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FYNBOS VEGETATION IN THE CEDERBERG WILDERNESS CONSERVANCY IN SOUTH AFRICA

ABS AS AN INCENTIVE FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM BUSINESS EXPERIENCES ON THE GROUND?

Fair and equitable sharing of benefits is one of the three, inherently interconnected objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Studies show that, in practice, rules and arrangements on access and benefit sharing (ABS) are not as directly linked to positive impact on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

What is this document?

This document explores what are some of the concrete challenges of ABS as a tool for biodiversity, from the perspective of businesses negotiating permits and agreements on the ground, in the context of the BioInnovation Africa (BIA) Project implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and beyond.

It also looks at some of the ways in which ABS implementation could address some of these challenges, particularly in the context of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. This document is based on interviews and discussions with BIA project partners and other companies involved in ABS negotiations and agreements in African and other countries.

Growing levels of awareness

ABS has been instrumental in raising business awareness on biodiversity. Businesses explain how questions and concerns on evolving rules on ABS have triggered internal discussions on the importance of biodiversity as a source of innovation and inspiration. Efforts to assess the potential relevance of ABS rules have promoted greater transparency and traceability in value chains. ABS principles have also led to increased recognition of biodiversity-related dependencies and potential impacts and improved practices in supply chains for natural raw materials. Yet ABS rules or agreements are not considered an effective tool, in themselves, to advance biodiversity conservation or sustainable use.

Compliance versus engagement?

There are many reasons ABS “does not work” as a tool for biodiversity, not least the priority for businesses, which for ABS is legal compliance. There are now 245 ABS legal, policy or administrative measures published in the ABS Clearing House. Identifying which of these rules may apply and adhering to compliance for relevant research, product development, procurement, and other operations – as well as those of direct and indirect suppliers – is paramount. Priorities are established based on risks and customer demands. Consideration of opportunities to contribute to local livelihoods and efforts for biodiversity is necessarily limited, at least in the initial stages.