



m&e case study

Working on Wetlands: developing local partnerships for integrated catchment management #7



Working for Wetlands develops local partnerships which enable communities to understand, appreciate, restore and manage wetlands so that they function to keep catchments healthy. They do this by:

- **Providing information on why wetlands are important and how to rehabilitate them**
- **Rehabilitating priority wetlands and creating local partnerships and jobs.**

Integrated management of catchments is one of the cornerstones of the C.A.P.E. strategy. Catchments play an integrative role in the landscape, as upstream use impacts on all downstream users. Working for Wetlands makes an essential contribution towards this objective by helping rehabilitate the wetlands which keep the catchments functioning. Its approach includes the use of wetland rehabilitation as a vehicle for poverty alleviation. Their stated goal is that: *“Working for Wetlands champions the protection, rehabilitation and sustainable use of South Africa’s wetlands through co-operative governance and partnerships.”* The Working on Wetlands initiative is one of the most concrete examples of the tremendous potential that the C.A.P.E. partners can harness when working together.

COORDINATING PARTNERSHIPS

Working for Wetlands operates by facilitating high level partnerships between different government departments and NGOs in order to develop integrated solutions and to access funding. They also include additional location-specific role-players in creating cooperative local governance structures for each project. Working for Wetlands is hosted by SANBI, but its operations include many other C.A.P.E. partners, including the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Working for Water, WWF-SA, the Expanded Public Works Programme and the Department of Agriculture.

BUILDING CAPACITY

The coordination unit of Working for Wetlands aims to provide a bridge between research and implementation. There is good scientific understanding of wetland functioning, but it is difficult for lay-people to access. Many of South Africa’s more ephemeral wetlands are also difficult to identify. Although there is a strong legal framework in place to protect wetlands, many have nevertheless been degraded by poor management. One of Working for Wetlands’ most important roles is therefore to provide guidelines for landowners on the identification of wetlands and the legal requirements of protecting them. This is further supported by the development of accessible material on the technicalities of restoration.

Working on Wetlands also facilitates the rehabilitation of priority wetlands. The majority of this work is supported by funding from the Department of Public Works. In selecting sites for rehabilitation each site is evaluated for potential return on investment. There are therefore two main criteria:

- the importance of the wetland which is determined by C.A.P.E. sponsored prioritization
- accessibility to a community requiring help through job creation.

As one of the primary objectives of Working for Wetlands is to assist with poverty alleviation, there is a strong emphasis on skills development for those employed by the projects. This adult education includes literacy, primary health (including HIV), and personal finance.

WORKING TOGETHER LOCALLY

In each catchment selected for action, Working for Wetlands facilitates the project, putting together the local working partnerships needed to restore and maintain functioning. They also access funding and report to donors. The membership of the local action committees is driven by the nature of the problem and the enthusiasm of the local role-players. The process is best illustrated example:

Agulhas: On the highly diverse Agulhas Plain there are 12 types of wetlands, 44 bird



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species and several IUCN Red Data-listed endemic amphibians. Some of the initial rehabilitation of wetlands in Agulhas was funded through C.A.P.E.'s support of the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI).

This project is now being managed by a partnership between Working for Wetlands and members of ABI, including South African National Parks (SANParks), Western Cape Department of Agriculture, and CapeNature. Rehabilitation within, and adjacent to, the Agulhas National Park is assisting with the creation of this new national park. This is being achieved through the removal of drainage furrows and invasive alien plant infestations left behind by farming operations. In addition to standard training in first aid, health and safety, and construction, teams due to exit the programme are given training in catering and small scale building, as these are scarce skills locally.

Berg and Breede: For many years the Kluitjieskraal wetland was under plantations which drained the wetland. Mountain to Ocean Forestry and Working for Wetlands have cleared this area and constructed structures to block drainage channels, facilitating rewetting of the wetland. The area now acts as a natural reservoir and there is prolonged dry season water availability. Many wetland species have returned.

Duiwenhoks Goukou: A number of C.A.P.E. partners including SANBI, CapeNature, Working for Water and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, support this project, which has created 24 jobs. The Duiwenhoks and Goukou are palmiet-dominated systems which are important for both biodiversity and the water supply to the nearby towns of Heidelberg and Riversdal.

Under previous agricultural policies farmers had been encouraged to dig irrigation trenches into the wetlands and drain them for cultivation. Palmiet was cleared right up to the river banks. Alien plants had been allowed to spread, which further destabilized the river banks. This situation had led to a degradation of water quality and severe erosion. There are two components to the restoration currently being facilitated in this area, namely alien clearing and construction of gabions to restore a headcut.

Cape Peninsula: The Western Cape Wetlands Forum was used as a platform for stakeholder engagement. Integrated rehabilitation of the Prinskasteel/Keysers River from source to sea was planned with funding from the Table Mountain Fund in consultation with local stakeholders, including the Sand River Catchment Forum and the City of Cape Town. This river is not heavily impacted, despite being in an urban area, allowing good potential for functional restoration. There has been strong emphasis on re-vegetation. This has included propagation of the endangered *Erica verticillata*. Furthermore, temporary employment has been created for 70 people.

In the Blouberg area the primary focus of their work is on alien clearing, while in Noordhoek the work has also rehabilitated erosion caused by riding paths. In the Prinskasteel wetlands, rehabilitation involves halting channel incision.

Verlorenvlei: This area is designated as a 'Wetland of International Importance' and is a host to 75 resident and migratory birds, and also other wetland species such as the rare minnow, *Barbus burgi*. It forms part of the Greater Cederberg Conservation Corridor Initiative and is under pressure from agriculture, which has resulted in over-abstraction of groundwater and degradation of water quality. The focus of work in this largely groundwater-driven system has been to clear impediments to flow and to remove invasive alien plants. Clearing is undertaken on private land and requires contracts with landowners to ensure long term follow-up. In 2008 this project employed forty-two people from Elands Bay and Redelingshuys.