

SOUTH AFRICA



The Heiveld Cooperative

The Mission of the Heiveld Cooperative is to produce and market the finest organic rooibos tea at fair prices on behalf of our members and thereby create a better life for small-scale farmers and other members of our community.

Map



The Bokkeveld Plateau is the northern-most outlier of the species-rich Fynbos Biome of the Cape Floristic Kingdom. Sandstone dominates the western margins of the plateau and vegetation is adapted to the low-fertility, acidic and sandy soils, summer drought and relatively cold, wet winters. One of the few plants in this biome with commercial value is rooibos (*Aspalathus linearis*), a shrub that has been utilised for centuries to make an herbal tea much beloved by South Africans, and more recently popular in many other parts of the world as a health-giving beverage.

Context



Most of the population of the Bokkeveld lives on privately owned farms. More than 95% of the land is owned by decedents of European settlers who comprise approximately 10% of the population. Farm labour is virtually exclusively provided by “Coloured” persons of mixed ancestry, who make up approximately 85% of the population.

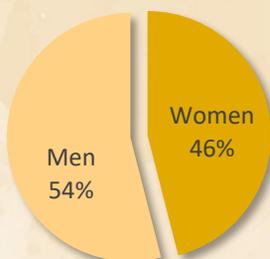


Description

The Heiveld Cooperative is a member-owned business based on agroecological principles that processes and markets organic and fair-trade certified rooibos tea produced by its members.



66 members



+20 workers for harvesting season

The primary business of the Cooperative is to process and market the organic and Fairtrade certified rooibos tea of its members to trading companies, most of which are in the global north. In order to support its primary business and achieve its mission, the Heiveld provides a number of supplementary services to its members including training in organic and sustainable production, provision of organic farming inputs, an internal organic control system.

Practices used by Heiveld farmers to improve soil and water management include the establishment of mulched and vegetated buffer zones, mulching the rooibos fields, using cereals as nursery crops in cultivated rooibos lands, and construction of contour bunds in cultivated lands and on roads to enhance infiltration of rainwater and prevent soil erosion.

Trajectory





Results and benefits



In its **19 years** of existence, the Cooperative has maintained a reputation as the **producer of highest quality, sustainably produced organic and fair-trade rooibos**.

In **2020** the Cooperative **paid its members R100/ kg** for their product. **All workers** employed by the Cooperative were **paid at least R210/day, 140% of the legislated minimum wage**. These higher prices were made possible by the **social contract** between the Heiveld and its 'fair trade' trading partners, who agreed to assist the members survive the **severe drought of 2014 – 2020** by cutting their margins and paying a higher price for the product. Throughout the 5 year drought no members were forced off the land or migrated away to find employment.



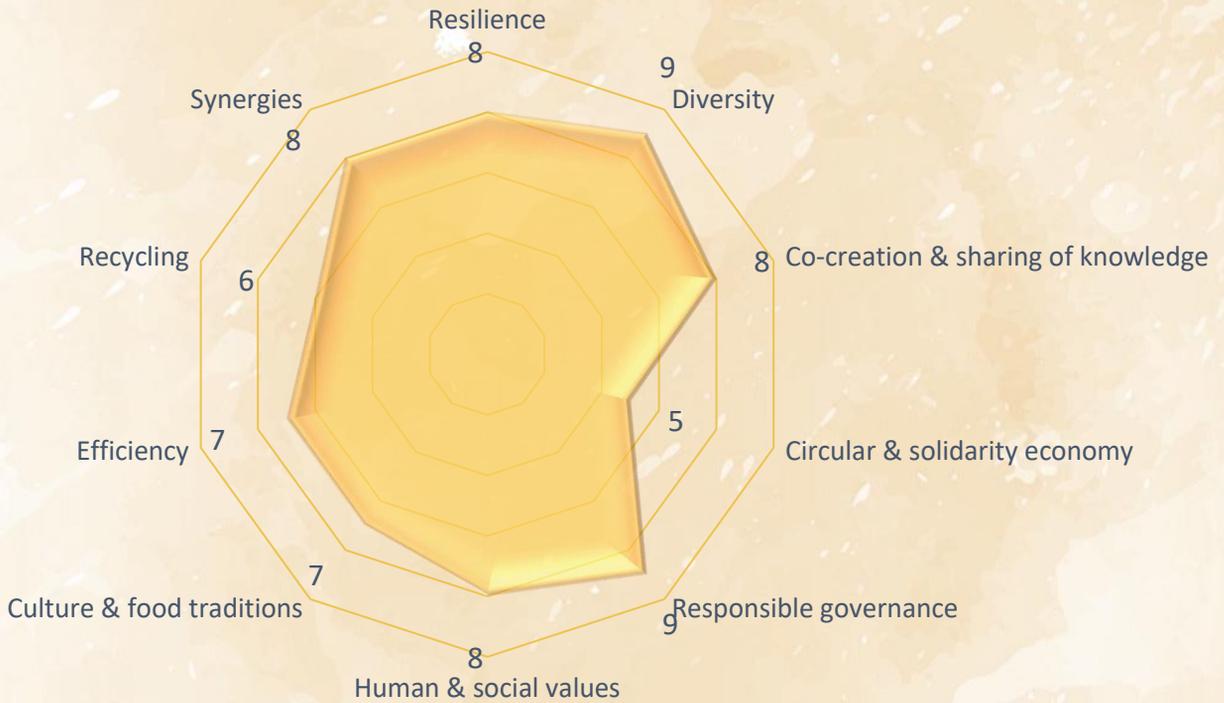
The Cooperative has engaged with the **research community** to facilitate action research with farmers to find answers to questions of concern to them. For example, research undertaken with the **University of Cape Town** investigated crucial aspects of **sustainable harvesting** of wild rooibos populations in **close collaboration with farmers** who had initially asked the questions. The results of the study demonstrated the optimal volumes of tea that can be harvested in the wild whilst maintaining the **health, productivity and reproduction** of the plants, as well as the **optimal harvest season** and frequency of harvest (Malgas, R. R., Potts, A. J., Oetlé, N. M., Koelle, B, Todd, S. W., Verboom, G. A., Hoffman, M. T. 2010).

The Cooperative has established the **necessary physical infrastructure** including constructing its **own processing facility**. The Cooperative established a Trust dedicated to broadening land access for its members and **conserving the environment**. In **2017** it succeeded in **purchasing the 2,500 ha Blomfontein farm**, which was **the first private nature reserve** to be proclaimed in the Northern Cape Province.



Research conducted on **ecosystem** functioning in **rooibos production areas**, which included 4 Heiveld members, showed enhanced ecosystem services such as **wind reduction, insect pollination** (greater abundance of bees and wasps, and greater diversity of species) and **soil fertility** (soil organic carbon and nitrogen concentrations) in these organic production systems. These benefits are associated with **enhanced connectivity to natural vegetation** and greater **plant species diversity** in cultivated fields (Herbst, M. 2011).

Lessons learned and reflected FAO principles



Resilience: 8

Enhanced knowledge about predicted climatic conditions and anticipatory adaptation to anticipated changes has enabled members, their farming enterprises and the cooperative itself to survive two extreme drought events.



Human & social values: 8

The Heiveld is built upon values of dignity, equity, inclusion and justice, as is reflected in its mission and constitution. The cooperative has played an active role in giving voice and decision-making powers to its members, especially women.



Diversity: 9

Conservation of wild rooibos harvesting areas ensures diversity of genetic material vital to ensuring resilience under anticipated future climatic conditions. Seed for cultivated plantations is locally collected from open pollinated plants.



Culture & food traditions: 7

By the profitable production and trade in a traditional beverage, the cooperative has enabled members to ensure food sovereignty. The traditional knowledge and experiences of members have shaped its policies and practices.



Co-creation & sharing of knowledge: 8

The initiative is built upon traditional knowledge, and agroecological innovations have been respectfully co-created with scientists, integrating knowledge from different traditions and methods.



Efficiency: 7

The farming system of members excludes harmful external resources. Although production per hectare might in some instances be lower than that of farmers using these products, incomes are higher and biological processes are enhanced.



Synergies: 8

Ecosystem services provided by pollinators, predators, microorganisms and fungi are enhanced in the production system.



Responsible governance: 9

The cooperative is responsibly and effectively governed in the interests of its members, who enjoy democratic participation and transparent access to decisions and information.



Recycling: 6

Plant material is used as mulch, soil conditioner and for compost to fertilise the soil and promote soil microorganisms and, when ploughed into the soil, as a soil conditioner.



Circular & solidarity economy: 5

The Heiveld trades health-giving rooibos globally via fair-trading partners, who pay a fair price in appreciation of the needs and desires of the producers to earn an adequate income on the basis of their knowledge and labour.

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The Avaclim project aims to create the necessary conditions for the deployment of agroecology in arid areas.

For more information : www.avaclim.org

Financial partners:



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