of South Africa's commercial agricultural land.
- As these issues are so specific to South Africa, and of relevance to the development of the rooibos industry, they will need to be addressed in the development of socio-economic criteria for sustainably produced rooibos.

Biodiversity conservation criteria used in international tea Codes of Conduct

Mainstream sustainability certification systems already include criteria for biodiversity conservation in their tea Codes of Conduct, next to other agri-environmental criteria, socio-economic criteria and criteria for traceability and transparency. Examples of commonly used biodiversity conservation criteria from these tea Codes of Conduct are: permits for ploughing and water use, bufferzones, fertilisation, irrigation, integrated pest management and making inventories of wildlife.

Next to these commonly used criteria, individual tea Codes of Conduct also have developed criteria which are only used in their own Code of Conduct. Examples of such criteria are the drawing up of Environmental Management Plans, wetland management, rivers and stream management as well as game management.

Do mainstream certification system conservation criteria match with RBI criteria?

The tea Codes of Conduct biodiversity conservation criteria can also be used in certifying sustainable rooibos tea, as they are generally relevant for reaching biodiversity conservation objectives. There is also some overlap between the RBI best practice conservation criteria and the tea Codes criteria.

¹³ Gerhard Pretorius, SARC biodiversity project manager. Personal communication, 20-01-2010.

¹⁴ RSA, 2003. Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Bill. Minister of Trade and Industry, Republic of South Africa.

There are some criteria in international tea Codes of Conduct that are not stated as such by the RBI. The harvesting of indigenous flora, having a water conservation programme, the fact that nothing can be disposed off in water resources, the consultation of authorities when management is closer than 2 kilometre from a nature park and making an inventory of wildlife are all criteria which are not taken up as individual criteria by the RBI. However, these topics are covered by RBI but under the heading of other criteria. Wetland, rivers and streams management are for instance examples of RBI criteria in which the water conservation programme criterion fits.

A great difference between the RBI and the tea Codes of Conducts is, however, that the RBI contains far more conservation criteria. Criteria which are used by the RBI but not taken up in international tea Codes of Conduct are:

- Stewardship agreements with the conservation authorities, which is a major issue in the area where rooibos is produced;
- Fire management, which is very relevant in Fynbos;
- Game management, hunting and control of damage-causing animals;
- Corridors/connectivity on-farm and across the landscape. This forms the basis for the existence of regional conservation strategy and for a global mitigation against climate change;



- Control of alien invasive plants. This is a legal requirement and a major factor in biodiversity loss in the area;
- Control of alien invasive fish. The Olifants river system in the rooibos production area is home to a number of endangered and critically endangered endemic species of fish threatened by alien fish;
- Rehabilitation of the buffer areas of aquatic systems as well as marginal lands where production is uneconomical;
- Waste management.

One important criterion, which standard-setting bodies have not included in their tea Codes of Conducts, is the criterion of financial planning. A sound financial plan, based on market research, is required by RBI for each farm as it will 'balance the development and management input of rooibos production with the effect it will have on the ecosystem services required for long-term economic and ecological sustainability'.¹⁵

The comparison between the RBI criteria and tea Code Criteria shows that the RBI contains far more conservation criteria than the tea Codes of Conducts. But are the additional criteria required to come to effective biodiversity conservation?

There are a number of reasons why the entire set of RBI best practice criteria are preferable to using the criteria from the mainstream certification system tea Codes of Conduct:

- The RBI biodiversity best practice criteria are more comprehensive than the criteria of the tea Codes of Conduct. Not only have more criteria been taken up in RBI's biodiversity best practices, the criteria are also more regionally specific. An example of this is fire management, which is an important issue to be addressed in the Fynbos habitat, as Fynbos is a fire-dependent system. Fires can assist the restoration of the vegetation, but can also cause local extinction of species when not properly managed. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that fire management is addressed in developing and implementing criteria for biodiversity conservation. Fire management is either not addressed by tea Codes, or not properly addressed.
- The RBI best practices guidelines will include people, planet and profit criteria, but will still have a central focus on biodiversity conservation, since this is required for reaching the regional biodiversity conservation objectives. Also, the socio-economic criteria that will be taken up will reflect the specificity of South African history in addressing issues such as land reform and empowerment issues;
- Mainstream sustainability certification systems often aim to also include small farmers in their system, which could lead to the situation where their criteria should be generally applicable. For biodiversity conservation in the Cape Floral kingdom however, including small-scale farmers (0,2-100ha) is much less effective than focusing on large scale farmers (100-3500ha). The SARC therefore has the objective to have 70% of all land cultivated under rooibos covered by 2014, instead of a number of farmers to participate. Therefore, the RBI best practice guidelines were, at first, focused at implementation by large farmers.¹⁶

These points clarify that implementing the entire set of RBI biodiversity best practices is the most effective and efficient means to reach the regionally specific conservation objectives, because of their relevance for the biodiversity targets in the region.

What would happen if standard-setting bodies would not take RBIs conservation interests into account in developing their rooibos tea Code of Conduct? Would biodiversity still be effectively protected when the RBI biodiversity best practice criteria would not be fully taken up in the certification system?

¹⁵ Gerhard Pretorius, 2008. *Rooibos Biodiversity Initiative (RBI). Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines for the Sustainable Production of Rooibos*. Natura Libra Environmental Consultants, Malmesbury, South Africa

¹⁶ In the future, the RBI will also target smallholders to implement the best practices.

5. Discussion

Who decides how a rooibos tea Code of Conduct is developed?

RBI's strategy to develop comprehensive best practice guidelines to meet the demand of tea buyers and to be able to preserve their biodiversity concerns, was overtaken by market developments. Before finalising the best practice guidelines, discussions had already started between the RBI and a standard-setting body about which criteria to include in a rooibos tea Code.

There are various ways in which RBI's interests can be taken into account in a rooibos tea Code, used by a standard-setting body. Discussions in 2009 and early 2010 between the RBI and the standard-setting body focused on the integration of the RBI criteria (partly or wholly) into the tea Code and whether the standard-setting body was to accredit the entire RBI best practice guidelines. The standard-setting bodies include interest of local stakeholders by multi-stakeholder consultations, in which local actors can give input in the development of the rooibos tea Codes of Conduct.

The RBI has guided a multi-stakeholder consultation to develop the RBI best practice guidelines and the RBI should be able to have a say in which direction the certification process should go. Importantly, the RBI is owned by South African stakeholders, instead of international actors. They have set up the RBI and have taken it forward, supported by most of the rooibos industry, conservationists and the local government.

Even though the RBI is consulted for the set of criteria for a Code of Conduct, the final decision is usually made by the standard-setting bodies. They are driven by the demands of their clients (tea buyers), who look for reasonably priced sustainably produced products. The standard-setting bodies usually look for practically applicable criteria. It is hence expected that international certification systems will not include the entire set of RBI biodiversity conservation best practices. It considers these criteria too extensive to implement and audit.

From a legitimacy, democracy and development point of view, it is therefore preferable that the RBI actually decides which way to go regarding certification of RBI rooibos tea. This situation is preferred over the implementation of a rooibos tea Code of Conduct owned by international actors, of which the development is led by the decisions of tea buyers and the standard-setting bodies.

What would be the consequences if the RBI criteria will not all be taken up in international certification systems?

If the international certification systems would not include all RBI best practice biodiversity conservation criteria in certifying rooibos, this could impact in various ways on regional biodiversity conservation efforts. Potential implications are:

- It could lead to regional actors not feeling ownership of the certification system criteria as their interests are not entirely taken into account.¹⁷ This could lead to non-

¹⁷ This is also confirmed by Sandra Kruger & Associates, 2010. *Rooibos Socio-Economic Study*. Sandra Kruger & Associates, Cape Town, South Africa.

compliance, especially when they think that the final set of sustainability criteria is not in their interest in the end.¹⁸

- Farmers who currently do implement the RBI best practices could become certified in the international certification system. However, they may cease to implement the full set of RBI conservation practices when the requirements of the certification system are less stringent. Implementing the less comprehensive set of practices is probably cheaper than fully implementing the RBI practices. Because of this, and because competition in the market for rooibos is fierce at the moment, it could lead to a situation where farmers opt in favour of receiving certification instead of in fully implementing the RBI. This would lead to a decrease in the implementation of biodiversity conservation practices.
- Farmers who do not currently implement the RBI best practices do not necessarily feel ownership towards the RBI and can choose to become certified in the international certification system. When the conservation practices in final tea Codes of Conduct are less demanding than the RBI practices, they would have lower costs of production than farmers implementing the RBI best practices. Such farmers could then receive a higher margin for their sustainably produced rooibos tea. Competition between farmers in the market could result in the decrease of RBI best practice implementation by farmers who earlier participated in the RBI.

Not including all biodiversity best practice criteria in international certification systems could thus water down or even undermine the efforts of the RBI.¹⁹ This could decrease the possibility to effectively conserve this internationally important biodiversity hotspot and its capacity to continue to produce.

Therefore, the accreditation of the entire RBI best practice guidelines by the international certification schemes has the largest chance of success, both for reaching the conservation objectives of the rooibos industry, and farmer compliance to the criteria. Because the RBI regionally specific biodiversity criteria would be used instead of a set of generally applicable conservation objectives, and local stakeholders would feel ownership over the certification process.

6. Conclusions

Ownership and collective action

In international marketing, decisions are made in interaction between standard-setting bodies, marketers and higher management. Tea buyers look for a sustainable rooibos tea product for a reasonable price, preferably at little or no extra cost. Their demands can lead to pressures upstream in the supply chain to become compliant to certain criteria. This could lead to a mismatch between global private regulation and regional conservation objectives.²⁰

¹⁸ This is confirmed by Giovannucci, D., & Ponte, S. (2005). Standards as a new form of social contract? Sustainability initiatives in the coffee industry. *Food Policy*, 30(3), 284–301.

¹⁹ This concern is confirmed by Gerhard Pretorius, SARC biodiversity project manager. Personal communication, 20-01-2010.

²⁰ This is confirmed by Giovannucci, D., & Ponte, S. (2005). Standards as a new form of social contract? Sustainability initiatives in the coffee industry. *Food Policy*, 30(3), 284–301.

When market demand drives the process, the regional interests may not be taken fully into account. This may have a negative effect on the RBI conservation endeavours in South Africa.

Ownership is an important factor to make sustainability activities work. The RBI shows that through collective action quite an impact has been realised in biodiversity conservation efforts. The regional stakeholders' ownership of the RBI could decrease when the certification system would not properly include the interests of the RBI. The collective action in biodiversity conservation by the rooibos industry could then change into a situation where individual actors making choices for their own benefit.

For regional initiatives to influence certification processes is a difficult task that requires sector, societal and ecosystem specific knowledge as well as knowledge of international marketing processes. Regional stakeholders can more effectively discuss various options with the standard-setting bodies, if such knowledge is timely acquired. This would increase their negotiation power. Standard-setting bodies can better take into account the regional requirements if they are (made) aware of them.

Use of criteria in international Codes of Conducts

As shown by this case of the rooibos industry, connecting a regional biodiversity initiative to an international mainstream certification programme is potentially a good strategy, although there are various pitfalls to be avoided. When not guided properly, it would not necessarily be a good sustainability strategy as regional dynamics may differ and may have specific requirements which are not included in mainstream sustainability certification.

Marketing a product through an international certification system is therefore not automatically the best option for reaching regionally specific conservation objectives, even though economically it might provide market opportunities to actors in the rooibos industry. As the RBI was already so advanced in developing their biodiversity best practice guidelines, using a set with less comprehensive and stringent criteria would diminish RBI's impact. The consequence could be that the regional biodiversity conservation activities would be watered down.

The most effective way to support the (inter)nationally important Fynbos habitat through rooibos production is the accreditation of the entire set of regionally specific RBI best practice guidelines by international standard setting bodies.

7. Recommendations

Regional conservation initiatives that aim to connect produce to international markets while implementing conservation practices, should become knowledgeable about international marketing and its implications. This will contribute to informed decision making. It may increase the negotiation power of these initiatives towards international buyers and standard-setting bodies.

Governments and NGOs wishing to support regional conservation initiatives to become connected to international markets should therefore:

- Investigate whether the regional initiative has experience in international marketing;
- Take into account local ownership issues in planning their support;
- If and when required, assist the regional initiative in market research, so the regional initiative can make better informed decisions in international marketing processes;
- Support the regional initiative in gaining knowledge on factors important for the regional biodiversity and international marketing (such as regionally specific environmental and socio-economic characteristics);
- Show the regional initiative the consequences of a range of potential decisions that can be taken, keeping the actual goals in mind;
- Enable or facilitate discussions between buyers, standard-setting bodies and the regional initiative on which decision-making structures and criteria to take into account;
- Address the issue of including a proper set of regionally important sustainability criteria with standard setting bodies and tea buyers.

Standard-setting bodies who consider developing a Code of Conduct for a product that affects (inter)nationally important biodiversity resources, should:

- Align with local initiatives, taking into account issues of ownership, and their decision making procedures;
- Critically assess the conservation criteria in their Code of Conduct, and adapt their criteria to biodiversity specific criteria relevant for the region the product comes from.

These recommendations aim to contribute to an effective and durable strategy for preserving internationally important biodiversity resources.

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