

BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP & ECONOMY NEWSLETTER

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About the Biodiversity Economy Project

The Biodiversity Economy Project is a five-year project, funded by the Global Environmental Facility, that aims to boost the biodiversity economy around protected areas in South Africa. The project builds on South Africa's *National Biodiversity Economy Strategy*, which seeks to balance the conservation of biodiversity with sustainable use – to achieve economic development and equitable distribution of benefits. The second pillar of the project is focussed on increasing benefits to local communities who are involved in conservation, by improving capacity to implement the biodiversity economy.

The World Bank is the implementing agency for the second pillar, which is executed by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), with South African National Parks (SANParks), South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), Eastern Cape Parks and

Tourism Agency (ECPTA) and iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority (IWPA) as sub-executing agencies.

Project activities will focus on three landscapes spread across the country in areas with strong potential for vibrant biodiversity economies. They include the Greater Addo-Amathole node in the Eastern Cape, the Greater Kruger-Limpopo node in Limpopo, and the Greater iSimangaliso node in KwaZulu-Natal. The project will work with communities in these nodes to bring new areas under conservation through biodiversity stewardship programmes. It will also increase economic opportunities by providing support to small businesses, improving governance capacity, and benefit sharing.

For more information on the project, please contact: [Mpho Gumula Ratshikhopha at M.Gumula@sanbi.org.za](mailto:M.Gumula@sanbi.org.za)

Biodiversity stewardship is an approach to securing land in biodiversity priority areas through entering into agreements with private or communal landowners.

Biodiversity economy encompasses the businesses and economic activities that either directly depend on biodiversity for their core business or that contribute to conservation of biodiversity through their activities.



SANBI supports the biodiversity economy through a new project

By Toni Kay Dyers, Mpho Ratshikhopha and Zoleka Mkhize

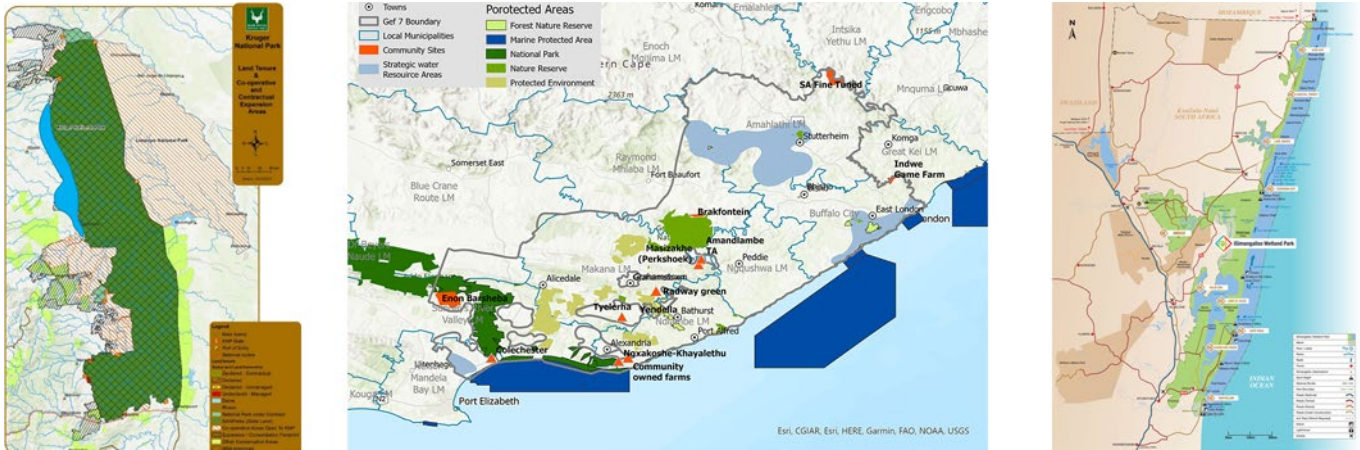
A new five-year project, funded by the Global Environment Facility, aims to boost the biodiversity economy around protected areas in South Africa. The project will focus on three biodiversity economy nodes: the Greater Addo-Amathole, the Greater Kruger-Limpopo, and the Greater-iSimangaliso. The project is expected to mobilise investment in the biodiversity economy, create jobs and improve livelihoods for as many as 260 000 people living in and around protected areas...

The Biodiversity and Land Use Project was a Global Environmental Facility (GEF) funded project implemented by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) that made important gains for biodiversity stewardship. To build on these gains, another round of funding has been secured from the GEF for a new five-year project.

The new project aims to catalyse financing and capacity for the biodiversity economy around protected areas. SANBI, together with SANParks and iSimangiliso Wetland Park, will be an executing agent tasked with implementing a component of this US\$ 9 million project.

The project will harness the unrealised potential of the biodiversity economy to address constraints relevant to South Africa's development in and around protected areas, including high unemployment, limited livelihood options and inequality in rural economies. The project will support building the biodiversity economy nodes for community stewardship and livelihoods, as well as growing the biodiversity economy nationally to enhance communities' stake in wildlife conservation. In addition, the project will support the mainstreaming of biodiversity across sectors, reduce land degradation, and promote resilience to climate change impacts.





Map of the Greater iSimangaliso biodiversity economy node, Greater Kruger-Limpopo biodiversity economy node, and Greater Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node.

The project will focus on three biodiversity economy nodes, including the Greater Addo-Amathole node in the Eastern Cape province, the Greater Kruger-Limpopo node in the Limpopo province and, the Greater-iSimangaliso node in the KwaZulu-Natal province.

SANBI will implement the sub-component of the project that aims to share lessons learnt from the three project nodes, including between the nodes, nationally, and internationally. SANBI will also oversee work on community stewardship and livelihoods to be undertaken by the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) in the Greater Addo-Amathole node of the Eastern Cape province. Biodiversity stewardship is an approach to securing land in biodiversity-priority areas through entering into agreements with private or communal landowners. Entering into biodiversity stewardship agreements can have many benefits for communal landowners, including support for

land management and the potential for successful commercial enterprises.

As we are all aware, COVID-19 has negatively affected our economy in so many ways. The tourism industry suffered greatly because of it. The global pandemic has shown us how important biodiversity is. Healthy, functioning ecosystems that protect us are essential for people's overall health and well-being. In attempts to recreate South Africa's economy, this project is of extreme significance and is being implemented at a critical time. It is envisioned that the project will mobilise investment in the biodiversity economy and as a result, it is estimated that over 260 000 people living within the three project nodes will benefit indirectly from the project.

For more information on biodiversity stewardship and SANBI's work on this new project, please contact: Mpho Gumula Ratshikhopho at M.Gumula@sanbi.org.za

A planning workshop for the Greater Addo-Amathole Node

By Zoleka Mkhize and Mpho Ratshikhopho

A workshop was held to plan the work of the project in the Greater Addo-Amathole Node. The workshop introduced the new node co-ordinator, and discussions were held about establishing a Node Co-ordination Committee. The workshop also discussed the roles and responsibilities of different entities towards achieving the targets of the project, and how these would be measured and

reported. Following the workshop, each entity has a better understanding of what is required of them in the project...

The Biodiversity Economy Project seeks to balance biodiversity conservation with sustainable use for economic development and equitable distribution of benefits. It builds from the *National Biodiversity Economy Strategy*, which sets out measures to develop wildlife, bio-trade, bioprospecting, and ecotourism sectors aiming



Stakeholders of the Biodiversity Economy Project attending the planning workshop for the Greater Addo-Amathole Biodiversity Economy Node.

to improve job creation. The project has activities in three biodiversity economy nodes: the Greater Addo-Amathole Node, the Greater Kruger-Limpopo Node, and the Greater iSimangaliso Node.

South African National Parks (SANParks) convened a planning workshop for the Greater Addo-Amathole Node in December 2022. The workshop served as an introduction to the newly appointed node co-ordinator, and it was a great opportunity for the project entities to plan, and get a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The workshop was attended by representatives from the World Bank, the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), SANParks, and the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA).

The workshop was filled with discussions on the planning of the project. The node co-ordinator highlighted shifts to the planning following lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic about the importance of diversifying activities for the sustainability of the wildlife economy sector. Rather than focus purely on tourism, the project will explore other opportunities such as mixed-wildlife cattle ranching and cattle auctions. Experience shows that a mixed system is not as complex to run and has immediate financial gains for communities which are quickly realised compared to just tourism. There is also a national priority to explore further opportunities on the game meat strategy, where the project can help build capacity in communities to operate abattoirs and explore safety-net payments from carbon for sustainable grazing.

Key outcomes from this meeting included discussions on the development of the Node Co-ordination Committee which will focus on reporting progress and providing strategic advice to the project. The committee will align with and build from the existing Park Forum but will go beyond a specific focus on park matters to create a broader space for different sectors to collaborate, including government departments, non-governmental organisations, and municipalities. It was suggested that the committee be structured to live beyond the lifespan of the project.

It was agreed that the Master Plan will be one of the interventions developed for which this committee will provide inputs and get guidance. All partners of the committee will be expected to integrate this work into their respective spaces. The role and responsibilities of each entity within the Addo-Amathole node were identified during the workshop. A proposed co-ordinated matrix was presented to ensure that entities obtained a full understanding of the deliverables required to achieve the targets of the project.

Learning exchanges and biodiversity stewardship were also discussed. It was raised that SANBI will lead the learning exchanges nationally and within the project nodes. The project entities will help to identify stakeholders to engage in learning exchanges, as well as participating and sharing lessons within the landscapes. The ECPTA will appoint a biodiversity stewardship facilitator to focus on communities within the node.

Another discussion topic was project reporting. Technical reports will be submitted quarterly to measure the progress of the project indicators. To keep the momentum running, the entities agreed on conducting quarterly planning meetings to ensure alignment and commitments towards targets.

The workshop acknowledged that a lot of work has been done through various projects. However, no tangible community benefits have yet been realised. Through the project, there is an opportunity to showcase tangible work

done for the communities. It will empower communities to be owners of their natural resources while advancing their knowledge and understanding of the biodiversity economy that they can benefit from. The project hopes for communities to become more aware of and positive towards nature so that they can start managing land better.

For more information on the biodiversity stewardship programme contact Mpho Ratshikhopho: at m.gumula@sanbi.org.za

A woman behind the Greater Addo-Amathole Biodiversity Economy Node

By Gugulethu Mcanyana and Zoleka Mkhize

Naledi Mneno is the newly appointed co-ordinator for the Greater Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node.

She will be responsible for identifying communities that can benefit from the project, meeting with stakeholders, developing a master plan, and working on the procurement plan, yearly work plan, and technical reports. Improving the lives of local community members is something Naledi is passionate about and hopes to achieve through her role as the Addo Amathole Node co-ordinator...

Naledi Mneno is the newly appointed co-ordinator for the Greater Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node for the Biodiversity Economy Project. The node is located in the Eastern Cape province and stretches from the Addo Elephant National Park to the Great Fish River Nature Reserve. Part of the Biodiversity Economy Project is to build biodiversity economy nodes for community stewardship, improve livelihoods, and grow the biodiversity economy nationally to enhance communities' stake in wildlife conservation. A biodiversity economy node is defined as a geospatial platform that establishes networks that enable market access, skills transfer, investment attraction, and supply chain linkages by incorporating underdeveloped but biodiversity-rich communal lands, private lands, and existing protected areas.

Naledi Mneno is contracted by South African National Parks (SANParks) and works to identify communities who may benefit from the project, meeting up with different stakeholders who will play a role in the development of this biodiversity economy node. The power of



Naledi Mneno, co-ordinator of the Greater Addo-Amathole Biodiversity Node.

collaboration and the willingness of all the different stakeholders to be part of this project is a highlight for Naledi. There is genuine excitement from all the parties involved as they can see how the project will benefit local communities.

The node co-ordinator has the responsibility of formulating the co-ordination committee that will bring together different stakeholders from different government departments, different levels of government, non-governmental organisations, and communities from the landscape. The platform will allow them to work together towards a shared vision of an economy anchored in biodiversity and conservation while also ensuring the benefit of local communities. Part of this work is to develop a master plan, which is an integrated

plan that will include all the stakeholders. This master plan will be finalised once the co-ordination committee has been established. The co-ordinator will also work on the procurement plan, which is submitted to the World Bank, and the yearly work plan and technical reports that are required every quarter.

The Biodiversity Economy Project strives for the development of local communities and ensures that there is equal benefit sharing throughout the landscape. Supporting small businesses within the node is one of the ways that will ensure that communities benefit from the project. An incubation programme is set to begin in the upcoming year and this programme will run for two years. The node co-ordinator is working closely with the Addo Elephant National Park management team to identify potential opportunities for local Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs).

"The opportunities are vast, unlocking these potential opportunities will produce tangible benefits for the community," she said.

Growing the economy will open doors for the local communities and assist in decreasing the amount of unemployment in this area.

The Biodiversity Economy Project is still fairly new, but challenges have come to light, including the state of

readiness of certain communities to participate. Internal challenges, such as communities not having local governance structures or dissolved structures, make it difficult to introduce the opportunities associated with the project. A governance and leadership toolkit was developed by SANParks, and the toolkit will be used to assist communities with governance issues. The project will support communities to establish Community Property Associations (CPAs), trusts, and business enterprises that communities can use to unlock investments.

A target of 5 000 hectares of community land for conservation has been set in the Addo-Amatole node. This land may be declared as a nature reserve, or protected environment, or by having a contract with the community to manage their land sustainably.

"The work that we do might just be a drop in an ocean, but it might just be what one or two families need to make a living."

Improving the lives of local community members is something Naledi Mneno is passionate about and hopes to achieve through her role as the Addo Amathole Node co-ordinator.

For more information contact Naledi Mneno at Naledi.Mneno@SANParks.org

Tshivhula community shows how conservation initiatives improve rural livelihoods

By Tshimangadzo Nndwakhulu, Zoleka Mkhize and Mpho Ratshikhopha

The Tshivhula community, who lost their land during apartheid, successfully regained control of six farms of approximately 20 000 hectares. They established a Community Property Association (CPA) and partnered with a private company to establish a business enterprise in the wildlife and ecotourism sector. Despite the challenges, the Tshivhula CPA has established markets worldwide, forged valuable connections with international clients, and provided the community with diverse skills. Their journey has had a profound impact on the socio-economic condition of the community, and on protecting the natural resources that sustain the community...

Up in the Soutpansberg mountains, extending from the Limpopo River to the banks of the Great Sand River in the

eastern region of the Mokgalakwena River, the Tshivhula people, also known as the Vhatwanamba, settled decades ago. Direct descendants of the Great Mapungubwe Kingdom, the Tshivhula people lived with the rich biodiversity of their land. They harvested their medicines and food from the enormous shrubs and utilised the wild animals in the area. They hunted and kept herds of livestock while enjoying the shade of the giant trees which protected them from the blazing midsummer heat. The gathering of mopane worms and the indulgence in wild berries were treasured rituals for the Vhatwanamba people. However, the apartheid era unjustly stripped them of their land, forcing many to become refugees in distant regions.

In 1998, the Tshivhula community embarked on a journey towards restitution of their land, as the post-apartheid government made efforts to address land lost during the



Wildlife in Tshivhula Game Farm.

apartheid era. This marked the beginning of a journey for the Tshivhula community. Between 2009 and 2018, the community successfully regained control of six farms of approximately 20 000 hectares. As a result, it became necessary to establish a Community Property Association (CPA) which led to the birth of the Tshivhula CPA to represent the community members who had lost their land. Acknowledging that land serves as an economic resource, the CPA recognised the need for innovative strategies to ensure various business activities in the wildlife and ecotourism sector. They opted for a joint venture approach by partnering with a private company as a shareholder. This collaborative effort has proven to work successfully. The CPA aspires to establish a business solely operated by the Tshivhula CPA, however, they are currently thrilled with the progress and operations of this joint business venture.

Simon Mafela, the Secretary of the Tshivhula CPA, is delighted with the success of the CPA. He works in



Tshivhula business enterprise.



Mr. Simon Mafela and Colleagues.

collaboration with the chairperson, the deputy secretary, the treasurer, other community members, and Chief Abel Tshivhula. He emphasised the significance of establishing connections and partnerships in the success of the CPA.

Through close collaboration with the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism (LEDET), Mr. Mafela gained valuable insights into establishing and co-operating with the Tshivhula CPA business venture in wildlife and ecotourism. This collaboration sparked his interest in the sector and led him to join the Limpopo Emerging Wildlife Association, which connects various African communities within the province. His involvement in this association introduced him to entities like the South African National Biodiversity Institute, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment, and Wildlife Ranching South Africa. Active participation in events like the People and Parks conferences and the United Nations Development Programme's Biodiversity Finance project further expanded his knowledge of effective CPA management and socio-economic transformation in the sector.

As a result of these efforts, the Tshivhula CPA has successfully established global markets and valuable connections with international clients. They've also had the opportunity to share their CPA's operational structure with other community property associations and entities. This led to Mr Mafela representing South African communities at the CITES conference in Panama and engaging with stakeholders in the wildlife and ecotourism industry in Dubai. These opportunities fostered collaborations with foreign nationals, resulting in mutually beneficial business ventures and partnerships. For instance, their participation in the CITES conference helped them showcase their work at Huntex 2023, attracting interested parties looking to bring clients from the United States to visit the Tshivhula enterprise.

The Tshivhula CPA places great importance on enabling unity in the community. They are cognisant of their responsibility to reclaim and use the land for the benefit of



Tshivhula CPA community engagements.

the community. To achieve this, the CPA has provided the community with diverse skills development opportunities, including experience in game counts and game capture, exposure to hunting practices, and housekeeping and lodge activities. At present, the CPA is actively involved in fast-tracking the land claim process for the remaining Tshivhula farms. Collaborating with various partners, they aim to offer training programmes and employment opportunities to community members. The CPA intends to facilitate the establishment of community businesses on certain portions of the Tshivhula farms, enabling community members to enhance their skills, generate more employment opportunities, and develop sustainable enterprises.

Despite the development of partnerships and exposure to experienced individuals in the sector, the CPA faces challenges in finding a suitable model to ensure equitable profit sharing from the revenue generated to directly address the community's needs. The concept of communal ownership of land creates a challenge when it comes to profit sharing, because beneficiaries are not allocated shares, and there is no guideline to help CPAs deal with this matter. There are other challenges, including mining activities that threaten the biodiversity stewardship programs as well as the huge threat of animal poaching which poses a significant risk to business operations.

According to Mr. Mafela, achieving success as a CPA is a challenging process that necessitates perseverance and transparency. He emphasises the importance of CPA leadership and continuity to avoid the loss of vision of the entity. This entails diligent planning, clearly defined roles, acquiring relevant information, and forging meaningful partnerships and connections. The journey of transformation undertaken by the Tshivhula community has had a profound impact on the socio-economic condition of their community, and it has played a pivotal role in protecting the natural resources that sustain the community. The sustainable operation of Tshivhula CPA represents a significant example of reversing the legacy of apartheid.

Celebrating 20 years of biodiversity stewardship implementation: 3rd National Biodiversity Stewardship Conference

By Zoleka Mkhize, Mpho Ratshikhopha and Ntwanano Mendes

The 3rd National Biodiversity Stewardship Conference was a four-day event that brought together 150 delegates from various entities to celebrate 20 years of biodiversity stewardship. The conference showed how biodiversity stewardship has changed from being just a way to protect nature to supporting many further socio-economic benefits. The conference included representatives from communities who talked about how biodiversity stewardship is helping to improve people's lives. The conference resolutions were generated with everyone's input and will be taken into the future...

"When people come together good things happen." It was this jovial feeling that carried over to the four-day National Biodiversity Stewardship Conference, held in March 2023 at Africanos Country Estate in the Eastern Cape. The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), together with their partners, hosted the 3rd National Biodiversity Stewardship Conference. It was made possible by the Global Environmental Facility-funded Biodiversity Economy Project. The conference was hosted in the Greater Addo-Amathole Node, which is one of the identified biodiversity economy nodes for the implementation of the GEF project.

Biodiversity stewardship is an approach to securing land in biodiversity priority areas through entering into

agreements with private and communal landowners. It was initiated in 2003 and has, over the years, proved to be the main mechanism for protected area expansion in South Africa. The 3rd National Biodiversity Stewardship Conference could not have come at a more perfect time! The year 2023 marks 20 years of the implementation of this conservation mechanism in South Africa. The purpose of the conference was to commemorate and reflect on the impact biodiversity stewardship has made in expanding protected areas and consider its potential to unlock economic benefits and rural livelihood development. Following on from the two previous conferences, the first conference in 2017 with the theme 'Unlocking benefits of biodiversity stewardship' and the second conference in 2018 with the theme of 'Sustainable land use for our shared future', the third conference demonstrated the added value of biodiversity stewardship beyond protected area expansion.

Biodiversity stewardship has evolved from being just a conservation tool to supporting other streams of work, such as the biodiversity economy, Strategic Water Source Areas (SWSAs), social development, protection of important ecological infrastructure, and community conservation. The conference was therefore structured to focus on these and other conversations reflecting on the successes, benefits, and challenges of biodiversity stewardship. Engagements included good practices for stakeholder interactions, rural development, and land reform through biodiversity stewardship,



Delegates at the National Biodiversity Stewardship Conference.



Field visit to the iNtsomi Park.

mobilising finance for biodiversity and the role of private partnerships, biodiversity stewardship as a mechanism for securing SWSAs, and reimagining the future of biodiversity stewardship.

The conference opened with a visit to an existing biodiversity stewardship site, iNtsomi Park, which falls within the Addo Consolidation Priority Area. Delegates were taken on a journey of the iNtsomi Park, which was a great opportunity to highlight the concept of biodiversity stewardship and set the scene for the activities and insightful discussions during the week of the conference. In the opening session, facilitated by the Chief Director of Biodiversity Information and Policy Advice from SANBI, the programme was kickstarted with a councillor from the Sundays River Local Municipality welcoming all the conference delegates to the event. The Chief Director of Biodiversity and Conservation from DFFE delivered a

presentation on global and national environmental policy and its implications for biodiversity stewardship, and the General Manager of Parks Expansion from SANParks narrated the journey of biodiversity stewardship and its implementation in South Africa from 2003 to 2023.

The conference brought together 150 delegates representing various entities including national governments, provincial governments, international agencies, non-governmental organisations, the finance sector, traditional authorities, private landowners, communal landowners, and the youth. Among the delegates were the first landowners to sign a stewardship agreement, from the Elandsberg Nature Reserve in the Western Cape. This was such a special treat for the attendees. Mike Gregor was interviewed in a live interview by Mpho Ratshikhopho from SANBI. The interview revealed that they had explored all mechanisms to get



Group discussions.

the land protected but failed, and finally, the biodiversity stewardship approach was implemented. This showcased why biodiversity stewardship is the most suitable option for landowners wanting to conserve biodiversity while benefiting from the natural resources on their land.

A key highlight of the conference was the presence of the Community Property Associations (CPAs) represented by traditional leaders, and land reform and communal landowners of various communities including Bambanani CPA, Tshivhula CPA, Bela Bela CPA, Somkhanda CPA, Donkerhoek CPA, Mgundeni CPA, Brakfontein, Rooiwal, Bakwena Tribal Authority, and Emvokweni Community Trust. Delegates were taken on a virtual tour of the different projects implemented in the landscape of these communities, highlighting the value and benefits of biodiversity stewardship in developing their community livelihoods. The words of gratitude remained with the representatives as the communities acknowledged

the opportunities and knowledge that the various entities bring to improving their communities and the conservation of their valuable land.

There was an open space for the integration of everyone's voices into the conference discussions. This was achieved through the presentations, panel, and group discussions, which led to an exciting close-off at the commissions and conference resolution session. Delegates were grouped and requested to discuss key resolutions for the future of biodiversity stewardship on the themes of community biodiversity stewardship, capacity development, business development, and community beneficiation. The resolutions were accepted and will be taken to various platforms and forums for further engagements.

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Fostering connections and collaborations among communities within the Greater Addo-Amathole Biodiversity Economy Node

By Zoleka Mkhize and Mpho Ratshikhopha

An inaugural community learning exchange was held for the Greater Addo-Amathole Biodiversity Economy Node. The learning exchange brought together various communities to learn, share experiences, and raise awareness about the benefits of biodiversity stewardship and its contribution to the biodiversity economy...

"We are grateful for the knowledge and such great exposure, we are motivated to start small and grow where we are, from a plot of cabbages you can own a farm"

... says a community with enthusiasm, capturing the sentiment that echoed throughout a three-day learning exchange event between communities in the Greater Addo-Amathole Biodiversity Economy Node in the Eastern Cape province.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in partnership with the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) and South African National Parks (SANParks) hosted an inaugural community learning exchange in October 2023. The event was conducted to foster connections and collaborations amongst

communities within the Greater Addo-Amathole node. It created a space to raise awareness among communities about the benefits of biodiversity stewardship and for them to learn and share experiences, challenges, and lessons. The key to the learning exchange was to establish a strong community of practice where relationships can flourish. Communities could learn from each other's expertise in establishing successful businesses in the biodiversity value chain.

The learning exchange was themed "*Unlocking Economic Opportunities for Communities through Biodiversity and Wildlife Economy*". It marked the commencement of many learning exchanges that will be held through the lifespan of the Biodiversity Economy Project as part of Component 2 about knowledge-sharing.

The event brought together various government officials, Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), representatives from Rhodes University, private game reserves, Makana and Ndlambe Local Municipality, non-governmental organisations, and the communities of the Greater Addo-Amathole Biodiversity Economy Node. Also present were community representatives from Mpumalanga, Limpopo, and KwaZulu-Natal to share the learning.



Delegates at the community learning exchange.



A representative from Ndlambe Local Municipality Community Farms giving feedbacks during the reflection session.



Emcakwini Community Trust of Babanango Game Reserve presenting their project during market stalls.

Facilitated by Mahlodi Tau from SANBI, the event was filled with thrilling discussions about the biodiversity stewardship programme, including stories of change from communities who are already in the biodiversity stewardship programme and the beneficiation plans, benefit sharing, and issues around governance. Kickstarting the event was an introductory and networking session where communities shared their stories of how they connect with nature. It provided insight into how communities perceive and express the significance of their relationship with nature. In reconnecting communities to biodiversity stewardship, ECPTA took participants on a journey of the biodiversity stewardship programme in South Africa, highlighting its implementation and real-life case studies of community involvement.

“Indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili” – a Xhosa saying, reminds us that valuable knowledge can be gained from those

who have walked the path before us. This saying found its home in the learning exchange as existing community biodiversity stewardship sites, namely Tshivhula, Bela Bela, Donkerhoek, Emcakwini Community Trust, and Bambanani and Ukuthanda Ukukhanya opened their ‘market stalls’, giving attendees a tour to their projects, allowing them an insight to their economic activities, business approaches, achievements and challenges encountered in the implementation of their projects. Participants were thrilled as they shopped for information, filling in their baskets with experiences and invaluable lessons about operationalising community biodiversity stewardship sites. One community member alluded *“My shopping basket is full”* symbolising the abundant knowledge and inspiration gained from the market stalls.

Participants listened with much motivation as the conversations highlighted the importance of community governance structures, institutional arrangements, and

business approaches, where successful Community Property Associations (CPAs) highlighted the importance of functioning governance structures.

The event concluded with a thought-provoking reflection session, providing participants with an opportunity for introspection on the valuable information to bring back to their respective communities. Every community, NGO, and department present was granted the platform to collectively assess the knowledge gained from the

learning exchange. The moment of reflection encouraged them to identify potential areas for improvement in their respective approaches and operations. The communities engaged passionately, expressing their deep appreciation for the information they had been exposed to, especially for those who were attending such events for the very first time. They were happy to disseminate lessons and knowledge within their communities, ensuring that the benefits of this learning exchange would also benefit those who were not present.

SANBI embarks on documenting learning from the biodiversity economy nodes

By Zoleka Mkhize and Wisani Lubisi

SANBI convened a one-day workshop to initiate the process of documenting the learning that comes out of the Biodiversity Economy Project. Significant to this is the development of a set of transformative outcomes and outcome indicators to measure the change resulting from project implementation. Partners collectively contributed to developing these transformative outcomes...

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) is leading the implementation of Component 2 of the Biodiversity Economy Project, which aims to facilitate knowledge exchange in the project. The key intention is to capture learning coming out of biodiversity stewardship with communities and biodiversity economy and to share the lessons between the nodes, at the national level, and internationally through the Global Wildlife Program to allow for replication and scaling up. Capturing learning

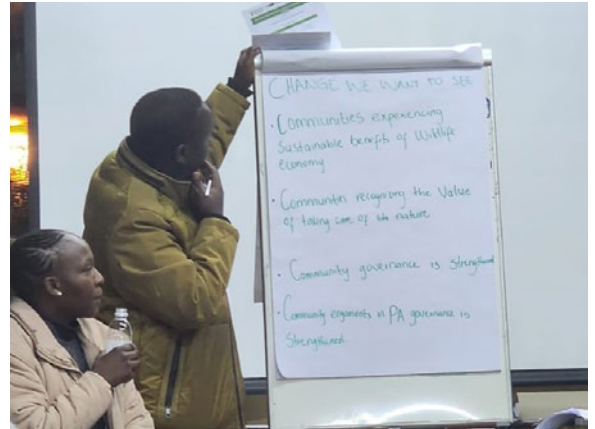
requires constant monitoring of change to understand the value added through the project activities.

As part of the process of capturing learning coming out of the project, SANBI convened the first Monitoring, Evaluation, Reflection, and Learning workshop in Pretoria in August 2023. The workshop was attended by the partners of the Biodiversity Economy Project and served as an initial step to introduce conversations around the project's transformative outcomes that will aid in documenting the learning coming out of the project's implementation efforts.

To document learning requires the development of transformative outcomes and outcome indicators that will strengthen the projects' existing Monitoring and Evaluation plan by capturing the value created by the project, evidence of change, and recording the voices and experiences of the communities. Adopting social learning processes, the workshop created a space of trust and



Participants at the learning workshop during plenary and small group discussions.



Group leaders providing feedback presentations of transformative outcomes and indicators.

enabled active participation. Participants helped to co-develop the transformative outcomes and indicators that will be used to track project lessons. What emerges from the stories will open a common understanding of how the concept of a biodiversity economy node can contribute to economic growth and biodiversity gains.

The workshop opened with a small group discussion that allowed participants to connect while also understanding how everyone connects with the project. In these small groups, stakeholders were requested to share their roles in the Biodiversity Economy Project and say what excites them about the project. Seated in a plenary circle, everyone was requested to introduce themselves to a larger group and respond to the question...

"What change do you wish to see through the Biodiversity Economy Project?"

Delighted and eager, participants shared the expected shifts and changes they were hoping to see by the end of the project. Out of this reflection, a set of key substantive changes were selected during a plenary session to serve as the project's key transformative outcomes.

For each of the identified transformative outcomes, stakeholders were then requested to work in small groups and respond to questions about what needs to be paid attention to be able to show that the project is moving towards the change, and how it is being received by communities. The feedback presented from each transformative outcome could potentially be adopted as outcome indicators to track and observe the changes emerging out of the project implementation efforts. It is these outcome indicators that would indicate the effectiveness of the project.

The workshop closed with the opportunity for the project stakeholders to suggest themes for upcoming learning exchanges, to ensure that SANBI convenes future learning exchanges that meet the needs of communities and the project partners. Partners were also allowed to ask questions of clarity around the proposed process of documenting learning. Further discussions around this plan will be discussed in the upcoming Technical Working Group. SANBI will have additional conversations on the identified transformative outcomes with communities from the three nodes to get their perspective on the intended shifts and the change expected from this project.

Forging a sustainable future for communities through biodiversity economy

By Wisani Lubisi and Zoleka Mkhize

Implementing partners of the Biodiversity Economy Project gathered for a meeting of the Technical Working Committee. The meeting discussed the project's progress, as well as focussing on the transformative outcomes that

will be used to document learning through the project. A field visit to the KwaDapha community revealed the project's impact on local development and conservation efforts. This event fostered collaboration, knowledge sharing, and a deeper appreciation of the project's positive impact on community livelihoods...



Delegates at the Technical Working Committee meeting.

The implementers of the Biodiversity Economy Project gathered in Mkuze, KwaZulu-Natal over two days in October 2023 for the Technical Working Committee (TWC) and field visits to communities working in the Greater iSimangaliso Biodiversity Economy Node.

The first day was the TWC meeting to discuss the progress made in implementation of the project activities in the recent quarter. The meeting started off with an update on the revised game meat strategy for South Africa, which has been approved by the cabinet for implementation. The strategy seeks to formalise and transform the game meat industry and was designed to contribute towards food security, economic growth, and job creation while conserving biodiversity. The meeting emphasised the need for entities to align with this initiative, further encouraging entities to submit proposals for participation.

The Project Management Unit provided partners with an update on the results framework and financial report to show progress towards the set targets for the quarter. The three node co-ordinators, the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the Eastern Cape Parks

and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) presented on performance, expenditure, key achievements and challenges, as well as a broad outline of planned activities, timelines, and budgets. It was heartening to note that the World Bank expressed its satisfaction with the improved reporting from the three nodes.

During the discussions, the team considered it crucial to establish a learning platform where entities could exchange learning about the challenges and experiences encountered during the implementation of project activities. This platform will create a shared understanding of what is happening within the nodes. One of the key items from the previous TWC meeting was the need to develop a reporting process to track hectares under improved practices. Mpho Gumula presented the reporting processes that everyone found useful.

The second day of the meeting focused on the processes to document learning coming out of the project implementation, which was led by SANBI. This was the second session following the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reflection, and Learning Workshop held in



The event applied a social learning process.



A community resource hub in the KwaDapha community.

August 2023. The session was aimed at strengthening the transformative outcomes and outcome indicators that were developed in the previous workshop. The transformative outcomes and indicators will strengthen the project's existing Monitoring and Evaluation plan by capturing the lessons, changes, and value added by the Biodiversity Economy Project.

The session made use of social learning processes where participants worked in groups to ensure that the indicators aligned with the monitoring and evaluation indicators and also capture what the project is hoping to achieve. It was interesting to see everyone starting to understand the value of documenting lessons and change. The session was closed by a session about the practice of reflecting on smaller shifts that are happening. Stakeholders were surprised to note that the project has brought so much change within their organisations and in their personal development. The outcomes of these sessions will be documented in a living document – the “generation and documentation of learning plan” – that will be updated as we continue implementing the project.

The final day featured a field visit to KwaDapha, providing the stakeholders with firsthand exposure to project activities within the Greater iSimangaliso Node. KwaDapha is a small rural community at Bhanga Nek in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The field visit began with a viewing of the Bhanga Nek Community and engaging

with the homestay beneficiaries, as well as other stakeholders working with this community. It was an exciting opportunity to explore the beautiful and eye-catching landscape of Kosi Bay.

Isimangaliso Wetland Park Authority aims to develop the KwaDapha area by establishing various tourism activities that will benefit communities while conserving the natural beauty of the area. It became evident that the area faces challenges related to infrastructure and services, such as proper roads and electricity, but there have been interventions in terms of developing communities. Community resource hubs have been established through a project by WILDTRUST that aimed at providing support on key initiatives such as building ocean awareness, training, micro-enterprise development, employment opportunities for youth, support for community involvement in conservation activities and tourism opportunities, and more. Community members used to have to travel a long distance to nearby towns just to have computer and internet access to create basic things like CVs, apply for further learning and employment, do assignments, print documents, and do copies. The hubs changed the lives of the community members living within the park by providing them with closer access to these services. iSimangaliso Wetland Park will now continue to support the initiatives through the Biodiversity Economy Project to ensure the sustainability of the work initiated by WILDTRUST.