



ABS Collaboration and Support Initiative

Enhancing capacities and overcoming barriers to Access and Benefit-Sharing permitting procedures for selected Small, Medium, and Micro-Enterprises (SMME).

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), the Southern African Essential Oil Producers' Association (SAEOPA) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) under the BioInnovation Africa project (BIA) are partnering on the **Access Benefit-Sharing Collaboration and Support Initiative** (the Initiative) to enhance capacity and address barriers to the ABS permitting procedures to selected SMMEs. In

particular, the Initiative aims to support SAEOPA members who are essential oil or vegetable seed oil producers with their applications under the new DFFE ABS online permitting system. This is an important step towards implementing the Essential Oil Sector Development Plan which identifies compliance with national and international regulations including the Bioprospecting, Access and Benefit-Sharing permit system as one of its key objectives and development areas.

1. CONTEXT

The South African Government through the DFFE is party to the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS). Thus the DFFE has the responsibility to provide legal certainty and ensure that the country's indigenous biological resources are managed responsibly both for its people and the environment. A key part of the work of the DFFE in this area is focused on operating a biotrade and bioprospecting permitting system. These permits ensure that the South African government fulfils its international responsibilities and that businesses working with the biodiversity of South Africa in the biotrade, and bioprospecting sectors eventually will share benefits according to legal requirements.

In 2022, the DFFE collaborated with GIZ-BIA to implement an ABS "handholding" project. As part of the project eight biotrade businesses were supported and guided in their permit application process.

This project had very positive results including:

- 1) clarification of issues related to biotrade and bioprospecting permit applications,
- 2) consolidation of documents, templates and forms related to biotrade and bioprospecting applications,
- 3) the development of a set of ABS Business Guides covering *inter alia* the above,
- 4) strengthening the relationships between the DFFE and the participating businesses and
- 5) supporting wider knowledge sharing and peer learning in the sector.

Despite these successes, businesses highlighted that further action is required to streamline the biotrade and bioprospecting permit application process. In response, the DFFE identified the need to adapt the permitting system with the aim of improving the efficiency of the system. To date, this led to the creation of an online platform for permit applications.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE ABS COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT INITIATIVE

The aim of the Initiative is to support 17 selected SMMEs who are members of SAEOPA and work with the priority species as identified by GIZ-BIA and the DFFE to:

- enhance the capacity of selected SMMEs in the essential and vegetable/seed oils producing sector to navigate the new DFFE ABS online permitting system through direct technical support and training
- leverage ABS expertise to strengthen SAEOPA capabilities on ABS permitting processes to support other members and future entrants in the essential or vegetable/seed oils production sector
- provide a platform for selected SMMEs to share experiences and solutions on improvements to the permit process and the online platform
- document the results of the initiative and generate recommendations for the DFFE on improvements to the system beyond the Initiative
- exchange insights and experiences with other business support organizations, including ABS Complaint Bio-Trade in South(ern) Africa supported associations that are implementing species-specific development plans, to better assist their members



Day 1 of SMME Training
9 – 10 April 2024

3. ACTIVITIES

The Initiative adopts a multipronged approach which includes:

- SMME training and education sessions: Two training sessions, each with a particular focus.
- Direct technical support: Individualized assistance for participating SMMEs with applications through the new DFFE ABS online permitting system.
- Knowledge transfer and exchange with the sector association on ABS procedures to support continuous learning beyond the Initiative.
- Documentation and analysis: Identification of areas for improvement in the online application process.
- Dissemination of lessons learned and experiences to other biotrade/bioprospecting sectors, their associations and business support organisations.



SMME representatives navigating the online permitting system.

4. EMERGING RESULTS AND LESSONS

Notably the Initiative is still underway and will conclude in November 2024, below is a summary of developments up to July 2024



EMERGING RESULTS:

- 1 SMME successfully applied to renew their permit using the online system, the renewed permit has already been issued to the applicant.
- 2 SMMEs submitted permit applications using the online system.
- 2 SMMEs submitted their permit applications in hard copy.
- 2 SMMEs are among the participants who have been applying for a permit since 2018.



EMERGING LESSONS:

- Proactive engagement between government and industry during the permit application process is crucial as it creates shared responsibility towards compliance – we are not alone, we are together in ensuring ease of compliance and maintaining momentum in the process.
- Creation of a separate cell phone messenger group supported eased communication and engagement amongst SMMEs and those parties responsible for the support of the SMMEs.
- SMMEs highly value less formal and structured spaces to engage, discuss and share experiences – allow for this to happen during the training sessions and other events where SMMEs are together.
- SMMEs communicated that once their application is submitted, they feel empowered to respond and support other SMMEs.
- Combining the trainings with individualised support is key to best prepare the participants for the permit application.
- The need to optimise the online system for language and use on mobile devices was identified.
- Direct engagement between the DFFE and the SMMEs creates a future opportunity to clarify the regulatory landscape of the DFFE in relation to compliance on the one side and the role of the enforcement unit on the other side.
- Maintain the option and support for SMMEs to also submit in physical application.

5. WHAT'S NEXT?

- Engagement with SMMEs to gain insight and feedback on their experience with the online permitting system and analysis of the information received.
- Presentation and sharing of lessons and experiences with other associations and sector development plan implementers.
- Development of a project report with recommended actions for implementation beyond the Initiative.



Group photo of representatives from participating SMMEs, the DFFE, SAEOPA and GIZ-BA

ABOUT THE ABS ONLINE APPLICATION PROCESS

The ABS online permitting system is an exciting development that not only makes it easier for businesses to apply, but also for the DFFE to review and engage with permit applications. Businesses are able to track the progress of their applications in real time and will stay up to date on the status of the permit and importantly what is expected of them in the process. Another valua-

ble functionality of the platform also enables the DFFE to post links to supporting documentation and tools directly where users will need it – making information and guidance so much more accessible. The DFFE encourages all businesses in the biotrade sector to make the shift to this system to support a more streamlined permit application process.

Acessing the online permitting system

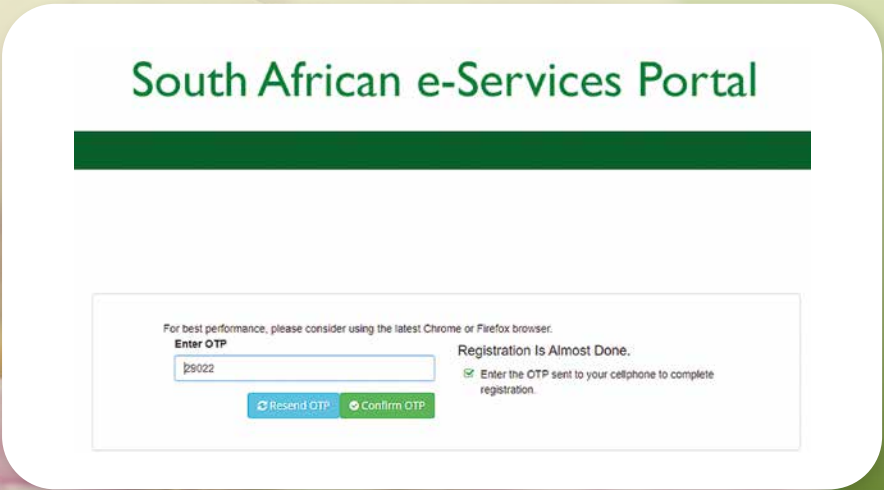
1.

Register on this website:
<https://www.eservices.gov.za/>



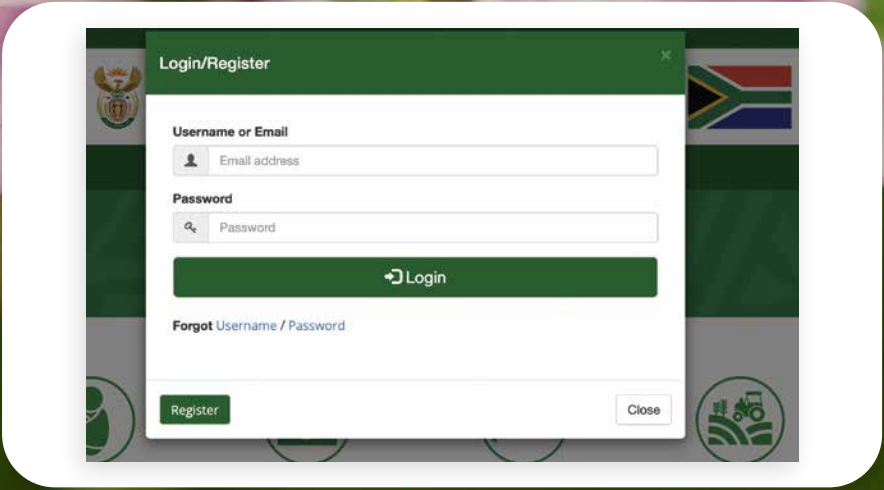
2.

You will receive a onetime pin on your email or cellphone. Use this to complete your registration



3.

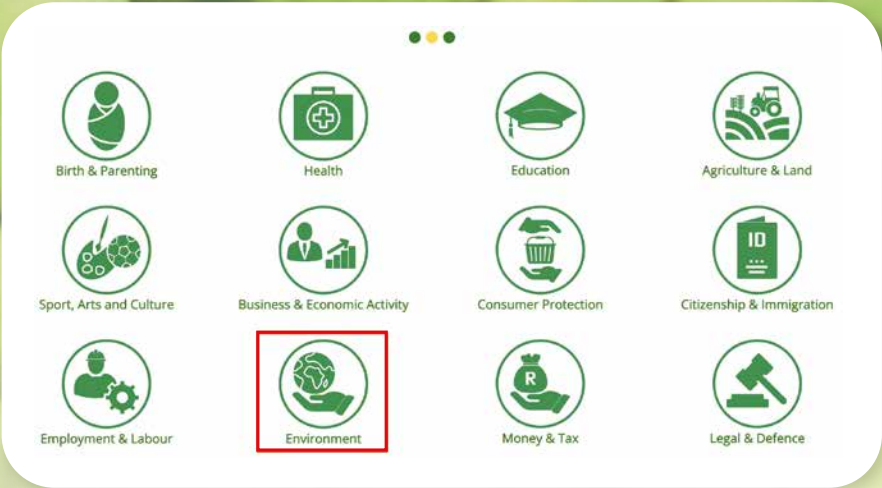
Return to <https://www.eservices.gov.za/> click on login/register, enter your email and password, login



Accessing
the online
permitting system

4.

Choose Environment



5.

Choose Department of
Forestry, Fisheries and
the Environment



6.

You will reach this screen.
Select New Application,
thereafter BABS. Fill in the
information and click submit
only at the end of application



TOOLS AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS ON ABS

SIX STEP GUIDE FOR BUSINESS ON ABS:

Phase 1 of SMME support on ABS permitting procedures resulted in the development of six practical guides which provides a shared understanding of how businesses can engage with ABS. The ABS business guide is a useful orientation and explanation tool for the completion of the online permitting system.

DECISION TREE

To assist both national and international researchers working with South African indigenous biological resources to become ABS compliant an ABS Decision Tree was developed with the support of South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). While the initial purpose of this tool was to guide researchers, it will be equally valuable to businesses/SMMs in the biotrade sector and will be shared and promoted in this context by the DFFE and GIZ BIA.

BENEFIT-SHARING FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE GUIDE

Successfully linking Conservation and Sustainable Use (CSU) with ABS has long been a challenge at the international level with very few successful examples and limited guidance. GIZ and the DFFE supported the development of the “*Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Access and Benefit-Sharing approaches in South Africa*” (BS4CSU Guide) in collaboration with SANBI which is a globally outstanding and truly groundbreaking contribution for regulators, users and providers in this field.



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