

# 26<sup>th</sup> Biotrade Stakeholders' Forum

Meeting Minutes (11 November 2025 | Fire & Ice, Menlyn)

## 1. Welcome & Opening Reflection

The Forum opened with reflective stories about its original intent and how it has evolved since the first meeting in October 2018. What began as a coordination space for programme and project activities has gradually grown into a broader ecology of actors —increasingly shaped by affinity and peer-learning. The origin story shared at the meeting acknowledges the Forum's contribution over the years and is especially valuable context for newcomers. Refer to **Annex 1** for the full story, from a GQSP-SA perspective, by Elsie Meintjies.

As this was the final meeting of the year, the agenda held a reflective quality — looking back at what has unfolded and sensing into possible directions ahead. Inputs were offered on relevant sector topics as well as ideas for strengthening the Forum's ongoing development. Given the strong SMME representation at this meeting, future topic-gathering would benefit from BSOs participation and other ecosystem partners, ensuring a broader mix of perspectives. This will help balance the themes that surfaced during the session (see Section 3) and informs next steps (Section 4).



*The king protea, SA's national flower, was used as a metaphor for the Forum — with its layered petals and strong centre symbolising how resilience grows through many forms of support.*

## 2. What We're Tending To: A Shared Reflection

Participants recognised that the work held by this network is complex. To surface this, a broad question was offered: **"What are you tending to?"** This is a warm-data prompt — a way of listening that pays attention to relationships and context. Warm data invites us to notice how experiences connect across people, places, pressures, and possibilities. Rather than collapsing responses into tidy categories, it helps us see the nuance and interconnection present in the system. A short video clip by Nora Bateson was played to introduce the concept. (Short video link: <https://batesoninstitute.org/2018/09/12/nora-bateson-on-warm-data/>)

In small groups, participants shared what they are tending to in their current work. These reflections are captured in the minutes as Signals — early indicators of where energy, concern, care, or possibility is gathering in the system. A signal is simply something in the conversation that points to a pattern and communicates — a concern, a care, a focus, a constraint or a possibility. It does not offer a solution or a judgement; it keeps us close to peoples lived experience and to what is taking shape. The final column in the table below describes what the signal is communicating, without interpreting or analysing it on behalf of participants.

## Signals Table: What stakeholders are tending to

Small group responses	What People Are Tending To	Where This Shows Up	Type of Signal
<b>1. Conditions of the System</b>	Change, pressure, uncertainty, balance	End-of-year intensity	Existing system pressures and shifts in conditions
<b>2. Care for the Resource</b>	Passion, protection, preservation, consistency	Plants, IP, generational stewardship	Persistent patterns linked to identity, continuity, and custodianship
<b>3. Relational Work</b>	Collaboration, reflection, co-operation, connection	Many of the SMEs have an interest to use Castor oil and Cassava; access to permits	Patterns of coordination, connection, and shared activity
<b>4. Working Across Different context or perspective</b>	Synergy, values, balance, creativity, complexity	Different organisations, diverse languages and contexts, shared challenges	Patterns of interaction across boundaries, languages, or contexts
<b>5. Seeking Understanding</b>	Curiosity, wanting information, ambition, seeking support	Land returning to origins; access to land; financing	Signals of information gaps, learning needs, or emerging questions
<b>6. Practical Realities &amp; Constraints</b>	Wisdom, partnership, assistance, training needs, climate factors	Farming systems; cost, distance, weather	Constraints and enablers shaping current possibilities
<b>7. Opportunity Orientation</b>	Innovation, collaboration, value addition, market access	Whole-plant processing; pricing	Early signs of potential pathways or areas of emerging possibility

### 3. Different Types of Challenges Showing Up

The topics raised by participants span **clear, complicated, complex and not-yet-knowable issues**<sup>1</sup>, which means the Forum cannot rely on a single programme or solution pathway. Instead, the three annual meetings can act as sense-making opportunities that clarify what is known, explore what needs expertise, and surface emerging patterns. Light, low-cost touchpoints and small safe-to-try actions can keep learning alive between gatherings. This

<sup>1</sup> Snowden & Boone (2007), Harvard Business Review [A Leader's Framework for Decision Making](#)

approach works with the reality of the system and supports practical next steps without over-engineering the Forum's role.

Discussions highlighted four recurring themes currently present in the sector:

1. **BABS Permits/compliance:** Ongoing need for support, accessible and practical guidance.
2. **Focused SMME Support:** Early-stage enterprises require contextualised support.
3. **Funding & Beneficiation:** Strong interest in financing pathways linked to value addition.
4. **Promoting South Africa's Offering:** A need for a stronger outward-facing narrative to position biodiversity, Indigenous knowledge, research and development and SMME innovation.

The small group responses also revealed that participants are working with different types of challenges. Some were clear and process-driven — compliance steps, permit navigation, and practical training needs. Others were complicated, requiring specialist coordination and analysis, such as export readiness, and beneficiation. Many fell into the complex space, reflecting interdependent pressures like the rising cost of doing business, sustainability and succession, market access, funding navigation, and the relationships between SMMEs, regulators, academia and communities.

A few issues sat on the edge of chaos, where sudden cost spikes, regulatory uncertainty or climate shocks create instability. And some invited more reflection — how Biotrade is understood in South Africa, how traditional and commercial knowledge systems meet, and what meaningful support looks like in different contexts.

Treating these responses differently helps the Forum work with the reality of the system rather than forcing everything into one type of solution or topic. See **Annex 2** for the full list of contributions and their grouping into clear/obvious, complicated, complex, chaotic and not-yet-knowable categories.

#### 4. Meeting & Hosting Practices

Participants reviewed a set of good meeting practices and selected those they felt would best serve the Forum going forward. These practices will be tried out in upcoming meetings, with ABioSA and GQSP-SA both hosting or supporting the sessions as the network learns what works well. Each meeting host is encouraged to weave some of these practices into the design, allowing the Forum to keep evolving its way of working.

The selected practices emphasise participation, reflection and shared hosting:

- Pairing inputs with time for reflection, questions or response.
- Beginning with lived examples to ground conversations in real experience.
- Allowing multiple ways of contributing — speaking, writing, or offering a single word in the chat.
- Creating intentional space for quieter voices.
- Sharing back lightly, with one insight rather than full summaries.
- Offering panellists a small set of questions to choose from, with optional pre-submitted questions.
- Rotating hosts and using “micro-hosting moments” to distribute leadership.



- Keeping introductions warm and human, and adding simple online inclusivity touches (names, chat, visibility).

A fuller description of these practices is provided in **Annex 3**.

## 6. Next Steps

The next Forum is scheduled for 3 **March 2026 (online)**.

23 June 2026

19 October 2026

Potential focus areas include:

1. BABS regulation navigation
2. Market access
3. Early-stage financing
4. Strengthening South Africa's Biotrade narrative

As this meeting had a strong SMME presence, participants are encouraged to help broaden the perspectives by encouraging more BSOs to contribute to shaping the agenda. In the new year, a Google Form will be circulated where members can:

- build on the four focus areas by offering specific details or by contributing through a short presentation, joining a panel, or suggesting another form of input;
- indicate if there is a different or vital topic that should be added for consideration.

Members may also volunteer as hosts or co-hosts for segments of future meetings, supported by ABioSA and GQSP. Please let us know if you would like to grow into a co-hosting role.

Nnana Elizabeth Makhubu and Princess Sakhe from the Mabhoko Royal Kingdom have already volunteered to co-host the next online meeting together with GQSP-SA and ABioSA, supporting broader participation and co-creation of the agenda.

Sharon Bolel, Executive Director of SAAFFI, also highlighted that SAAFFI will be hosting a conference on the 19 March event at the GIBS Conference Centre, Illovo, Johannesburg and encouraged Forum members to attend and participate.

## Annex 1: The Biotrade Stakeholders' Forum by Elsie Meintjies

The journey of the Biotrade Stakeholders' Forum began on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2018. Since the humble beginning of the first meeting, today marks the occasion of the 26th meeting.

The purpose of the first meeting was so that stakeholders could get a clear understanding of what the ABioSA and the GQSP-SA projects are all about and lay down the foundations for us to get an understanding of other projects supporting the biotrade sector. The intention was for participants to identify areas of collaboration, cooperation or coordination between different initiatives. We saw signs of growth emerging.

Since then, the meso-landscape of stakeholders supporting the Biotrade sector has been mapped. We continued to identify new stakeholders and broaden the knowledge base and expand the potential for collaboration, cooperation and coordination at every meeting.

Initially the participants attending the meetings were from the public sector and from projects funded by international cooperation partners. More recently, we expanded our outreach to the private sector, who have been included in the invitation and, of course, the themes of the meetings adapted accordingly – we cultivated new ideas. This has led to a rich and diversified network of institutions supporting the Biotrade sector—each one a vital part, further fuelling and strengthening our roots.

Given the regular interaction between the members, I am of the view that because we are all aware of the different projects, each of us can assist MSMEs – who are full of life, hope and potential, in growing taller and stronger by reducing their searching costs as we can guide them – with fresh perspectives -to the right institution, the right project and the right contact person.

Besides the support for MSMEs, there have been many instances where participants have indicated that they would like to explore further opportunities for working together. This no doubt can result in enhanced innovation, joint problem-solving, increased efficiency and resource sharing - all to the benefit of the biotrade sector.

The chairing of the meetings on a rotating basis has required quite a bit of collaboration, cooperation and coordination from both projects – above all, it has required commitment. It has been an enriching experience working with so many different themes and presenters. as each theme reflected on a current trend. The Biotrade Stakeholders' Forum is a diversified network of institutions and enterprises supporting the biotrade sector. It has been described as both an Affinity Network and a Peer-Learning Network

This forum reaches over organizational or physical boundaries, ranks or social status.

We express appreciation to those presenters who shared so freely of their expertise and experience.

I brought with me a king protea, the SA national flower. This flower is a powerful flower that beautifully symbolizes the story of growth, resilience, and adapting to diverse environments.

Allow me to close with a quote from Henry Ford:

"Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success." — Henry Ford



May we have fruitful discussions today and looking forward to a new chapter during 2026.

## Annex 2: Types of Issues Raised by Participants

Main	Description	Topics Raised by Participants
CLEAR / OBVIOUS	Areas with known rules, clear steps, or established processes. Improvements relate to access, clarity, or consistency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal &amp; trade compliance support for SMMEs</li> <li>BABS permits</li> <li>Regulatory approval steps</li> <li>SMMEs supported in compliance</li> <li>Soil/general management</li> <li>Soil health with Indigenous farmers</li> <li>Production know-how (training)</li> <li>How to access funding (procedural steps)</li> <li>How to access local markets (retail entry steps)</li> <li>Value-chain support functions</li> <li>Retail network exploration (initial engagements)</li> </ul>
COMPLICATED	Areas requiring expertise, coordination or analysis. Multiple options exist but can be planned for.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Import replacement</li> <li>More companies in export markets</li> <li>Matching funding with sector needs</li> <li>Beneficiation</li> <li>BIOPANZA connection</li> <li>Focused SMME support packages</li> <li>Evidence base for policy</li> <li>Improved extension support / localised resources</li> </ul>
COMPLEX	Areas with many interdependencies and diverse experiences. No single solution: patterns emerge through conversation and experimentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced cost of doing business (systemic pressure)</li> <li>Sustainability &amp; succession</li> <li>Indigenous knowledge systems – recognition</li> <li>Mapping production knowledge along the value chain</li> <li>Peer-to-peer learning exchange</li> <li>Capacity constraints across the system</li> <li>What helps SMMEs enter markets</li> <li>Navigating funding opportunities (beyond the procedural steps)</li> <li>Cooperative support</li> <li>Biotrade as evolving practice and narrative</li> <li>Relationships between SMMEs, regulators, support organisations, communities &amp; markets</li> </ul>
CHAOTIC EDGE	Areas experienced as unstable or unpredictable; require stabilising actions or quick responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sudden spikes in input costs (fuel, electricity, logistics)</li> <li>Regulatory uncertainty when rules vary or shift</li> </ul>
NOT-YET-KNOWABLE	Areas requiring reflection, multiple perspectives and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biotrade as a South African identity and narrative</li> <li>Relationship between traditional knowledge, value addition &amp; commercial pathways</li> </ul>



	<p>slower inquiry rather than quick solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What “meaningful support” looks like across contexts</li> <li>• What succession and sustainability look like in each community or enterprise</li> </ul>
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## Annex 3: Good Meeting Practices suggested by Participants

These practices reflect good meeting practices. and offer a shared way of holding future Forum gatherings — whether online or in person (when funding allows). They support participation, reflection, and a sense of being held by the wider network rather than a single facilitator.

### 1. Meeting Practices

These approaches help keep discussions grounded in real experience and accessible to everyone:

- **No presentations without discussion.** Every input is paired with time for reflection, response, or questions.
- **Begin with a lived example.** Starting with a real story before sharing slides helps locate the topic in people’s actual context.
- **Multiple ways of contributing.** People can speak, listen, write, or add one word in the chat — all forms of participation count.
- **Make space for quieter voices.** Include written reflections, chat responses, or small-group moments that allow different forms of expression.
- **Share back lightly.** Instead of long summaries, invite one insight that stood out.

### 2. Panel Conversations

Panel moments can help deepen the system’s learning when handled with care:

- **Offer 2–3 questions at once** and let panelists choose the ones they feel equipped to respond to.
- **Invite questions beforehand** when possible, so panelists can offer grounded, experience-based contributions.

### 3. Hosting the Forum

Here “hosting” refers to how the meeting is held — not physical venues. Given budget realities, online sessions will remain the core format, with occasional in-person gatherings when funding makes them possible.

The following hosting practices help distribute leadership and keep the Forum relational:

- **Rotating Hosts.** Hosting shifts each session so the Forum is held by many voices, reflecting the diversity of the network.
- **Warm, human introductions.** Keep opening moments natural, light, and welcoming rather than formal.
- **Micro-hosting moments.** People can host a small part (e.g., welcome back from break, introduce a speaker, offer a guiding question, close the session) without running the whole meeting.
- **Online inclusivity touches.** Call participants by name, monitor the chat, check sound/visibility, and invite quieter voices in.



- **Hosting open to everyone.** Anyone can volunteer to host — it's not a specialist role, though some preparation helps.
- **Co-hosting.** Two people hosting together eases pressure and brings in different perspectives.

Annex 4: Attendance register

See Attached separately

Annex 5: Action Plan

1. ABioSA and GQSP will prepare a guideline to indicate what shared host, and co-host entails and be shared with the Biotrade Stakeholder Forum