



Tea cups, aerial view.

Teacup artwork highlights environmental issues

What can you do over a cup a tea? Rather a number of socially significant things, such as hooking up with old friends. At the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden (NBG) a cup of tea became the product of innovation when more than 2,000 cups were used to create an impressive artwork in June 2021.

The South African Rooibos Council decided to pledge support to efforts to better manage the environment with a display titled 'Working towards a sustainable future'. The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) was a suitable partner as the environmental champion and Walter Sisulu NBG was the host venue.

The display was part of the annual World Environment Day celebrations that seek to highlight the importance of good environmental management for a sustainable future. The artwork installation was the product of mixed media artist Gina Waldman, who was commissioned to do the artwork using various rooibos tea blends that were carefully positioned to resemble a globe when viewed from above.

SA Rooibos director, Nicie Vorster, said the industry was renewing its focus on sustainability. Vorster also said in the statement they chose to illustrate their pledge towards social and environmental stewardship in a creative way,

because art has the ability to connect with people on emotional and subliminal levels, sometimes inspiring a heightened appreciation for nature or a re-evaluation of human progress.

"On average, about 14,000 tons of rooibos are produced every year, of which half is consumed locally, while the rest is exported to more than 30 countries across the globe. Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, UK and the US are currently the biggest importers of the tea," said Vorster. "While enormous strides have been made to make the rooibos tea chain more sustainable, we can always do more, and we will build on the foundation we have to continue working on all three dimensions of sustainability — environmental, economic and social — while also taking the Agenda 2030 Sustainability Development Goals into account."

Vorster emphasised, "As our sustainability journey continues to gain momentum, we are encouraging other industries and the public to also play their part in preserving the environment and building a green economy in which all can thrive."

Written by Ronny Tshabalala. First published by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in the SANBI Gazette November 2021. Republished with permission.

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