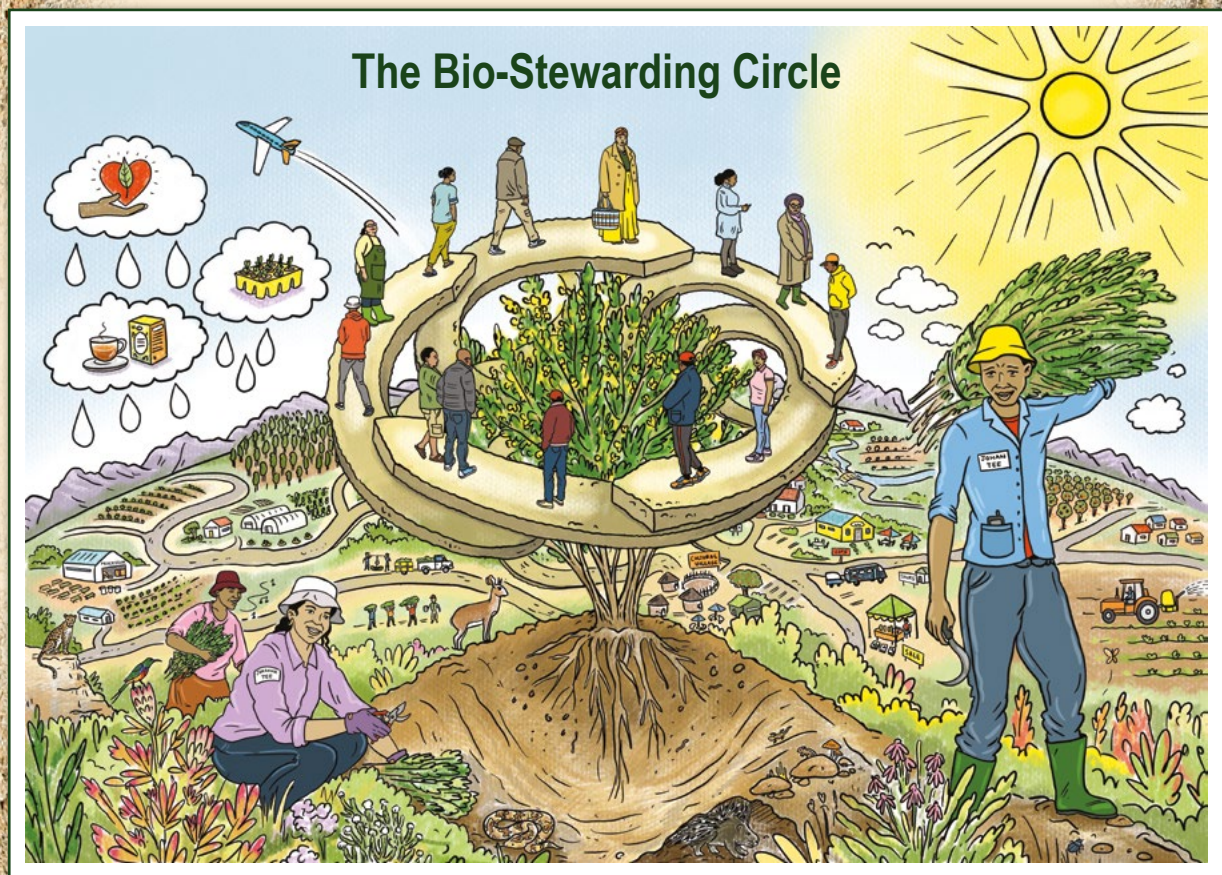


# Wild Harvesters at the Heart of Honeybush



Wild Harvester Collaboration  
2025



This document is part of a series of knowledge products produced by the BioInnovation Africa (BIA) project in South Africa. Other BIA knowledge products and biotrade resources can be found on the joint website of BIA, ABioSA and the ABS Capacity Development Initiative: <https://www.abs-biotrade.info/partner-countries/south-africa/resources/>

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Participants gave their informed consent for photographs to be taken and shared, and for their likenesses to be rendered as artistic illustrations included in this document.

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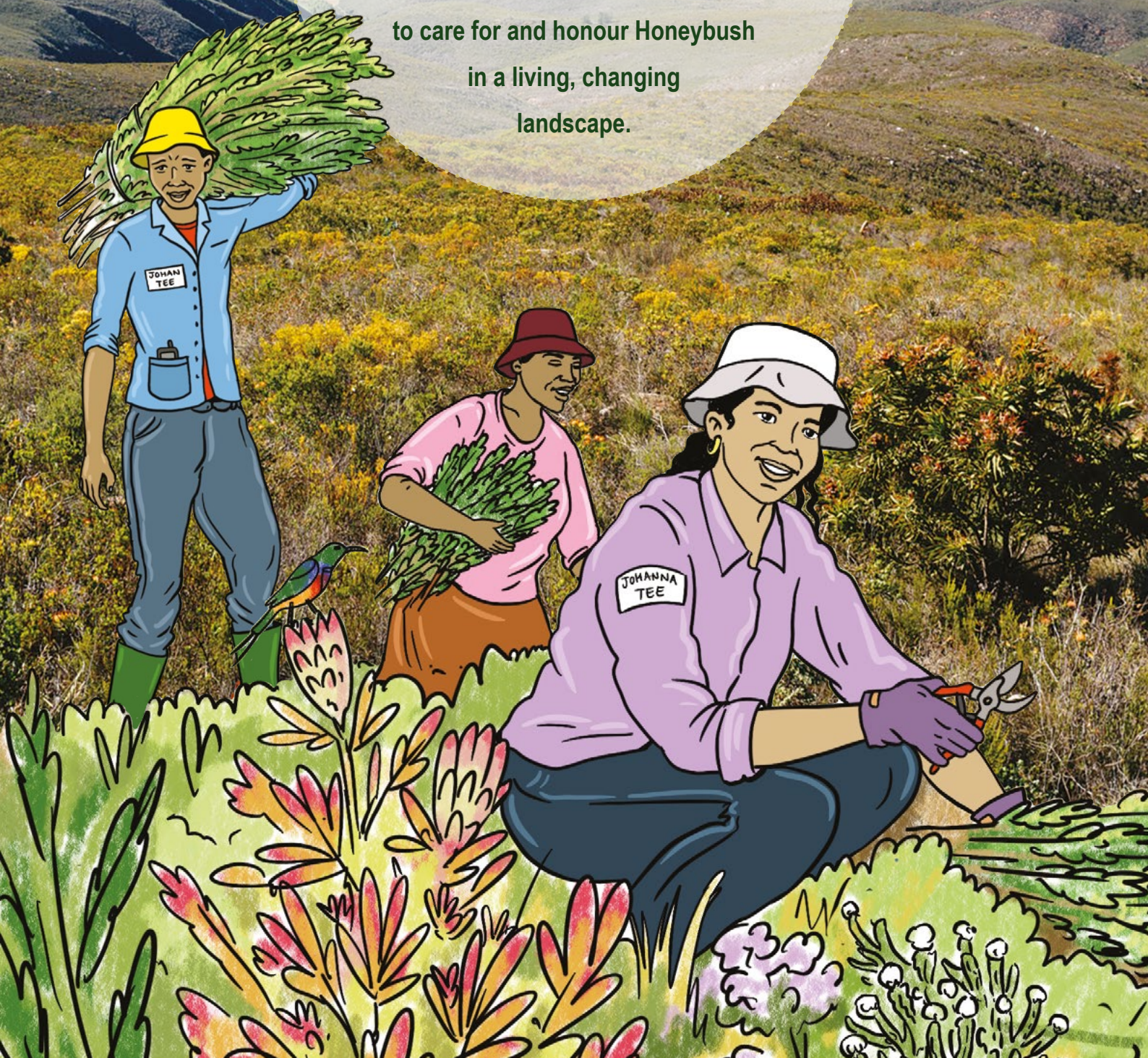
Photograph of hand holding honeybush: Brett Eloff

Afrikaans translation: Magdaleen Du Toit



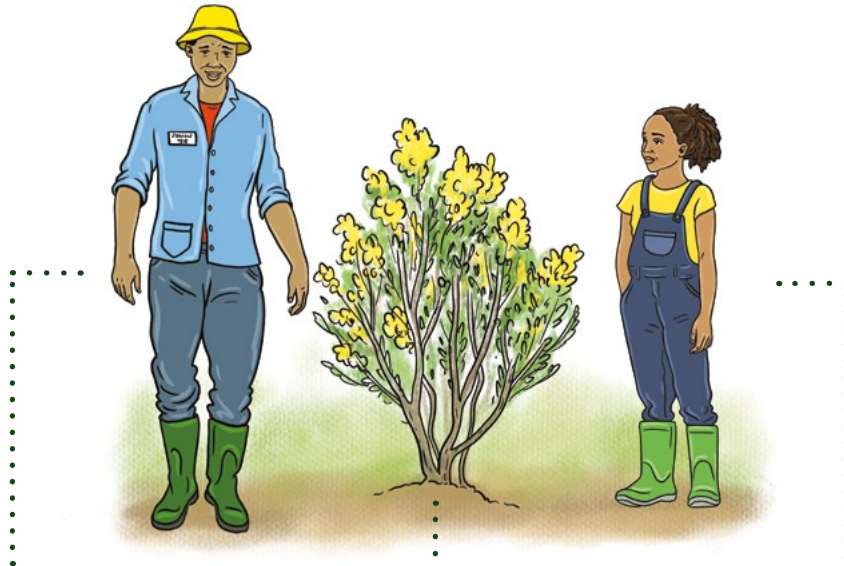
The following storyline has  
been informed by Wild Harvesters and  
others supporting the sustainable harvesting  
of Honeybush.

Through the eyes of Wild Harvesters and those  
walking alongside them, this document invites  
a deeper reckoning with what it means  
to care for and honour Honeybush  
in a living, changing  
landscape.





The characters depicted in this booklet include:



The wild harvester, “**Johan Tee**,” reveals what is important to people who are doing wild harvesting of Honeybush.

The **Honeybush plant** (*Cyclopia*) speaks on behalf of nature, its needs and its potential.

The **young girl** represents those of us who wish to know more about Honeybush and what it means for the benefit of all.

Being a wild harvester is challenging work and important work. It requires a lot of skill which is vital as a seasonal income source for families living in the area and to protect the wild environment.

What makes Honeybush so important to you?

For one thing, it has been the tradition of many generations of people who lived on this land and it is unique to South Africa.

People have enjoyed it as a delicious tea and many have found it to have health benefits.

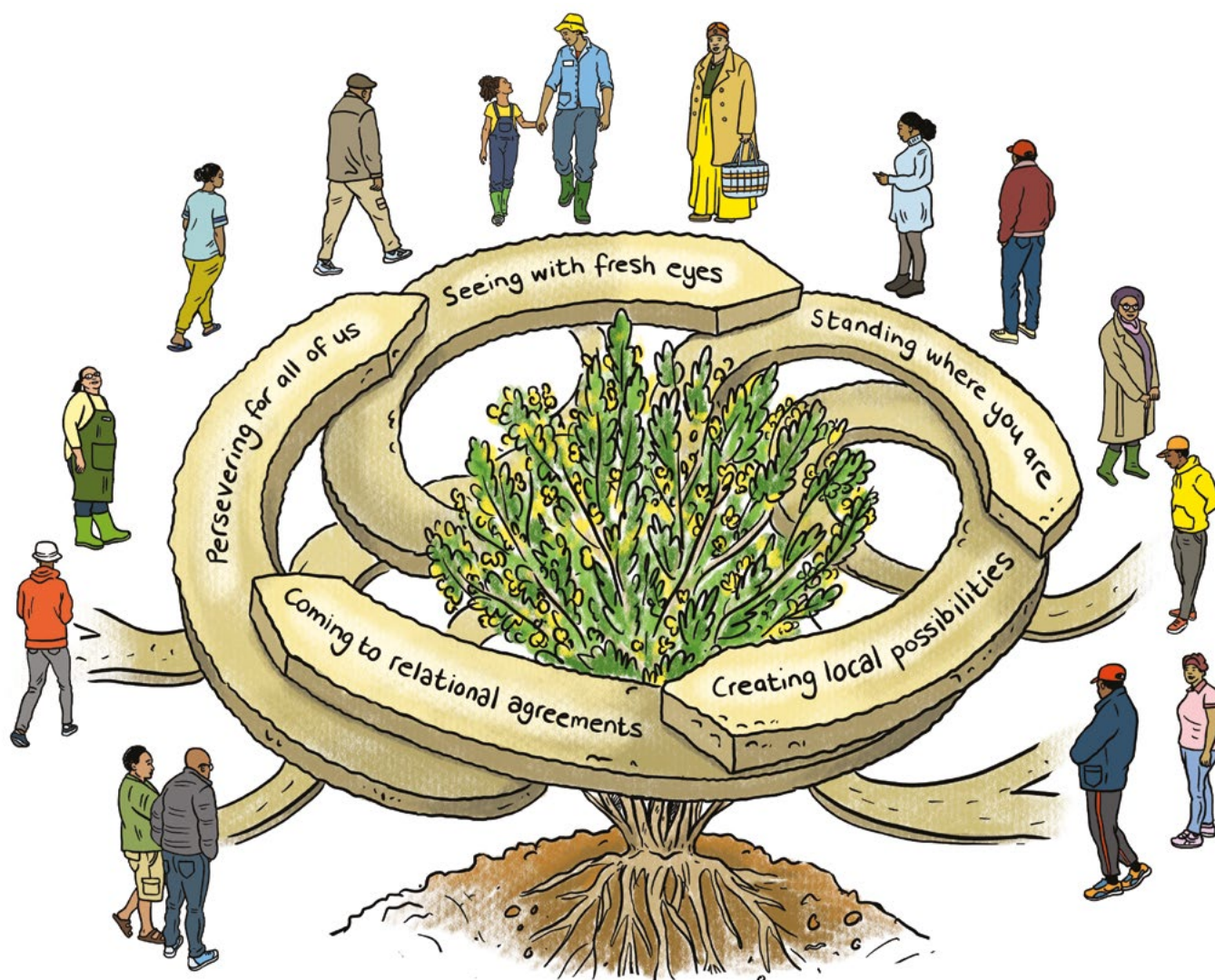
For wild harvesters, we have a special feeling of pride for the beauty of this plant and its bright yellow flowers.

I am considered endangered. Without proper tending, I won't survive.





These are a few guide posts supporting people working in Honeybush, nurturing what matters within the local Honeybush communities, and caring for the Honeybush ecosystem.



## The Bio-Stewarding Circle



The **Bio-Stewarding Circle** is a shared space for finding our way together.

It is built on the understanding that we are shaped by our relationships:

- with each other,
- with the land,
- and with the plants we depend on.

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# 1. Seeing with fresh eyes

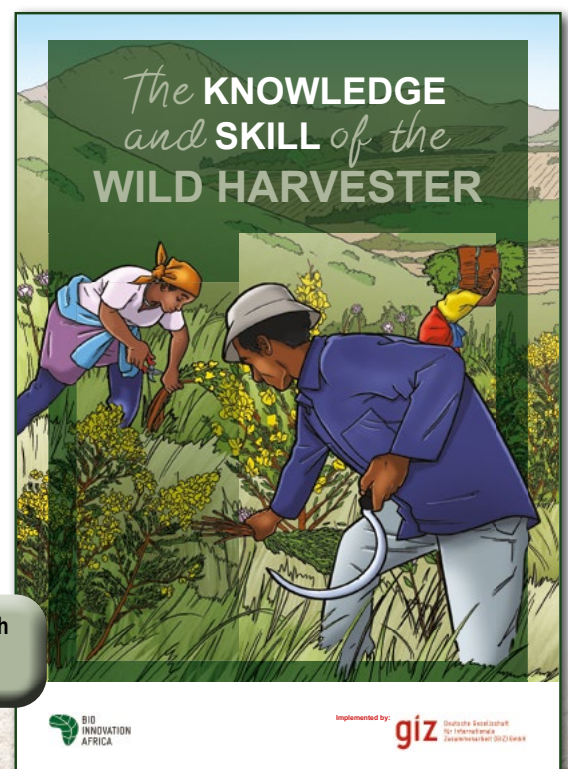
The Bio-Stewarding Circle

It is time to think about what is possible beyond simply selling bundles of wild harvested Honeybush.

What do you mean by that?

Well, we could sell natural tea locally, we could help farmers with clearing invasive species, and we could partner with scientists and conservationists to teach others how best to harvest in the wild.

I think I will thrive if traditional and local ecological knowledge, and scientific research join together.



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## 2. Standing where you are

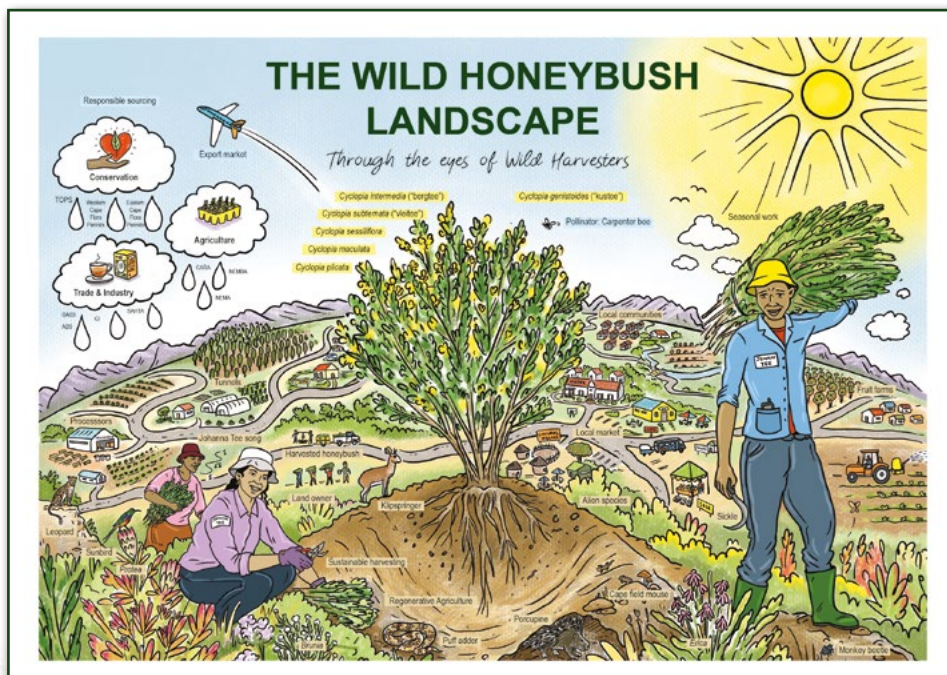
### The Bio-Stewarding Circle

There are many aspects to Honeybush – it is the plant species (23 in all), it is the people and it is the laws. And it is also how we imagine possibilities. These aspects all relate to one another.

This feels big and somewhat overwhelming, how do I find my way?

A good place to start is to visualise the bigger picture and look at what interests you most and speaks to your needs. There are different sources of information depending on what you are interested in. It is good to find out more.

It nice to be popular.



The Wild Honeybush Landscape invites conversations that support sharing perspectives and visioning.



Download in English and Afrikaans





### 3. Creating local possibilities

#### The Bio-Stewarding Circle

You know in this area there are so many bed and breakfasts for tourists.

Are you thinking that there is an opportunity there?

Yes, I think it is worth exploring. Tourists like to have experiences that they can't get any place else.

Perhaps we can share with them the beauty of the Honeybush Landscape and why it is worth preserving.

This means we would need to approach people in this industry as well as other industries and do something that is out of our comfort zone.

There is more to me than people know. So don't be afraid to think in new ways.



#### What Shapes the Price of Honeybush?

Exploring relationships, responsibilities, and real costs behind each harvest

To understand what shapes the price of Honeybush requires knowledge of the many factors affecting the journey of Honeybush all the way from its environment of origin through to the decisions of the consumer of the final product. It is a long and complex journey, and it helps if all stakeholders in the value chain understand the issues affecting these different parts of the value chain. This tool can support a more transparent and trusting relationship between these stakeholders and enable possibilities for optimised valuation of Honeybush, including where there are opportunities for better prices and associated terms and conditions of business. Cyril Leuchow - Abidul Aziz







The Bio-Stewarding Circle

## 4. Coming to relational agreements

A lot of people are doing a lot of different things related to the Honeybush plant. It is time for us to think about how all of these things and people relate to one another.

How do you do that?

It is about learning how to talk to others and looking at the details together. It is also about managing expectations and avoiding misunderstandings that can be hurtful and expensive. To strengthen how we work together and avoid heartache there is such a thing called Relational Agreements.

Don't forget me when you are making an agreement.



### How to Create a RELATIONAL AGREEMENT

Between:  
*Supplier and Buyer*

Good working relationships take care—especially when people are forming new partnerships or working together over time. In the Honeybush sector, much of the work happens through trust and informal agreements. This agreement is a practical tool to support those relationships—to make expectations visible, clarify roles, and create space for open conversation. It was developed through the Wild Harvester Collaboration to help harvesters, buyers, landowners and others talk through what matters, what each person will do, and how to handle changes or challenges in a fair way.

**What is a relational agreement?**  
A transactional agreement is for one specific exchange. For example, when you buy a car or sell a property.  
A relational agreement is for an agreement that goes over a longer period of time. It is written knowing that time will have an impact on some of the promises made and some of the conditions might need to be changed later on.

**Why is a relational agreement valuable?**  
It works because you can manage the expectations of both parties in the relationship at the beginning. You admit that to have a successful long-term relationship, you need to write down ways to keep the relationship on track. So you define together:

- What is the purpose?
- What is success?
- What worries us about this relationship?
- What can we do so that we don't disappoint each other?
- If problems do come up and they will, how can we solve them in a realistic way?

Based on: The Book of Agreements: 10 Essential Elements for Getting the Results You Want by Stewart Levine

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## 5. Persevering for all of us ...

... Including Future Generations

Imagine a world without wild harvesters.

What would that look like?

The implications are many and they are significant. Just a few are:

- We would lose the on-the-ground stewards, noticing pests, disease outbreaks, or poaching.
- We would lose overall plant and animal biodiversity.
- We would lose the connection between local communities and conservation agencies.

We need each other.





The page is framed by numerous colorful illustrations of diverse individuals of various ages and ethnicities. Some are wearing outdoor gear like hats and jackets, while others are in casual clothing. They are depicted in various poses, some looking towards the center text, others looking away, creating a sense of a community gathered around a shared topic.

## Acknowledgements

There's a lot that matters when it comes to harvesting Honeybush in a way that keeps it going for the future. What you've been reading shares the thoughts and feelings of Wild Harvesters themselves.

We sat together with Wild Harvesters and listened to what's important to them. We also spoke to conservationists, researchers, and people who understand the Honeybush trade.

Our last gathering brought all these voices together—to support Wild Harvesters, to keep Honeybush strong for the next generation, and to show just how important this work is.

Wild Harvesters from Misgund, Haarlem, Oudtshoorn, Tsitsikamma, and George were part of this.





## The Path Appears as you Walk

(Set in the Langkloof, South Africa)

The sun is already high as the harvester climbs the mountain slopes of the Langkloof. The heat presses down, the earth dry beneath their boots. There is no easy road here – only steep paths, loose stones, and the sharp scent of fynbos in the air.

The bergtee grows where it chooses, not in neat rows but in the wild, clinging to the mountainside. The harvester knows where to find it, not because of signs or maps, but because their body remembers. They have walked these hills before. They know the way the land speaks – how the plants hide in the shadow of rocks, how the wind shifts when a storm is coming, how the scent of honeybush thickens when the leaves are ready to be cut.

The sun burns. The sweat drips. The hands work. Some days, the branches cut easily, smooth under the shears. Other days, the plants are stubborn, twisting, resisting. The harvester does not rush.

There is no shortcut in this work – only patience, rhythm, and knowing when to stop and take a breath. Far below, the valley stretches wide, dry and golden. The mountains stand firm, as they always have. The harvester wipes their brow, adjusts the weight of the bundle on their back and moves forward. The way is not always easy. But step by step, it is found.

By Monika Adelfang-Ramsden  
Wild harvester Collaboration 2025  
Friends of Honeybush