

Impact case study (REF3)

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| Institution: Coventry University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 17 Business and Management Studies | | |
| Title of case study: Promoting the value of sustainable practices in global cut-flower supply chains | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 – 2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Dr David Bek | Reader in Sustainable Economies | 2015 - present |
| Dr Jill Timms | Associate Head of School for Research | 2015 - present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No. | | |

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

The cut-flower sector generates annual revenues of \$55 billion globally. However, the industry has been associated with high carbon and water footprints and poor labour practices within its international supply chains. The research of Bek and Timms evaluated how certification and standards could help cut-flower producers, wholesalers, retailers, governments, and representative groups to embed holistic sustainability policies and practices within supply chains. This research has **raised awareness of sustainability issues** in the international cut-flower industry; **changed industry sustainability standards**, certifications and practices globally; and **influenced government policy** in the UK, EU and Africa.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Since 2015, Dr Jill Timms and Dr David Bek at Coventry University have investigated how stakeholders in the cut-flower industry can move from a narrow, environment only definition of sustainable supply chains, towards a more holistic approach that balances 'People, Planet and Profit' in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Developing the case for holistic sustainability practices

Research led by Bek and Timms (2015 to 2018) in South Africa and the UK sought to raise awareness of, and understand the benefits of, sustainability practices within the operations of elite producers, processors and retailers, including Tesco, Woolworths, Haygrove, United Exports and Kromco (R3, R6, G3). These benefits were identified through a series of key informant interviews with corporate level retail managers, farm managers, training providers, sustainability consultants, auditors and standards bodies; and an evaluation of quantitative sustainability data collected via site inspections. The analysis established that improving sustainability practices helped to meet consumer demands for more sustainably produced goods and reduce operational costs (R3). However, the research identified that many business managers had a narrow understanding of sustainability and needed more robust training; and that the implementation of sustainability standards and certifications in businesses required improvement (R6). Drawing upon the research findings, Bek (R3) proposed the implementation of an Improvement Cycle Model which links research, training and improved sustainability outcomes.

Embedding certifications and standards in the cut-flower industry

From 2016 to 2020, the research evaluated different stakeholders' knowledge of sustainability standards and certifications in local and global cut-flower supply chains (R1, R4, R6, G2). Key informant interviews and focus groups were undertaken with: retailers, producers and industry representative bodies, including the British Florist Association (BFA) and Flowers from the Farm (FFTF), to ascertain their respective perspectives. This research revealed an imperative for sustainable practices to be better embedded throughout cut-flower supply chains. The research identified that UK consumer demand for 'Green/Eco/Ethical' flowers was increasing, but there was no robust system to provide information about the sustainability credentials of cut-flowers by/to wholesalers, florists and therefore consumers (R4). Furthermore, the

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research concluded that existing certifications only provided snapshots of compliance, but did not promote a culture of continuous improvement in practices (R4).

Promoting sustainability in wild flower harvesting markets

From 2015, Bek investigated the factors that affected the long term economic and environmental sustainability of the wild cut-flower industry in South Africa (SA) (R2, R3, R5, G1). Longitudinal analysis of import/export data, visits to all nodes of the supply chain, interviews and focus groups with retailers, exporters, importers, packsheds, harvesters and informal flower sellers, were used to examine these factors. The work identified that weak regulation by the State conservation agency had led to hotspots of unsustainable practices and that more robust data collection by Cape Flora SA was required to align it with other SA horticultural export industries (R3, R5, R6). The research concluded that the natural wild flower resource base would be damaged, and market share would be lost, unless practices within the industry became more joined up and sustainable (R5).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Hughes, A., McEwan, C. and Bek, D. (2015) 'Postcolonial perspectives on global production networks: insights from Flower Valley in South Africa'. *Environment and Planning A* 4 (2), 249-266. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1068/a130083p>. **Winner of Ashby Prize 'most innovative papers' in Environment and Planning A Journal 2016. Announcement of the prize in November 2016 vol. 48, no. 11 2103-2107.**

R2. Bek, D., Binns, T., Blokker, T., McEwan, C. and Hughes, A. (2017) 'A high road to sustainability? Wildflower harvesting, ethical trade and social upgrading in South Africa's Western Cape'. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17 (3), 459-479. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12149>.

R3. Bek, D. and O'Grady, K. (2018) *The Scale, Structure and Sustainability of the wild fynbos harvesting supply chain in the Cape Floral Kingdom - research project final report to Table Mountain Fund (WWF-SA)*. South Africa: Flower Valley Conservation Trust, pp. 1-100. Available from <https://www.flowervalley.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TMF-Research-Report-Final.16nov2018.pdf> [24 February 2021].

R4. Timms, J. and Bek, D. (2019) 'Corporate social responsibility and private employment regulation: A challenge to precarity and inequality in neo-colonial supply chains?' in *British Sociology Association Annual Conference*. held 24–26 April 2019, Glasgow Caledonian University, UK. Available from <https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/publications/corporate-social-responsibility-and-private-employment-regulation> [24 February 2021].

R5. Privett, S., Bek, D., Bailey, R., Binns, T., Raimondo, D., Kirkwood, D., and Euston-Brown, D. (2020) 'Conservation in the context of wildflower harvesting: the development and implementation of a Vulnerability Index on the Agulhas Plain of South Africa'. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 63 (10), 1738-1757. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2019.1687428>.

R6. Bek, D. and Timms, J. (2017) 'Making governance work for sustainable cut-flower value chains' in *Development Studies Association Conference*. held 6-8 September 2017, University of Bradford, UK. Available from <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/dsa2017/paper/39580> [24 February 2020].

Grants

G1. Bek, D. (PI) (2015 to 2018) *Investigating the Structure of South Africa's fynbos industry*. WWF-SA: Table Mountain Fund. Total grant amount: £33,000.00.

G2. Timms, J. (PI) (2016 to 2019) *Promoting Ethical Flowers for Improving Working Conditions in Supply Chains*. British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust: Small Grants Scheme. Total grant amount: £9,940.00.

G3. Bek, D. (PI) (2016 to 2019) *Sustainable Practices Make Sustainable Businesses*. Tesco International Services, WWF-SA and the Wine Industry Ethical Trade Association. Total grant amount: £15,000.00, funding to Coventry University: £10,000.00.

G4. Bek, D. (PI) and Timms, J. (CoI) (2020 to 2021) *Sustainable Wild Harvest Products*. IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative, Netherlands: Fresh and Ingredients Program. Total grant amount: €89,427.00 (£80,868.84), funding to Coventry University: €36,000.00 (£32,554.80).

G5. Bek, D. (PI) and Timms, J. (PI) (2020 to 2021) *Creating Resilience and Sustainability in Flower Supply Chains*. Department for International Development UK: COVID-19 Vulnerable Supply Chains Facility (VSCF). Total grant amount: £291,000.00, funding to Coventry University: £16,000.00.

Awards

A1. Bek, D., Timms, J. and Lanari, N. (2019) *Awarded Highly Commended in the National Green Gown Awards, 'Research with Impact' category for the Sustainable Cut-Flowers project*. National Green Gown Awards 2019. Available from https://www.sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk/green_gown_awards_2019_coventry_university_fina [24 February 2021].

The quality of the research is conveyed through publication in peer-reviewed academic journals and conference papers and competitively awarded research grants.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Bek and Timms' research has raised awareness of sustainability issues in the international cut-flower industry; changed industry sustainability standards, certifications and practices globally; and influenced government policy in the UK, EU and Africa.

Raising awareness of sustainability issues

"This project has completely changed our thinking as an organisation. If it were not for the project, sustainability would not be on our agenda" Chair, British Florist Association (S2).

Their collaboration in the research raised awareness of sustainability practices amongst BFA members and placed sustainability at the top of the BFA's priorities (R4, S2). A guide for florists was co-created by Bek and Timms with the BFA, providing information about sustainability challenges, solutions and certifications (S1). Launched at BFA Fleurex 2019, hardcopies were delivered to 3,000+ BFA florists (S3). It is freely downloadable on the project website (S2), is promoted by the Sustainable Floristry Network (Australia), and Asociación Española de Floristas (BFA's Spanish equivalent) have permission to translate and share it. A second launch at the FFTF 2020 Conference raised awareness among their 800 members (S4). As a direct result of the research, sustainability is a priority for FFTF and the research team are now piloting a Sustainable Cut-flower Standard with FFTF members (S2).

Using the research, Bek and Timms' are supporting the BFA in promoting sustainability at a grass roots level by incorporating it within national floristry qualification curricula (S3). In South Africa, an e-learning training course in holistic sustainability practices in horticulture, integrating the Improvement Cycle Model, has been developed and successfully rolled-out (informed by R2, R5, G1), with support from Tesco, Woolworths, Intaba Flowers and WWF-SA (S6).

An international *Working Group* (S5), comprising cut-flower retailers, growers, merchants, florists, national marketing bodies and NGOs, led by Bek and Timms (R1-6), is facilitating relationships between stakeholders across supply chains and sharing sustainability best practices. For example, FleuraMetz UK, (the world's second largest flower wholesaler) now

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routinely communicate flower sustainability credentials to customers and offer preferential procurement for accredited sustainable suppliers (S2).

“With the help of the project we have made it accessible for florists to understand exactly what sustainability means in our industry...there was a real demand from our customers to ... know really where the flowers were coming from and a bit more background about the conditions for the workers...working with Coventry University has been great for us”
Manager, FleuraMetz UK (S2).

The working group’s activities have influenced the policy and practices of the Fairtrade Foundation, enabling them to sell certified Kenyan roses to three additional large UK retailers, one UK wholesaler, and for the first time, directly into the floristry sector (S3). This has resulted in a 12% growth in Fairtrade roses sales in 2019, with an extra £140,000 being paid in Social Premium to producers (S2).

“Through the forum that Coventry hosted... I met with a leading flower trader in the UK and ... they were not trading any Fairtrade flowers at all, but they were trading into some of the biggest supermarkets. A year and half later they actually supply FT lines into some of those retailers. ... a real key, tangible outcome that has seen a growth in Fairtrade flower volume through being able to work with a huge trader that I would not have met otherwise” Senior Supply Chain Manager (Flowers), Fairtrade Foundation (S2).

Changing industry sustainability standards, certifications and practices globally

The report on the sustainability of the Cape Flora industry (R5), was launched at a Cape Town workshop, with participants including: the industry marketing body Cape Flora SA, WWF-SA, growers, processors, provincial government departments and local and international retailers. Attendees formally adopted the report’s recommendations and a local working group (including Bek) was established to oversee delivery (S7). As a result of the research, Bek and Timms (R2, R4, R6) have had invitations onto certification industry steering groups including: revising MPS cut-flower certifications and developing a ground-breaking social-ethical standard based on continuous improvement at production sites, in partnership with BRCGS (whose standards are used by 29,000 suppliers worldwide) (S8).

Influencing government policy in the UK, EU and Africa

Bek and Timms have contributed evidence from the research to two UK parliamentary consultations, including a review of the Grocery Code Adjudicator’s role, and highlighting the imperative to directly support the small-scale cut-flower sector in a review of the Agriculture Bill (S9). The research has received UK government recognition through funding awarded by DFID (G5) to support a Covid-19 response project including Fairtrade, MM Flowers, Women Working Worldwide, working with ten farms and three retailers to build resilience within Kenyan cut-flower supply chains and provide direct support to 6000+ workers during the pandemic.

As a result of the research (R1-R4), the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning commissioned the *Sustainability Business Plan for the Wild Harvesting Industry* (S10). This is being used as a model for developing a roadmap, under Bek and Timms’ guidance, towards adoption of sustainability standards for the global wildflower industry in a Dutch government funded project led by the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI) and the Dutch Flower Group (the world’s largest cut-flower trading firm) (G4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1. Bek, D, and Timms, J (2020), *Sustainable Cut-Flowers: A handy guide to key issues and good practice*. Coventry University and British Florist Association. Available from <http://sustainableflowers.coventry.domains/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Booklet-Sustainable-Cut-flowers-2020.pdf>.

S2. Bek, D., Timms, J. and Lanari, N. (2019) *Awarded Highly Commended in the National Green Gown Awards, ‘Research with Impact’ category for the Sustainable Cut-Flowers project.*

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National Green Gown Awards 2019. Evidence of how R1-R6 and G1-3 has impacted key stakeholders.

- Judges' comments: Green Gown Awards 2019 *Winner's Brochure* (p. 65) Available from https://www.greengownawards.org/files/gga_2019_winners_af_notttrent_lr.pdf [24 February 2021].
- Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University (2020) *Promoting sustainability in the cut-flower industry* [video] available from <https://youtu.be/nQy-92y7jls> [24 February 2021].
- Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University (2019) *Promoting sustainability in the cut-flower industry: Finalist in the 'Research with Impact Category' Green Gown Awards 2019* [video] available from <https://youtu.be/pXqA-mnXcR4> [24 February 2021].

S3. Compilation of evidence letters (2020) from a selection of major flower industry stakeholders detailing the impact the research has had on their organisation, knowledge, priorities, practice and plans: A. British Florist Association (BFA); B. The Fairtrade Foundation; C. MM Flowers Plc.; D. Flower Council of Holland; E. Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI); F. Women Working Worldwide (WWW); G. Flower Valley Conservation Trust (FVCT); H. Lavender Green Flowers; I. MSP Certification; and J. FleuraMetz International Wholesaler.

S4. Bek, D. and Timms, J. (2020) *The Sustainable Cut-Flower Project* [online] available from <http://sustainableflowers.coventry.domains/> [24 February 2021].

S5. Combined report of four key stakeholder engagement workshops (2017-2020).

1. *Flowers, Sustainability and Certification*, the first stakeholder engagement workshop, 18 July 2017, Coventry University.
2. Multi-stakeholder workshop on *Sustainability in Flower Supply Chains*, 1-2 May 2018, hosted by MM Flowers UK, Alconbury, UK.
3. *Driving Sustainability in the Cut-Flower Industry*, international stakeholder engagement workshop, 3-4 April 2019, hosted by FleuraMetz wholesaler, Aalsmeer, the Netherlands.
4. *Resilience and sustainability*, the postponed and then online fourth key stakeholder engagement event, 10 December 2020.

S6. E-Learning Course report, summary user statistics and letter from the e-learning course's administrator, providing details of end-user feedback. Coventry University, Sustainable Footprint Learning Group, Wieta, Tesco, Woolworths and WWF (2020) *Sustainable Practices make Sustainable Business E-Learning Course*. Available from <https://elearnconnect.com/courses/sustainable-practices-make-sustainable-businesses/> [24 February 2021].

S7. Report from the workshop, *Developing an Action Plan supporting the Cape Flora Industry*, held in November 2018, Grabouw, Cape Town, South Africa.

S8. Bek, D. (2020) *How Ethical Trade Standards and Responsible Sourcing are driving consumer behaviour and investment decisions*: White Paper. London: BRCGS.

S9. Collated expert evidence in conjunction with research, business and civil society coalitions, presented to the UK Parliament in response to calls for evidence.

- UK Parliament (2017) *Supermarket Practices-Grocer Code Adjudicator Review Call for Evidence Submission*. January 2017.
- UK Government (2020) *Evidence submitted to the UK Government Consultation on UK Parliament Agriculture Bill*. March 2020.

S10. Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (2019) *Biodiversity 2019 BUSINESS PLAN: Development and implementation of a Sustainable Flower Harvesting Assurance System*. South Africa: Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development.