



Executive Summary

Emerging Rooibos Farmer Market Access Project



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OVERVIEW: *problem-opportunity statement*

Global markets increasingly require rapid and coordinated response to standards and certification. Yet despite broad political transformations in post-Apartheid South Africa, structural power relations limit emerging farmer capacity to effectively access certified markets such as fairtrade and organic. Within the Rooibos commodity network, inequitable functioning has prevented emerging farmers from fully developing critical market-access skills and resources. While diverse groups have collaborated to achieve mutual interests, the cooperative building process has been marked by conflict. There is a need to involve producers in networks as this will help the industry to more effectively capture lucrative market opportunities. Successful community and emerging farmer network efforts are potential building blocks in which to inform further engagement. The South African Rooibos Council is working towards developing formal emerging farmer networking space as part of its Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) portfolio. Diverse industry and organizational experts are increasingly invested in emerging communities and a core group has expressed interest in further collaboration. Commodity network efforts have been incrementally achieving goals, but more work needs to be done to ensure development sustainability and scalability.

Action plan: Our team initially engaged human capabilities to implement a farmer-leader-based approach to producer support. This strategy integrated training, participatory action research (PAR), and industry networking to develop the capacity necessary for effective participatory information sharing and action planning (PIE/PAP) at the community and industry levels.

Primary stakeholders: at project outset we invited the participation of all emerging farmers. Though estimates vary, there are approximately 353 emerging farmers currently operating in South Africa’s smallholder Rooibos sector, with 295 residing in participating groupings. Because of the size of Wupperthal and the remote location of many farmers, we based participant groupings on community location rather than producer grouping. In other areas, we engaged with producer associations which have subsequently become cooperatives. By project end, 13 farmer leaders representing seven groupings successfully completed an in-depth training-of-trainers (ToT) program and Driefontein representatives attended two multi-day ToT sessions.¹ 203 community members attended broader workshops. We ensured female involvement by maintaining a strong gender focus throughout the project: six of the 13 farmer leaders are women, as were approximately half of the community workshop attendees.

Table 1: Participating Communities

Region	Community/Farmer Groupings
Wupperthal	1.Langkloof and Eselbank 2.Wupperthal, Langbome, Beukeskraal, and Nuweplaas 3.Kleinvlei, Agterstevlei, and Grasvlei 4.Suurrug, Menskraal, Heiveld, and Koueberg 5.Heuningvlei, Brugkraal, and Witwater
Spanjaardskloof/Elim	6.Strandveld Tea Farmers Cooperative
Nieuwoudtville	7.Rooikatstert Agriculture Cooperative 8.Independent Farmers
Clanwilliam	9.Driefontein Small Farmers Primary Cooperative

¹ 35 farmers comprise the Driefontein Small Farmers Primary Cooperative which joined the project at mid-term. Thus we were unable to include this group in all project activities.

Goals and objectives: we synthesized numerous academic-practitioner goals to develop an integrated framework for project delivery.

Table 2: Project Goals and Objectives

	Academic	Practitioner
Goals	Engage PAR to problematize emerging farmer conditions, problems, and opportunities	Develop farmer leadership via participatory market-access training and support
Objectives	<p>Examine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical dimensions • Organizational, industry, and farmer engagement • Democratic, bureaucratic, and social dimensions including gender, class, race, and age • Impact of certification efforts <p>Determine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural conditions, problems, and opportunities • Capabilities • Likely points of intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify emerging farmer capabilities and needs • Design and implement ToT program in conjunction with community workshops • Develop training materials and farmers’ guide to certification • Expand institutional capacity of the South African Rooibos Council to provide an enabling environment • Evaluate outcomes • Develop recommendations • Integrate good practices

ENGAGEMENT: tools

To synchronize ongoing involvement, we developed a New Methods model for holistic producer-industry support. Complementary conceptual tools frame this approach and may help inform policy research and engaged scholarship forums. These include (1) commodity network analysis, (2) socio-political theories of power, (3) the human capabilities approach, (4) PAR, (5) outcome-based adult education, and (6) grassroots development mechanisms. We synthesized commodity network analysis with socio-political theories to examine questions concerning democracy, bureaucracy, and power within the emerging Rooibos sector. Programmatically, we incorporated Amartya Sen’s human capabilities approach, which engages the concept of capabilities to more effectively measure socio-economic wellbeing. PAR precepts informed activities to ensure stakeholder involvement

and input. In terms of training, we combined grassroots development mechanisms—such as capabilities community mapping—with outcome-based adult education to stimulate active learning, knowledge sharing, assessment, and goal achievement. While these conceptual tools are diverse, they are also complementary and synthesis evolved from reflexive application and pragmatic adaptation.

Components: we facilitated multiple activities throughout the project. Though each phase broadly informed the next, many activities were ongoing and/or overlapping. Action research data informed monitoring and evaluation, which included: 1) resource and capabilities assessment, 2) learner assessment, 3) training and activity evaluations, 4) mid-term fieldwork, and 5) evaluation surveys.

Table 3: Project Outline

Phase	Activities and Outputs	Data Collection
Entry and information building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite project participation • Commodity network mapping • Capabilities workshops • Leadership elections • Capabilities indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Unstructured organizational and farmer interviews • Participant observation
Capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three multi-day ToT workshops with leaders • Modular toolbox of training material and farmer guide to standards and certification • Leadership commodity networking activities • PAR training and community fieldwork • Leaders design and facilitate one workshop • Develop Emerging Farmer Working Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant observation • Document analysis • Semi-structured farmer leader and emerging farmer interviews • Semi-structured commodity network interviews
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging Rooibos farmer policy seminar • Evaluate project outcomes and materials • Set of academic-practitioner papers and publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant observation • Document analysis • Leadership and community project evaluation surveys

IMPACT: *structural problems*

The Wupperthal communities have been in disarray due to cooperative-based conflict. Although reasons for this are complex and disputed, research uncovered the following contributing factors: 1) poor communication at all levels, 2) lack of technical and management expertise, 3) minimal market knowledge, and 4) inadequate infrastructure—specifically in regards to roads and telecommunications. These challenges may at least partially stem from previously implemented projects which failed to fully invest in appropriate levels of capacity building. Participating farmer groups in other regions were small and organized but faced similar market-access concerns, including lack of industry-level representation and knowledge.

Leadership opportunity: this project created impact by investing in human capabilities. ToT-community workshop integration helped leaders develop and transfer critical knowledge: 100% of community members felt the leaders had good knowledge of the topics they presented in workshops, 82% said the leaders had provided feedback on the training they had received, 78% had received feedback on leader industry networking activities, and 65% said they would go to leaders for advice before approaching external experts.

Table 4: Leadership Training Topics

Production and Market Access	Leadership and Management	Participatory Action Research
Market research/strategies	Verbal /written communication	Socio-political theories
Standards and certification	Financial management	Research methods/ethics
Fairtrade/Organics/UTZ	Recordkeeping	Interviewing
Right Rooibos/biodiversity	Industry networking	Translation
Branding	Effective planning	Data analysis
Rooibos production	Public speaking/facilitation	Community needs assessment/evaluation
Food safety		

RECOMMENDATIONS: *key points*

Farmer leaders have developed an information sharing network that is focused on opportunity rather than conflict. They have been active in sharing market information in their communities to help clear up misunderstandings. Via research involvement, they have highlighted market-access problems and opportunities and have expressed interest in working with certification bodies to engage solutions to cooperative issues. Throughout the project, leaders have been enthusiastic, professional, and supportive of one another, with information exchange appropriately advancing in multiple directions. The Rooibos Council has expressed commitment to providing leaders with an enabling environment, and leaders are in the process of formalizing the Working Group. Thus we recommend the following:

Table 5: Key Recommendations

Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wupperthal emerging farmers should work with certification bodies to seek solutions to ongoing bureaucratic challenges—for example, the potential of establishing a two-tier cooperative system• Farmers should actively seek projects that invest in farmer and management capacity building and transportation/telecommunications infrastructure
Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizations should provide ongoing technical assistance to emerging farmers and include the leadership group in preliminary planning processes to ensure that projects deliver the services that farmers most need
Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industry representatives should collaborate with the leadership group in production planning and market development initiatives
All Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participatory information exchange and action planning may be used to expand collaboration and strengthen farmer participation in lucrative markets• All groups should develop stronger communication networks with one another to improve the quality of support and maximize market potential

Conclusions: despite best intentions, development projects often reinforce a state of dependency in which people remain unable to take charge of their own livelihoods. At worst, projects may destabilize and/or demoralize already struggling communities. Active capacity building and equitable participation can help reverse this process, but to achieve

sustainability, historically disadvantaged communities must have ongoing access to resource and capacity building opportunities. Development forums highlight the importance of bringing farmers into projects as stakeholders rather than as beneficiaries who must passively receive pre-determined assistance; yet given agency constraints, involvement is all too often superficial.

Everyone makes mistakes, but with effective leadership, these become critical learning opportunities. As one research respondent stated “We must all admit we were wrong. When we start to admit we are wrong we can say we are so sorry. Then we can forgive each other and start the opportunity of a new beginning.” Indeed, peace and reconciliation precepts lie at the heart of the South African nation-building process and these strategies may inform global conflict resolution discourse as well as localized action. Via action research the project team overcame numerous difficulties, including faulty communication, social divisions, and funding and time constraints. As a result, we learned from one another and more effectively achieved evolving project goals. We hope the Emerging Farmer Working Group will expand industry-network involvement and help producer communities realize their full market-access potential.

The project team thanks you for your ongoing support and interest.

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