Overview of the members within the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative: their status, perspectives and communication preferences.

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Upper catchment of the Akkedisberg mountain range kept free of invader plant species through collective management by the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative partners.

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ABSTRACT

An online survey was completed to review the current status and perspectives of the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) members. The report reflects on the type of institutions involved with ABI, and their perceptions of the voluntary association. Responses from the survey indicate a strong relationship and association with biodiversity conservation in the Overberg. The last decade of ABI has been successful in engaging with partners and institutions. This is evident by the long track record of participating institutions, good common understanding of ABI objectives, and ongoing interest to participate in the future.

The review has a number of key findings for the ABI partnership to take into consideration for the next phase.

- ABI can play a stronger role in linking current green businesses to markets and enabling more sustainable income streams.
- ABI to share information on available resources, partner's news, latest news and the ABI strategy.
- ABI to sustain the momentum of the current communication plan, specifically social media, which can be a good platform for connecting institutions and businesses with a wider network.
- ABI to track investments made towards conservation, and associated impact across the region as this may assist ABI to leverage greater funding or access different financial resources.
- ABI can bring small businesses into the collaborative ABI space and build a communication plan that is tailored to their available communication platforms and needs.
- ABI can build the capacity of small businesses and their workers, by linking them to opportunities, and possible mentorship and learnership programmes run by the ABI partners.

This survey can be repeated to evaluate the effectiveness of communication to members and measure institutional changes in the landscape. It is also relevant for updating the types of resources and information that members have an interest in. This data is useful to align proposed future institutional models and activities of ABI with the expectations and current ability of the ABI partners. The report provides baseline information for prioritizing future activities involving small business development, and can be referenced to determine success of future actions taken by ABI.

1. PURPOSE AND PROCESS

The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) has an 18-year history of partners working collectively to conserve biodiversity within the Overberg. A detailed understanding of the different partners' profiles, their threats, opportunities and expectations for ABI is useful to identify areas that can be maximized to benefit the ABI partnership, as well as vulnerabilities of the association.

Given that ABI is currently undergoing a revisioning process, it's the right time to take stock of the past 10 years of ABI – since the launch of the second phase of ABI, when Flower Valley Conservation Trust took over the secretariat and coordination role. This document, based on two surveys undertaken in the ABI area, will help guide the ABI Committee to better prepare the association for the next 10 years. They will enable the voluntary association to have a more focused and strategic approach to the structure of the organisation, the activities undertaken, the audiences it reaches, and how best to bring about positive change in the Overberg to meet the ABI vision.

Two online surveys using Google forms were held to get feedback from the ABI institutional partners and the small businesses who work with the different institutions in the region. Forty questions were asked as part of the questionnaire on the following areas of interest:

- The profiles of both institutions and small businesses
- Threats and opportunities for members
- The role of ABI and expectations
- Communication preferences

2. METHODOLOGY

It was firstly decided to develop two surveys to reach two core audiences: those institutions that have worked with ABI, and the small businesses operating in the landscape in natural resource management. The questions were developed for each of these audiences. The surveys were kept as short as possible in order to encourage maximum participation, while still aiming to gather all the required information to inform the future of ABI.

Following that, the participants were prioritized and invited to participate in the survey. The current ABI database of 1242 interested stakeholders was categorized into four tiers: Tier 1 members are actively participating and contributing to ABI; Tier 2 are participating, but not necessarily contributing; Tier 3 may not know about ABI, but they are involved in activities that are instrumental to ABI's vision; Tier 4 participants are interested in what ABI does and receive information, although they may not be working exclusively in the Overberg.

The questionnaire was emailed using Everlytic (bulk email software) to all of the Tier 1 and 2 stakeholders in the database – a total of 117 people. This was followed up by phone calls and personal messages to selected Tier 1 stakeholders to promote participation in the survey.

A different approach was used to get small businesses to participate in the survey. Partners that work with small businesses in the green economy were asked to send the questionnaire to their contacts or phone the business owners to assist with completing the questions. As a result, many of the participants in the survey are connected to alien clearing (in particular the ABI Alien Clearing Programme), as well as fynbos harvesting.

For the purpose of interpreting the results the two surveys are referred to as the institutional survey, representing organisations, associations and government entities, and business survey, representing businesses (mostly micro or small businesses) or similar initiatives. The separation is necessary given the different legal structures, scale of operation, associated threats and opportunities and current and future communications efforts required. The results interpreted in this report are from 35 institutions and 22 businesses that completed the survey.

3. PROFILE: INSTITUTIONAL AND SMALL BUSINESSES

3.1 Description

Small businesses and institutions strongly identify themselves with biodiversity conservation in this region. The ABI partnership has been in existence for 18 years (10 years as part of ABI Phase 2) and the longevity of partners is one of the main reasons for this long-term presence in the landscape. More than 90% of core ABI partners (institutional) and 64% of small businesses who completed the survey have operated for longer than three years. In fact, 19% of small businesses have operated in the green economy sector for over a decade. The majority of businesses in the survey identify themselves as part of the conservation sector, thereafter part of the green economy and agriculture. Sixty percent of small businesses indicated that they would not change sectors if given the opportunity. Institutions also had a strong association to the conservation sector, followed by agriculture and social development.

Nearly half of the institutions that participated in the survey work across the Overberg District, with the rest focused in the Overstrand and Cape Agulhas Municipalities. The Theewaterskloof and Swellendam Municipalities were under represented in this survey, with only two organisations focusing in each of these areas. This is likely linked to ABI's focus over the past 10 years, which has seen ABI prioritize the Overstrand and Cape Agulhas Municipal areas, working off those relationships built up prior to 2011 (the launch of ABI's second phase).

The types of legal structures for the institutional survey are diverse, with the majority registered as non-profit in nature. Seventy percent of the small businesses are registered as private companies (Figure 1).

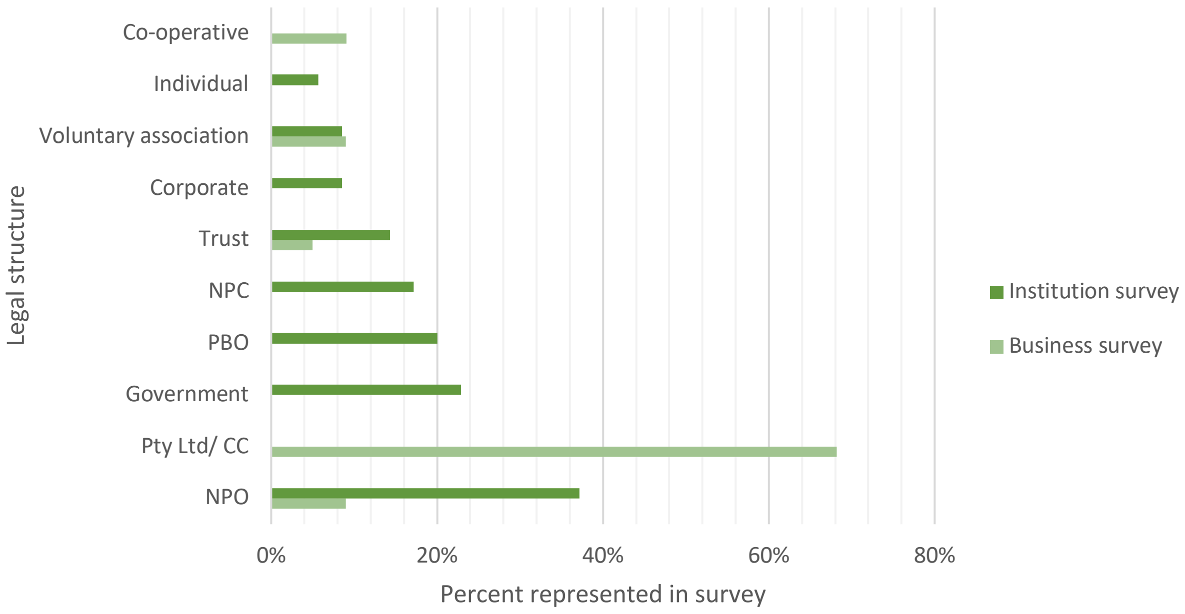


Figure 1: The types of legal structures present for the Institutional (n=35) and Business (n=22) surveys.

The business survey showed diverse services offered within the green economy. This demonstrates a broader range of what is traditionally considered as green economy development in the ABI context, which is often associated with natural resource management services (fire and alien invasive plant clearing). Diversification of skills development into alternative ecologically conscious industries is something to consider when looking at the future development of the green economy.

Services currently offered by small businesses in the green economy	
Alien clearing	Training
Livestock farming	Environmental Education
Construction	Nature Guiding
Woodcutting	Fynbos Honey
Fynbos harvesting	Food Production
Fire Management	Industrial cleaning
Restoration and Rehabilitation	Managing illegal dumping sites
Cultivation	Thatching

Implications for ABI:

The survey shows that ABI is strongly connected to the conservation sector – a strong basis to work off. Going forward, given the importance of agriculture and the need to create jobs in the Overberg, greater focus could be placed on agriculture and social development, in tandem with the conservation sector.

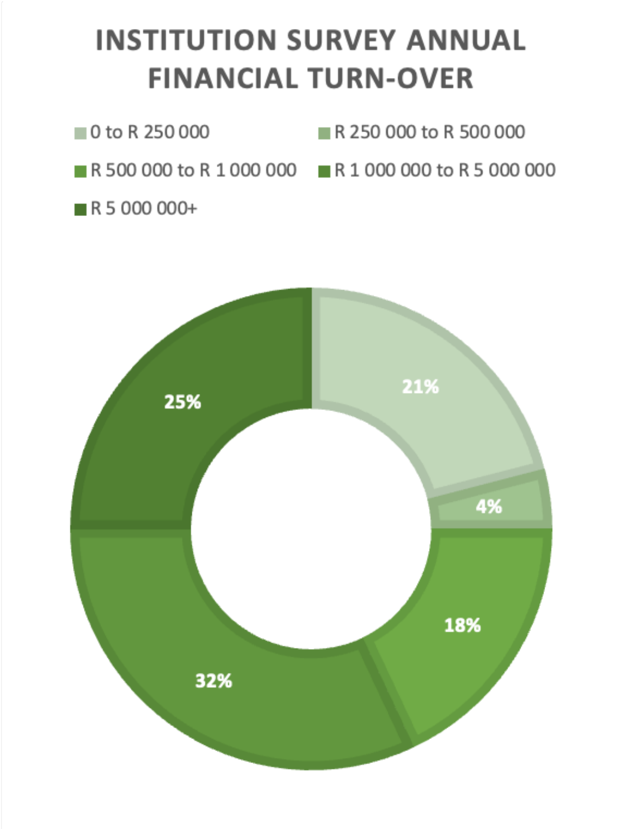
Also, given the wide range of services offered by small businesses, there could be a renewed communications focus on these other industries. In the past, ABI's communications focused on alien clearing, as a result of the ABI Alien Clearing Programme.

3.2 Economic status

South Africa is the most unequal society in the world with a Gini Index – which measures inequality – of 63% in 2020 compared to the international average of 45% (IMF, 2020). This is primarily driven by a highly skewed income distribution towards the richest 20% of the nation receiving almost 70% of the income (IMF, 2020). Further disparities exist based on distance from large metropolitans (such as Cape Town and Johannesburg), and rural environments are the more impoverished with fewer opportunities for employment the further away people are from these urban settings (IMF, 2020). A consequence of this disparity is the continued migration of people from rural environments towards cities and surroundings. This is unlikely to change in the near future. Within this context, nature-based employment opportunities are considered one of the means to stimulate the economy in rural landscapes. Although this survey is not comprehensively representing all businesses in the green economy, the data is sufficient to provide an indication of economic trends present with the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative's area of influence.

The seven institutions with the highest revenue in the ABI area together invest more than R35-million into the broader conservation sector annually (Figure 2). This is comparable to the first phase of ABI during which $11 784 775 (around R177-million in today's terms) was spent by the partners over six years from 2003-2008 (Child, 2010), which is equivalent to ±R30-million per annum using current exchange rates. The partners in the ABI collective have been able to sustain and even grow investments into the green economy and conservation of biodiversity since the first phase of ABI. Measuring how these investments are maximised by working collectively and enabling greater impacts is a potential role for the ABI association to consider.

The majority of small businesses do not reflect a profitable return if current annual income is distributed across a 12-month period (Figure 2). Only 33% of businesses in this survey are able to operate for 9 to 12 months of the year, while the remaining 67% are unemployed for more than 4 months of the year. Further insights can be gained from identifying the sources of income invested into the sector and the sustainability of the resource (Figure 2).



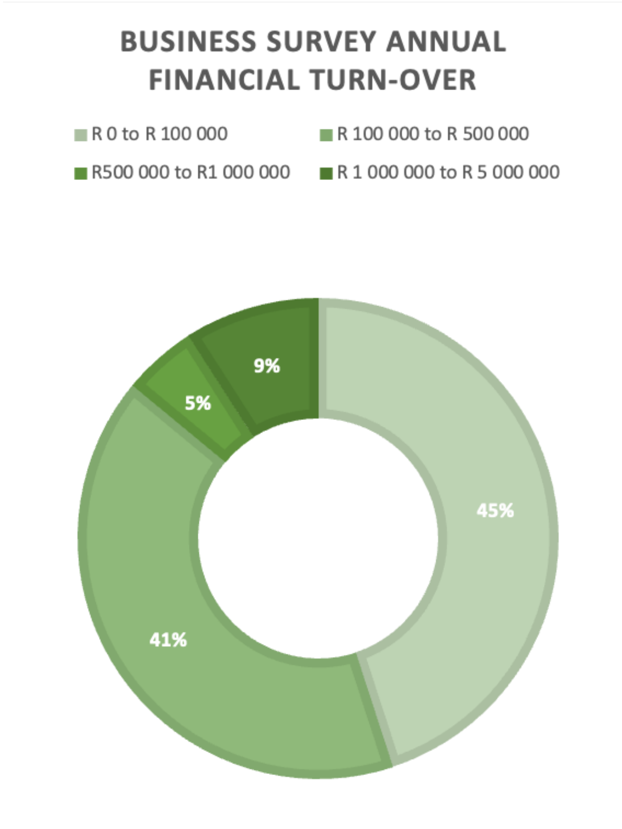


Figure 2: The percent of organisations represented in different categories for their annual financial turn-over (Institutions n= 28; Businesses n= 22).

There is a strong dependence on government and charitable income to drive the local green economy. Based on responses from the survey, both institutions and businesses have a similar mix of income sources including generated wealth (sales; services; annual membership), government (government grants and tenders; municipal tenders) and charitable income sources (philanthropic grants; donations; NGO-funded projects). Without government and charitable sources of income the majority of institutions and businesses will cease to exist.

This also highlights that the vulnerabilities faced by non-profits (predominantly charitable income sources) are transferred to those businesses who are largely reliant on the activities of the non-profit conservation sector. It is an inevitable weakness, which requires further consideration on how to make business income independent from the charities that support them. The same is true for government income sources, which help to boost the green economy in the region, but also create a dependency on a revenue that is not secure in the medium-term future, due to national treasury changing funding priorities.

Interestingly, more than 20% of the participating institutions rely on sales and services to support their financial sustainability. This may be an ongoing trend in future to create reliable income streams in the landscape for the non-profit sector.

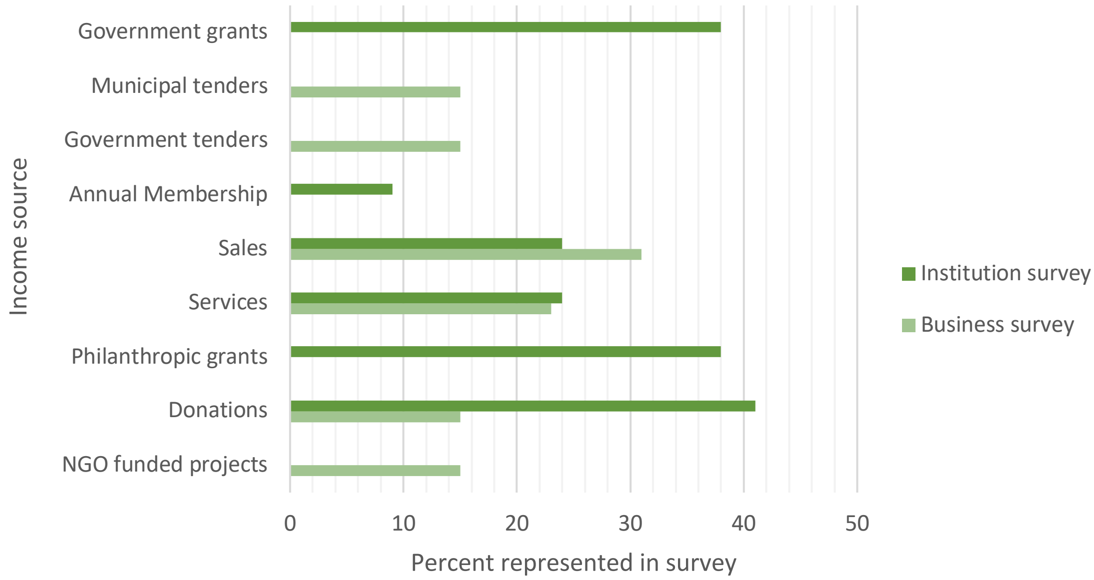


Figure 3: The different types of income sources for the Institutional (n=34) and Business (n=13)[1] surveys, represented as percent of occurrence out of the total represented organisations.

Implications for ABI:
Considerable funding has gone into the conservation sector in the ABI region since 2003. ABI could play a greater role in mapping this investment and work off this information to support greater collaboration. It's also clear from this interesting comparison between the institutional partners and business participants that there is a need to close the inequality gap in this region. The challenge for the ABI community is how to make green business more sustainable in the longer term and sustain current employment opportunities. At the same time, business must have a positive return to biodiversity conservation.

3.3 Employment

The majority of institutions tend to be smaller with fewer than 20 people employed in the organisation. The institutions with greater staff components are weighted towards government or substantial government funding. There are two exceptions: one institution is focused on sales and the other relies on charitable income.

Most small businesses have 10 or less people employed with an average of 8 people per business (22 businesses employ 168 people). A limitation for most small businesses is ownership of appropriate transport, which is why businesses do not employ more than 10 people due to the transport restrictions of getting staff to the work site. Another contributing factor is the lack of capital investment to enable growth of these small businesses. Half of the businesses said that there is more work available than current businesses can feasibly commit to, which suggests that market availability is not the reason for limiting further growth. Market availability is not equivalent to market access, which is a potentially a greater factor

[1] Only 13 of the 22 businesses answered this question in the survey.

limiting small businesses. Another explanation is that increasing the staff component of these small businesses may not be economically sustainable in this sector, which at times has strong seasonal influences due to weather and job availability.

Category **Number of people employed**	**Number of Institutions**	**Number of Businesses**
0-10	14	19
10-20	6	3
20-50	4	0
50+ people	9	0

The number of institutions and businesses that have more than 50% of a single race group employed in their organisation was used an indicator of racial representivity within the sector. The assumption is that if one racial group is consistently more prevalent in relation to the population pool available to work, it is an indicator of poor racial integration across the sector. The Overberg District demographic statistics (ODM, 2019) show that the majority of the workforce are coloured and this mimics the institutions and businesses in the survey, which are more likely to consist of predominantly coloured employees, than other racial groups present.

50 - 100% employees	**Institutions**	**Business**	**Overberg District population racial breakdown (2019)**
African	13%	40%	31%
Coloured	23%	60%	51%
White	13%	0%	16%

It is recommended that number of people per racial group within predetermined income brackets should be used as a future measure of integration, as well as including gender as a measure.

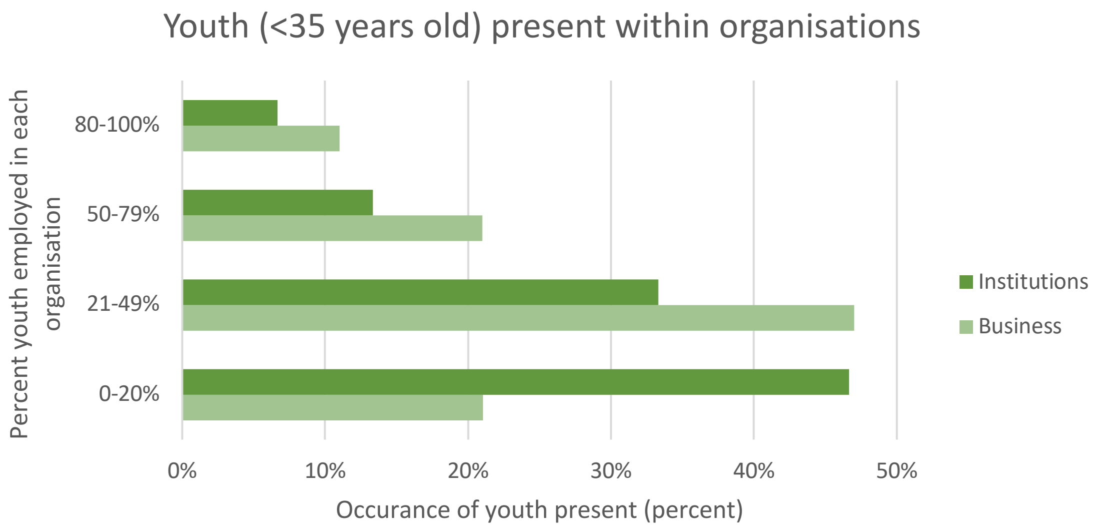


Figure 4: The breakdown of youth present (percent) within an organisation and occurrence of each category for 35 institutions and 22 businesses.

The business sector appears to be employing youth more frequently relative to the institutions (Figure 4). Small business driving youth employment and associated work place upskilling is not ideal for improving quality of services and growing the business. The comparatively larger institutions could play a much stronger role to support small businesses through learnerships, internships and training, and integrate already skilled and experienced youth into the sector. Lack of skilled labour is noted as a weakness in small businesses, as described in more detail in the following section.

Implications for ABI:
The survey shows that employment opportunities are available, but that businesses struggle to capitalize on these because of the lack of market access. The ABI partnership could therefore prioritize supporting greater market access, as well as more upskilling opportunities.

4. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR ABI MEMBERS

An overview of the most commonly mentioned internal and external factors influencing the ABI partners both positively and negatively is given in Table 1. In general, both businesses and institutions perceive their staff, track record in the sector and professional knowledge as their greatest strength. In contrast, the common weaknesses are financial and lack of staff capacity (both in skills and number of people).

The surveys highlighted the same threats for the various businesses and institutions. The COVID lockdown and associated economic inactivity was expected to emerge as a threat from this survey. The coastal Agulhas area is largely reliant on tourism income, which was greatly reduced in the past 18 months due to travel restrictions from national COVID prevention measures.

The second biggest threat highlighted in these surveys was related to a changing climate. This is mentioned in association to changes in ecological functioning such as fire patterns and frequency. Furthermore, invasive plants and their increased fire risk featured strongly. Changing weather also has an impact on the agricultural sector and producing reliable crops. The climate emergency is often spoken about at high levels of government, which may seem removed from the landscape. However, on the ground impact of climate change is clearly evident at the local scale based on this survey. The ABI partners are already aware of climate change, although they may not use the formal terminology.

There is an overwhelmingly positive outlook based on the opportunities listed, with many ideas and gaps identified that can be considered for expansion and further development (Table 1).

Table 1: The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for ABI members in the Overberg.

INSTITUTIONS	BUSINESSES
STRENGTHS	
▪ *Long track record in the sector* ▪ *Professional knowledge and expertise* ▪ *Quality management* ▪ *Diligent, enthusiastic and hardworking team* ▪ *Access to land* ▪ *Committed conservation partners* ▪ *Conservation business* ▪ *Innovation* ▪ *Governance structures*	▪ *Committed team* ▪ *Experience in the sector* ▪ *Good communication* ▪ *Team management* ▪ *High work standard* ▪ *Professional knowledge and expertise*
WEAKNESSES	
▪ *Limited financial resources* ▪ *Lack of staff capacity (people)* ▪ *Financial stability* ▪ *Skills shortage* ▪ *Lack of common regional vision and strategy for integration* ▪ *Capital intensive* ▪ *Dependence on international tourism or a few key donors*	▪ *Lack of funding and capital* ▪ *Transport limitations (including increased cost)* ▪ *Loss of skilled workers* ▪ *More opportunities to upskill workers* ▪ *Lack of staff capacity* ▪ *Access to land*
OPPORTUNITIES	
▪ *Ecotourism* ▪ *Green economy business* ▪ *Training and skills development* ▪ *New and existing partners in the landscape* ▪ *Community development* ▪ *Protected environment expansion (corridors)* ▪ *Landowner buy-in for cooperative natural resource management* ▪ *Wider community information sharing* ▪ *Restoration, research and protection of biodiversity on land and marine*	▪ *Opportunity to develop formal operating standards in the thatching industry* ▪ *Formalizing business has opened up tenders and more private work* ▪ *Opportunity to grow business by getting more landowners involved* ▪ *Upskill workers to become contractors* ▪ *Increase fynbos market potential* ▪ *Grow harvest yield* ▪ *Adding manufacturing value at the level of production* ▪ *Businesses can grow with more land being available for use* ▪ *Increasing awareness of natural value* ▪ *Increase opportunities for staff to gain skills* ▪ *Diversifying and creating unique products* ▪ *Tourism* ▪ *Regenerative organic market* ▪ *Sincere collaboration*

	▪ *Green houses can expand and secure farming business* ▪ *Water saving irrigation systems* ▪ *Well matured compost*
THREATS	
▪ *Less or inconsistent funding* ▪ *Climate change impacts (fire and aliens)* ▪ *COVID 19 impacts* ▪ *Illegal/inappropriate clearing of habitat* ▪ *Poaching (fauna and flora)* ▪ *Lack of participation*	▪ *Ongoing COVID situation may impact funding and work available* ▪ *Changing weather conditions* ▪ *Increasing transport costs* ▪ *Unplanned fires* ▪ *Pricing with third parties involved*

Implications for ABI:
Climate change is highlighted as a very strong theme, for both businesses and institutions. As such, ABI could use this avenue in a collective effort to build awareness, collaboration and develop mitigating measures linking people on the ground to the regional and national efforts of building climate resilience. This is clearly a strong theme currently globally, and ABI should make the most of this in terms of support to partners, as well as in its communications work going forward.

5. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Lack of staff capacity and the loss of skilled workers were frequently mentioned as a vulnerability to organisations in the survey. The survey posed this question to businesses: what are the critical skills you need to manage your business? A number of skills emerged that are rarely considered when developing training plans. Technical skills development opportunities are sometimes available for businesses, as well as first aid and health and safety qualifications. However, operational, wellbeing and relationship skills (as classified in Table 2) are missing when planning skills development for businesses. These skills can be further developed through experiential learning opportunities, and structured mentorship programmes for both the business owners and workers. Such skills packaged in a simple and easily accessible way is a future opportunity for micro-business development in the region.

The survey questions were more structured for the institutions with options provided to select from. The top three critical skills lacking in institutions are research, technical and financial skills.

Table 2: Businesses in the Overberg identified critical skills for a successful business. These were 16ategorized into five groups.

CRITICAL SKILLS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE OVERBERG

Operational	**Professional**	**Wellbeing**	**Relationships**	**Development**
Marketing skills	Construction	Health and safety	Relationship building	Training
Service delivery	Alien clearing knowledge	First Aid skills	Coordinating people	Skills development
Production management	Natural resource knowledge	Passion	Networks	Mentorship
Bookkeeping	Chainsaw skills	Motivation	Team spirit	Innovative work methods
Planning	Herbicide skills	Willingness	Community connectors	Educational background
Organising	Sustainable harvesting	Strong workers	Diplomacy	
Administration	Essential oil experience	Attitude	Community management	
Multi-task skills	Beekeeping knowledge	Tone	Transparency	
Computer skills	Weather knowledge		Cooperation skills	
Trilingual	Woodcutting skills		Work ethics	
Communication skills	Cleaning skills		Discipline	
			Team work skills	

Implications for ABI:
The ABI coordination unit could work with partners to encourage the transfer of softer skills, and highlight the need for more mentorship programmes in the region. Partnering and linking into government-funded mentorship opportunities should also be considered.

6. PERSPECTIVES OF THE AGULHAS BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE (ABI)

6.1 Institution Responses

There is a good common understanding of what ABI does in the landscape by the different institutions. Some of the quotes below capture the ABI purpose and philosophy. The common understanding of ABI's role across the landscape indicates that the method of communication to and between partners is effective. Over 70% of the ABI institutions that took part in the survey are partners or members of the voluntary association. Other institutions are associated with ABI through the alien clearing project and form part of the Project Implementation Committee, and the remainder are interested in the newsletters.

"ABI is a collection of people and organizations who care about the environment through people, who support each other to achieve our collective goals."

"A conduit for achieving nature conservation across the great Agulhas Plain"

"An overarching body of local stakeholders striving to achieve efficiency of resources, social support and work opportunities and the continued biodiversity conservation of our area."

"An association of organizations and people with a common interest in the well-being of the Overberg's natural systems and the people who live and work here."

"A platform for knowledge, information and resource sharing. A partnership between all organizations (government or private) involved either directly or indirectly with conservation in the Overberg."

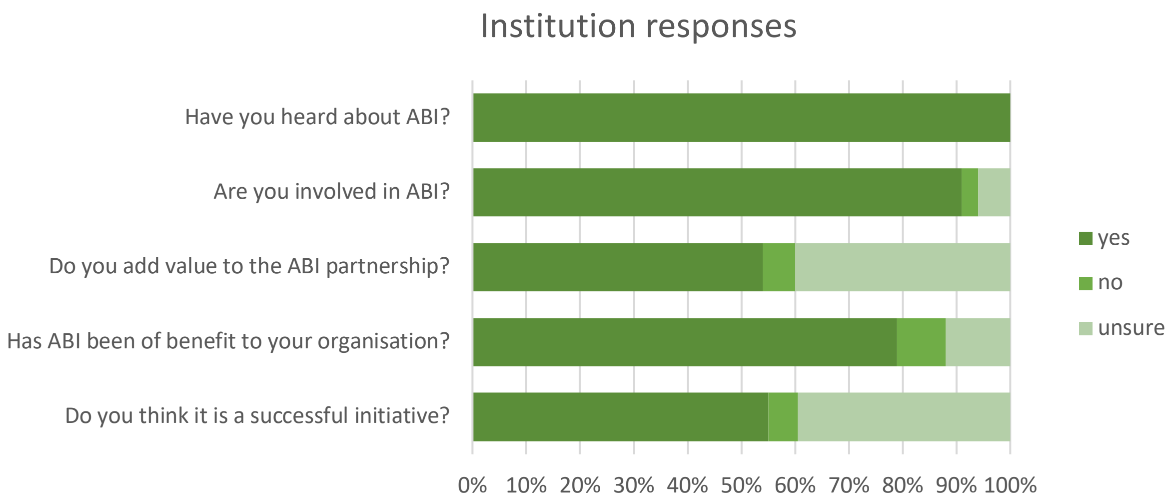


Figure 5: Institution's role and understanding in the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative.

Institutions were asked if they consider ABI a successful initiative and the majority (60%) said it is (Figure 5). The following reasons were given for why institutions consider ABI a successful initiative.

- The long track record in the landscape
- Ability to collectively execute large projects
- The role of collaborating and coordinating partners
- Sharing of information and skills
- Providing training assistance
- Providing farmers with technical assistance with herbicide and alien management
- Collective thinking and planning
- Trustworthy platform
- Coordinated single voice for greater bargaining power

▪ Collectively overcoming challenges

A small percentage did not think it is successful (6%), and the remaining institutions were uncertain. The reasons given were the lack of information on how success is measured and which targets are being used. This point was raised in the first evaluation after phase 1 of ABI (Child, 2010), and perhaps is still an ongoing weakness. Other reasons listed for uncertainty of success is that ABI needs to be more diverse and inclusive, and enable greater traction in the landscape for pressing conservation issues.

There was general consensus on the methods ABI could consider to fund the initiative and are shown in Figure 6. Alternative options suggested by individual institutions (not listed in Figure 6 below) include exploration of carbon credits and profit-sharing mechanisms with the business sector.

The direction and role that ABI should take in future had numerous responses in the survey, which were captured and demonstrated in a word graphic (Figure 7). The general themes mentioned included; collective community response, capacity building, fundraising, management of alien species, working collectively with government and strategic planning.

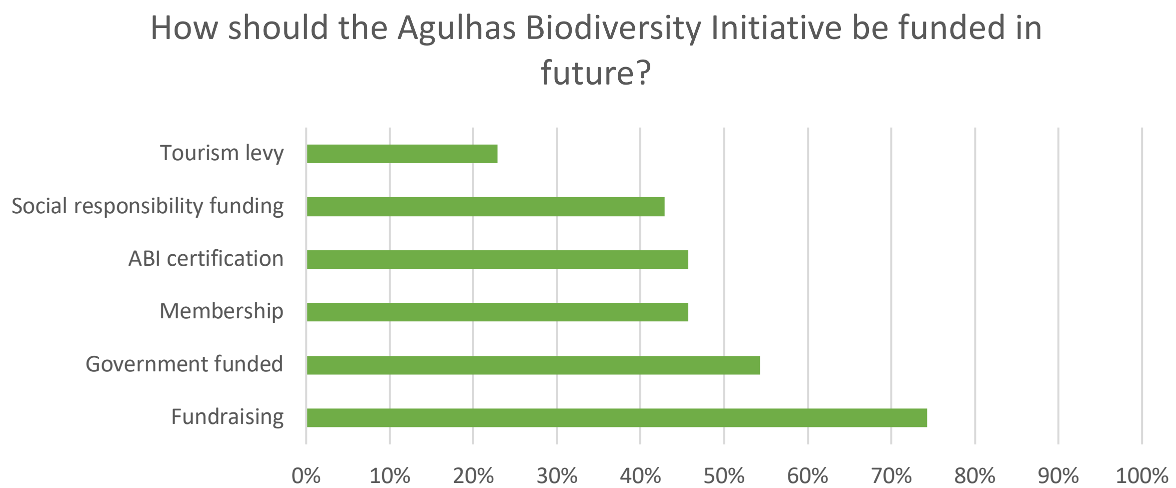


Figure 6: Recommended funding mechanisms for the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative suggested by the different institutions.

Figure 7: Responses of what institutions thought the future should be for the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative demonstrated in a word graphic. The larger the word the more frequently it was referenced in the survey by the participants.

Implications for ABI:

While ABI is well known among partners, given the years in existence and the ongoing communications taking place (including the building of personal relations via one-on-one communications), there is an opportunity to now tailor the renewed ABI to meet partner's needs and expectations better. More than that, communications can also be more diverse and inclusive in the future.

The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative needs to put steps in place to measure the impact of its new strategy, and to demonstrate that working collaboratively has a greater positive impact than individual effort. This will assist with fundraising and leveraging greater traction to address regional and urgent conservation concerns.

6.2 Business Responses

Businesses have a common understanding that ABI's role in the landscape is alien invasive clearing. Some businesses perceived ABI as a forum to assist landowners with land management and two mentioned biodiversity stewardship. Figure 8 shows that 32% of businesses had not heard of ABI before. There is a lack in common understanding within the green economy businesses about ABI's role in the landscape and its vision, compared to the participating institutions.

The majority of businesses involved in ABI worked as contractors in the alien invasive clearing project. There appears to be less inclusion of other green businesses into the collaborative ABI space compared to responses received by institutions, of which 90% have participated in ABI in some way (refer to Figure 5). This may be as a result of the survey's bias towards contractors in the ABI Alien Clearing Project.

When asked if businesses think ABI is a successful initiative the responses were varied (Figure 8). Alien clearing businesses mostly answered negatively or were uncertain. Businesses who perceived ABI's role in the context of biodiversity stewardship and land use management had more positive perceptions on the success of ABI.

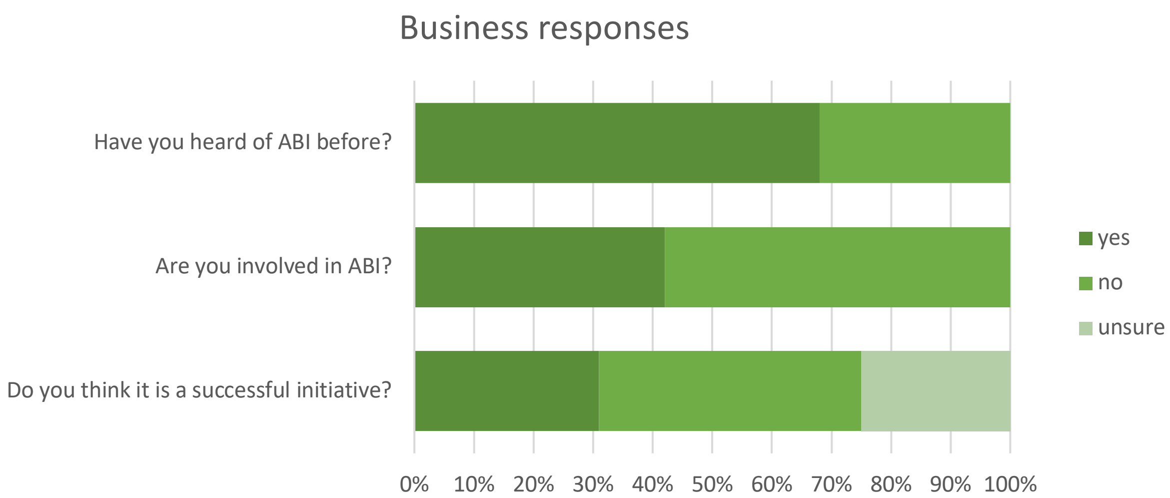


Figure 8: Businesses were asked what their role in ABI is and if it is a successful initiative.

Implications for ABI:
Should ABI continue with an ABI Alien Clearing Programme, it needs to be approached differently. Project branding should be stronger – not only at the start, but also as the project continues to ensure new teams also understand ABI, and the context in which they are working. It would be important to ensure branding between ABI and the implementing agent (should it be a separate organisation) is also clearly differentiated. But beyond that, ABI communications should be more inclusive of other green businesses (not only alien clearing) and how to support these appropriately.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 Institution Responses

Communication is considered an essential part of any organisation. Around 85% of institutions in the survey have a communication plan in place. This emphasises the necessity to have a strategy on how to communicate effectively and keep abreast with the increasing and changing media platforms. More than that, it also highlights the opportunities for ABI to connect with these instituional partners, by ensuring ABI is incorporated into their plans in a way that benefits both ABI and the organisation.

Social media – Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram in particular – are the preferred media platforms for insitutions to share their stories and to stay informed about news in their networks (Figure 9a). Although social media is the preferred platform for sharing and receiving information, when it comes to the ABI partnership most institutions receive information through email, newsletters, word-of-mouth and one-on-one meetings (Figure 9b). Only 17% are actively viewing ABI's social media platforms.

The use of emails and newsletters appears to be an effective means of sharing information within the ABI partnership, and there is a strong preference for this type of communication to continue in future (Figure 9b and 9c).

Informal dialogue between insitutions and with ABI is an important method of information sharing between institutions (Figure 9b). It furthermore indicates that people are regularly communicating with each other through informal networks. This could be considered a positive spin-off from the one-on-one engagements and group meetings held by ABI, resulting in the dialogue and information sharing to continue beyond the formal enagaments.

A consequence of sporadic donor funding for ABI is intermittent communication support.
This may be one reason why social media is not effective within the ABI network considering that it is usually a popular media platform (Figure 9a). The ABI social media platforms are not used as actively as it could be. As a result, word-of-mouth could travel faster than social media among these insitutions. Another reason is that the ABI partnership originated before social media, and the historic communication platform was informal dialogue, which has persisted as a way of sharing information in the ABI partnership. Institutions do value social media and there is a preference to have this form of communication ongoing (Figure 9c). None of the institutions prefer word-of-mouth as a method of communication. This is likely because word-of-mouth is an unreliable way to share information, and not because they dislike receiving information via informal dialogue.

The institutions gave feedback on the types of information they would like to know more about from ABI. Their responses are categorised into four groups namely; Resources; Partners Latest News and ABI-specific (Table 3). This table shows that institutional respondents would like ABI to provide a broader communications function that is not only ABI specific. In fact, their preference is that ABI communications supports their ability to run their business or organisation successfully (by providing them resources), and connects them with partners by sharing partner news. Institutions would also like ABI to be a source of news to them for example, news on job and training opportunities, and news on developments (such as Environmental Impact Assessments etc.)

There is a positive response and willingness for institutions to share their stories, events, photos and news on the ABI platforms. This indicates firstly that there is still a need for a collaborative communication platform,and secondly, there is willingness to contribute to such a platform.

Implications for ABI:
The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative should try to ensure a consistent social media presence. Once momentum is built up on social media platforms, it is detrimental to lose it – as ABI then also loses some of the opportunities associated with these platforms. Another recommendation is setting up a WhatsApp group for ABI members – or at the very least a broadcast group via WhatsApp – linked to information that partners would like to receive (see Table 3).

Emails and newsletters remain key communications tools for ABI, and must be customized to the information partners would like to receive. To start off with, all information could be shared with all audiences. However, over time, news tailored to specific audiences as per their interests will deepen knowledge sharing. The four tiers of interested participants developed as part of this survey will be a useful tool in future for targeted communication.

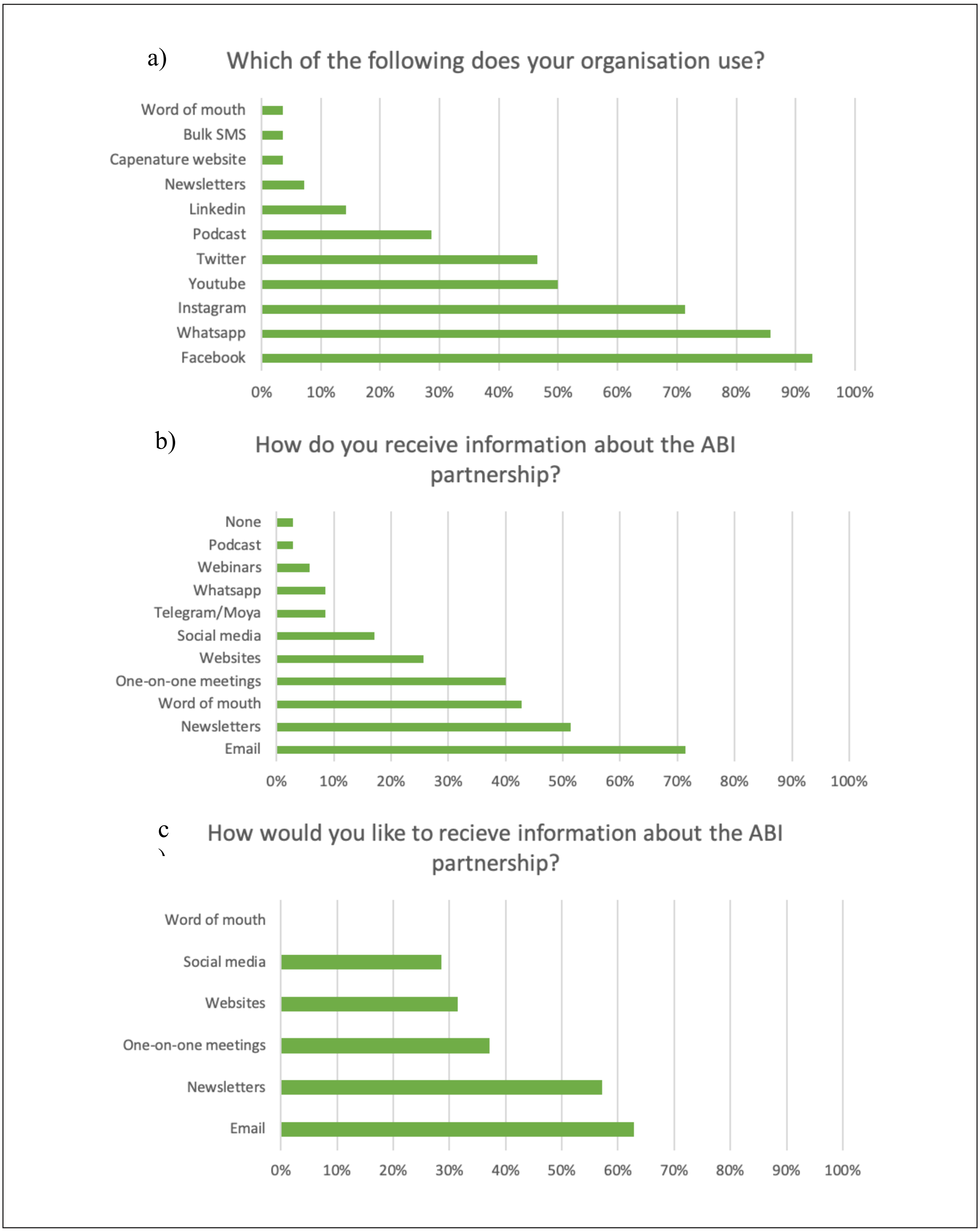


Figure 9: Responses from the institutions on how they communicate and receive communication from the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative.

Table 3: What do institutions want to hear more about from the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative?

Resources (to manage your business)	**Partner's news**	**Latest news**	**ABI-specific**
Easy to understand government policy and strategies	Know what different organisations are doing in the landscape	Capacity building opportunities	Where do we go from here for next 10 years of conservation in ABI
Information on water resource management	Get to know new initiatives and partners	Funding opportunities	Minutes of meetings
Latest legislation relevant to conservation	Stakeholder mapping	Assistance to clear alien species	
Advice to landowners		Controversial developments	

7.2 Business Responses

In contrast to institutions, small businesses are predominantly sourcing information locally (Figure 10a and Figure 11). Attending meetings, keeping personal networks and relying on friends and partners is considered the easiest sources of information for small businesses (Figure 10a). The reliance of businesses on verbal communication limits them to only have access to information within their personal networks. A plausible explanation could be that the green economy sector is relatively informal, and most opportunities are gained through personal networks.

However, this doesn't mean that businesses aren't using social media. On the contrary, Facebook and WhatsApp are extremely popular among this audience (92% of respondents use these, see Figure 10b), although Twitter, which is essentially a networking platform, is not popular among this audience. This use of social media is a lost opportunity for ABI. These small businesses could benefit from appropriate information that speaks directly to them on social media platforms. This in turn could link them into larger non-local networks – which could support business growth. In future surveys, we'd recommend adding the question: What digital platforms do businesses use to promote their services? The answers could guide ABI to help link small businesses to a broader audience and share non-local information back to the businesses. Another potential benefit is creating new market access – a challenge highlighted earlier in the document- through access to diverse communication platforms.

The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative could also make use of the media to share appropriate messages – with local and national newspapers, as well as local and national radio stations. This audience does not seem to receive news via online platforms (see Figure 11). Plausible reasons are a combination of expensive data costs, ability to access internet, and proficiency to use diverse digital platforms.

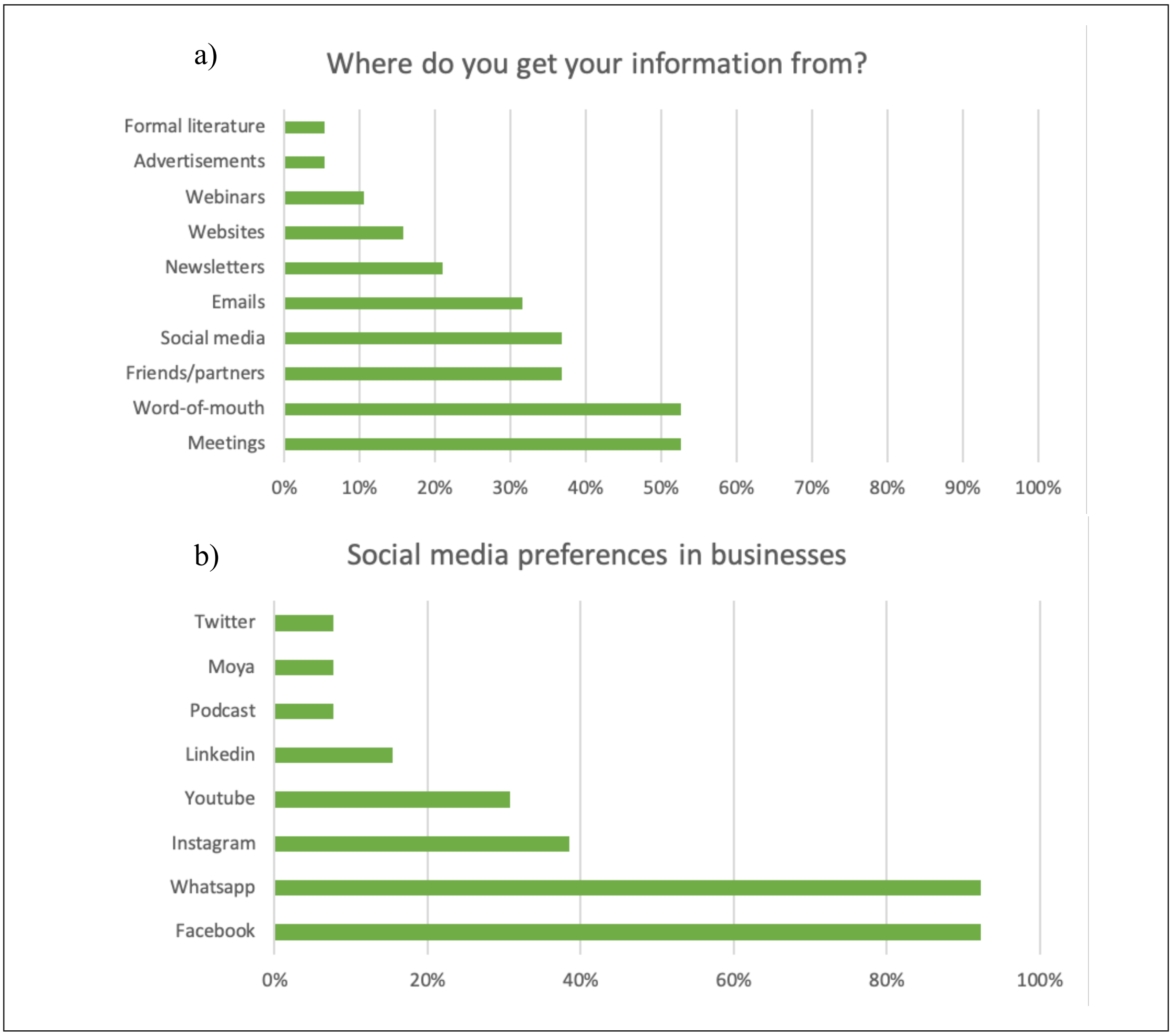
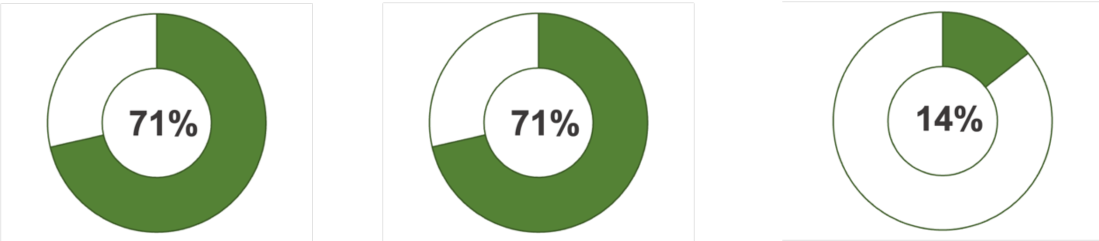


Figure 10: Response from businesses on how they source information and social media preferences.



Newspaper
Suidernuus
Hermanus Times
Die Burger
Sunday Times
Cape Times
Mail & Guardian
The Village Newspaper

Radio
KFM
Heart 104.9
Caledon FM
RSG
SAFM
Cape Talk
Radio 702
Radio 2000

Digital News
Google daily news
The Farmers Weekly newsletters

Figure 11: Businesses listed their preferred media for newspaper, radio or digital news, such as websites.

With regards to the type of information businesses would like to receive from ABI, they had similar interests to that of the institutions. These similarities fall within the categories of 'Resources' and 'Latest news', with minimal focus on 'Partner news' and ABI-specific information (Table 3). In fact, this audience is not particularly interested in receiving ABI-related news, and is likely influenced by their current partial understanding of what ABI does. Rather, businesses would prefer to receive information about jobs, business and market opportunities. Sharing these opportunities are perceived to have a more direct benefit to businesses.

What would businesses like to hear more about?

- Job opportunities
- Funding sources/initiatives
- Environmental news and awareness
- Markets
- Skills development opportunities
- Business opportunities
- Research
- Conservation projects to get involved with
- Opportunities for SMME support and collaboration
- Competitions

Implications for ABI:
Looking ahead, ABI's communications strategy should consider: Firstly, conveying information through businesses' preferred media platforms, which is different to the platforms ABI

currently has at its disposal; Secondly, provide a platform that can link businesses to non-local business; Thirdly, focus on providing key information to this audience quickly, with a focus on jobs, market and training opportunities. Lastly, an alternative to the above considerations or as an addition, enable businesses to develop their own communication plan and execute it with the different digital media in a cost-effective way.

8. RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE SURVEYS

The approach used in this survey to get feedback from the ABI participants was very successful – 48% response rate (57 responses of the approached 117 people) – and is recommended for future surveys as well. We suggest repeating this survey in three years' time, to see whether the gaps identified in this document are appropriately filled by ABI in the next phase, and identify new opportunities and threats that may be relevant to the region. This will allow for relevant information flow from the participants back to ABI.

In future surveys, we suggest adding additional questions to the business respondents about communications, for example:

- Do you have a communication or marketing plan?
- Does your business have a website, social media platforms or other visual displays of what you do?

Another suggestion is to use a different measure (more specific questions instead of categories) for diversity integration in the sector and include gender variables as well. The next phase of ABI will allow for greater formalization of the institutional structure moving away from the current implementing agent, Flower Valley Conservation Trust, to ABI's own independent organization. In this process, indicators of success need to be identified, and included in the next survey as appropriate. For example, how many new fundraising opportunities did you hear about through ABI, and if yes, were you successful? These specific questions will provide better measures of success for ABI's objectives.

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ADDENDUM 1: LIST OF QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE INSTITUTION SURVEY.

	Institution Survey Questions
	Timestamp (date and time)
	Do you wish to participate?
1	Name & Surname
2	Organisation
3	Position
4	Department
5	Email
6	Have you heard about ABI?
7	Are you involved in ABI?
8	If yes, how are you involved?
9	How many years has your organisation been in existence?
10	What is your structure or nature of business (NPO, NGO, Gov)?
11	What sector do you work in?
12	At what level do you operate?
13	How many people are employed (part- and full-time) by your organisation?
14	What are your two main sources of income?
15	What are your organisation's 3 main strengths?
16	What are your organisation's 3 main weaknesses?
17	What are the 3 main opportunities for your organisation?
18	What are 3 main threats to your organisation?
19	What are the main skills your organisation can offer SMMEs and the ABI Partnership?
20	Which skills are lacking in your organisation?
21	What percentage breakdown do you employ in each category? (Black, Coloured, Indian, White, Other)
22	What percentage of your organisation qualifies as youth (35 years and younger)?
23	What is the annual turn-over in your organisation?
24	In which municipal area do you operate?
25	What do you understand ABI to be?
26	Do you think it is a successful initiative?
27	Please give reasons for your answer.
28	How long have you been involved with ABI?
29	Has ABI been of benefit to your organisation?
30	Please explain.
31	Do you add value to the ABI partnership?
32	Please explain.
33	What role should ABI play in future?
34	How should ABI be funded in future?
35	Does your organisation run its own communication programme/plan?
36	Which of the following does your organisation use?
37	How do you receive information about the ABI partnership?
38	How would you like to receive info about the ABI partnership?
39	What information would be helpful for you to receive about the ABI partnership?
40	Would you be willing to share your news/events/photos/videos with the ABI partnership, via ABI platforms?

ADDENDUM 2: LIST OF QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE BUSINESS SURVEY.

	Small Business survey (SMMEs) questions
	Timestamp (date and time)
	Do you wish to participate?
1	Name & Surname
2	Organisation
3	Position
4	Email
5	What sector do you work in?
6	Are you the organisation owner?
7	How many years has your current organisation been operational?
8	Organisation Type
9	Municipal Area
10	How many people do you employ?
11	For how many months over the 12 months do you have work?
12	Do you think there is more work than all the organisations can manage?
13	How many people do you employ in each category (Black, Coloured, Indian, White, Other)
12	What percentage of the people in your organisation are under 35 years?
13	What is the annual turn-over in your business?
14	What are the 3 critical skills in your organisation?
15	What services does your organisation provide?
16	What is your main source of income?
17	If you could move into another sector, would you and why?
18	Are you part of any industry forum or represented on a board?
19	What are your organisation's three main strengths?
20	What are your organisation's three main weaknesses?
21	What are the 3 main opportunities for your organisation?
22	What are the 3 main threats to your organisation?
23	What are the current skills gap in your organisation?
24	Which of the following do you use?
27	What do you understand what ABI to be, please describe?
28	Do you think it is a successful initiative?
29	Have you heard of ABI before?
30	Are you involved in ABI?
31	If yes, how are you involved?
32	How do you get information related to your organisation (business opportunities, a change in laws, etc)?
33	What information/news/themes related to your organisation/business would you like to hear more about?
34	What newspaper, website and/or radio station do you read or listen to most days?
35	Any other comments or remarks?

ADDENDUM 3: ORGANISATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY

Participating organisations in the survey	
Institutions	**Small businesses**
Acorn Agri and Food (Previous Overberg Agri)	Bee Max Honey
Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI)	Black Thari Cleaning and Contractor Trading
Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency	Carstens Versatile Services
Camphill School	Cold Mountain Cooperative
CapeNature	Elim Opsienersraad
CapeNature	Flower picker and Alien clearer
CapeNature	Food 4 Thought Community Projects NPC
Cold Mountain Cooperative	James Mavusa
Department of Agriculture Western Cape (LandCare)	JM Enterprises
Dyer Island Conservation Trust	KLM Flowers
Farm 215 Private Nature Reserve	Louis Rohland
Flower Valley Conservation Trust	Mary Ahrends
Food 4 Thought NPC	MP Apollis Enterprises
Fynbos Trust	Organic Bunch Pty Ltd
Grootbos Foundation/ Private	Overberg Eco Rangers
Heilfontein Protea Farm	Pieters Flowers & Events PTY
Independent/Private Individuals	Robert Coller
Khoi Indigenous Nation Traditional Association	Southern Tip Thatchers
LoveGreen Communications	Stitch in Time
MAGIC	TERIT
Napier Mountain Conservancy	Van der Heyde Contractors
Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area	Weytile Welcome Zenani
Overberg District Municipality	Zizameleni primary coop
Overberg Eco Rangers NPO	
Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust	
Regenerative SPACE	
Sandberg Fynbos Reserve	
SANParks	
SAOSO	
Spanjaardskloof Inwoners Vereniging	
Vogelgat Nature Reserve	
Western Cape Department of Agriculture	
Whale Coast Conservation	