REALISING THE BENEFITS OF BIODIVERSITY FOR MUNICIPALITIES

South Africa has a vast wealth of biodiversity that provides a number of benefits that are essential for economic growth and social development. Municipalities have an increasingly significant role to play in protecting this important biodiversity. At the same time, municipalities face immense challenges related to high levels of poverty, unemployment and service delivery. The Biodiversity and Land Use Project was initiated in 2015 to support municipalities in effectively regulating land use and environmental management to ensure that biodiversity continues to provide essential ecosystem services to municipal residents.
MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY INTO LAND-USE PLANNING AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL

Natural resources and functioning ecosystems are the basis of life, economic activity and human well-being. South Africa has a vast wealth of biodiversity that supports the production of ecosystem services that are essential for economic growth and social development. The integration between biodiversity, sustainable development and human communities is most relevant at the scale of local government. Municipalities are directly responsible for the provision of services to communities, including social and economic development and a safe, healthy living environment. Municipalities are also the foremost level of government responsible for land-use planning and decision-making. Legislation requires that municipalities develop Spatial Development Frameworks that enable them to make land-use decisions based on desired patterns of economic growth and sustainable development.

SOLVING THE CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Municipalities face multiple challenges relating to poverty, unemployment and service delivery. Limited capacity and co-ordination also results in ineffective environmental governance. In addition, provincial and national government departments have a mandate to regulate land-use and enforce environmental management legislation. Improved collaboration between these departments and municipalities will achieve better outcomes for biodiversity at the municipal level. By supporting municipalities to address these challenges, they will be better able to perform their mandate for service delivery and biodiversity conservation.

CHALLENGES

- Low level of biodiversity understanding
- Limited use of biodiversity information
- Capacity constraints
- Weak compliance monitoring
- Poor co-ordination between departments
- Fiscal obstacles
- Inadequate engagement with landowners

SOLUTIONS

- Improve biodiversity awareness
- Guidelines to assist in using biodiversity information
- Strengthen municipal capacity
- Improve mechanisms to monitor compliance
- Promote collaboration
- Promote dedicated budget allocations
- Promote biodiversity-friendly practices
The Biodiversity and Land Use Project was initiated in 2015 to support municipalities in effectively regulating land use to ensure that biodiversity continues to provide essential ecosystem services to municipal residents. The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) will implement the Project, together with its partners, with funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The overarching objective of the project is:

*To minimise the multiple threats to biodiversity by increasing the capabilities of authorities and land owners to regulate land use and manage biodiversity in threatened ecosystems at the municipal scale.*

**Component 1: Land-use regulation and environmental management**

The first component of the Project deals with land-use management, regulation, compliance and enforcement. The Project aims to encourage the uptake of biodiversity considerations into municipal planning and decision-making, with an emphasis on strengthening biodiversity content in Integrated Development Plans and Spatial Development Frameworks. In addition to land-use regulation, the Project aims to work with relevant government departments to develop and implement other environmental management tools in support of improved biodiversity mainstreaming. It also aims to increase the capacity of regulatory authorities to carry out their functions more effectively with regard to biodiversity. The Project will illustrate the possible financial gains from incorporating ecosystem services into municipal planning, which will ultimately promote increased budget allocation for investments in ecological infrastructure within municipalities.

**Component 2: Incentives on private and communal land**

The second component of the Project focuses on improving the management of land and natural resources, to ensure that priority biodiversity is able to persist in a healthy functioning state. Most of the biodiversity priority areas in the target districts are on land that is either privately or communally owned. Thus, the Project will involve the implementation of biodiversity stewardship agreements on private and communal land. Biodiversity stewardship is an approach to entering into agreements with private and communal landowners to protect and manage land in biodiversity priority areas. Biodiversity stewardship programmes are currently underfunded. Through this Project, private and communal landowners will be empowered to become custodians of important biodiversity on their land.

**ADDRESSING POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT**


For this reason, the Project aims to create at least 600 jobs through the restoration of ecological infrastructure.

Restoring ecological infrastructure will improve service delivery related to disaster risk reduction, water and sanitation.
The Biodiversity and Land Use Project is being implemented in four districts and their local municipalities. These municipalities occur in global biodiversity hotspots and national biodiversity priority areas.

**Ehlanzeni District Municipality** is located in Mpumalanga province. Over 70% of all South Africa’s vertebrates occur in this area, including a very high diversity of mammals and birds. The municipality has a population of 1.6 million. The tourism industry plays a central role in the district, with Kruger National Park as one of the major tourist destinations. Land in much of the district is the subject of prospecting or mining rights, and commercial forestry, urban and informal settlements are expanding. The municipality faces a number of challenges with regard to land ownership.

**uMngungundlovu District Municipality** in KwaZulu-Natal, falls within one of the most diverse corridors in the Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany hotspot. A large percentage of this district is comprised of high-yield water catchment areas, with numerous Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas. Just fewer than 1 million people live in the district, where there is mixed land use on commercial livestock farms and a strong emphasis on tourism. Extension of urban areas, major infrastructure and ‘ribbon’ development along the N3 corridor, are driving biodiversity loss. Water demand for the municipality and downstream users exceeds supply.

**Cape Winelands District Municipality** in the Western Cape is found between two globally recognised biodiversity hotspots, the Succulent Karoo and Cape Floristic Region. It has extraordinary endemism and diversity of succulent and vascular plants, invertebrate species, specialist insects, freshwater fish and birds. The municipality is home to 650,000 people. Much of South Africa’s wine is produced in the area, and it is also an agricultural centre for deciduous fruits and vegetables. Overconsumption of water, damming of rivers and water pollution has compromised the ecosystem functioning in this municipality.

**Amathole District Municipality** is located on the south-eastern seaboard of South Africa. The municipality hosts high species diversity at the intersection of five different biomes. About 1.7 million people live within the municipality. The area is mostly under communal land tenure, with small-scale crop farming and open grazed livestock. Biodiversity and ecosystems are subject to pressures from spreading urbanisation, commercial agriculture and plantation forestry, overgrazing, mining, industrial activities and wind farms.

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