

Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative



The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) is a landscape initiative set up in 2003 under the overarching fynbos conservation and development programme, Cape Action for People and the Environment (C.A.P.E.). Through C.A.P.E., ABI received funding from the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme.

During the first phase (2003-2010, coordinated by SANParks), ABI became a successful multi-stakeholder partnership between 25 organisations involved in the management and use of the Agulhas Plain's natural assets: government, landowners, the private sector and conservation organisations. The ABI partners implemented a number of projects and programmes aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting economic development on the Agulhas Plain.

During Phase 1, ABI had four outputs:

1. A landscape-level conservation management and planning system was to be established by public-private partnerships negotiated by a well-capacitated extension service
2. Ecologically, socially and ethically sustainable harvesting of wild fynbos was to be demonstrated as a viable land use on the Agulhas Plain
3. A participatory and responsible tourism strategy was to be implemented in the Agulhas Plain, and was to contribute to sustainable livelihoods
4. Increased local support for biodiversity conservation in the Agulhas Plain was to be generated through a broad-based conservation awareness programme.

At the end of the Phase 1 period, in 2010, the United Nations Development Programme labeled the project 'Satisfactory' - with two of its outputs receiving the 'Highly Satisfactory' commendation.

During the first phase, ABI also enjoyed a number of major successes. Although too numerous to mention, here are some of ABI Phase 1's highlights:

- Nearly 50 percent of the Agulhas Plain is now under some form of conservation management
- The Agulhas National Park was established
- Off-reserve conservation proceeded very rapidly, with the development of a new conservation approach through the Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area - a collective landowner group marrying conservation with agriculture
- Around 2500 people were employed in the bio-experience economy
- Some 75,000 hectares of aliens were cleared
- Fynbos lands being harvested sustainably increased to 30,000 hectares, from zero before
- Big retailers opted for the ethically picked fynbos bouquets
- A responsible tourism strategy was developed
- Considerable progress was made in integrating conservation objectives into the mindsets and activities of municipalities, landusers and educators
- Conservation was integrated into 18 Eco-Schools and Junior Landcare and Kids in Parks camps, which supported more than 1000 individuals annually, while 17 teachers were trained in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sphere and qualified as ECD practitioners.

ABI's Second Phase

At the end of the first phase of ABI, it was decided to continue the landscape initiative, so as not to lose the valuable relationships and partnerships developed during the first eight years. ABI then evolved into a voluntary association, that serves as the conservation coordination hub of the Overberg region of South Africa. Today ABI remains the meeting place for those involved in, or interested in, conserving this biodiversity hotspot. From private

landowners, to government departments, to conservation organisations - ABI serves as their meeting point, where key conservation issues are tackled. ABI is currently coordinated by Flower Valley Conservation Trust.

ABI has five tasks, known as the 5c's:

1. To convene interested and affected parties to develop a strategy for cooperation to influence land-use and development planning, as well as to develop an integrated development plan for the ABI area.
2. To collate good quality information and data; analyse, communicate and use this data so that it can be utilised as a basis for planning and monitoring of initiatives.
3. To facilitate communications between all parties with a particular focus on engaging local municipalities in the delivery of services that mainstream biodiversity and natural resource conservation.
4. To conceptualise projects and initiatives by supporting partners in the identification of gaps and opportunities, including research, which guide and prioritise conservation action and projects.
5. To raise the cash for and secure investment in priority activities and projects, including sourcing sustainable finance through innovative mechanisms and projects.

ABI works with four main themes:

1. Integrated land-use planning (including controlling invasive alien plants)
2. Viable nature-based, responsible tourism
3. Environmental education
4. Transitioning to a Green Economy

ABI also directly supports two major projects: The ABI Alien Clearing Project; and the ABI Small Grants Programme.

For more information, visit: www.agulhasbiodiversity.co.za

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