

Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) Wetlands South Africa Ehlanzeni District Municipality



'Wetlands for Prosperity' Workshop Workshop Report

Venue: Bundu Lodge, White River.

Date: 25 November 2015



Summary

On 25 November 2015, the Ehlanzeni District Municipality (EDM) and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability hosted the “Wetlands for Prosperity” workshop as part of Ehlanzeni District’s involvement in the Local Actions for Biodiversity (LAB) Wetlands SA project (LWSA). The workshop was aimed at raising awareness about the importance of wetlands management and conservation on the local government level, and how it pertains to important local issues such as economic development, disaster risk reduction and service delivery.

EDM identified the need to engage with the political rather than administrative representation of both the district and inlying local municipalities for the first round of workshop as the support and buy-in of the decision-makers are vital in ensuring project success going forward. It was also important getting the invaluable inputs from other members within the region, more so the traditional leaders, whom are the direct link to communities, have extensive knowledge and the understanding of the local natural environment, as well as being able to speak to both the challenges being faced together with the good stories of the relationship between the natives and the services offered by the environment – and how they coexist.

The workshop delegation consisted primarily of local traditional leaders from within the district. Presentations and discussions coincided and ranged from climate change in the district, public-private partnerships in relation to disaster risk reduction to what exactly wetlands ecosystems are, why they are important and how the municipality and communities can benefit from wetland goods and services.

Workshop Objectives

The workshop was an interactive and open discussion process. It strived to enable decision-makers to learn about the importance of wetlands at a local level, providing a platform for participants to provide input to how wetlands conservation can support Ehlanzeni District through enhancing economic development, disaster risk reduction and service delivery in general.

The workshop objectives were:

1. To explore the link between wetlands, local economic development, disaster risk reduction and service provision for municipalities.
2. To better understand the role of stakeholders in aligning work in terms of wetlands management and conservation.
3. Understanding how municipalities and communities can effectively manage these resources to maximum benefit in the future.
4. Provide an opportunity for Mayor/s to demonstrate their commitment to wetlands and biodiversity through the signing of the *Durban Commitment: Local Governments for Biodiversity*. *THE SIGNING FOR EHLANZENI DISTRICT WILL OCCUR AT A LATER, PRE-DETERMINED OCCASION.*



Figure 1: Workshop participants gathered for a picture together with the ICLEI Africa team and workshop presenters.

Workshop

The workshop was attended primarily by Local Traditional Leaders, political and technical representatives from both district and local municipalities, province and the private sector. Ehlanzeni District Municipality (EDM) is part of the LWSA project (see Annex 1), an initiative funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability in 11 district and metropolitan municipalities in South Africa. The “Wetlands for Prosperity” workshop in Ehlanzeni was aimed at creating awareness about the essential importance of conserving and management of biodiversity, with a specific emphasis on wetland ecosystems. It was viewed important by EDM to drive this awareness raising on the level of the decision-makers in both the district and local governments, creating buy-in and interest into the project, ensuring successful implementation and prosperous action going forward.

The approach to merge local decision makers and specialist from various relevant disciplines, i.e. Wetland Ecologist, Enviro Economists, insurers paid dividends as the discussions and knowledge shared were in-line with the overall objective of the workshop. The Ehlanzeni region is currently experiencing significant impacts of climate change – drought spells and flash floods, which causes tremendous environmental and social constraints such as major water and food security problems, as well as claiming innocent lives. The region has cause for concern.

The LWSA project aims to lessen some of the challenges being experienced due to climatic changes by promoting and enhancing the protection and appropriate management of the regions wetland ecosystems for the benefit of those whom inhabit it.

Councilor Johan Mavuso, Speaker of the Ehlanzeni District Municipality stood in for and represented Mayor Shongwe to do the official welcoming and opening address. In his speech he alluded to the importance of biodiversity, particularly highlighting the important role of wetland ecosystems and its value to municipalities. He stressed the fact that EDM cannot do this work alone, and will need to rely on partnerships with other institutions working in the sector, saying: *“Today’s workshop is held in partnership with ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability as part of the ‘Local Action for Biodiversity: Wetlands South Africa’ programme that Ehlanzeni is participating. However, we need many partnerships to support this work, and make sure that our precious wetlands are sustained and well-managed for the benefit of our people. We are asking for your help to create awareness of how essential wetlands are for our future.”*

Climate change and Ehlanzeni

It was important to set the tone for the workshop by looking at the climatic situation of the region; historically, presently and also future predictions. Ms. Kirsty Robinson from ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a climate change specialist and presented on the ever-present environmental phenomenon, looking at the impact of humans on the changing climate and how the rainfall and maximum temperatures have been fluctuating over the last decades. More notably, her findings suggest an increase in both maximum and minimum temperatures leading to a general warming in the area – possibly increasing the likelihood of dry weather spells leading to drought. The change and condition of the rainfall patterns are a bit uncertain at this stage. It is advised that EDM’s future planning considers both an increase and/or decrease in annual rainfall.

It is important to when discussing climate change impacts, consider the key function of wetlands in relation to climate change. Wetlands have the potential to store water (important in the context of drought and limited water availability) and slowing surface run-off. This is important in the climate change context, as projections indicate that climate change will, in some places, cause an increase in the intensity of rainfall events, increasing the likelihood of floods.

An important question was asked arose from the audience: How do governmental departments advise farmers, in an agricultural region such as EDM, regarding climate change/impacts? It is a very difficult question to answer as there are so many factors to consider, but as a start, it is important to look at examples of adaptation actions which could be taken, e.g. drought resisting crops, canopies for hail attenuation, conserving wetlands ensuring water security etc. It all depends on the climate change situation, and the challenges being experienced by farmers.

Wetlands and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Ehlanzeni District

SANTAM has embarked on the Business-Adopt-A-Municipality (BAAM) initiative in support vulnerable municipalities, partnering with Ehlanzeni District and other municipalities across the country. The objective of BAAM is to assist in strengthening the institutional and participatory development capacity of local municipalities to combat and mitigate poverty. Also important is engaging relevant

stakeholders in aid of reducing disaster risk factors by identifying risks and the respective causes, the benefits of upstream risk prevention on downstream situation, eradicating environmental bad practice as it leads to loss/damage to property, which in turn increases insurance claims and for the purpose of the LWSA project, investigating what role wetlands can play in the consideration of all issues related to disaster reduction.

Ms. Ray-Ann Sedres: Head of Integrated Sustainability at SANTAM introduced the project at the workshop. Her presentation encapsulated the partnership with EDM, highlighting SANTAM's vision of reducing disaster risk by engaging holistically across all departments within EDM and through partnerships with the district and other external bodies. Notable strides have been made under the project thus far which include the sponsorship of a Vodacom ICT intervention to enable reporting between District and LMs and early warning SMS system to remote communities, training of stakeholders (engagement with Traditional Leaders is important to prevent communities developing on fragile land) and the revision of various district by-laws in aid of ensuring sustainable development in the region.

The presentation was well received by the workshop delegation, who had pertinent questions and suggestions to the process: SANTAM was urged to engage with Working for Wetlands/Water to prevent possible repetition of work, but also streamline progress and effectiveness of work. Also, the need to engage more widely with other stakeholders who can positively contribute to the overall project. [Chief/Kings blurb to be inserted here](#)

Wetlands

Wetland ecosystems are extremely complex ecosystems to comprehend. For this reason it was important to get someone with the necessary knowledge and expertise to talk to the subject. Mr. Anton Linström is a Wetland Ecologist who shared very insightful and interesting presentations about wetlands and their services they provide. His first presentation can be labelled a "101 on Wetland ecosystems", as he spoke in some detail to the what exactly defines a wetland (as per the National Water Act, 1998), different plant and animal species and the different indicators of wetlands (terrain unit, soil form, soil wetness and vegetation Indicators). He also presented the different types of wetlands (floodplain, valley bottom with/without channel, hillslopes, and depression). He also demonstrated to the delegation how to identify the presence of and the various types of wetlands (by examining the soil, plant and animal types and characteristics), unique to the Ehlanzeni region and in general. Anton really emphasized the value of ecosystem services, and highlighted the importance of managing and conserving wetlands – cattle grazing (mitigate overgrazing), water can be used for drinking/domestic use, plants have medicinal properties which can treat wounds, food/cooking properties (mints) and many others.

The second part of Anton's session focused on the wetland resources in the Ehlanzeni and greater Mpumalanga area and their status. The Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) developed an Mpumalanga Biodiversity Sector Plan (MBSP) which includes Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBA) maps which feed into municipal Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs) which will assist municipalities developing sustainably and prevent loss of biodiversity ecosystems such as wetlands – the Verloren Valei RAMSAR site in Mpumalanga and other important wetlands occur in sensitive areas and must be properly managed to prevent degradation or loss. Land-use activities which impact wetlands include; on-site: water drainage and crop production, timber production, over-grazing, burning, damming (drowning wetland), mining, town/settlement development. Off-site: mining (pollution/acid drainage/runoff), sewage works (water quality, animal/species life) etc.

Anton alluded to the work being undertaken by Working for Wetlands in the province related to wetland ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation and the need for more stakeholders to get involved.

He also urged the workshop to join the Mpumalanga Wetlands Forum (MWF) to get involved, learn about wetlands and receive relevant information on ways to ensure their protection.



Figure 2: Mr. Linström presenting on wetland ecosystem services

“A healthy environment = a healthy society”. Anton Linström

Wetlands and local economic development

Dr. Hugo van Zyl of Independent Economic Researchers addressed the workshop on the economic value and service delivery potential of wetland ecosystem services, and presented case studies to depict this claim. Dr. van Zyl’s shed some much needed light on the complexities of adding monetary value/s to ecosystem goods and services. It is important to, from a wetlands ecosystem point of view, understand what actual services are being provided (and are viewed as more important), i.e. food security, flood regulation, cultural (recreational) to name but a few, and link these services to variables of life and well-being, i.e. security, health, etc. Valuation can then be achieved.

The case studies presented looked specifically at the economic value of wetlands: Water treatment values of Western Cape wetlands, Wetland rehabilitation and livelihood benefits from the Craigeiburn-Manalana Wetland, Mpumalanga, Wetland rehabilitation and property values in Cape Town. Further information on the findings can be found in Dr. van Zyl’s presentation, also on request.

Ms. Liz Metcalfe: Project Manager of the LWSA project at ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability presented on the potential job opportunities from wetland related activities. The “Green Economy” space is quite new in South Africa but is being positively explored and successfully so, particularly in the local government fraternity. In relation to the before-mentioned, work related to wetlands are providing people and communities around the country with substantial working/income opportunities. And as mentioned before, the green jobs space is still in its infant stage, but growing at a promising rate. Since 1995, the environmental rehabilitation sector has provided close to half-a-million jobs nationwide, and many more is being foreseen.

Wetland ecosystems are under tremendous pressure, more notably from human influences such as pollution, which is diminishing functionality, causing loss of ability to provide pertinent services such as water purification and water storage. In addition to that, the presence of invasive plant species are also a cause for concern as these plant species degrade our natural ecosystems by sucking up all water and even causing extinction of indigenous vegetation. The City of Cape Town has developed a Green Jobs section, whose primary focus is to restore and rehabilitate natural resources by removing invasive

alien vegetation from river systems, wetlands etc. This provides the public with lucrative job opportunities whilst conserving the environment at the same time.

Working for Wetlands are also working on numerous wetland restoration and rehabilitation projects nationally, conserving the environment, restoring it to its natural state (where possible), rehabilitating wetlands to a functional state, and providing numerous jobs opportunities in the process.

Way forward

The workshop was really well attended, and provided all present with a very fruitful experience of knowledge sharing and learning. The share of information between specialist and traditional leaders was invaluable in EDM's quest of ensuring the management, protection and sustainable utilisation of natural resources, wetlands in particular, in the region.

The next steps for EDM in the LWSA project is the compilation and development of a Wetland Assessment Report, pulling together existing information relating to biodiversity/wetlands in the district, which will then feed into the next phase of developing a Wetland Strategy and Action Plan. Engagement between EDM and ICLEI will continue and foreseen to grow with ICLEI providing a strong support base to EDM in ensuring the successful implementation of the LWSA project.

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 LWSA project is facilitated and lead by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability Africa Secretariat, and funded by the USAID. This programme works in partnership with 9 District Municipalities and 2 Metropolitan Municipalities throughout South Africa.

Annex 2: Agenda



Ehlanzeni District Municipality **'Wetlands for Prosperity' Workshop**

Thursday 25 November 2015, **08:30am – 2:30pm**,
Bundu Lodge, White River.

Program Director: Ms. Liz Metcalfe ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

08.30 – 08.50	<i>Registration (tea & coffee)</i>
09.00 – 09.30	Welcome by the Executive Mayor
Introduction: setting the scene in the Ehlanzeni District	
09.30 – 09.50	Purpose of the Workshop (10 min) Ms. Liz Metcalfe: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i> Introduction of the Workshop: Local Governance and Environmental Management (10 min)
09.50 – 10.05	Climate change and Ehlanzeni (15 min) Ms. Kirsty Robinson: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i>
10.05 – 10.35	Wetlands and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Ehlanzeni District (20 min plus 10 mins Q&A) Ms. Ray-Ann Sedres: <i>SANTAM</i> .
10.35 – 11.00	Introduction to wetlands: (20 min plus 5 mins Q&A) Mr. Anton Linström: <i>Wet Earth eco specs</i>
11.00 – 11.30	<i>Tea/Coffee break</i>
11.30 – 12.00	Wetland resources in Ehlanzeni District (20 min plus 10 mins Q&A) Mr. Anton Linström: <i>Wet Earth eco specs</i>
Wetlands for prosperity – local solutions	
12.00 – 12.30	Wetlands and local economic development (20 min plus 10 mins Q&A) Dr. Hugo van Zyl <i>Independent Economic Researchers</i>
12.30 – 12.50	Creating 'green' jobs from wetland management (15 min plus 5 mins Q&A) Ms. Liz Metcalfe: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i>
13.50 – 13.10	Wrap-up and way forward. LAB: Wetlands South Africa Mr. Ryan Fisher: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i>
13.10 – 13.30	Signing of the Durban Commitment – Local Governments for Biodiversity by District & LMs Mayors.
13.30 – 14.30	<i>Lunch</i>