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Biodiversity management principles: a cross-sector comparison of South African companies

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2017

http://hdl.handle.net/10539/23571

Kristiansen, Guro Hagen (2017) Biodiversity management principles: a cross-sector comparison of South African companies, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/23571>

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Abstract

The interaction between business and biodiversity has seen growing importance in corporate management; impacting policy, practices and strategy. This study examines South African companies' assimilation of recommended biodiversity management practices, as communicated through their annual reporting and official websites. A selection of nine South African companies in the forestry, sugar and mining sectors were studied with regards to their reporting on biodiversity management practices. The research aimed to understand the extent of structured approach to biodiversity management, and explore potential sectorial differences.

The study found a wide acceptance of the UN Global Compact Principles, the GRI reporting guidelines and the King Code of good governance principles. However, the companies did not demonstrate a consistent governance structure for biodiversity management. The study revealed one mining company with a stronger biodiversity governance structure making the use of various dedicated policies and standards. Furthermore, the study identified few sector specific differences. Though the forestry sector demonstrated good practice with its emphasis on biodiversity in its supply chain management.

The study did not reveal a particular uptake of emerging biodiversity concepts such as No Net Loss, payment for ecosystem services or agroforestry, however the companies had adopted several sustainability and governance recommendations and standards. The study did not identify the existence, nor the use, of dedicated biodiversity certification programmes or South African developed cross-sector biodiversity certification programmes.

The finance sector is in a good position to positively influence corporate biodiversity management practices. However, the study results give an impression that there is untapped potential in the finance sector to further drive the biodiversity management agenda in South Africa.

Keywords: Corporate Biodiversity Management, Biodiversity Management Framework, Biodiversity Best Practices,