



Ethical Production in South Africa: Sustainable Wildflower Harvesting and Fairtrade Raisin Production

Stakeholder Report 2012

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Executive Summary

Background

This 33 month Leverhulme Trust funded project, based jointly within the Geography Departments of Durham and Newcastle Universities, evaluates the dynamics of ethical trade within international agri-supply chains emanating from South Africa. Two case studies of ethical production have been the focus of the research; (i) **'Sustainable wild flower harvesting' on the Agulhas Plain** is an initiative driven by a local NGO seeking to promote biodiversity conservation through engagement with the market. Wild *fynbos* flowers are harvested according to innovative ecologically guided protocols. The initiative seeks to reduce pressure to convert the land into other economically productive uses by assuring the market value of the flowers; (ii) the **Eksteenskuil Agricultural Co-operative (EAC)**, which was the world's first **Fairtrade** raisin producer and has supplied raisins to the UK's Traidcraft plc since the late 1990s. Beyond these two case studies the research has examined the rollout of ethical trade in South Africa, where a number of innovative ethical programmes and initiatives have emerged within agri-supply chains. Conceptually the research has evaluated the role of geographic context in shaping these ethical production initiatives and the values enshrined within them. Our analysis demonstrates that such supply chains are firmly embedded within local cultures and politics that influence the ways in which the projects play out on the ground.

Key research questions

- What are the main economic, environmental and social impacts of the initiatives?
- Whose ethics/values are driving the initiatives, and with what implications for stakeholder participation?
- In what ways are environmental and social ethics integrated in these initiatives?
- How does 'place' matter in terms of the development and impacts of these initiatives?

Key findings

Trends in ethical governance

- Post-apartheid South Africa has proven a fertile environment for the emergence of ethical initiatives, many of which are driven by local stakeholders, including an active civil society. Retailers' ethical trading strategies have also been important given that the inequities of apartheid still resonate with many consumers in Europe.
- The number of accredited Fairtrade producers grew rapidly in South Africa in the mid-2000s. However, many producers have subsequently withdrawn, citing compliance costs and inadequate markets. The evolving promotion of Fairtrade within the domestic South African market is, however, an exciting departure presenting new challenges.
- The fruit industry has been pro-active following negative international publicity and has established the Fruit South Africa programme to ensure ethical standards across the industry. One of the benefits of this programme will be to establish the principle that producers need only undergo a single main audit, thus reducing 'audit fatigue'.
- Retailers are deepening engagement with ethical issues in South Africa, albeit in different ways. One response from some UK retailers has been to couple in-country resources for ethical trade (i.e. local offices) with their expanding in-country procurement teams so that they can be more responsive to local ethical issues and trends.

Sustainable Wildflower Harvesting in the Western Cape

- 56,000 hectares of the Agulhas Plain are currently being conserved due to stakeholder commitments to the sustainable harvesting programme.

- Demand for Cape Flora (*fynbos*) bouquets has grown very rapidly, reaching nearly 400,000 during 2011. The majority of these are exported, with most sold in Marks and Spencer in the UK. Market outlets in both the UK and South Africa are increasing.
- Around 100 full time jobs have been secured via the sustainable harvesting supply chain (SHSC) with extra seasonal opportunities also available. Pay levels and working conditions are generally better than in the mainstream wild flower industry and many other agricultural sectors. However, employment growth has not been proportionate to the growth in demand for Cape Flora bouquets.
- Local organisations have played a significant role in defining the ethical standards, especially in terms of managing the environmental impacts. Key tools that have been developed include the Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice and the Species Vulnerability Index.
- There are risks that retailer buying practices and local pack shed sourcing policies can compromise ethical outcomes.
- The changing composition of the local workforce, driven by migration largely from the Eastern Cape, has led to challenges in communicating the principles of the sustainable harvesting programme.

Fairtrade in Eksteenskuil, Northern Cape

- Eksteenskuil is populated by the descendants of 'Coloured' people who were relocated onto small, fragmented plots of land on island braids within the Orange River deemed unsuitable for white farmers by the apartheid government. Many residents still do not have access to their title deeds.
- The physical environment of Eksteenskuil, which is vulnerable to a number of natural hazards, is a challenging context within which to farm profitably. However, the technical skills of some farmers from Eksteenskuil are highly regarded within the dried fruit industry.
- Fairtrade has brought benefits to the community in Eksteenskuil by providing all important market access and catalysing the creation of a Co-operative body whose operations are funded through the Fairtrade Premium.
- Premium monies have been used to pay for collectively available farm implements, regularly cited by members as the key benefit from Fairtrade. In addition, water pumps for irrigation have been provided and social projects have been initiated such as the provision of proper school bags for all children on the islands.
- Socio-economic progress has been highly differentiated with some members successfully developing their farming businesses whilst others continue to struggle to sustain livelihoods.
- The community's socio-political background has contributed, at least in part, to the often fraught relationships that have existed with some external stakeholders. The net result is that developmental projects within Eksteenskuil have often failed to live up to expectations.
- Many respondents questioned whether the Fairtrade system is sufficiently flexible to respond to the differing needs and values of producer groups. The future of EAC as a Fairtrade entity is uncertain, not least due to the increasing availability of Fairtrade raisins from other countries.

Conclusions and recommendations

Unlocking the geographical complexity of the ethical and fair trade movements and working in culturally-sensitive ways with producer communities is vital if the movement is to gather momentum and facilitate meaningful socio-economic development. The report concludes by making a range of recommendations for different stakeholders, which emphasise the critical importance of understanding local contexts when embarking upon ethical initiatives.

Further project information and analysis can be gained via the following weblink:
<http://www.geography.dur.ac.uk/projects/ethical-production-south-africa/Home/tabid/3895/Default.aspx>

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Acronyms

ABI – Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative

BEE – Black Economic Empowerment

BBBEE – Broad based Black Economic Empowerment (the most recent Act governing BEE)

BWI – Biodiversity and Wine Initiative

CFR – Cape Floral Region

EAC – Eksteenskuil Agricultural Co-operative

EFA – Eksteenskuil Farmer’s Association

FFI – Fauna and Flora International

FLO – Fairtrade Labelling Organisation

FTSA – Fairtrade South Africa

FVCT – Flower Valley Conservation Trust

LRAD - Land Reform for Agricultural Development

PPSA – Protea Producers of South Africa

SAD – South African Dried Fruits (a Division of Pioneer Foods)

SHCP – Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice

SHSC – Sustainable Harvesting Supply Chain

SKA – Sandra Kruger and Associates

WIETA – Agricultural Ethical Trade Initiative (SA)

Project Design

This 33 month project, based jointly within the Geography Departments of Durham and Newcastle Universities, evaluates the dynamics of ethical trade within international agri-supply chains emanating from South Africa. Two case studies of ethical production have been the focus of the research. The first focuses upon 'sustainable wild flower harvesting' on the Agulhas Plain, which has successfully tapped into domestic and international markets including Marks and Spencer in the UK. The second case study is the Eksteenskuil Agricultural Co-operative (EAC), the world's first Fairtrade Raisin producer, which supplies raisins to Traidcraft in the UK. Beyond these two case studies the research has looked at broader issues around the rollout of ethical trade in South Africa.

South Africa is a particularly fertile location for research into ethical trade. The lifting of sanctions in the 1990s generated huge interest as consumers sought to support the 'New South Africa' in the post-apartheid era. Indeed, Traidcraft's relationship with the Eksteenskuil raisin farmers was generated out of this context. Equally, apartheid legacies have persisted, for example in labour practices, thus posing a reputational risk for retailers when sourcing commodities. A whole host of ethically focused initiatives have emerged in response to these opportunities and challenges in the last decade or so. For example, the South African wine industry was a pilot for the UK Department for International Development's Ethical Trading Initiative programme leading to the formation of the Wine Industry Ethical Trade Initiative (WIETA); the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI) has led to more than 100,000 hectares of land on wine estates being set aside for conservation purposes and national policy on Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) sets a very specific context for ethical production. However, the trend towards voluntary and private sector driven monitoring and compliance has to be understood in the context of very weak regulatory governance via the national legal framework. Whilst South African laws on labour standards and environmental management are far reaching, there is a minimal enforcement. Thus, the South African context offers fascinating opportunities through which to engage with debates about ethical economies.

Key Questions

The project is structured around the following key questions:

What are the main economic, environmental and social impacts of the initiatives?

The very point of ethical initiatives is to generate positive impacts within various realms. For Fairtrade the focus is very much upon stabilising and improving producer incomes, whilst contributing to broader social development within the community. Environmental benefits are clearly core to the sustainable harvesting case study but the attainment of progressive labour standards is also an important element of the programme. Thus, a core aspect of our research has been to interrogate the extent to which these beneficial outcomes are actually occurring and to seek to identify factors which mediate these outcomes.

How does ‘place’ matter in terms of the development and impacts of ethical production initiatives?

The case studies engage with ethical and Fairtrade initiatives that originate in both the Global North and within South Africa itself. One of the objectives of the research has been to identify the different ethical/fair trade initiatives that apply to the EAC and sustainable wild flower harvesting case studies, whilst identifying the differing institutional frameworks and networks through which they operate. The South African case is particularly interesting in this respect owing to the ways in which national and local policies of empowerment inform and affect the workings of these codes and standards.

In what ways are environmental and social ethics integrated in ethical production initiatives, and with what success?

Environmental concerns have gained greater currency within consumer and corporate discourse in recent years. This project has sought to identify the different environmental codes and standards that are emerging in the two case study areas, and to consider whose ethical values they represent. It has also been important to consider whether concern for the environment comes at the expense of socially-focused elements or whether these strands blend into a more coherent concept of broad-based sustainability.

Whose ethics/values drive the ethical production initiatives, and with what impacts on stakeholder participation?

The research has sought to identify the ways in which cultural, social and economic identities of different stakeholders within the two case study production networks affect engagement with the ethical/fair trade components of the supply chains. The question of ‘*whose* ethics?’ has resonated strongly with many of the people interviewed during the project. In other words, are the values embodied within the codes and standards of ethical production compatible with the concerns of farmers, pack shed workers, pickers and other stakeholders within the supply chains? At the local level it has been important to evaluate the impacts of social and political hierarchies within the rural communities and to examine how these affect participation in organisations like management boards, training opportunities, supplier committees and so forth. Given that ethical schemes are promoted to consumers as generators of socio-economic upliftment, it has been crucial to evaluate the livelihood impacts of the supply chains, whilst considering how these impacts have been refracted through particular roles played by people in institutions, farms and households.

Research Methodology

This research has built on several smaller pilot research grants (see Box 1 below) undertaken by the research team into different facets of ethical trade. This has included work over several years in the Western Cape region of South Africa as well as projects investigating UK retailer’s ethical policies. These projects have provided access to the case study areas, assisted in the identification of a range of key informants and gatekeepers, and fostered research methodologies appropriate in the context of South Africa.

Linked Research Projects undertaken by the Research Team

- 2012-15 "**Fairtrade's Environmental Challenges and Community-based Adaptation to Climate Change: The Case of Jute Producers in Bangladesh**", Economic and Social Research Council Collaborative Studentship with Traidcraft Exchange, PhD Student: Sarah Rich, supervisors: Dr Alex Hughes and Professor Nicky Gregson.
- 2009-2011: "**Managing Ethical Trade in a Global Economic Crisis: The Case of UK Retailers**", British Academy (SG-53960), £6778, Dr. Alex Hughes.
- 2009: "**Evaluating Biodiversity-Economy Initiatives in the Western Cape**", University of Otago funding, £4,000, Professor Tony Binns and Dr. David Bek.
- 2007-2009: "**Retailers and Corporate Social Responsibility: Developing and Promoting a Strategic Agenda**", Economic and Social Research Council Impact Grant (RES-172-25-0048), £44,412, Dr. Alex Hughes and Professor Neil Wrigley.
- 2006-09 "**Fairtrade and Community Empowerment. The Case of Sugar Production in Malawi**", Economic and Social Research Council Collaborative Studentship with Traidcraft plc: PhD Student: Dr David Phillips, supervisors: Dr Alex Hughes and Dr Kate Manzo.
- 2006: "**Evaluating ethical trade in the South African winelands: jewel in the crown or poisoned chalice?**", British Academy (SG-43017), £7459, Dr. Cheryl McEwan and Dr. David Bek.
- 2005-2007: "**Organising Ethical Trade: a UK-USA Comparison**", Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-23-0830), £108,000, Dr. Alex Hughes and Professor Neil Wrigley.
- 2003: "**New beginnings and old identities: An evaluation of worker empowerment schemes in South Africa**", Nuffield Foundation (SGS/00909/G), £5,949, Dr. Cheryl McEwan and Dr. David Bek.
- 2002-2003: "**Learning to Account for Ethical Trade: Retailers, Knowledges and Social Audits**", British Academy (SG-33442), £4914, Dr. Alex Hughes.

The key stages of the research are listed below along with accounts of the main research methods:

i. Secondary data collection (UK/South Africa)

The aim was to establish the broader South African context for debates about fair/ethical trade and biodiversity. The main tasks were developing the context of the research and deepening institutional and collaborative contacts in South Africa.

ii. 'Mapping' the network of actors involved in each case study area

Actors were identified in the production networks/value chains of dried fruits and cut flowers from the site of production to marketing and distribution channels, including the regulatory role of organisations like FLO. This part of the research involved the use of existing secondary materials and interviews with key informants in UK-based organisations.

iii. Pilot survey

Each case study required a short preliminary visit to discuss the project with key individuals at the field site. The initial visit facilitated the development of relationships with key stakeholders to forge a close dialogue. In addition it was possible to identify and recruit appropriate field assistance for the purposes of facilitation and translation. A sample of smallholder farmers at Eksteenskuil, and landowners and pickers at Flower Valley, were identified through the key informants to pilot the semi-structured interviews.

iv. Fieldwork in South Africa



Figure 1: Clockwise from back right- David Bek, Alex Hughes and Cheryl McEwan (with Flower Valley's Alfred Schwartz).

Prolonged periods of time were spent in each case study area, as well as in the Cape Town hinterland where a number of key ethical trade focused organisations are based. The majority of the data was captured via semi-structured interviews. Box 2 provides an overview of interviews conducted. Interviews were conducted in Eksteenskuil with a sample of smallholder households cross-cutting social, economic and geographical categories. These included, *inter alia*, EAC members and non-members, EAC office staff, EAC Board members, people from each of the three island groups, people from different age categories and people with different size land holdings. In addition, interviews were conducted with informants offering alternative perspectives on the Eksteenskuil community including landless residents, workers, commercial farmers and external stakeholders including government officials, research bodies and processing companies.

The second phase of fieldwork in early 2011 coincided with severe flooding around the Orange River (see page 41 for more detail). This posed both logistical and methodological challenges for the fieldwork with a visit having to be delayed because the area was impassable. The sheer severity and immediacy of the impact of the floods upon people and their livelihoods necessitated a shift in the perspective of the research at that point. Thus, the flood event and peoples' responses to it provided raw insights into the dynamics of the community itself and its inter-relationships with other organisations and institutions.

Interviews were also conducted with a range of informants in the sustainable harvesting supply chain, including suppliers, pack shed managers and employees, pickers, government agencies, retailers and NGOs. Informants offering perspectives from the wider mainstream wild and cultivated flower harvesting industries were interviewed. Excellent coverage of different stakeholder perspectives was gained for the sustainable wildflower harvesting case study, with an array of different respondents being accessed including *inter alia*: flower pickers (crucially from both the sustainable harvesting network **and** the mainstream industry, as well as Coloured¹ and Xhosa workers), packers, contractors, suppliers, pack shed managers, landowners. The interviews were supplemented by participant observation in various forms including observing

¹ Despite a deeply problematic history and often contested usage, apartheid racial categories continue to be widely used and many of our respondents self-identify as Coloured. In rural areas of the Western and Northern Cape, in particular, there are very specific historical and political meanings attached to what it means to be 'Black', 'White' and 'Coloured', (see Erasmus, Z., 2000. Some kind of White, some kind of Black: living the moments of entanglement in South Africa and its academy. In: Hesse, B., (Ed.), *Un/settled Multiculturalisms*. Zed, London: pp. 185–207).

meetings, seminars and conferences, keeping a field diary and observing everyday trader/smallholder work and domestic life. In addition, we organised a one-off research day in collaboration with the Flower Valley Conservation Trust which assessed the practical application of sustainable harvesting methodologies in the *veld*. Visual methodologies also played a supportive role, with photo and video data capturing various forms of evidence. For example, we used video to acquire expert analysis of picking techniques and also to capture short accounts of the realities of daily farming life. The interactive nature of dissemination events in March 2012, at which preliminary findings were presented, generated further research data.

Box 1: Local Research Support

Undertaking multi-stakeholder research generates many challenges, not least gaining full, informed access to respondents. The pre-existence of contacts linked to each of the case study projects was instrumental in ensuring effective access. It was necessary to seek support from local research assistants to enable interviews with flower pickers, pack shed workers and Eksteenskuil community members to be undertaken. The assistants' support extended well beyond translation. They played a crucial role in creating an atmosphere of trust and ensuring that cultural/linguistic nuances were smoothed over during the interviews. The high quality of the support we received is reflected in the richness of the information that was gathered throughout the project.

People who assisted with the research included:

- + Zaitun Rosenberg – formerly with Sandra Kruger and Associates, now an independent consultant
- + Rhoda Malgas – Department of Conservation, Ecology and Entomology, University of Stellenbosch
- + Dr. Shari Daya – Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences, University of Cape Town
- + Nobesuthu Tshongweni – former intern at the Association for Fairness in Trade, Cape Town
- + Colin Tucker – Research student in the Department of Conservation, Ecology and Entomology, University of Stellenbosch
- + Jonitha Swarts and Theresa Alexander – interns with CapeNature, Western Cape

v. Fieldwork in the UK

Interviews were conducted with a range of informants in the UK including commercial stakeholders in each supply chain and NGOs who undertake lobbying and advocacy around ethical/sustainability issues.

vi. Dissemination:

Dissemination to stakeholders has taken a number of forms:

- A visit was made to South Africa in March 2012 in order to feedback directly to various stakeholder groups. Further details can be found on the relevant section of the project website:
<http://www.geography.dur.ac.uk/projects/ethical-production-south-africa/Home/tabid/3895/Default.aspx>
- A presentation was as part of a Traidcraft Learning Week.

- This stakeholder report has been widely circulated and made available via the project website.
- In addition, dissemination via academic channels has been on-going throughout the project.

Box 2: Breakdown of Interviews

Sustainable harvesting

52 interviews were conducted in, and around the Agulhas Plain, with 56 different informants

These included 4 FVCT staff members, 2 CapeNature employees, 11 pack shed workers (5 Afrikaans speakers; 6 Xhosa speakers), 17 pickers (9 Afrikaans speakers; 8 Xhosa speakers), 2 pack shed managers, 8 suppliers, 4 FVCT Trustees, 8 external stakeholders (such as conservation NGOs, retailers and so forth).

10 other interviews with 10 different informants were conducted in South Africa and the UK which directly informed this case study.

In total 62 interviews were conducted directly in relation to sustainable harvesting

Eksteenskuil

72 Interviews were conducted in/around Eksteenskuil with 57 different informants. 44 representatives from 29 households within Eksteenskuil were interviewed, comprising 22 men and 22 women. These included: 23 EAC member households, 6 non-member households (including 3 landless households); 7 households on North Island (11 individuals), 13 households on Middle Island (21 individuals) and 9 households on South Island (12 individuals). 14 interviews were conducted with local external stakeholders.

10 Interviews were conducted with 6 different Traidcraft staff

7 Interviews were conducted with 8 people in other South Africa based organisations (such as FTSA)

In total 89 Interviews were conducted directly in relation to Eksteenskuil

Other categories

29 interviews were conducted with commercial and NGO informants in the UK and South Africa.

These included: 9 retailers (7 in UK, 2 in South Africa), 3 fruit processors, 1 importing agent in the UK, 1 South African exporting agent, 2 producer representative bodies, 1 training organisation, 1 auditing company, 11 NGOs (7 in South Africa and 4 in the UK).

During the apartheid-era, agricultural industry workers endured very poor working conditions and consumer boycotts of South African produce were a common feature of the global anti-apartheid struggle. However, since the ending of apartheid South Africa has proven a fertile location for the emergence of ethical initiatives. What is especially interesting is the extent to which these initiatives are evolving from within South Africa itself, driven by local stakeholders, including an active civil society. Overseas retailers, particularly from the UK, have also played a crucial role by increasingly insisting upon the application of some form of ethical oversight with third party auditing placed at the heart of retailer ethical management strategies. Such retailer engagement can be linked to an imperative to manage reputational risk,² as one commercial informant stated, *'I think businesses are looking at their supply chains and they perceive an increased risk in that area. People are more aware of it. Customers are more aware of it, companies are more aware of it, They feel more pressure on them to do something about it. It becomes less acceptable for businesses not to do something about it.'*

Trends in Ethical Governance

In the late 1990s several ethical trading companies sought to source products from the 'new' South Africa in order to enable their consumers to reverse past boycotts and pro-actively support the process of post-apartheid transition. The Fairtrade movement was quick to engage within South Africa, with more than 100 producers seeking certification at one point, although some shifts were required in the model in order to fit with the country's complex economic and political context.³ As Fairtrade was starting to gain a foothold so the Wine Industry Ethical Trade Association (WIETA), a not-for-profit, voluntary organisation seeking to promote ideals of ethical trade in the local industry, emerged. This originated as a UK-government Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) pilot project operating via a tripartite alliance comprising corporations, NGOs and trade unions. In spite of the history of bitter antagonism between the stakeholders concerned the ETI pilot successfully assisted South African partners in developing and refining inspection methodologies for monitoring on-farm labour standards. Indeed, it was pivotal in bringing various industry stakeholders together for the first time. The ETI pilot was so successful that local actors decided to persevere with the concept and devise a home grown model – the first of its type in the world. In 2005 WIETA extended its reach further down the wine supply chain and also more broadly within the overall agricultural sector. The rigour of WIETA's methodology, which goes beyond pure auditing to incorporate improvement planning, generated interest from major UK retailers, such as Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury.

Despite this, WIETA faced a number of challenges between 2006 and 2010. These included; the struggles the organisation faced in coping with the quantity of audits that it was commissioned to deliver; relationships between stakeholders were becoming strained and the simultaneous growth of other ethical initiatives, such as Fairtrade, affected WIETA's ability to create a clear identity. Fairtrade itself has stuttered in spite of the development of supportive local bodies such as Fairtrade Southern Africa (FTSA) and the Association for Fairness in Trade (AFIT). The

² South Africa's troubled past continues to resonate in the imaginations of many northern consumers. Therefore civil society campaigns which highlight on-going abuses represent a threat to corporate reputations. This reality was clear in the aftermath of the publication of the Human Rights Watch report, 'Ripe with Abuse', in 2011: <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/safarm0811webwcover.pdf>.

³ Kruger, S and Du Toit, A, 2007. Reconstructing fairness, in Reynolds, L.T., Murray, D.L. and Wilkinson, J, (eds.), The challenges of transforming globalization, New York: Routledge, pp. 200-220.

number of accredited suppliers reached 67 in 2009,⁴ but has subsequently dropped back to 34, of which only 3 are smallholder organisations.⁵ Reported reasons for the decline include: unreliable markets (with some informants being critical of retailers for a lack of enduring commitment); problems in meeting the standards and frustrations with FLO bureaucracy.

Box 3: How UK and South African retailers manage ethics within their supply

It was clear from our interviews with retailers, agents and producer bodies that firms are paying increasing attention to ethical issues. Indeed, several UK retailers now operate with staffing resources within South Africa, rather than managing their supply chains from a distance. This practice enables retailers to build and maintain closer relationships with their suppliers on a number of levels. This can be partly understood as a commercial decision to ensure the smooth running of supply chains on the one hand and also as a mechanism to manage reputational risk on the other. Retailers can be much more proactive in their management of supply chain ethics when they have representation 'on the ground'. Building closer relationships with suppliers may also be perceived as a shrewd strategic move given the growing demand for South African produce from emerging markets. Exactly how this manifests itself in corporate practice varies considerably from company to company. Variations occur in terms of:

- i) *the type, role, extent and outcomes of audits.* For example, some firms rely largely on the light touch GlobalGap Risk Assessment on Social Practice (GRASP) audits, some prefer the more in-depth and developmental WIETA audits, whilst others rely upon their own auditing systems. For all firms audits are a key tool in managing ethical standards within their supply chains;
- ii) *the extent to which ethical trade plays a role in branding and promotion.* Marks and Spencer in the UK and South African retailer, Woolworths, both have high profile ethical business programmes which not only proclaim that high ethical standards are built into their way of doing business but which are also central to their product branding and marketing. Some other firms are more discrete, claiming that a low key approach gives more credibility to their business ethics.
- iii) *how supply chains are managed.* Some firms are seeking to shorten their supply chains by dealing more directly with producers, although in some cases intermediaries may still be involved. Working more closely with producers is linked with reducing ethical risk as retailers can become aware of issues more quickly.
- iv) *approach to Fairtrade;* Fairtrade has entered the mainstream in various ways. For some retailers commitment to Fairtrade is central to their ethical strategy. Other firms incorporate Fairtrade in a more low key way stating that Fairtrade is just one component of their overall ethical strategy. *'We like to give consumers choice and rather than making that decision for them and only stocking one ethically labelled product we do have Rainforest Alliance and FT, we give the consumer a choice and hopefully they can make an informed decision'*. Fairtrade has only recently entered the South African domestic market but is strongly promoted by the FTSA.

⁴ http://rhodes-za.academia.edu/GavinFraser/Papers/1633093/IS_FAIRTRADE_IN_COMMERCIAL_FARMS_JUSTIFIABLE_The_impact_of_Fairtrade_on_commercial_and_small-scale_producers_in_South_Africa

⁵ <http://www.fairtradeafrica.net/producers-products/producer-profiles/?submitProfileSearch=Search&producerName=0&floid=&productStandard%5B%5D=19c&Countries%5B%5D=1>

⁶ <http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=176702>

⁷ http://WIETA.org.za.www34.cpt3.host-h.net/download/New_WIETA_Seal_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Audit proliferation has become a major concern for many producers within agri-industries, with some being forced to undergo several audits possessing overlapping features in the space of a single year. The fruit industry has responded to this problem by setting up the Fruit South Africa (FruitSA) programme in 2008 to develop a single South African-based ethical standard and programme in order to provide retail buyers with assurance that working conditions are sound in their South African supply

base. Suppliers benefit from undergoing only one ethical audit that meets with international and local labour standards, retailers' requirements and national labour laws. However, it should be noted that Fairtrade representatives were not involved in the processes that steered the FruitSA programme, thus it would appear that Fairtrade audits still have to take place on farms seeking to supply those markets. There has been much internal debate concerning the role that WIETA and its code might play in the implementation of the standards. Ultimately however, the resulting ethical code represents an alignment of the international standards and tools developed in the prominent Global Social Compliance Programme (GSCP) with elements of South African law, the country's Skills Development Act and Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). The first edition of Fruit South Africa's Ethical Trade handbook was launched in October 2011 with the endorsement and financial support of UK retailers including Sainsbury, Waitrose, Co-operative Food, Tesco and Marks and Spencer.⁸ Although overseas retailers have been involved, the agency of South African organisations is notable.



Figure 2: Stakeholders debating ethical trade issues at a project dissemination workshop in March 2012

⁸ http://www.fruitsa-ethical.org.za/handbook/pdf/FSA_Ethical_Trade_Handbook_English.pdf

Case Study 1: Sustainable harvesting of wild flowers on the Agulhas Plain

The development of the sustainable harvesting programme

The Cape Floral Region (CFR) is the smallest and richest of the world's six floral kingdoms and Conservation International considers the CFR to be 'the richest and most threatened reservoir of plant and animal life on earth'. The CFR is extremely floristically diverse, home to an estimated 9,600 plant species of which 70% are endemic. The main vegetation type is known locally as *fynbos* ('fine leaved bush') but nearly one third of the original area of *fynbos* has been lost and 1200 species are critically rare, threatened or vulnerable. Unsustainable harvesting of wild flowers (poor harvesting techniques and excessive off-take of flowers) is one of the threats to the biome.

Fynbos has been harvested from the wild for many decades as the distinctive appearance of the flowers (such as the iconic proteas) and foliage has proven popular with consumers, especially in Europe. Thus, large quantities of *fynbos* are exported every year from the Western Cape. The majority is sent to auctions in Holland. However locally produced bouquets offering greater local value-added are proving increasingly popular, with UK retailer Marks and Spencer being a major importer. The *fynbos* industry has historically been loosely organised and weakly regulated. In environmental terms this has led to excessive pressure being placed upon the resource base as marketable species have been exploited beyond their capacity to successfully reproduce.

Until the late 1990s, Flower Valley farm was owned by a commercial farmer, who sold locally gathered wild flowers to the Amsterdam flower market. UK-based conservation NGO, Fauna & Flora International (FFI), purchased the farm in 1999 in order to protect the landscape from possible conversion into a vineyard.⁹ The Flower Valley Conservation Trust (FVCT) was established to create a business linking social investment with biodiversity. Under the auspices of the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI),¹⁰ the FVCT responded by developing the concept of 'sustainable wild harvesting' whereby wild flowers could be harvested in ways that are both economically and environmentally sustainable.



Figure 3: Fynbos species vulnerability coding

The resultant sustainable harvesting pilot programme incorporated three elements: a Species Vulnerability Index, a Resource Base Assessment and the Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice (SHCP). The Vulnerability Index was compiled grading individual species on a scale of one to eleven according to their level of vulnerability. The grade determines the permitted pattern of harvesting, which in some instances may mean that picking is banned altogether. To eradicate poor picking practice, sustainable off-take levels have been established in consultation with botanists, applying the precautionary approach to reduce harvesting risks. In order to standardize picking practices, a 50% sustainable off-take level for all harvestable species is prescribed. This will be adjusted as more field work information becomes available from which species specific off-take levels can be identified. The Resource

9 Bek, D., Binns, T., Nel, E., 2012. Wild flower harvesting on South Africa's Agulhas Plain: a mechanism for achieving sustainable Local Economic Development? Sustainable Development.

10 <http://www.agulhasbiodiversity.co.za/>

Base Assessment enables land users to know what *fynbos* plants grow on their lands, which of those can be picked, and how much can be picked sustainably. Thus, the assessment is a means for calculating *fynbos* resources on properties. Such assessments can be linked to the sustainable harvesting database which uses pack shed data to record the precise off-take patterns from different locations.

The SHCP was devised to ensure that pickers operate in ways that minimise damage to the ecological resource base. Measures included in the SHCP range from discouraging littering in the *veld* through to technical advice on optimal cutting angles. Pickers are trained to use the SHCP via the Agricultural Sector Training and Education Authority (AgriSETA) vocational education accreditation system.



Figure 4: Pickers receiving sustainable harvesting certificates in 2011

Ultimately, it is the practical application of the SHCP that lies at the very heart of the FVCT's sustainable harvesting programme. CapeNature perform regulatory duties within the *fynbos* industry as a whole, awarding permits on an annual basis to landowners and picking teams. With support from South African retailer PicknPay a Sustainable Harvesting Manager has been positioned within CapeNature since 2010 in order to promote the programme.

Between 1999 and 2004, the project enjoyed high levels of recognition among the international donor community. For example, it was a Shell Group 'Legacy' Project to mark the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and a grant of US\$100,000 was donated for investment in infrastructure on the farm. However, it became clear that there was a lack of a clear business strategy, market opportunities tended to ebb and flow, and by 2004 the enterprise was totally dependent upon subsidies from FFI for its survival. Various changes were made to the organisational structure, including separating the Trust from the business side. From that point bouquet production and marketing was dealt with by the separate commercial arm of Fynsa, while the Trust focused upon the social and environmental aspects of the project.

Fynsa's new management believed that accessing niche markets via long-term relationships with retailers was essential if the project was to become self-sustaining. In this sense, becoming part of a global production network was crucial to achieving a set of inter-connected goals concerning social and economic development and, perhaps paradoxically, conservation. In 2005, the Shell Foundation and Marks and Spencer collaborated to provide further inputs via the 'Small-Scale Suppliers Programme'. Through this programme, the Shell Foundation invested \$1 million and its expertise into developing the producer end of Marks and Spencer's chains for three flower and fruit growing schemes in Africa, including sustainable wild flower harvesting. This intervention has proved critical in dealing with supply chain management problems and ensuring a consistent supply of quality product, illustrating how both firm and non-firm, national and transnational actors and their multiple-positioned values shape the material practices of the supply chain.



Figure 5: Fynsa's pack shed in Stanford

FVCT's pilot programme for sustainable harvesting has been successful due to the linkage with the UK-based retailer Marks and Spencer, who have sourced 'Cape Flora' bouquets from the Fynsa pack shed via the agent MM-UK, a division of AMC-Fruit. Thus, Fynsa has been the key node through which the Sustainable Harvesting Supply Chain (SHSC) has operated. This supply chain has several distinguishing characteristics, with the emphasis being upon the creation of an ethically focused supply-base. Suppliers are expected to adhere to the principles of sustainable harvesting and to be active participants in the broader programme. Equally, labour standards should be consistent with national labour laws as a minimum and preferably be compliant with auditing standards such as those of WIETA. In order to supply *fynbos* to Marks and Spencer, suppliers have been required to attain sustainable harvesting accreditation, whereby members of their picking teams undertake training. The pilot initially involved eight suppliers (six remain) based in the Stanford-Napier-Gansbaai rural area of the Agulhas Plain. In the last two years the broader programme has started to gain wider traction with more retailers, suppliers and pack sheds either showing interest or becoming directly involved. Indeed, the PPSA (Protea Producers of South Africa) industry body has taken the step of integrating a voice for the sustainable harvesting programme into its institutional structure.

Box 4: Location matters

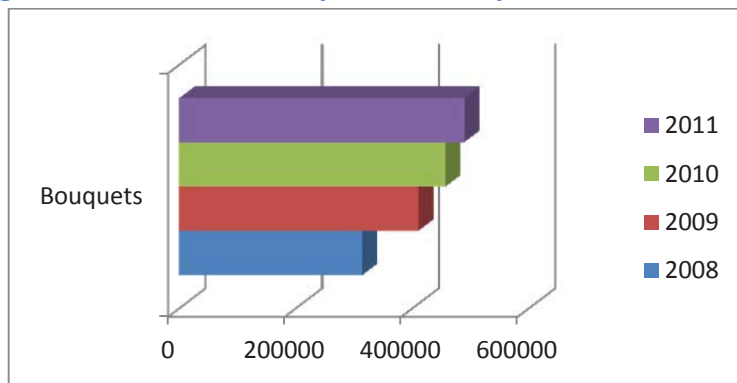
The very emergence of the sustainable harvesting programme can be linked to the characteristics of the location within which the Cape Floristic Region is situated. The Greater Cape Town region contains three highly reputed universities, a wide range of policy institutes and NGOs. These bodies provide rich intellectual and social capital that provides the scientific and lobbying support needed to sustain conservation initiatives such as this. Furthermore, the location of retailer Head Offices in Cape Town has also proven significant in facilitating entry to markets. The relative proximity of Cape Town international airport, which offers daily flights to the UK, is also critical in enabling efficient management of the supply chain. The dynamics of the socio-economic history of the Agulhas Plain are also relevant. The region has historically experienced problems with racialised patterns of poverty and under employment. These challenges have been exacerbated since the end of apartheid by internal migration streams as people have moved, especially from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape, in search of work. Whilst it is important not to take a deterministic view of the importance of place, it is clear that the complex characteristics of a place and the people and institutions that it contains at any given point in time can have considerable ramifications for how a project plays out on the ground.

Programme outcomes

Market Development

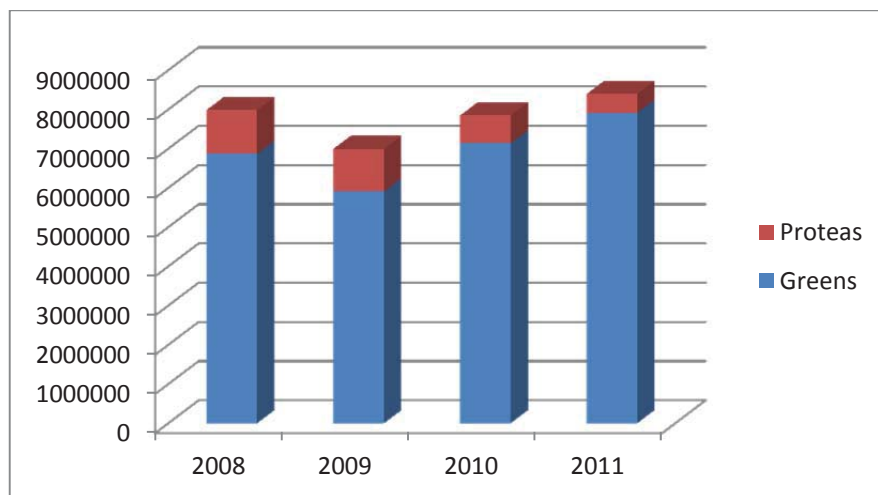
The SHSC can be contrasted with the 'mainstream' *fynbos* industry, which requires neither sustainable harvesting credentials nor labour standard accreditation. The precise size of the mainstream industry is not known, although it currently dwarfs the SHSC, mainly supplying fresh and dry product into the Dutch auction markets. However, the SHSC is the largest route by which Cape Flora bouquets reach the market. In this sense bouquet production is very important for the South African economy as the downstream processing aspect adds local value and jobs.

Figure 6: Production of Cape Flora Bouquets 2008-2011



More than £4 million worth of bouquets were sold in Marks and Spencer stores in 2008, contributing 4% of the firm's total flower sale revenues and this market has continued to grow rapidly. During 2011 total Cape Flora exports reached 400,000. In the last two years a link has been created with PicknPay in the Western Cape; a market that has grown steadily. There has been further market development in the UK as major retailer J Sainsbury have come on board since September 2010, whilst South African chain Checkers ran a small supply pilot in late 2011. In order to meet the increasing demand for bouquets there has been a corresponding increase in demand for stems. Thus, the sustainable harvesting network supplied an extra 1.047 million stems of 'greens' in 2011 compared to 2008.

Figure 7: Trends in supply of fresh flowers from the Sustainable Harvesting Network to Fynsa 2008-11



It should be emphasised that the SHSC chain is not the only route through which sustainably harvested product comes to market, although it is the only supply chain which currently requires ethical credentials. Firstly, the sustainable harvesting network (the current core of 6 suppliers who deliver to Fynsa) also supply to other pack sheds. Secondly, the Bergflora pack shed in Stanford is also showing interest in the sustainable harvesting programme and is seeking to develop markets



Figure 8: Research assistant Nobesuthu is delighted to receive a Cape Flora bouquet.

specifically for sustainably harvested product. Bergflora have developed a link with South African retailer Woolworths. Whilst there appears to be no specific requirement for bouquet content to be sustainably harvested, Woolworths do apply their own set of ethical criteria to all the products that they source. Links with other UK retailers are being developed by Bergflora and the inclusion of a sustainable harvesting component will be increasingly important for retailers in terms of reputational risk management.

Employment Creation and Labour Standards

One of the stated objectives of the sustainable harvesting project was to generate a substantial increase in employment levels. Currently the sustainable harvesting supply chain provides employment for approximately 85 full time employees and 75 part-time. Despite the increase in



Figure 9: Flower Valley's picking team at work

the demand for Cape Flora bouquets, employment levels on the picking side have plateaued as the increase in demand has largely been met by existing teams. On the plus side this should equate to an increase in earning potential for those pickers. There has been some growth in employment within the Fynsa pack shed, most especially in terms of the seasonal workers brought in to assist during peak times. For example, an extra 50 staff may be brought in for 2 weeks around Christmas, whilst 20 casual workers are brought in for the other 5 busiest months of the year. Overall, increases in

demand have been met via overtime payments to existing staff rather than an expansion of the workforce. Whilst overall employment numbers have not grown dramatically, workers have benefitted from a shift from seasonal to year-round employment as there is demand for bouquets throughout the year, in contrast to the more seasonal patterns experienced in the mainstream industry.

Figure 10: Employment within the sustainable harvesting supply chain

	2009	2011
Fynsa	38	40 (+50 casuals at peak)
Supplier 1	15	15
Supplier 2	9	8
Supplier 3	16	15
Supplier 4	4	4
Supplier 5	12	13 (+25 via contractors)
Totals	84	110 (+50 seasonal)

Whilst the market for *fynbos* bouquets has grown significantly this growth has, for a number of reasons, not equated to a proportionate expansion in opportunities for new entrants to sustainable harvesting. Equally, market demand for certified *fynbos* products has not reached a critical mass that would validate the investments required to bring such products to market. The global economic crisis has been a major constraining factor, hitting consumers in the global North very hard. Thus, this has not been an easy time to seek to expand markets. Whilst the Marks and

Spencer market has grown there has been great pressure on margins as UK consumers have demanded 'greater value' during the on-going economic crisis. Furthermore, an increase in UK VAT of 2.5% (effective from 4th January 2012) further increased the pressure on the producers, effectively adding 50 pence to the cost of a £20 bouquet. These macro-economic constraints imposed significant pressures on the ability of the wild *fynbos* market to expand its employment impact.

Not only has sustainable harvesting made contributions in terms of sustaining overall employment, it can also be credited with sustaining 'decent' employment. The sustainable harvesting project initiated through the FVCT has always considered social development to be at its core, thus representing all dimensions of true sustainability. Marks and Spencer insisted that labour standards be assured through the involvement of the Western Cape-based auditing body, WIETA. WIETA at the time were Marks and Spencer's audit body of choice for products from the Western Cape as their auditing standards and approach were deemed compatible with the retailer's ethical Plan A approach. As a result Fynsa, Flower Valley, Lourens Boerdery, Nieuwedam Farms and Infanta Flora were granted full WIETA accreditation during 2009. Stanford Flora and Protea Permaculture also underwent the initial inspection process. In addition, socio-economic baseline work undertaken in 2009¹¹ verified the WIETA findings indicating that labour standards in the sustainable harvesting supply chain were somewhat better than found within agriculture in the region more broadly. Furthermore, wages and working conditions appear to be significantly better in the sustainable harvesting network than in the mainstream industry as a whole where audit requirements are minimal.

The professionalism of the sustainable harvesting network is a factor in ensuring decent working conditions for pickers and packers. This includes sound business practices such as ensuring year round production for different markets (albeit enhanced by the guarantee of markets via Fynsa), whilst the adoption of sustainable harvesting principles ensures that pickers are not sent into areas sparsely populated with flowers – which is bad practice environmentally as well as problematic for pickers working to piece rates. Pickers operating in the mainstream industry report that they may earn as little as R30¹² per day (less than half the minimum wage) when instructed to pick in old, over-harvested locations.

Furthermore, the WIETA audits, the parallel socio-economic baseline study and our own interviews indicate that wages are better than those usually associated with work in agricultural industries. Indeed, pickers can earn up to double the rates of farm workers in other sectors, while nearly 90% of pickers interviewed for the socio-economic study stated that their earnings were higher than in their previous employment. The socio-economic study concluded that worker living standards as a whole are considerably higher than would be expected in a rural area and are better than those found in neighbouring urban areas. One of the larger suppliers has also been successful in facilitating the creation of two new picking teams headed by former employees. Work is on-going to enable these teams to become fully independent 'empowered' operators.

11 Flower Valley Conservation Trust 2007 'Sustainable harvesting: monitoring and evaluation of economic and human development performance and impact', unpublished report.

12 Exchange rate on 4th September 2012: £1 = ZAR13.3

Social development and empowerment

Goals of social upliftment and empowerment have not produced the extent of outcomes that had originally been envisaged at the outset of the programme. It has proven very difficult for new entrepreneurs to participate as suppliers within this sector of the economy as there are many barriers to entry, not least the various forms of capital required to enter the market at an economically viable level. The FVCT recognises these challenges and is supportive of a transitional, mentor-based system which is being implemented by one of the members of the sustainable harvesting supply network.

Furthermore, opportunities for career enhancement are limited, especially within picking teams where the position of team supervisor is the only option for promotion. Linguistic and cultural problems have also been noted within some workforces. Many Xhosa speaking migrants from the Eastern Cape reside in Gansbaai and Stanford and gain employment within some of the picking teams and pack sheds. Xhosa speakers reported problems in benefitting fully from the sustainable harvesting training as all the teaching and materials are only available in English and Afrikaans. Workplace tensions can be linked to communication problems within the workforce and between workers and managers who cannot speak each other's languages.

The FVCT has catalysed a number of positive developments in the area. For example, donor support for the project has enabled an early learning centre to be built for workers' children and local women to be trained as childcare practitioners. Links with the local horticultural college have created opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain scholarships and subsequently secure employment in the region. These have provided an opportunity for the delivery of agricultural skills and dissemination of knowledge about environmental issues. Along with FVCT's organisation of community events, such as the local music festival held at the farm, these are all further examples of value capture for the sustainable harvesting supply chain.

Harvesting practices and the growth in the sustainable harvesting footprint

All the members of the sustainable harvesting network were extremely positive about the concept of sustainable harvesting and the imperative for a code to ensure conservation of the *fynbos*. Furthermore, pickers also recognised the value of the code, especially in terms of securing their own livelihood in the future. The perspectives of pickers who have worked in the mainstream industry were interesting, with some noting the clear difference in practice demanded in the



Figure 11: Sustainable harvesting trainer Gerhard van Deventer explains how to apply picking rules.

sustainable harvesting network compared to their previous experiences. For example, pickers in the mainstream industry revealed that picking practices consistently fall short of the standards set within the SHCP. Pickers were observed removing seed stock in depleted areas that were long overdue to be burned and removing the majority of the flowers on protea compacta bushes. Pickers also talked about the daily pressures they are placed under to remove high volumes of stems even in areas that had already been over picked. Given that pickers usually operate under piece rate arrangements, daily wages can be very low. A picker who has recently changed employers and

now works in the sustainable harvesting network explains the difference in approach, *'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.'*

Although general standards of harvesting within the sustainable harvesting network are better there is still evidence of inconsistency in the application of the SHCP. There are areas where improvements could be made such as seeking to reduce the quantities of stems that are rejected following delivery to pack sheds. Such reject levels result from a combination of factors including inappropriate/unclear order requests from pack sheds and harvesting errors. There was also evidence that picking standards in the sustainable harvesting network do not always meet the full standards of the sustainable harvesting code of practice. Non compliances can be linked to pressures to fulfil the orders within very short timeframes, lack of supervisory oversight, insufficient training and deficiencies within the broader regulatory system.

Box 5: Cultural histories and knowledges

Two broad cultural groupings work as pickers and packers within the industry. The first is the Coloured community who have longstanding connections to the region and the flower industry, the other is Xhosa migrants from the Eastern Cape who have moved in search of employment. Members of these two broad groups have very different cultural linkages to the land and the local environment. Most Xhosa workers stated that they had no prior knowledge of *fynbos* before starting to work in the industry, whereas many Coloured workers have much deeper connections to the *fynbos* ecosystem that can be traced back through family employment histories. This matters in the sense that a conservation driven programme which depends upon worker practices needs to be cognisant of people's baseline knowledges and attitudes in order to ensure that training and management are appropriate.

One of the best indicators of the success of the programme has been the rapid growth in the land area which is in effect benefitting from the landscape protection offered by sustainable harvesting. In other words if land is being harvested sustainably then pressures to convert the land to other uses are reduced. In the initial stages of the programme approximately 10,000 hectares of land was subject to sustainable harvesting. Currently suppliers into the sustainable harvesting supply chain harvest on a land area exceeding 30,000 hectares, with three of the suppliers having significantly increased the areas from which they harvest since 2007. In addition, the managers of the 26,000 hectare Overberg Test Range, located in the east of the Agulhas Plain, have decreed that its resources can only be harvested by accredited pickers. Thus, an area of land slightly in excess of **56,000 hectares** is currently designated as the footprint for sustainable harvesting. This is a notable achievement given that the sustainable harvesting programme is only just starting to move beyond the pilot phase. By way of comparison, the wine industry has achieved a footprint of 130,000 hectares of land set aside for conservation through the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative. It is clear that considerable momentum is being gained through the collective conservation impacts of these industry programmes.

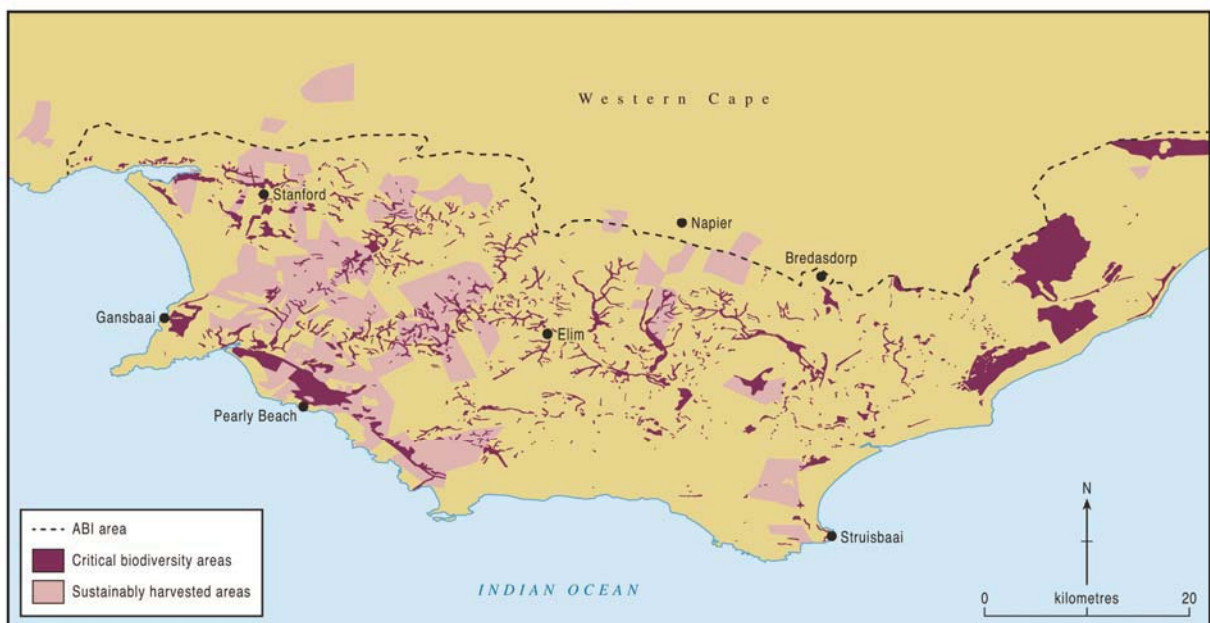
Furthermore, there is an overlap between the geographical pattern of sustainable harvesting and designated Critical Biodiversity Areas. The fact that harvesting occurs in these areas is important as it provides safeguards in terms of the management of the area, whilst ensuring that the landowner has some form of economic incentive to maintain the current land use of the area. SANPARKs are in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding with FVCT with regard to the implementation of exclusive sustainable harvesting on their properties, whilst similar Memorandums are envisaged with CapeNature and Municipalities. Such a landowner led-approach is a progressive way to ensure that sustainable harvesting is disseminated further. Indeed, some suppliers point out that it is easier for them to rent new picking areas if they have

sustainable harvesting accreditation as landowners are assured that their land will be not mistreated.

Figure 12: Geographical spread of Sustainable Harvesting within the Agulhas Plain 2007



Figure 13: Geographical spread of Sustainable Harvesting within the Agulhas Plain 2011



Ethical drivers in the marketplace

The role of the ethical credentials inherent in the bouquets varies between the retailers. For Marks and Spencer, these credentials are incredibly important as they fit with the company's 'Plan A' philosophy. In this sense there are two dimensions to Marks and Spencer's support. On the one hand, sustainably harvested bouquets are icons of the Plan A approach. Interestingly, the firm has been reticent, until fairly recently, to explicitly market the sustainable harvesting story. On the other hand, there is a risk management aspect. Marks and Spencer need to ensure that such high profile products are produced in a way that is consistent with the firm's values and as such are not a threat to the firm's reputation. Sainsbury position themselves as a leading ethical retailer largely through their support for Fairtrade. For other retailers the ethical story is currently less important, although UK retailers would expect that labour standards meet minimum levels. However, if the market continues to grow through these other retailers and *fynbos* becomes firmly embedded within supermarket portfolios then retailers will in all probability raise their expectations. It is likely that most retailers are currently unaware of the full extent of reputational risk involved in acquiring *fynbos* via the largely unregulated mainstream *fynbos* supply chain. However, there is increasing evidence that UK retailers are paying increasing attention to the ethics inherent in their supply chains. Tesco, Sainsbury and Asda all now operate with technical teams in South Africa which act as in-country resources, partly to ensure responsiveness to ethical management. Thus, pack sheds that are diligent in ensuring that their suppliers meet ethical criteria will be best placed to capture these growing markets.

Retailers' demands in the areas of bouquet design, pricing pressure and ordering lead times put pressure on suppliers' ability to comply with FVCT's Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice and accompanying labour standards represented by WIETA and Fruit South Africa codes. Although FVCT and Fynsa have made significant strides in establishing the Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice, there is some digression from this code caused in part by commercial pressures. Emphasis on bouquet aesthetics and design, although not fundamentally in contradiction to the model of sustainable harvesting for wildflower bouquets, presents some clashes of interest in practice. For example, species availability is seasonal in the wild and prone to variations driven by minor, but commercially significant, annual and other climatic vagaries. Furthermore, retailers tend to desire symmetrical flowers with minimal blemishes. However, as one supplier explains natural products, which are still beautiful, tend not to be uniform, and this can clash with quality controller criteria, *'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 it's dead or brown, it is still a pretty thing. The marks are part of the flower, how we recognise the flower.'* The lucrative *protea compacta*, which is the main focal flower used in Cape Flora bouquets, is especially problematic in this regard as the petals naturally darken with time. This can lead to high rejection rates at pack sheds.



Figure 14: Beauty or beast? A double headed pin cushion which does not meet retailer standards.

Retailers' demands for minimum stem lengths can mean that re-sprouting species are cut too short and many other species are precluded from usage, putting greater pressure on a small number of species. What has arguably been a more chronic issue for wildflower harvesting are the demands exerted by large orders and short lead times, which place pressure on suppliers attempting to comply with the FVCT Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice. Suppliers explain that they often receive orders from the pack shed the

night before, or sometimes on the day the order is due, despite the fact that the retailers tend to place their orders a week ahead. They therefore have little time to plan the most effective use of their resources in ecological terms, which in turn puts pressure on workers who have to deliver the orders. Negative impacts upon the environment and labour standards cannot be purely understood as inevitable outcomes of unidirectional pressures imposed by retailers, since local agency in business management, whether within a supplying team or a pack shed, can also exert an influence upon outcomes for the environment and workers. It is certainly the case that some local operators have been better able to manage downward pressures than others.

Box 6: Key points of influence upon ethics in the production of Cape Flora bouquets

- ✚ FVCT's development of the sustainable harvesting code of practice and associated social development programmes;
- ✚ Marks and Spencer's support for the SHCP and insistence upon the implementation of WIETA audits. This support is consistent with the standards set out in the firm's Plan A programme;
- ✚ Marks and Spencer's and other retailers' buying practices and quality standards which have multiple direct and indirect impacts upon harvesting practice and the ecology of the *veld*.
- ✚ The ethics of intermediaries such as suppliers and pack sheds, especially in terms of how they run their operations, are also influential.
- ✚ For the vast majority of consumers the decision to purchase Cape Flora bouquets will be driven by the attractiveness of the bouquet and the extent to which it offers value for money. Some may be influenced positively by the sustainable harvesting story (where publicised) or negatively by air-miles labelling.
- ✚ For workers in the SHSC the main priority is that they earn a living. In practice sustainable harvesting practices could be compromised in order to meet the orders required for a given day. Pickers may be concerned about the consequences of poor practice but ultimately their main concern is to ensure that 'bread is put on the table'.
- ✚ Worker values and interests are represented through unions, civil society groups and individual advocates within the broader institutional setting, such as FVCT and WIETA's Board.

The way forward for the sustainable harvesting programme

FVCT's radical and ethical potential is as yet nascent, but in the context of the history of biodiversity conservation in the Western Cape, it remains a significant and exciting departure. A key challenge for biodiversity conservation in South Africa is communicating the inter-relatedness of environmental and human well-being in the competition for government resources.

The sustainable harvesting programme is interesting for many reasons. The fact that the ethics of the programme are strongly driven by 'local' stakeholders, albeit mediated by the commercial ethics of the UK retail market, is extremely interesting in the context of this research project. Furthermore, the way in which social and environmental elements have been blended within the overall ethical package sets precedents in terms of supply chain management. What really sets

the SHSC apart is the very specific focus upon conservation verified through commitments to training and in-field practice. It is clear that the sustainable harvesting programme has made a number of significant achievements in various realms. These include:

- ✚ Development of tools and protocols to support conservation, such as Sustainable Harvesting Code of Practice and the FVCT's sustainable harvesting database
- ✚ The relatively large and rapidly growing 'sustainable harvesting footprint'
- ✚ Significant increase in the market for sustainable *fynbos* measured in terms of number of bouquets produced and number of retailers served
- ✚ Stabilisation of employment levels linked to increase in year round permanent employment
- ✚ Pay and working conditions (as verified by WIETA) are generally better than in the mainstream flower industry and in much of the local agricultural sector
- ✚ Sustaining of supplier and pack shed businesses
- ✚ Reasonable proportion of pickers have received sustainable harvesting training

Areas requiring further development include:

- ✚ Rolling out sustainable harvesting training and ensuring that it is fully accessible to all relevant linguistic groups;
- ✚ Improving the verification and monitoring of picking practice;
- ✚ Rolling out sustainable harvesting more widely within the industry such that it becomes increasingly mainstream;
- ✚ Development of new opportunities for career development and for emerging entrepreneurs within the sustainable harvesting supply chain.

These are areas that the FVCT is not only aware of but are taking positive steps to rectify. The FVCT is confronted by a number of challenges as it seeks to drive the sustainable harvesting programme forward. These challenges include being able to access critical points of influence in of the regulation of conservation management. In terms of legislation this should be a duty of state agencies. However, due to severe resource constraints the degree of oversight available is very limited and largely ineffectual. Therefore there is a need to seek other institutional arrangements through which land use and conservation can be regulated. A fundamental problem this creates is that the costs of regulation need to be met. As the state does not meet the cost so the burden is shifted onto other stakeholders. Given the seemingly ever increasing downward cost pressure imposed by retailers, exacerbated by the severity of the UK's economic downturn, so increasing strain is imposed upon commercial entities on the ground. This highlights a significant contradiction within the broader ethical trade model around the question of who should 'pay for ethics'.

Case study 2: The Eksteenskuil Agricultural Cooperative (EAC) – Fairtrade Raisin Producers

History and geography of Eksteenskuil

Eksteenskuil (near the town of Keimoes) is a rural settlement in the Lower Orange River valley, in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. The river, and numerous irrigation channels, criss-cross the area, which is made up of 21 small islands. Although each of the 21 small islands has its own name, the islands were grouped for administrative purposes as North, Middle and South. The present Eksteenskuil community was formed via an apartheid-era resettlement scheme after the Second World War and in accordance with the 1913 Land Act. Eksteenskuil was an Act 9 area from which white farmers were relocated during the late 1950s to more productive areas elsewhere and Coloured people from various locations within the broader region applied to move to Eksteenskuil. Most families currently living in the area have been there for three or four generations. Eksteenskuil currently comprises approximately 180 households and more than 1,200 people. During the apartheid-era the community possessed some degree of decision-making autonomy and municipal offices were sited on Middle Island (currently these buildings are used as the EAC offices). Subsequently, Eksteenskuil has been subsumed into the Kai !Garib municipality. Interestingly, this change has contributed to the development of a sense of disconnection from local government and a feeling that the community's needs are no longer being served adequately, particularly in the realms of utility and service provision.

The re-settlement process generated a number of injustices. Firstly, Eksteenskuil was considered economically unviable (partly due to the on-going flood risks) for white farmers, yet was deemed acceptable for Coloured farmers. Secondly, the new arrivals were granted considerably smaller plots than their predecessors, usually no more than 1 hectare of productive land. Although some consolidation has occurred over time most families currently farm less than 5 hectares. Thirdly, individual land holdings were fragmented thus farmers would be managing land that was not consolidated into single workable blocks. Indeed, the farms are often further divided by the many branches of the river and connected mainly by dirt roads and small bridges. The average block is approximately 0.7ha, whilst average current landholdings are around 7 hectares. Fourthly, title deeds were not automatically transferred to the new farmers. Indeed, 55% of families still do not possess the official documentation despite government policies intended to expedite such matters.¹³ Instead, many applications for land ownership documentation remain mired in bureaucracy.

Of the 2,000 hectares of land in the Eksteenskuil area, 600 hectares are arable and dominated by irrigated farming. Access to water for irrigation is dependent on concrete and dirt channels. In the early years of the re-settlement process the smallholders focused upon growing small scale cash crops and kept livestock. Many also sold their labour to local white farmers,

bringing back grapevine cuttings from which they started to produce raisins. Indeed, the provision of plentiful water allied to hot, sunny summers is ideal for growing grapes and producing high



Figure 15: A block of vines undergoing flood irrigation on North Island.

¹³ Sandra Kruger & Associates 2010. Eksteenskuil Agricultural Cooperative land use and socio-economic survey, report compiled for Traidcraft, January 2010.

quality dried fruit. EAC members in 2009 farmed a total of 521.4 hectares of which 155.5 hectares was not under arable production. Raisins (270 hectares) represent the main source of income, although many farmers run diversified operations also growing lucerne (69.7 hectares), cash crops (13.1 hectares) and wine grapes (11 hectares). The current Eksteenskui community also includes several 'commercial' (defined as working more than 40 hectares), white farmers, mainly on Middle Island, landless labourers and, during harvesting season, migrant workers.



Figure 16: Cheryl McEwan and Alex Hughes survey the damage wreaked by the 2011 floods. Here the waters have washed away part of a dirt road.

Eksteenskui is a hazardous location within which to farm. Some of the challenges are generic to the region and can afflict all farmers, however the smallholders of Eksteenskui lack the resources to mitigate damage and offset losses. Localised summer hailstorms can be extremely destructive, writing off crops and even damaging property in a matter of seconds. Untimely frosts, especially during the early growing season, can also lead to crop damage and yield reduction. Summer cloud and rain can have a significant impact upon yields and raisin quality as occurred in 2011. The Orange River has a tendency to produce severe floods every 25 years or so with more minor flood peaks occurring from time to time. Eksteenskui farmers who live

on the banks of the channel braids are obviously most vulnerable to severe damage as was the case in 1988 and 2011. Troops of blue vervet monkeys, who feast on grapes and other fruits, are a further problem. Farmers in some areas of North Island suffer especially from problems caused by monkeys. In addition to these natural hazards there are human induced problems such as fires which may be started accidentally or occasionally intentionally.

Figure 17: Map showing location of Eksteenskui and its island layout

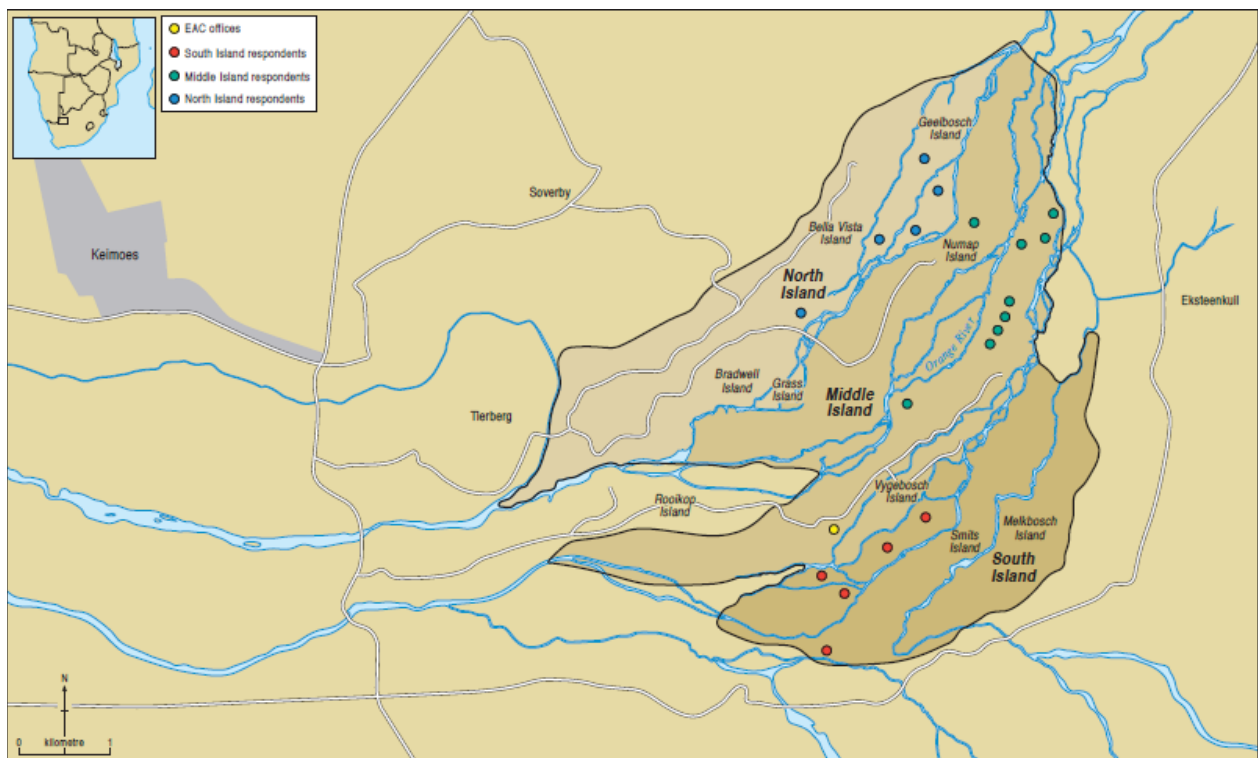
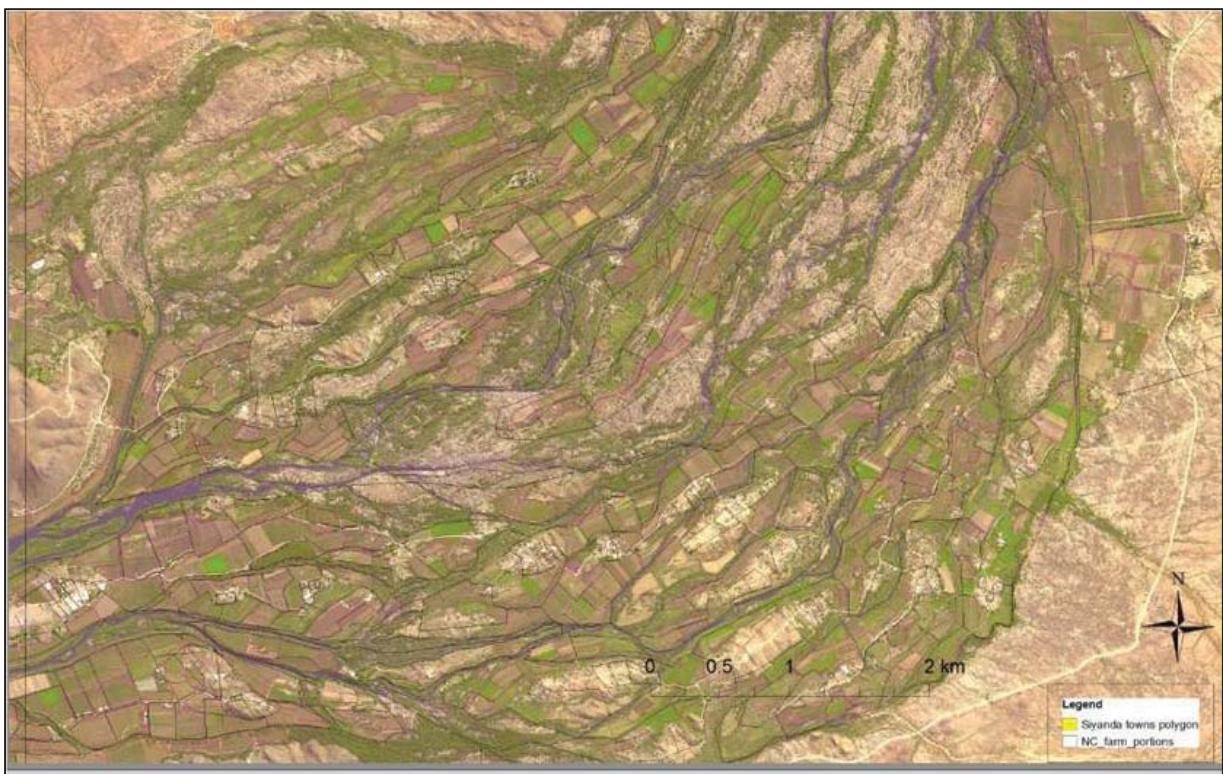


Figure 18: Aerial View of Eksteenskui, March 2012



Figure 19: Satellite view of Eksteenskui



The farming economy in Eksteenskui

The circa 100 farmers currently belonging to EAC, which formerly existed as the Eksteenskui Farmers Association (EFA), have been selling raisins to the UK's alternative trading organization, Traidcraft plc, since 1995, beginning very shortly after the end of apartheid and in advance of many dominant Fairtrade certification schemes.¹⁴ The raisins—Choice grade Sundried Thompson's—are used mainly for Traidcraft's popular cereal bars, the Geobar, and their muesli

¹⁴ Not all farmers in Eksteenskui are members of EAC. The actual numbers of signed up members tends to fluctuate continually but has risen by a dozen or so in the last two years.

products. Traidcraft's relationship with Eksteenskuil has involved both commercial and developmental objectives, with close links being maintained between Traidcraft and EFA/EAC's management over a number of years. Indeed, the relationship with Eksteenskuil has been symbolically important within Traidcraft's marketing, representing an opportunity for ethically aware consumers to engage constructively with South African producers in the post-apartheid era.

The farmers belonging to the Cooperative sell the majority of their raisins through the dominant processor in the area—South African Dried Fruits (SAD)—with whom Eksteenskuil farmers have had a long-standing relationship since the 1960s and which is now itself FLO-certified.¹⁵ EAC has been FLO certified since 2003. The Cooperative replaced the Association in 2007 in response to FLO requirements, illustrating the need in this case for the organization to adapt to ethical conventions already established between alternative trading organizations in the North and producer cooperatives in Latin America. In this move, the Fairtrade model originally shaped by a combination of Northern and Latin American conventions is re-worked through a very specific cultural and political context.

Traidcraft has tended to buy the majority of the community's Fairtrade raisins (production is usually between 400 and 600 tonnes) although in recent years the proportion has declined, partly as a result of changes in demand and also because Traidcraft has started sourcing cheaper Fairtrade raisins from Chile and Afghanistan. In 2012 Traidcraft only sourced 40 tonnes from EAC. For EAC this poses a challenge in terms of needing to find alternative markets. Whilst demand for Choice grade raisins is high it is proving harder to find markets willing (or able) to pay the extra Fairtrade costs, including the Premium which is critical for funding the basic administrative functions of the Co-op.

Socio-economic characteristics of the community

This section provides a brief overview of the socio-economic characteristics of the EAC membership. Clear disparities exist within the community, with some households being relatively comfortable and others being impoverished. In general terms, residents of Middle Island tend to be better off as do households with larger land holdings. Indeed, many of the larger landowners are considered by external experts to be commercial farmers in all but name, running efficient businesses and exhibiting excellent agronomic skills. Furthermore, several industry figures commented that farmers from Eksteenskuil are some of the very best in the region. Some farmers have a very close attachment to the land defined in part by the proximity to nature and also in some cases to the connection to a family history of farming. Such sentiments are captured by one Middle Island farmer as follows; *'I love this place, very much. When my son wakes up in the morning he says 'Pa we must get to work', it makes me very nostalgic'*.

There are considerable disparities in household income within Eksteenskuil. 13% of members have monthly incomes over R15,000, whilst 22% receive less than the minimum wage for farm workers (R1200).¹⁶ Middle Island has fewer households at the lower range of the income spectrum and more at the top end. Whilst farming is the main source of income for EAC member

¹⁵ EAC member farmers have some autonomy in terms of where to sell their raisins. During 2011 for example, some farmers choose to sell to Red Sun, which at the time was processing payments more quickly than SAD. However, because Red Sun is not FLO-certified, these sales cannot count as Fairtrade and therefore do not earn premium monies for the Co-op.

¹⁶ Sandra Kruger & Associates 2010. Eksteenskuil Agricultural Cooperative land use and socio-economic survey, report compiled for Traidcraft, January 2010.

households (50% are reliant on farming for at least 75% of their income), other sources are also important. The road and bridge construction projects initiated after the socio-economic survey will have altered the proportions of non-farm income and also increased household incomes in a number of cases. Indeed, many people have multiple income earning strategies. In some cases these enable people to improve their lives significantly, whilst in others they just enable survival. High dependency levels are evident in some homes with three or more generations dependent on a small number of income earners. Several respondents told us that their grown-up children currently reside elsewhere, especially within the Western Cape. Some do return, especially daughters, to look after elderly relatives and to assist with farming. Several returnees we interviewed commented that they were pleased to return to Eksteenskuil where they enjoy the natural environment, peaceful lifestyle and relative safety and security. However, many young people do move away from the area in search of work as working the land is arduous and low on reward, a situation exacerbated by the risks imposed by the natural environment. As one respondent on South Island put it, *'farming at Eksteenskuil is like a slow death'*; a sentiment that was echoed by others.

Whilst 93% of members report that they live in brick houses rather than reed and brick houses, a quarter report that their house is in poor condition.¹⁷ The majority of the latter are those with small landholdings. According to the SKA survey, the average household size is just over 4 people per household, with children under 18 representing a third of the total population and those over 65 representing 11%. The vast majority of members get their household water either from canals or directly from the river. Only 7% of members receive water from the municipality. Furthermore, 41% of members do not have water tanks for storage, whilst 41% do not have running water in their homes, of whom the majority are small farmers. Not surprisingly, many people do not consider their drinking water to be safe; an issue which was exacerbated during the 2011 floods. Few members have water heaters, which again is hardly surprising given that only a third of households have electricity, the vast majority of who live on Middle Island. However, 88% of large farmers have electricity. Just under a third of households state that they sometimes do not have enough food for three meals a day.



Figure 20: A dwelling on South Island which still has a hole in the roof caused by hail in 2002. Water has to be collected from an open channel nearby.

Since the SKA survey was conducted there have been several significant events that will have altered the circumstances of many of the households. The severe floods and localised summer rains of 2011 affected all the farmers negatively, but for some the impacts were more profound than others. More remote areas of North Island were particularly badly affected, whilst better infrastructural maintenance on Middle Island shielded some farmers from the worst impacts. In a more positive vein, road and bridge building projects have directly and indirectly provided income earning opportunities for some local people. For example, some people have been employed directly, a handful of others have set up their own sub-contracting operations, whilst others have

17 Sustainable Livelihood Consultants 2010. Impact assessment of Fairtrade in South Africa: case study report, Eksteenskuil Agricultural Cooperative, 11th June 2010.

seized the opportunity to sell goods and services. One person recounted how they were selling raisins as snacks directly to the road crews. Furthermore, the new road development on Middle Island has significantly improved accessibility and reduced wear and tear on vehicles.

A co-operative community?

'That's how people are on the island, not very committed to helping each other, greediness and things like that. People do not give their co-operation freely. People's attitudes have changed and they seem less concerned about their neighbour or the other person. So you end up trying to look after yourself,' Middle Island farmer.

Despite the centrality of the church to many people's lives there is a strong sense that the community is not united, furthermore that community spirit has declined over the years. Many respondents gave examples of how they have felt personally let down by neighbours and others in the community. Some talked about how they had felt isolated during the floods of 2011. For example, one individual described how he had been forced to single-handedly repair the road near his house in order to attend a close relative's funeral as none of his neighbours would offer any assistance. Other people did talk about their desire to support others but said that their assistance was not always welcomed. Interestingly, a number of our respondents talked about the centrality of their religious faith to their lives and their relationships. However, their observations were often fatalistic, suggesting that problems, such as flood damage, are pre-ordained and that the agency of individuals, and thus the community as a whole, is limited. Another theme that was frequently mentioned was the abuse of alcohol which many people feel is a significant problem affecting social cohesion and farming standards. Hard data on the extent of this problem is lacking but there is considerable anecdotal evidence that alcohol is affecting many people's lives and by spending time on the islands the researchers were able to observe examples of this.



Figure 21: Church life is important to the majority of people in Eksteenskuil.

Box 7: Community divisions in action – access to farming implements and flood relief funds

The ways in which community divisions play out in daily life are exemplified here in two spheres. Firstly, there are challenges faced by the Co-op in managing the usage of the farm implements which are collectively owned and secondly, the way in which flood relief support has been organised and disbursed following the 2011 floods is problematic. Both these examples illustrate the divisions that exist in the community and the ways in which inadequate administration and communication fuel these divisions.

- ❖ Typical complaints voiced about the farming implements:
 - Access is not equitable as certain people always seem to have first priority for hiring them;
 - People do not take necessary care when using them and do not own up to causing damage;
 - People often do not replace fuel that they have used in tractors.
- ❖ The delivery of flood relief also exemplifies issues of poor communication and distrust within the community.
 - Community members were sent a survey in March 2011 in which they were asked to detail the extent of their losses due to the floods. Many refused to fill it in. The precise reasons for this non-compliance are not clear but seem to stem in part from a lack of clarity about which agency was requesting the information, whether compensation for damages would actually be paid as a result, and a general sense of powerlessness.
 - Relief monies were provided in December 2011 in the form of cash cards. The distribution of these cards appeared random. Some households received no money at all, in other households one person received a card, whilst in other households several people received a card. This process was apparently driven by Provincial government and the distribution list was collated by the wife of an EAC member who is employed by a Provincial Department. Both the Co-op and local government, who hold detailed household records, were by-passed during this process. The net effect was to fuel rifts within the community and for blame to be unjustly laid at the door of the Co-op as the nearest administrative authority.

Links with External Stakeholders

Projects

EAC has enjoyed very close links with Traidcraft since the mid-1990s. The relationship has involved commercial and developmental activities with Traidcraft having backed a number of small projects over the years. Traidcraft has also funded and co-facilitated FLO training workshops and provided targeted support to the farmers following damaging hailstorms in 2002, poor harvests in 2005, a storage shed fire in 2009 and flooding in 2011. More recently Traidcraft have engaged a Western Cape based-consultancy, Sandra Kruger¹⁸ and Associates (SKA), to work closely with the Co-op and provide levels of oversight that cannot be provided by Traidcraft from the UK. SKA's role has included delivering training, supporting the Women's Group and undertaking base line assessments of the socio-economic status of the community. Whilst Co-op

¹⁸ Kruger was initially involved with the community as a FLO liaison officer

Board members and office staff have developed relationships with Traidcraft representatives, knowledge of Traidcraft is more limited amongst the mainstream membership. Interestingly, SKA staff members have much higher recognition levels within the broader community owing to their intensive interactions with members during training programmes.

EAC's status as a Coloured producer organisation has opened up a number of opportunities for funding and support. For example, funds have been attracted from the Fairtrade Foundation's Technical Assistance Fund, Comic Relief, Solidaridad, Orange River Wine Cellars, the Northern Cape Provincial Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, SAD and various Traidcraft supporters. The resultant projects have included vineyard investments for raisin and wine grapes, a fig orchard, donation of tractors, support for a women's group and technical assistance. Unfortunately the outcomes of many of these projects have fallen short of their potential due to conflicts between donors and EAC. EAC's leadership has tended to interpret donor/consultant advice and project criteria as disempowering and 'micro-management', and instead sought to bring its own criteria to bear. For example, there have been heated debates about the implementation of several vine investment schemes, whereby resources have been available to plant new vines on smallholder plots. EAC's management has tended to argue the case for spatial equity whereby the new blocks are distributed across Eksteenskuil's three main island groups. By contrast, donors have been keen for blocks to be located near to one another to make the most efficient use of the resources available. For example, heavy equipment has to be hired to prepare the soil for the new vines and it is much more efficient if the costs of moving the machinery from farm to farm are kept to a minimum. Equally, agronomists can more easily provide on-going support if the blocks are near to one another. Outside observers believe that it would make more sense for spatial equity to be achieved by planning projects over time with the focus shifting from one geographical area to another. All too often debates about the nitty-gritty of project implementation have reached an impasse and have even on occasion ended in the courts.



Figure 22: A new vine project

The root causes of these problems are complex but there is little doubt that political history plays a role as long entrenched attitudes and mistrust are not easily swept away. It is hardly a surprise that some members of the EAC management have found the process of engaging as equals with long established provincial government officials, for example, to be a highly problematic experience. This situation creates frustration for external stakeholders summarised by a commercial respondent as follows; *'Some of those guys have semi-political agendas and they try to push for that. But on the other side are good farmers, good producers who with a little bit of help can push further.'* Ultimately, such conflicts have been a distraction from the task of effective project management and as a result many projects have failed to reach their potential. In the words of one member, *'I do not understand where all the investments done years ago have gone now - projects that were not sustainable and have not become something.'*

Examples, of under-performing projects include:

- A major donor investment in a sizeable fig orchard has delivered few benefits because the fruit stayed fresh for only a very short period and thus were difficult to market. This was due to an inappropriate variety of tree being planted. The orchard, which has been overgrown and neglected for some time, is rented from a farmer near the EAC offices at an annual cost of R20000.



Figure 23: Peter van Wyk provides a tour of the overgrown fig orchard.

- Tractors were provided by donors, including SAD, Department of Agriculture and EAC themselves. However, these are used largely to transport raisins to market rather than for ploughing and grass cutting in vineyards because the tractors are too wide to fit between the rows of vines. Thus, the benefits of these expensive investments have not been fully realised.
- A Women's Group was started in Eksteenskuil with a remit to develop small income earning projects. The group has received external support in terms of funding, including monies via Traidcraft to fund a co-ordinator. However, relatively little has been achieved by the group in terms of developing sustainable projects, whilst the position of the group in relation to EAC's organisational structure is unclear.

Local Networks

Eksteenskuil was the world's first Fairtrade certified raisin producer and is also one of only three Fairtrade smallholder raisin co-operatives operating within the global Fairtrade system. Furthermore, EAC is active within the South African Fairtrade movement and was a founder member of the Association for Fairness in Trade (AFIT) based in Cape Town. Yet, the organisation's more localised network development and general profile has been very weak. During our initial interviews with local external stakeholders it was surprising to discover that there was virtually no local knowledge of EAC's status as a Fairtrade producer, whether amongst the commercial farming community or within differing departments of local and provincial government. Whilst links with external organisations were in existence, these tended to be isolated and EAC's project partners had little, if any, knowledge of each other's role in developing the community. For example, local municipalities have a statutory duty to co-ordinate local economic development projects. As a Fairtrade producer with a remit to foster developmental projects EAC would be in a strong position to benefit from direct involvement in this process. Yet, there has been no coming together of the relevant bodies. Furthermore, the Provincial Department of Agriculture has been supporting projects in Eksteenskuil for many years, but only became aware of Traidcraft's longstanding involvement as a result of their participation in this research project. The reasons underlying these knowledge deficits are complex- however, several respondents commented that EAC's representatives had all too often 'played their cards close to their chests' and not seen the benefits in drawing external stakeholders together to work collaboratively. Questions have to be raised, however, as to why the external stakeholders themselves have not made more effort to identify organisations with a connection to EAC. The net effects of this weak networking have been to create unnecessary overlap between external

projects, to waste opportunities for catalytic multi-stakeholder projects and ultimately to foster an atmosphere of mistrust.

The upshot of EAC's reputation as a difficult partner has been that some organisations have started to withdraw from engaging with the Co-op as a body and instead are working directly with small groups of farmers within the Eksteenskuil community. Such alterations in institutional arrangements seem to be resulting in projects moving ahead more smoothly, although concerns exist that this approach will cement the pre-existing socio-economic stratifications within the community as more advantaged farmers are the ones likely to be drawn into new project opportunities. However, there have been positive signs of a fresh approach being taken by the Co-op after the 2011 floods. Indeed, one local stakeholder commented, *'it is like a new wind that is blowing out of Eksteenskuil now'*. It is yet to be seen whether this 'new wind' can lead to significant change within EAC's relationship with external stakeholders and ability to deliver successful projects.

Benefits from Fairtrade

The key financial benefits of Fairtrade for EAC include guaranteed access to markets (for many years they were the only Fairtrade raisin supplier to Traidcraft), a small price premium paid directly by SAD to farmers above the market price and the Fairtrade social premium. The principle of stable pricing structures does little in practice by itself to benefit EAC farmers, as for several years the Fairtrade minimum price has been significantly lower than the market price (£0.45 per kg compared to £1.13 per kg for Thompson seedless raisins, for example). Prices for Choice grade South African Thompsons have been reasonably high on world markets in recent years, thus the low level of the Fairtrade minimum has not necessarily been a significant problem in itself. Indeed, farmers achieving decent yields should be able to make a good income per hectare in an average year, assuming their broader farming and business skills are adequate. However, many farmers are constrained by the small size of their land holdings which means they do not benefit from economies of scale.



Figure 24: Quality checking at SAD's Upington plant

Pre-FLO certification Traidcraft made regular additional payments ('Traidcraft premium') which were used to benefit not just vine fruit farmers but the wider community. The management committee of EFA was allocated this responsibility. Currently, the social premium is £0.07 per kg for raisins and FLO stipulates that this money, paid directly to the Cooperative based on its sales through the processor, SAD, should be used for community development at the discretion of EAC's elected Board. To date, the social premium has supported various projects (see Box 8 and Figure 26 below), such as the provision of bags for school children and, most significantly, the purchase of farming implements that can be hired at a minimal rental fee by members across the islands. Indeed, it was the provision of the implements which was most commonly cited as a benefit of Fairtrade by farmers during our research.



Figure 25: One of the tractors provided for EAC members.

The formation of the Co-op itself is a benefit from Fairtrade for the individual farmers, as they can gain from the economies of scale that collective endeavour achieves. For example, the Co-op can bulk purchase chemicals for individual members, whilst a single overarching body can play a significant role in facilitating access to resources, seeking new markets and lobbying on behalf of its members. Members' perceptions of the benefits of Fairtrade are mixed. The majority of people we interviewed were largely positive about the impacts, with many pointing out that access to implements has been helpful. However, there is a sense that the benefits from engagement with Fairtrade were felt most keenly in the early stages, but that progress has slowed more recently as EAC has not catalysed the full potential benefits of Fairtrade status.

Figure 26: EAC's Expenditure of the Fairtrade Premium in 2009

Premium Income (ZAR)	Project	Expenditure (ZAR)	Cumulative Expenditure
	School bags	10,000	
	Pumps	10,000	20,000
	Office costs	351,110	371,110
	Water	10,000	381,110
	Transport	35,300	416,410
430,000			416,410

Box 8: Examples of Fairtrade Premium investment since 2005

- Equipping and maintaining the office.
- Co-op administration and leveraging grant funds
- Funding of the women's project. Women from the community identify and roll out projects.
- Providing social inputs, such as financial assistance for funerals, funding support for higher education students from the community; typing CVs for local people.
- Workshops on Basic Business Management for farmers and non-farmers (undertaken in two successive years).
- Educational equipment for all primary schools in the three different islands groups.
- Farmers' Days (two per annum: June/November) and Information days are being held during which experts (strategic partners) transfer information to members to develop their production and management capacity.
- Farming equipment is purchased on an annual basis and made available to members at a minimal fee to cover maintenance costs.
- The organisation facilitates and co-ordinates the purchase and dissemination of chemicals to combat pests and plant diseases.
- Due to a lack of capital, members experience difficulties during harvesting and pruning. The organisation therefore assists members with small loans.
- First aid training for youths from the different island groups.

Ethics around the Fairtrade model

The ethics in this supply chain are heavily driven by the Fairtrade standards that are, of course, largely shaped by organisations in the global North – a reality that was referred to with some frustration by different South African Fairtrade stakeholders during the research. There is

certainly a perception that FLO is a bureaucratic organisation, which is slow to respond to new information and possibilities. Several respondents commented that African producers were struggling to make their voices heard within the Fairtrade system and that reviews of Fairtrade standards have tended to exclude some stakeholders. As the Sustainable Livelihoods report¹⁹ notes, EAC members are generally uncertain about the underlying concepts of Fairtrade and the institutional arrangements under which it operates. This perhaps emphasises the reality that the Fairtrade concept, and the ethics inherent within it, resonate more with the consumer in the global North than they do with many producers in the South. Furthermore, the Co-operative style of institutional arrangements relate more closely to Latin American than South African traditions. Confusion also emanates from the fact that an extra price premium is paid via SAD to the farmers as an income bonus. The status of this payment (known locally as the '*premi*') is ambiguous in the eyes of some farmers, who do not understand the difference between the '*premi*' and the Fairtrade Premium. As a result farmers do not understand why the Fairtrade Premium is collected and spent by the Co-op rather than disbursed directly to them.

Some respondents within Eksteenskuil believe that the Fairtrade model and its local implementation have been paternalistic in approach. This is at odds with the desire of those members to feel empowered through their co-operative. For some members the notion that people overseas both care about their living standards and appreciate the quality of their product is important. Other members were less interested in the moral drivers of their Fairtrade partners as their most pressing need is to sustain their household, something to which they perceive Fairtrade to be contributing. For South African retailers and processors the development of an ethical framework has a legal element due to BBBEE legislation. Thus, the desire to engage with Eksteenskuil (and producer organisations like it) is in part driven out of necessity to engage with the broader transformation agenda.

There are areas in which Fairtrade standards and systems are not in alignment with the needs and context of Eksteenskuil. Whilst the Fairtrade model prioritises social standards, following a recent FLO audit the Co-op was required to produce an environmental development plan with the (paid) assistance of an NGO and to undergo training on the control of soil erosion. However, it is debatable whether soil erosion is a significant concern in Eksteenskuil. Indeed, a case can be made that other environmental matters should be prioritised such as integrated pest management, fire prevention and the development of a disaster management plan (appropriate for events such as floods), linked to that of the Municipality.

In order to meet FLO criteria EAC members must farm less than 40 hectares and must ensure that the number of hired workers does not exceed a specified number per hectare. Raisin production is very labour intensive and the majority of members use hired labour during peaks such as harvesting and pruning, whilst some members also have permanent workers. Whether all the necessary labour standards are met in full is a moot point and given that most members adopt rudimentary approaches to paperwork it is hard for auditors to monitor standards precisely. Indeed, audits tend to be carried out at quiet times of year so as to minimise disruption. However, this can render hired labourers (who may be part of a seasonal migration stream or resident in other local settlements) invisible. To further complicate the process of auditing oversight, seasonal work often involves elements of reciprocity and familial connections. Whilst EAC's

¹⁹ Sustainable Livelihood Consultants 2010. Impact assessment of Fairtrade in South Africa: case study report, Eksteenskuil Agricultural Cooperative, 11th June 2010.

management state that members are aware of the need to apply labour and health and safety laws, there has to be some doubt about the consistency of practice.





While FLO's policy regarding BEE and land reform in South Africa does not directly apply to EAC because it specifically covers only commercial estates with hired labour, Eksteenskuil's Coloured community represents a previously disadvantaged group under apartheid and EAC is classified as a black empowered (>50% ownership) organization by BBBEE legislation. Thus, while Fairtrade does not itself support empowerment through BEE initiatives in the case of Eksteenskuil in the same way it does for workers on South African commercial estates, EAC members are eligible for support from the government's Land Reform for Agricultural Development (LRAD) and land tenure reform programmes, which enable farmers to acquire land to support farming operations and to obtain freehold titles for land already owned respectively. However, while at least six farmers have been successful in obtaining LRAD grants to purchase land, the majority have struggled, and less than half of EAC membership has received title deeds. Because FLO standards regarding BEE do not cover cooperatives, Fairtrade does not play a role in alleviating this struggle. While the market-based nature of South African land reform programmes has been critiqued, the struggle to obtain land and title deeds is seen by EAC farmers as an important aspect of empowerment.

Looking back and moving forward: EAC at a crossroads

'You must seek out the bigger picture. There is more to the future than raisins and premiums, they will not save the day', commercial respondent.

It is fair to say that the Co-operative has thus far struggled to fulfil its potential and that the level of social transformation that might have been hoped for has not materialised. In many ways the geography of the 'place' occupied by Eksteenskuil is quite extra-ordinary. As detailed earlier, the farmers are prone to a series of hazardous events that regularly threaten their productivity. Their capacity to manage these hazards is severely reduced by the broader political history which has left many farmers with small, fragmented plots of land and no title deeds. Furthermore, a history of dispossession, discrimination and disenfranchisement is a challenging context from which to build a confident community able to engage successfully with international markets. Indeed, the whole notion of community, which is so central to Fairtrade discourse, has to be challenged in this context as Eksteenskuil is more typified by divisions than a sense of collective endeavour. These divisions can be delineated in various ways but can certainly be linked to the fact that contemporary Eksteenskuil was borne out of a relocation policy that threw together people from different places and backgrounds. Furthermore, the geography of the islands and their limited infrastructure serve to deepen the sense of a lack of community.

For the past 18 months EAC has been at a crossroads. Changes in management and outlook have occurred putting the organisation in a better place to move forward. However, the Board and its staff face serious challenges including:

-  a drop in demand from Traidcraft and difficulties in accessing markets for Fairtrade raisins from elsewhere;
-  variable yields which make it difficult to secure long-term market contracts;
-  a reduced Fairtrade premium income means there is a lack of resources to deliver the Co-op's administrative roles;
-  the heavy reliance on the voluntary efforts of Board members;

- ✚ clarifying the Co-op's precise role which is currently ambiguous in the eyes of many members – is its principal objective to develop the farming economy or to provide social support?
- ✚ improving the organisation's reputation as a project partner;
- ✚ inculcating a sense of what it means to be a Co-operative amongst the membership.

On the positive side there is evidence that EAC's management has found a new energy and vigour. The Board Chair has been on a trade trip to China in a quest for new markets, whilst a more professional approach has been adopted towards the marketing of EAC. Furthermore, several second hand computers have been secured from a national bank, which will be made available for community members to use. There has been some improvement in relationships with external stakeholders, as illustrated by the new venture outlined below.



Figure 27: Raisin bins being prepared for processing at Red Sun.

A potentially game changing initiative is currently unfolding as local processor Red Sun Raisins are currently in negotiations with funders, which, if successful, will enable EAC members to access preferential loans to develop up to 5 hectares of new vines each. This could either involve replacing old low productivity vines or planting on new areas. Red Sun will provide support and expertise and the deal is that all raisins produced from those vines will be sent to Red Sun for processing. Red Sun will act as a service provider for EAC and thus the Fairtrade status of the raisins will still be retained where required. The plan is

to develop the farms in groups, with an initial batch of 12 having enrolled to plant new vines from 2013 if the funding can be found. The Co-op's role is to provide administrative and service support. Furthermore, there is a commitment to assist farmers in accessing their title deeds so that the loans can be processed. This venture is extremely exciting and has the potential to transform the productive capacity of the Co-op's members. The specific benefits of the project include:

- transformation of the vine stock to reliable, modern, high yielding varieties;
- attainment of land ownership documents enabling access to loans and the opportunity to realise their asset if they desire;
- a substantial increase in local employment;
- potential for small business development around service provision linked to the new developments.

The extent to which the scheme can transform the Eksteenskuil community as a whole is open to question. Whilst the top tier of farmers are well placed to make the best of the opportunity and to manage the responsibilities that come with such external investments, others may struggle to engage. Much will depend on the ability of the Co-op to facilitate training and support for all members. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that this project could be a catalyst for consolidation of land holdings in Eksteenskuil, with struggling farmers selling their land to more successful ones. Such a transformation would not necessarily be a negative outcome if it were allied to the creation of employment. Furthermore, whilst there is high demand for Choice grade raisins, opportunities to sell Fairtrade raisins appear more limited. If such markets cannot be nurtured then the viability of the Co-op in its current form will be thrown into doubt as there will be no Premium money to fund its administrative capacity. Alternative income streams would need

to be developed. Thus, whilst there is no doubt that raisin production will remain an important activity in Eksteenskuil for many years to come, the precise role that Fairtrade will play in the future development of the local economy is very much open to question.

Box 9: Impacts of Orange River flooding on Eksteenskuil during 2011

A period of unusually heavy rainfall, resulting from the La Niña and Southern Oscillation mechanism, affected much of Southern Africa from late December 2010. Rainfall within the catchment of Orange River resulted in severe problems in the Northern Cape from January 2011 as the Orange River discharge and peak flow reached their highest levels for nearly a quarter of a century. River levels of over 4.5 meters tend to cause localised flooding around Eksteenskuil, thus the peak of nearly 8 meters resulted in widespread devastation. The floods coincided with the second period of fieldwork for this project. Thus, the research team observed the scale and impacts of the floods at first hand. Below is a brief summary of the impacts of the floods upon the Eksteenskuil farming community.

Flood Impacts

1. On vines and yields

- Farmers on all three islands experienced damage to vines, including in some cases the complete loss of newly planted vines.
- There was significant damage to fields of lucerne and also to fruit trees.
- There was rampant weed growth in many areas.
- In almost all cases, yields were substantially reduced.
- The quality of raisins was affected, such that the percentage of 'Choice' grade was reduced and the proportion of 'No Value' raisins increased.
- As a consequence of the above, farmer incomes were significantly reduced.
- The coincidence of floods with harvesting had a negative effect on employment of seasonal workers who were unable to access their farms at critical times.
- Secondary impacts occurred as the high moisture levels induced fungus in the new growth which reduced yields in 2012.

2. On infrastructure

- Damage to power lines on North Island in particular.
- Damage to bridges on all islands: extreme damage on North Island, in particular.
- Extensive damage to existing roads, in particular on North and South Islands.
- Some irrigation channels were broken, whilst others were undermined.
- Some flood embankments were breached, whilst others were weakened.
- Farmers on all islands were cut off, which prevented delivery of raisins to processors at optimal times.

3. On health and social issues

- Some communities experienced difficulties in accessing medicines and the mobile clinic service was severely disrupted.
- There were outbreaks of diarrhoea.
- Problems with mosquitoes and other insects due to the moisture levels and pools of stagnant water.
- Many children were evacuated from the islands and stayed in hostel accommodation in Keimoes so that they could continue to attend school.

Conclusions and recommendations for stakeholders

The case studies investigated within this project illustrate, albeit to differing degrees, the possibilities offered by ethical production for achieving positive socio-economic and environmental outcomes within producer communities in South Africa, with relevance to the global South more broadly. However, in spite of the claims and intentions of the ethical/Fairtrade movement the capture of value remains a bone of contention. Indeed, a number of our respondents queried whether producers really gain any significant economic value by acting ethically. It is clear that the costs of ethics tend to be borne most heavily by the producers and those nearest to them within the supply chain, whilst retailers (mediated, they contend, by consumer preferences) retain considerable power in allocating value. The private sector steps into the regulatory void left by state agencies thus generating auditing and verification costs that are usually borne at the production end of the supply chain. These pressures, allied to the seemingly inexorable downward price push exerted by retailers, impose a considerable squeeze for stakeholders trying to 'do the right thing' on the ground. As one of our commercial respondents commented, '*the supply chain needs to be re-visioned*' in ways that retain higher value and create genuine empowerment opportunities at the producer end of the supply chain.

According to Barnett et al (2011 18)²⁰, "*the impact of fair trade is still only a pinprick on unequal patterns of world trade*". However, they also assert the deeper political and symbolic significance of this alternative trading movement through "*demonstration effects*" in the context of an unrelenting capitalist economy. To maintain this powerful political significance, the ethical/Fairtrade movements must ensure that their various models are successful in terms of achieving progressive socio-economic change for those at the production end of the supply chain. Unlocking the geographical complexity of these movements using some of the tools deployed during this project could enable more culturally-sensitive ways of working with producer communities. We would argue that such an approach is vital if the movements are to gather momentum and facilitate meaningful socio-economic development. Box 10 below outlines our key recommendations for the main stakeholder groups that are consistent with this call for attention to be paid to the specific characteristics of individual places and their wider networks.

²⁰ Barnett, C., Cloke, P., Clarke, N., and Malpass, A. 2011. *Globalizing responsibility: the political rationalities of ethical consumption*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Box 10: Key recommendations for different stakeholders

FVCT and its stakeholders

- Develop enhanced training materials, which recognise the linguistic and cultural challenges faced by workers.
- Improve monitoring of harvesting practice and develop a co-ordinated parallel research programme to evaluate ecological impacts.

EAC

- Clarify EAC's core objectives and be clear about the Co-op's 'Vision' for the future.
- Strengthen relationships with external organisations.

Fairtrade bodies

- Be attentive to geographical differences and ensure local priorities and realities are reflected in the application of standards.

Retailers

- By moving 'Beyond Audit' a more progressive, developmental approach should be adopted which is not limited to reducing non-compliances
- Be attentive to the impacts of corporate purchasing systems and policies on the point of source

Civil Society Groups and Consumers

- Sustain lobbying and advocacy activities as these do make a difference to corporate policies. Informed, carefully targeted research outputs and campaigns continue to be important in driving progressive change.
- Take 'Route One' and influence retailer practices via shopping choices. A critical mass of consumers making informed 'ethical' choices is the fastest way to alter corporate practices.

Researchers

- Use the rollout of Fairtrade in South Africa as an opportunity to evaluate ethical consumption in the global south. Drivers of ethical trade can be examined and compared to those in the Global North.
- Several respondents noted that buyers from the emerging economies are showing increasing interest in sourcing South African produce. This trend should be tracked, especially in terms of assessing impacts upon labour standards and environmental protection.

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Figure 28: Scenes from various dissemination events held in South Africa, March 2012

