

Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB): Wetlands SA Political Leader Workshop Ehlanzeni District Municipality

Date: 16th August 2017
Venue: Bundu Lodge, Nelspruit

Workshop Report

SUMMARY:

On **16th August 2017**, Ehlanzeni District Municipality (EDM) and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI Africa) co-hosted the “LAB: Wetlands SA: Ehlanzeni District Municipality Political Leader Workshop” at Bundu Lodge in Nelspruit as part of EDM’s ongoing involvement in the Local Action for Biodiversity: Wetlands South Africa (LAB: Wetlands SA) project.

The workshop aimed to improve key Ehlanzeni District Municipality political leaders’ understanding of the value of biodiversity and wetlands in particular. The workshop had three main objectives: (1) to raise awareness of what wetlands are as well as the services they provide; (2) to present the LAB: Wetlands SA project and highlight the key project outputs to date including the Ehlanzeni District Municipality Wetland Report, the Ehlanzeni Wetland Profile and to showcase the LAB: Wetlands SA video and (3) to encourage the Ehlanzeni District Municipality Mayor to sign the Durban Commitment to cement Ehlanzeni District Municipality’s commitment to protecting biodiversity and wetlands within the district.

The workshop entailed several presentations given by ICLEI Africa as well as a presentation from the South African National Biodiversity Initiative (SANBI). Many questions were asked by the Councilors present throughout the workshop which facilitated meaningful discussion around wetlands and wetland management. These discussions were facilitated by Kirsty Robinson.

Key attendants at the workshop included members of the Mayoral Committee (MMC’s) and Councilors from Ehlanzeni District Municipality. Also in attendance were technical staff from Ehlanzeni District Municipality (mainly the Environmental Health Unit), representatives from the local municipalities from within Ehlanzeni District Municipality, as well as some representatives from DEA Local Government Support and DARLEA. Unfortunately the Ehlanzeni District Municipal Mayor was unable to attend the workshop as she was called away at the last minute. As such, it was agreed that the Durban Commitment will be signed at a later date.



WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES:

Political Leader Workshops are one of the key outputs of the LAB: Wetlands SA project (for background, see **Annex 1**). These workshops are intended to build upon the 'Wetland Awareness Raising' Workshops held during 2015 and 2016 with the project municipalities; however these awareness raising workshops are aimed specifically at the political leaders.

Given the decision-making role of the political leaders, a lack of understanding and valuing of biodiversity, and why it is important in a municipal context, is hampering the ability of local governments to play a more proactive role in this area, and sees decisions being made that discount environmental considerations. The objective of the political leader workshops is to improve the key political leaders' knowledge and understanding of the value of biodiversity, and wetlands in particular, to facilitate better decision making around biodiversity and wetlands. The workshops are also intended to facilitate the signing of the Durban Commitment by the district municipality Mayor.

Based on previous discussions with EDM and the internal requirements of the municipality, the Ehlanzeni Political Leader Workshop was aimed at the Ehlanzeni District Municipal Mayor, key political leaders within the Ehlanzeni District Municipality (specifically Councilors) as well as key political representatives from the local municipalities within Ehlanzeni District Municipality. The key aims of the workshop were to:

1. To raise awareness of what wetlands are as well as the services they provide;
2. To present the LAB: Wetlands SA project and highlight the key outputs to date including the Ehlanzeni District Municipality Wetland Report, the Ehlanzeni Wetland Profile and to showcase the LAB: Wetlands SA video; and
3. To encourage that the Ehlanzeni District Municipality Mayor signs the Durban Commitment to cement Ehlanzeni's District Municipality's commitment to protecting biodiversity within the district.

A copy of the workshop agenda is attached as **Annex 2**.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ehlanzeni District Municipality opened the workshop with an opening prayer followed by a short speech by one of the MMC members to welcome the district and local political leaders and staff as well as the external stakeholders and ICLEI Africa members to the workshop. During the opening speech, the MMC speaker highlighted that the municipality needed to come with an open mind to the workshop, to learn and to take ownership of the outcomes of the workshop.

A round of introductions followed the opening speech, allowing attendees to introduce themselves and share their expectations for the event. Expectations were focused on three main areas, namely (1) a request for detailed information of what wetlands are and why should we care, (2) to understand the progress of the LAB: Wetlands SA Project and (3) to understand in greater detail the Wetland Strategy and Action Plan prior to presenting it to Council in the next few weeks. The Wetland Report and Profile as well as some of ICLEI's biodiversity management tools and guidelines were distributed to the workshops attendees after the attendees' expectations were shared.

WHAT IS A WETLAND

Ms. Ulrike Irlich of ICLEI gave a detailed presentation on wetlands. The presentation aimed to both introduce and give an overview of wetlands, raise awareness of the value of wetlands and highlight the current situation within the district pertaining to wetlands.

The presentation provided a detailed overview on what a wetland is, how wetlands can be identified and why wetlands are considered to be valuable to EDM. During the presentation, it was highlighted that 50% of wetlands within South Africa have been destroyed already and that 48% of the remaining wetlands are critically endangered. The presentation then went on to highlight the threats which wetlands within the district are facing and the role that the district and local municipalities can play in protecting and improving the management of wetlands.



Figure 1: Ms. Ulrike Irlich presenting on wetlands at the Ehlanzeni District Municipality Political Leader Workshop.

INTRODUCING THE LAB: WETLANDS SA PROJECT

Following Ms. Irlich's presentation, Kirsty Robinson of ICLEI introduced the LAB: Wetlands SA project to the group. As part of the presentation, Kirsty highlighted the aims and objectives of the project as well as the key deliverables to date noting particularly the 'Awareness Raising Workshop' held in November 2015, the Wetland Report and Wetland Profile which were both published in March 2017 and the Wetland Video which was finalised in April 2017.

The presentation was also used as a platform to introduce the Ehlanzeni District Municipality Wetland Strategy and Action Plan (WSAP), which is currently in the final stages of development, to the Councilors. The aims and objectives of the WSAP were explained to the Councilors as well as expected timeframes for the document to be presented to Council. There was positive feedback around the WSAP and general agreement amongst all present that the WSAP is something that is needed at this time.

In closing, the presentation highlighted deliverables still to be achieved as part of the project, namely the Implementation Project, Wetland Management Guidelines, the Ehlanzeni Case Study and attendance at the final National Wetlands Indaba in October 2017. Thereafter, the Wetland Video was shown and was very well received. Several Councilors present expressed the need to show the video to schools and local traditional leaders to raise awareness further.

"I hope this [video] will assist me to teach my local community and my fellow South Africans. It is a wonderful tool!"

Councilor E Mashele, Ehlanzeni District Municipality

SANBI PRESENTS ON THE ECOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

After the showing of the LAB: Wetlands SA Wetland Video, Ms. Hellen Nonyane from SANBI gave a presentation on SANBI's Biodiversity and Land Use Project as well as the Ecological Infrastructure Fund. The presentation initially gave an overview of who SANBI is and where SANBI sits in terms of South African governance systems then provided more detail on the work that SANBI does throughout South Africa. The presentation then went onto explain in detail what the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded Biodiversity and Land Use project is about and how it can benefit Ehlanzeni. Ms. Nonyane then provided details on the Ecological Infrastructure Fund (EIF) noting that the Biodiversity and Land Use project has set aside R5.5 million for the EIF to support projects to rehabilitate ecological infrastructure (including wetlands) within their project cities (Ehlanzeni District Municipality is one of them). The aim of the EIF is to mainstream EI into municipal programmes, projects and Integrated Development Plans (IDPs).

The presentation was highly valuable as it emphasized the ongoing partnership between ICLEI and SANBI. It also highlighted how the project proposals developed and submitted by Ehlanzeni District Municipality to ICLEI in application for the LAB Implementation Project, can also be used to apply for funding via the SANBI EIF funding which will be available from February 2018. This will effectively give Ehlanzeni a double chance of implementing a project in their municipality should they draft and submit proposals in time.

DEMONSTRATING A COMMITMENT TO BIODIVERSITY: SIGNING THE DURBAN COMMITMENT

Unfortunately the Ehlanzeni District Municipal Mayor was unable to attend the workshop at the last minute due to another urgent commitment. As such the presentation on the Durban Commitment was not required and sadly the Durban Commitment was not signed during the workshop.

The Mayor however has commented since the workshop that she will sign the Durban Commitment at a later date this year (2017) and send ICLEI a copy accordingly. Once this has happened, ICLEI will share this widely on the website.

WRAPPING UP & WAY FORWARD

In closing, in the Mayor's stead, MMC Cynthia Hlophe gave a short speech. Ms. Hlophe thanked ICLEI and SANBI for the presentations, emphasizing that the Councilors learnt a lot, and thanked the organisers of the workshop for the hard work that went into organizing the workshop.

Ms. Hlophe's speech highlighted the importance of the environment and emphasized that *"we need to learn how to appreciate nature, to make a difference"*. Ms. Hlophe noted that local government and local communities need to work together to make a difference. It was also noted that the Councilors need to take note of the Wetland Strategy and Action Plan when it is presented and take ownership of the strategy in order to take it forward.



Figure 2: Attendants at the Ehlazeni Political Leader Workshop.

Annex 1: Project background

Wetlands are high-value ecological infrastructure, providing essential ecosystem services such as clean water, clean air, food, medicines, flood regulation, water storage and habitat for biodiversity. Wetlands also play a role in disaster risk reduction, and their effective governance could lessen the negative effects of climate change through, for example, flood risk reduction, temperature regulation and water and food security for communities.

However, wetlands are South Africa's most threatened ecosystems, with 48% of wetland ecosystems critically endangered, resulting in an urgent need to increase awareness of wetland importance; and to develop the capacity of local governments to incorporate natural wetland resource objectives into municipal governance mechanisms and Integrated Development Planning, as well as to implement and fund projects on the ground.

In South Africa, there is a wealth of national environmental policies, however, mechanisms for mainstreaming biodiversity through all spheres of government needs to be strengthened. Lack of staff capacity, budget constraints, absence of participatory governance, lack of political leadership and public awareness and support, as well as deficiencies in relevant guidance, tools and resources, make wetland biodiversity planning and management a neglected component of our country's municipal governance.

The Local Action for Biodiversity: Wetlands South Africa (LAB: Wetlands SA) programme's key goal is to protect priority natural wetland resources, thus enabling the supply of ecosystem services, and promoting resilient communities and sustainable local economies under a changing climate within South African local governments.

The key objectives of the LAB Wetlands SA programme are as follows:

1. To improve local government and citizen knowledge and understanding (at the individual, organisation and policy levels) of the value of biodiversity and wetlands.
2. To initiate the process of integrating ecosystem services and biodiversity into local government planning and decision-making in a coordinated, multi-sectoral, gender-sensitive and participatory way.
3. To implement and pilot on-the-ground wetland projects and promote the development of bankable project proposals.

The LAB: Wetlands SA programme is implemented by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability – Africa Secretariat (ICLEI Africa), and funded by the USAID. This programme works in partnership with 9 District Municipalities and 2 Metropolitan Municipalities throughout South Africa. All project outputs, including the Municipality Wetland Report, Wetland Profile and Wetland Awareness Raising Short Film, can be downloaded from the project website:

<http://cbc.iclei.org/project/lab-wetlands-sa/>

Annex 2: Agenda



EHLANZENI DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY
POLITICAL LEADER WETLANDS
AWARENESS RAISING WORKSHOP



Date: 16th August 2017 | Time: 10h00 | Venue: Bondu Lodge | Facilitator: Kirsty Robinson

AGENDA

09:30 – 10:00	Tea and Registration	
10:00 – 10:15	Welcome by Ehlanzeni District Municipality	EDM Municipal Manager Mr FS Sibozza
10:15 – 10:30	Introductions & Workshop Expectations	ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability
Wetland Training for Political Leadership		
10:30 – 10:45	What are wetlands and why are they valuable?	ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability
10:45 – 11:15	Introducing the LAB: Wetlands South Africa Project	ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability
11:15 -11:30	Introducing the GEF 5 Project & Ecological Infrastructure Challenge Fund	SANBI
Pledging Commitment to the Environment		
11:30 -11:45	Introducing the Durban Commitment	ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability
11:45 - 12:00	Key Note Address	EDM Executive Mayor Cllr J Sidell
12:00- 12:15	Signing the Durban Commitment	ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability
12:15- 12:30	Photo Opportunity & Workshop Closure	Facilitator and Ehlanzeni District Municipality
12:30-13:00	Lunch	






