Ethical Consumerism in South Africa

Reflections on Stakeholder Interviews & Focus Groups with Western Cape Consumers
Outline

- The Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) scoping study
- Rise of ethical consumerism in South Africa: context, initiatives & trends
- Ethical perspectives of Western Cape consumers
  - Everyday routines and ethics of consuming
  - Responses to ‘Fairtrade’, ‘Proudly South African’ and ‘SASSI’ labels
- Developing markets for sustainably harvested fynbos bouquets
  - Consumer knowledge of fynbos
  - Consumer understandings of sustainable wildflower harvesting
- Developing ethical markets & promoting sustainable consumption in South Africa: challenges ahead
The Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) scoping study

- 21 interviews with key Western Cape institutions working on sustainable consumption and ethical markets
  - Companies (‘ethical pioneers’, retailers & restaurants), NGOs, consultancy firms, auditors, ethical trade multi-stakeholder organisations & industry associations

- 10 focus groups in and around Cape Town
  - Covering wide demographic and conducted in Cape Town (4), Cloetesville, Hermanus, Bredasdorp, Croydon & Elim (2) (with range of ‘middle class’ consumers)

- Aim: to identify the ways in which ethical markets and sustainable consumption are developing in South Africa, with reference to the Western Cape and sustainably harvested wildflowers
Rise of ethical consumerism in South Africa: context, initiatives & trends

- Increasing South-South trade, ‘rising powers’ (BRICS) & globalizing middle classes
- Changing LSM 7-10 group in South Africa
- Rise of *ethical* consumerism
- Sustainability & ethics: environmental and social issues (labour, support for small business)
- Ethical pioneers (e.g. Fair Cape Eco-fresh Milk) & mainstreaming ethics through corporate retailers
- Increasing success of schemes, initiatives and labels (3 examples)
  - Fairtrade (220% sales increase in 2012)
  - Proudly South African (from 1998 campaign to widely recognised ‘buy local’ label supporting jobs)
  - SASSI (South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative) from 2004
Ethical perspectives of Western Cape consumers

- Everyday routines and ‘ordinary ethics’ of consuming
  - Use of different retailers by each consumer (Woolworths & Pick’n’Pay most associated with sustainability)
  - Thrift & quality
  - Convenience/time
  - Shopping as work
  - Care & lifestyle
Ethical perspectives of Western Cape consumers: what counts as ethical...?
Ethical perspectives of Western Cape consumers

- What counts as ethical?
  - Ethics of meat
  - Provenance, supporting South African producers & workers
  - Support for the small producer/seller (social issues)
  - Health issues
  - Waste reduction & recycling
  - Environmental protection

- Influences on ethical decisions
  - Companies and NGOs
  - Labels & logos (can be helpful & overwhelming)
  - Media influences (including increasingly social media)
  - Care & guilt
  - Family/household influences and ongoing negotiations
Ethical perspectives of Western Cape consumers

- **Fairtrade:**
  - awareness variable (highest among urban high-income consumers & activists)
  - appetite for more knowledge & purchasing opportunities

- **SASSI:**
  - awareness greatest with urban and higher-income groups
  - lowest amongst lower income migrant workers & rural groups
  - value in opening up questions
  - practical tool

- **Proudly South African:**
  - awareness very high across social groups
  - less detailed knowledge in lower income groups
  - widespread support, though variable levels of purchasing in practice
  - association with resistance to Chinese imports
  - decision to buy based on considerations of price
Developing markets for sustainably harvested fynbos bouquets: consumer knowledge of fynbos
Consumer knowledge of fynbos

- Mountains, wildflowers, association with hiking
- Symbol of national identity (but strongest with those from Western Cape)
- Tourism
- Influential media - TV, literature, adverts, education (e.g. school and citizenship education programmes)
- Memories & family influences (Adderley St market)
- Funerals & death (for particular social groups)
- Historical knowledge of illegal harvesting
Developing markets for sustainably harvested fynbos bouquets

- Low level of awareness beyond individuals with connection to Kirstenbosch & environmental programmes
- Debate on sustainability label engendering trust or critical questioning (based on historical knowledge of harvesting)
- Support for purchasing sustainably harvested flowers, especially when linked to social issues
- Ethical credentials of retailers (corporations/small traders) matter when purchasing flowers
Developing ethical markets & promoting sustainable consumption in South Africa: challenges ahead (issues identified by interviewees)

**Evolving sustainability codes & programmes**
- Changing drivers (investors, media attention, economic context)
- Environmental/social balance
- Prioritisation of issues and programmes of work
- Making codes & standards locally-relevant to consumers

**Embedding and mainstreaming sustainability in organisational practice**
- Networked & global learning
- Forging effective partnerships (e.g. corporate/civil society)
- Mainstreaming through retail (and other) channels

**Communicating sustainability to consumers & developing markets**
- Reputational risk management & brand-building
- Effective awareness-raising (including use of social media)
- Fostering consumer trust
- Price sensitivity (costs for companies, civil society organisations and consumers)
Questions for breakout groups

- How do we balance ‘global’ initiatives and standards for sustainability and fairness with locally-relevant forms of ethical consumption?

- How is trust most effectively built with consumers of sustainable products (e.g. through labels, brands, information etc.)?

- What are the most effective ways of communicating ethical messages and information to consumers? (What works? What does not work?)