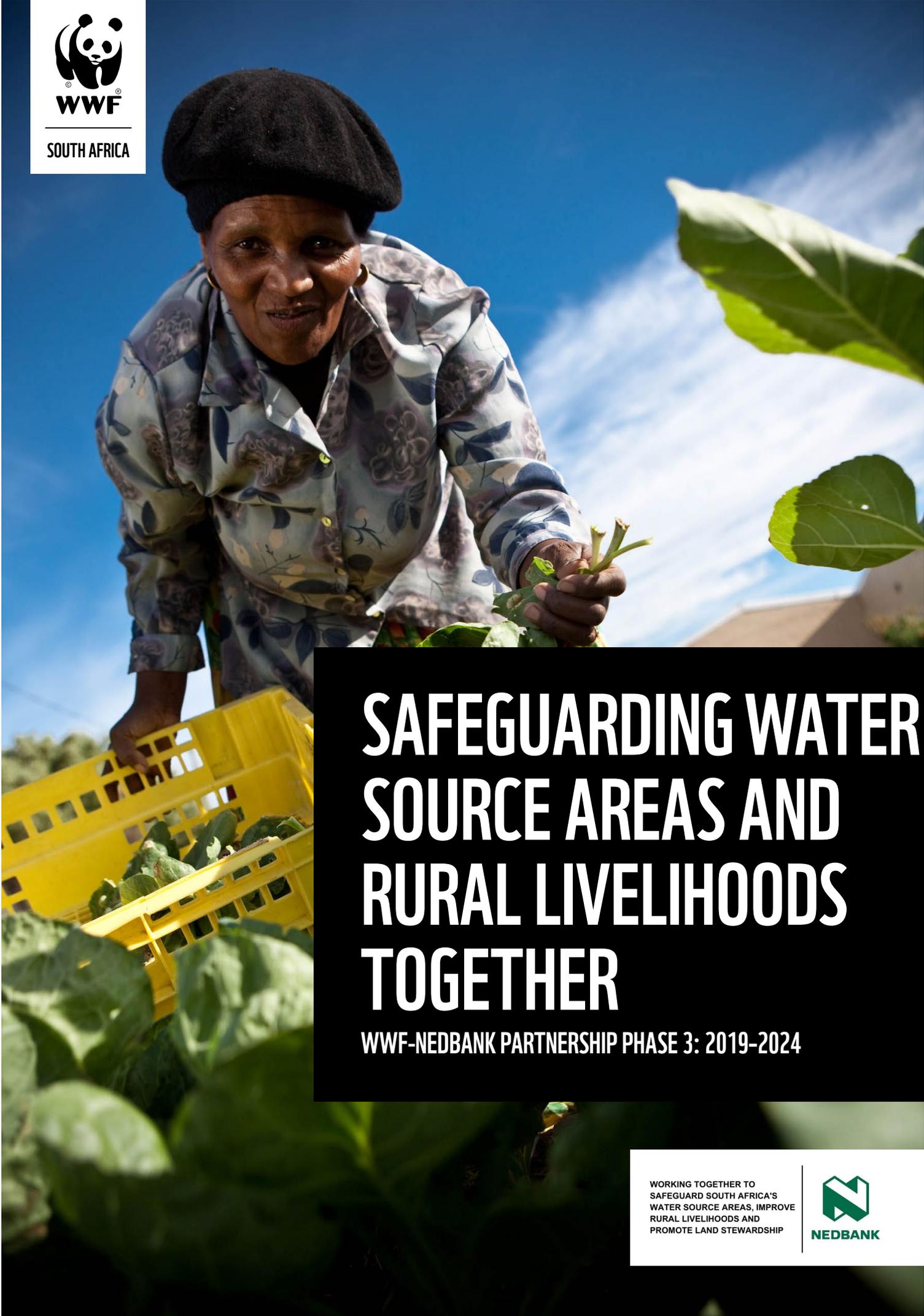




WWF

SOUTH AFRICA



SAFEGUARDING WATER SOURCE AREAS AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS TOGETHER

WWF-NEDBANK PARTNERSHIP PHASE 3: 2019-2024

WORKING TOGETHER TO
SAFEGUARD SOUTH AFRICA'S
WATER SOURCE AREAS, IMPROVE
RURAL LIVELIHOODS AND
PROMOTE LAND STEWARDSHIP



WWF South Africa collaborators

Freshwater stewardship:

Ayanda Cele, Samir Randera-Rees

Sustainable agriculture:

Shelly Fuller, Sue Viljoen, Luyanda Njanjala

Sustainable finance:

Wendy Engel, Cerin Maduray

WWF editorial team

Wanika Davids, Wendy Engel, Cerin Maduray, Justin Smith

Text editor

Marlene Rose

Proofreader

Lindsaye Mc Gregor

Design and layout

Karen Lilje: karen@hybridcreative.co.za

Cover photo

WWF Nedbank Green Trust

© Text 2024 WWF

All rights reserved.

Published in 2024 by WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly World Wildlife Fund), Cape Town, South Africa. Any reproduction in full or in part must mention the title and credit the above-mentioned publisher as the copyright owner.

Citation: WWF. 2024. *Safeguarding water source areas and rural livelihoods together: WWF-Nedbank Partnership Phase 3: 2019–2024*. WWF South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa

If you would like to share copies of this report, please do so in this printed or electronic PDF format. Report available online at: www.wwf.org.za/report/wwf_nedbank_partnership_phase_3

For more information, contact Cerin Maduray at cmaduray@wwf.org.za

WWF is one of the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisations with over 6 million supporters and a global network active in more than 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

WWF South Africa is a national office in the global WWF network. Started in South Africa in 1968, we are a local NGO with a vision of building a sustainable and equitable future in which humans and nature thrive. We work to champion the Earth's capacity to provide a source of inspiration, sustainable food, fresh water and clean energy for all. For Nature. For You.

wwf.org.za



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Nedbank and WWF South Africa have been partners for over three decades, since the formation of the WWF Nedbank Green Trust in 1990. In 2007, the partnership acquired a sharper focus when the two organisations entered into a transformational partnership separate from The Green Trust. The aim was to promote and enable sustainable agriculture, biodiversity and water stewardship in South Africa. This phase ended in 2012, and Phase 2 ran from 2013 to 2018.

This report gives feedback on Phase 3 of the WWF-Nedbank

transformational partnership, spanning from 2019 to 2024. Its primary aim is to reflect upon the key partnership actions and impacts achieved during this period.

Nedbank invested R25 million in this phase. The report highlights the various activities undertaken and outcomes achieved, incorporating insights from the staff members involved in the various work streams. It serves as a foundation for the future ambitions of the partnership and outlines the baseline for the upcoming Phase 4, which will extend for an additional five years.



CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS REPORT	2
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	4
MESSAGE FROM WWF'S CEO	5
MESSAGE FROM NEDBANK'S GROUP EXECUTIVE: GROUP STRATEGY	7
OVERVIEW	8
WWF-NEDBANK PARTNERSHIP: PHASE 3	8
PROTECTING STRATEGIC WATER SOURCE AREAS	16
PROTECTING THE uMZIMVUBU CATCHMENT	16
RANGELAND MANAGEMENT	20
IMPROVING PRODUCTION PRACTICES	24
BETTER PRODUCTION PRACTICES FOR DAIRY AND FRUIT	24
WATER-METERING CASE STUDY PROJECT FOR DAIRY FARMS	26
DAIRY STEWARDSHIP AWARDS	28
ASSESSING THE BANKABILITY OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE PRACTICES IN DAIRY FARMING	30
BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SUSTAINABLE DAIRY PRODUCTION	32
NEDBANK FUNDING IN THE FRUIT SECTOR	33
FOOD SECURITY AND AGROECOLOGY	34
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	38
MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING	38
SUSTAINABLE FINANCE	41
SUSTAINABLE FINANCE IN THE WWF-NEDBANK PARTNERSHIP	41
THE FUTURE	42
LOOKING AHEAD: PHASE 4	42



© WWF South Africa

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACAT	African Conference on Agricultural Technology	PGS	Participatory Guarantee Systems
CSA	Conservation South Africa	SAEON	South African Environmental Observation Network
DEDEAT	Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism	SIZA	Sustainable Agriculture in South Africa
ECPTA	Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency	TNFD	Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures
ERS	Environmental and Rural Solutions	UCP	uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	WEF	Water-Energy-Food
MPO	Milk Producers' Organisation	WRC	Water Research Commission
MTTM	Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi		
OECM	Other environmental conservation measures		

MESSAGE FROM WWF'S CEO

The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report for 2024 cites that over the next 10 years, the top four risks to the global economy will all be environmental in nature: extreme weather events, a critical change to Earth systems, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, and natural resource shortages.

The integration of environmental and social risks into mainstream economic decision-making has been a significant focus of the work WWF South Africa and Nedbank have done together over many decades. In the South African context, it goes even deeper: there may be social issues that are not environmentally related, but there is not a single environmental issue that is not also a social issue. Highlighting these connections between people and nature is central to our work.

This also shows that, as we come to grips with the targets set by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, societies, communities, governments and businesses are recognising not only our dependency on nature but also the impact that our actions have on nature. And, as a result, the actual risks that become present when we do not look after the natural environment.

With over 50 years of experience and expertise in applied research, conservation and policy work, WWF South Africa is well positioned to collaborate on a global and local scale. As a science-based organisation, WWF aims to find nature-positive solutions to conservation challenges such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, overfishing, water scarcity and climate change.

To do this, the organisation partners with like-minded businesses that are committed to transforming their operations, investments and supply chains. The Edelman Trust barometer for 2024 shows that in a world where trust is an increasingly scarce commodity, business and NGOs are the only two groups that are broadly trusted for their ethical approach and capability. As such, NGO/business partnerships can be a real "sweet spot" for rebuilding trust and credibility.

WWF has partnered with Nedbank for over three decades, adopting a landscape approach to address key environmental and social challenges that also resonate with Nedbank's business operations. The executive leadership of Nedbank has wholeheartedly embraced and supported this, making its most substantial investment over the past five years. This partnership has been a particularly special one for WWF, with deep relationships and respect built between the organisations, and a legacy of impact through the activities of both the WWF Nedbank Green Trust and the broader WWF-Nedbank partnership. WWF values and appreciates this impactful relationship with Nedbank.

This collaboration has facilitated better production practices in the agriculture sector and joint engagement on public policy and governance; improved access to and the equitable sharing of natural resources; supported the development of key forums like the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership (UCP); and is protecting ecologically critical areas in South Africa. There has been a willingness to evaluate and catalyse innovative solutions and to work with a range of other partners in implementing these.

WWF looks forward to the continued growth and evolution of this long-standing partnership, how it will integrate the global momentum around reversing nature loss into its objectives, and the achievements it can bring in the next five years.



Dr Morné du Plessis
Chief Executive Officer
WWF South Africa



© WWF South Africa

MESSAGE FROM NEDBANK'S GROUP EXECUTIVE: GROUP STRATEGY

Nedbank stands as a beacon of purpose-driven finance, steadfast in its mission to harness its financial acumen for the greater good of individuals, families, businesses and society at large. Our enduring sustainability is inextricably linked to the thriving communities we serve, making it imperative for us to fully embrace our role as a purpose-led entity in the economy, fostering societal prosperity through our endeavours. The realisation of our purpose is not only a commercial necessity but also offers a unique opportunity for differentiation in the marketplace.

We take immense pride in our alliance with WWF, a natural progression of our unwavering 30-year dedication to the WWF Nedbank Green Trust. The preceding half-decade has underscored the exponential outcomes achievable through synergistic efforts among diverse stakeholders committed to sustainability. The WWF-Nedbank collaboration is strategically poised to diminish the environmental footprint of production and consumption patterns, focusing on water conservation, carbon reduction, biodiversity preservation and sustainable land use. This holistic strategy encompasses both product innovation and community engagement.

Nedbank acknowledges the pivotal role we play in galvanising collective action to enhance the well-being of society. Our pledge of R25 million to this cause is a testament to our commitment. The fruits of this partnership

are evident in the remarkable achievements of our nine projects: the creation of 1 652 jobs, the development of skills for 1 537 individuals, the empowerment of 374 youths, the inclusion of 29 individuals with disabilities, and the upliftment of approximately 620 women.

Marking the culmination of this phase of our partnership, we eagerly anticipate the forthcoming chapter, which promises to bolster systemic intelligence and perpetuate environmental stewardship. Phase 4 will concentrate on nurturing nature and fostering green employment, pivotal elements within South Africa's national discourse. The government's endorsement of the Kunming 30x30 initiative, coupled with the pressing issues of stark inequality and youth unemployment, presents fertile ground for impactful initiatives.

As we build on this solid foundation, we remain steadfast in our commitment to driving positive change and fostering a sustainable future for all.



Priyabashni Naidoo
Group Executive: Nedbank
Group Strategy

WWF-NEDBANK PARTNERSHIP: PHASE 3

The long-term goal of the WWF-Nedbank partnership is to leverage Nedbank and WWF's respective capacities to reduce the impacts of production and consumption on water, carbon, biodiversity and land use. The approach is multi-faceted and aimed at both products and people.



WWF-NEDBANK TRANSFORMATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

In 1990, Nedbank and WWF founded the WWF Nedbank Green Trust to fund innovative projects to help solve some of the greatest societal and environmental challenges in South Africa.¹ In 2007, the partnership acquired a sharper focus when the two organisations entered into a transformational partnership separate from The Green Trust. In the 17 years since, three phases of the transformational partnership have been completed: Phase 1 (2007–2012), Phase 2 (2013–2018) and Phase 3 (2019–2024).

In 2011, Nedbank also joined the WWF Water Balance Programme to offset its operational water use of 553 000 kℓ over five years. The WWF-Nedbank partnership uses this investment to improve catchment health in the Enkangala Grasslands area in Mpumalanga and the Upper Umgeni in KwaZulu-Natal, with additional investment in the Western Cape.

In 2012, Nedbank invested R8,3 million in a transformational partnership focused on promoting sustainable agriculture in South Africa, especially in the country's priority places of biodiversity and water yield.² The partnership employs a combination of approaches, ranging from philanthropic sponsorship of WWF South Africa's Sustainable Agriculture Programme to driving sustainable business practices in Nedbank's internal operations.

The WWF-Nedbank partnership engaged with farmers in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, helping them to improve land-use planning, increase production and develop responsible farming practices in beef, dairy, fruit, sugar and wine.³

In 2019, Nedbank committed R25 million towards safeguarding critical water source areas, biodiversity hotspots and rural livelihoods, focusing strongly on the Eastern Cape.⁴ This was the start of Phase 3 of the WWF-Nedbank partnership. In the same year, Nedbank collaborated with the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO) and WWF to celebrate the efforts of South African dairy farmers to implement sustainable best practices.⁵ Scientifically researched data from a case study involving 62 pasture-based dairy farms in South Africa between 2013 and 2019 found a connection between the economic and environmental aspects of sustainable dairy production. The study also highlighted how the promotion of best practices can enhance the adoption of sustainable production methods.⁶

In 2022, a three-day road show for Eastern Cape dairy farmers was undertaken to show them how irrigation efficiency can be improved by using water meters. A year later, WWF's agriculture team, in collaboration with Nedbank, did a presentation on the WWF Wine Conservation Champions at Nampo, the largest agricultural expo in South Africa.⁷ WWF has been collaborating with Nedbank at Nampo for three years to highlight sustainable agriculture practices.

OBJECTIVES AND PROJECT AREAS

During Phase 3 of the WWF-Nedbank transformational partnership (2019–2024), the key focus areas were water stewardship, rangeland management, sustainable agriculture (especially in the fruit and dairy sectors), food security and agroecology, and sustainable production in the dairy sector.

WWF and Nedbank are both committed to fostering a culture of sustainability among South African consumers. The supported projects during this phase focused on the impact on people in local communities – from empowering and building the capacity of local farmers to influencing consumer behaviour.

The strategic environmental objectives and focus areas of Phase 3, as well as the highlights and the Phase 3 project partners, are summarised below. The map in Figure 1 on page 11 shows the project areas.



© A Burns / WWF South Africa

1 About Us - WWF Nedbank Green Trust

2 nedbank.co.za/content/nedbank/desktop/gt/en/news/nedbankstories/csi-news/2012/nedbank-invests-r8-3-million-into-wwf-sa-sustainable-agriculture-programme.html

3 Nedbank joins our Tree Hive - The Bee Effect (bee-effect.co.za)

4 R25m boost for Eastern Cape | WWF South Africa

5 MPO Nedbank Stewardship Awards 2020 – 19 Nominations received - MPO

6 wwfafrika.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_nedbank_dairy_business_case_report_v2.pdf?36342/Making-A-Business-Case-For-Sustainable-Dairy-Production

7 Nation in Conversation at Nampo (farmersweekly.co.za)



© WWF South Africa

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES FOR PHASE 3

WATER STEWARDSHIP

✔ **Objective 1**

Safeguarding water source areas and Critical Biodiversity Areas working with communal and private land stewards to promote sound catchment natural resource managements while maintaining water security and rural livelihoods, household food security and access to markets.

WATER SOURCE PARTNERSHIP: PROTECTING THE uMZIMVUBU CATCHMENT

✔ **Objective 1.1**

Developing a formalised Water Source Partnership to safeguard the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership (UCP) region of the Eastern Cape and Southern Drakensberg water source areas.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

✔ **Objective 1.2**

Promoting models of communal stewardship and rangeland management, land reform and biodiversity stewardship as an innovative approach to securing water source areas and contributing towards the national biodiversity targets of the Eastern Cape.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Objective 2

BETTER PRODUCTION PRACTICES FOR FRUIT AND DAIRY

✔ **Objective 2.1**

Promoting the adoption and verification of better production practices in key high-impact sectors in agriculture, including fruit and dairy, in priority spatial nodes 2 and 3, which include the Kouga Strategic Water Source Area and the Greater Sundays River citrus region.

🟡 **Objective 2.3**

Supporting the coordination of and training in agroecology farming to improve household food security and support access to markets, including local and formal supply chains.

SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND INNOVATIVE FINANCE

✔ **Objective 3**

Building the business case for sustainable production and exploring opportunities for innovative finance to promote and reward sustainable food production and land-use management.

RESEARCH, PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

🟡 **Objective 4**

Developing a research, futures planning, and monitoring and evaluation framework.

✔ Implemented 🟡 Still in progress ✖ Concern

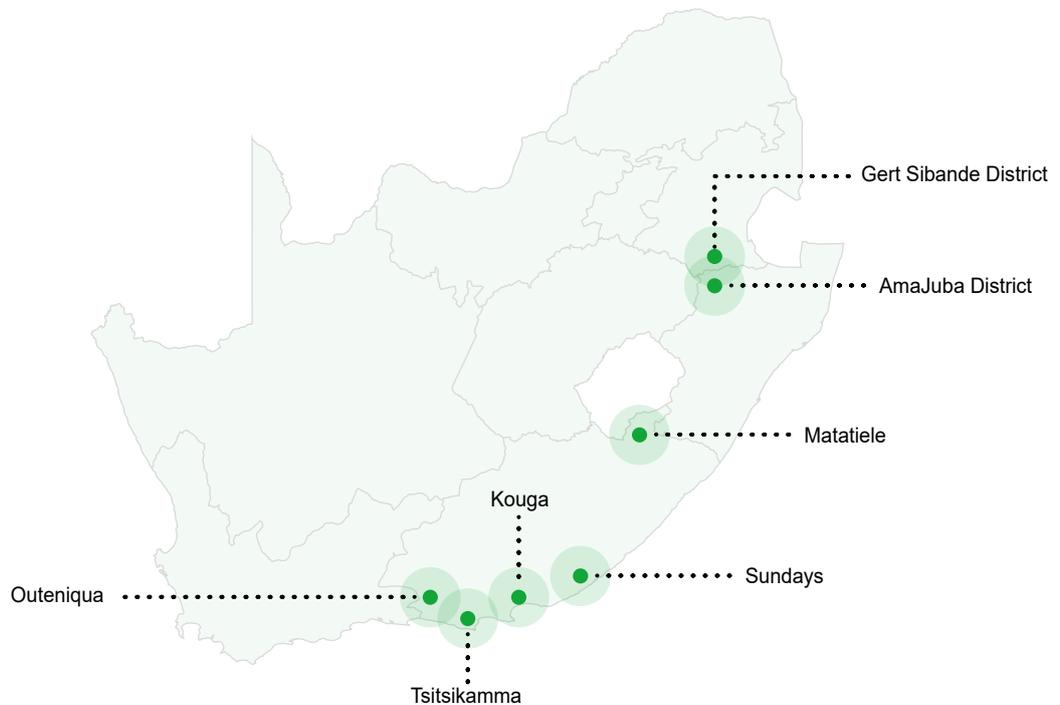
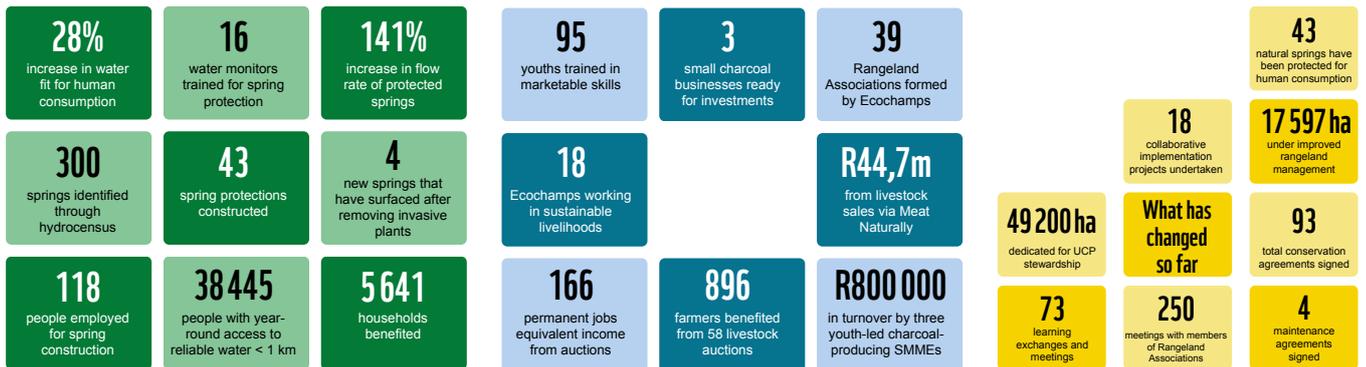


Figure 1: The project areas for Phase 3 of the WWF-Nedbank partnership

PHASE 3 HIGHLIGHTS



PHASE 3 PARTNERS

Project partners: WWF South Africa and Nedbank

Catchment conservation partner: uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership (UCP)

Collaborating partner: Conservation South Africa (CSA) (www.conservation.org/south-africa)

Dairy project partner: Trace and Save (<http://traceandsave.com>)

Fruit implementing partner: Living Lands (www.livinglands.com)

Impact amplification consultant: Sopact (www.sopact.com)

Secretariat, project convener and implementing partner: Environmental and Rural Solutions (ERS), which specialises in rangeland management, alien-vegetation clearing and spring protection work (<https://enviros.co.za>)

OBJECTIVE 1.1

Developing a formalised Water Source Partnership to safeguard the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership (UCP) region of the Eastern Cape and Southern Drakensberg water source areas.

Long-term goal

The WWF-Nedbank partnership delivers on its set objectives to ensure safeguarding and effective management of strategic water source areas.

Commitments

- Making sure that the WWF-Nedbank partnership has a multiplier effect, convening a wide range of role-players across all sectors, including the state, civil society and local leadership.
- Bringing together additional partners and resources to ensure that the Eastern Cape water source areas are secured and deliver lasting outcomes for people and nature in the Eastern Cape.

Activities and milestones

- ✔ Appointed a dedicated Water Source Partnership Coordinator in Matatiele offices.
- ✔ Developed capacity to monitor and implemented the UCP strategic five-year implementation plan as well as a monitoring and evaluation framework.
- ✔ Established and tracked new jobs created in rural areas by directly employing people with a focus on youth not currently funded by the government.

Project

- Protecting the uMzimvubu Catchment (page 16)



OBJECTIVE 1.2

Promoting models of communal stewardship and rangeland management, land reform and biodiversity stewardship as an innovative approach to securing water source areas and contributing towards the national biodiversity targets of the Eastern Cape.

Long-term goals

- Increase the area secured under Conservation Agreements.
- Coordinate the development and sharing of knowledge from lessons learnt in the uMzimvubu area with the relevant forums to increase good governance and to safeguard strategic water source areas. These two aspects are part of the WWF-Nedbank partnership objectives.

Commitments

- WWF South Africa will continue to support ERS and communities with capacity through the WWF-Nedbank partnership.
- ERS is committed to ensuring that investments generate amplified returns for the residents of the area and for WWF and Nedbank. The value of the WWF-Nedbank partnership is felt much more deeply than its monetary contribution. The encouragement, exposure and the space to innovate and learn that Nedbank and WWF provide are of inestimable value.

Activities and milestones

- ✔ Provided dedicated extension support to establish five new communal stewardship sites.
- ✔ Supported the sound land-use management of grasslands.
- ✔ Developed a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to track the benefits of sustainable rangeland management as part of the monitoring, research and evaluation framework. This framework tracked the reduced impact of rangeland management on water, biodiversity and carbon components.
- ✔ Promoted sourcing policies for grassland- or veld-raised beef with key retail and hospitality partners to reward sustainable rangeland management in the area and among communal stewardship sites.
- ✔ Supported improved livelihoods, as well as household food security and economic incomes generated through mobile auctions, agroecology markets and PGS⁸ farmer networks.

Project

- Rangeland management (page 20–23)

8 Participatory Guarantee Systems South Africa (PGS SA); www.pgssa.org.za



OBJECTIVE 2.1

Promoting the adoption and verification of better production practices in key high-impact sectors in agriculture, including fruit and dairy, in priority spatial nodes 2 and 3, which include the Kouga Strategic Water Source Area and the Greater Sundays River citrus region.

Long-term goals

- Implement and mainstream better production.
- Develop knowledge through business cases.
- Share knowledge through exchanges and training.

Commitments

- The SIZA (Sustainable Agriculture in South Africa) environmental standard is rolled out in the fruit sector downstream from the Kouga Strategic Water Source Area and the Sundays River valley.
- The dairy sector is engaged in implementing better production practices.
- The technical identification of what best practice looks like in dairy is strengthened to promote better understanding and improve water stewardship and environmental sustainability (this includes promoting the uptake of Trace and Save).
- Case studies of champion farmers are developed and shared along with communication material to grow awareness, share lessons and promote the adoption of better production practices.

Activities and milestones

- ✓ Obtained baseline data on current resource impacts, legal compliance and areas of high environmental risk, within the fruit and dairy sectors in nodes 2 and 3 respectively, using the SIZA self-assessment (SAQ). If relevant, the WWF Water Risk Filter or Confronting Climate Change Carbon Calculator can be used to obtain baseline data and provide targeted support for water stewardship interventions and sustainable production training. The target areas for fruit are the Langkloof, Joubertina and Kirkwood, and for dairy, the Kouga and Humansdorp regions.
- ✓ Supported awareness and training for local extension support with local partners in the region (“train the trainer” workshops and field days), including the Sundays River Citrus Company and citrus growers, Woodlands Dairy and other local stewardship initiatives.

Projects

- Water-metering case study project for dairy farms (page 26–27)
- Dairy Stewardship Awards (page 28–29)
- Assessing the bankability of regenerative agriculture practices in dairy farming (page 30–31)
- Nedbank funding in the fruit sector (page 33)

OBJECTIVE 2.3

Supporting the coordination of and training in agroecology farming to improve household food security and support access to markets, including local and formal supply chains.

Long-term goal

- Develop a PGS-certified agroecology node linked to financial savings, which provides local food to and is enabled to access the SPAR rural hub market. This agroecology node will be a centre of knowledge exchange with future agroecology nodes in the Eastern Cape and beyond.

Commitments

- An agroecology node is established by the end of 2020.
- Agroecology nodes connect farmers and support the safeguarding of the tributaries of the uMzimvubu River around Port St Johns.

Activities and milestones

- ✓ Fostered inclusive supply chains and developed sustainable value chains and better market access for smallholders through agroecology training and the introduction to PGS networks.
- ✓ Supported new alternative markets for Meat Naturally / rangeland beef.

Project

- Food security and agroecology (page 34–37)

OBJECTIVE 3

Building the business case for sustainable production and exploring opportunities for innovative finance to promote and reward sustainable food production and land-use management.

Long-term goal

Build the business case for sustainable production and explore opportunities for innovative finance to promote and reward sustainable food production and land-use management.

Commitment

At least one economic business case shows an innovative financing product or solution that supports and incentivises responsible farming practices.

Activities and milestones

- ✓ Wrote up the case study of the Woodlands Dairy Trace and Save model.
- ✗ Implemented a test case for one or two soft commodities, including citrus, deciduous fruit or dairy.
- ✗ Wrote up the sustainable production business case to evaluate innovative finance models focused on Meat Naturally or Cetane livestock to explore potential innovative financing solutions, such as the Humansdorp Cooperative supporting innovative dairy and citrus finance.

Projects

- Building the business case for sustainable dairy production (page 32–33)



© A Burns / WWF South Africa

OBJECTIVE 4

Developing a research, futures planning, and monitoring and evaluation (MEL) framework.

Long-term goals

- Oversee the development of a comprehensive MEL framework to track the ongoing progress of the partnership (at UCP landscape level and between the WWF and Nedbank partners), the measurable delivery and the scale of impact.
- Ensure that delivery and the scale of impact are well documented.
- Identify relevant academic forums, studies and joint presentations at seminars and conferences to promote scientific rigour in the partnership's work.

Commitment

Future visioning for integrated resource planning must be done to inform land-use development in the region through scenario modelling using Water-Energy-Food interdependencies.

Activities and milestones

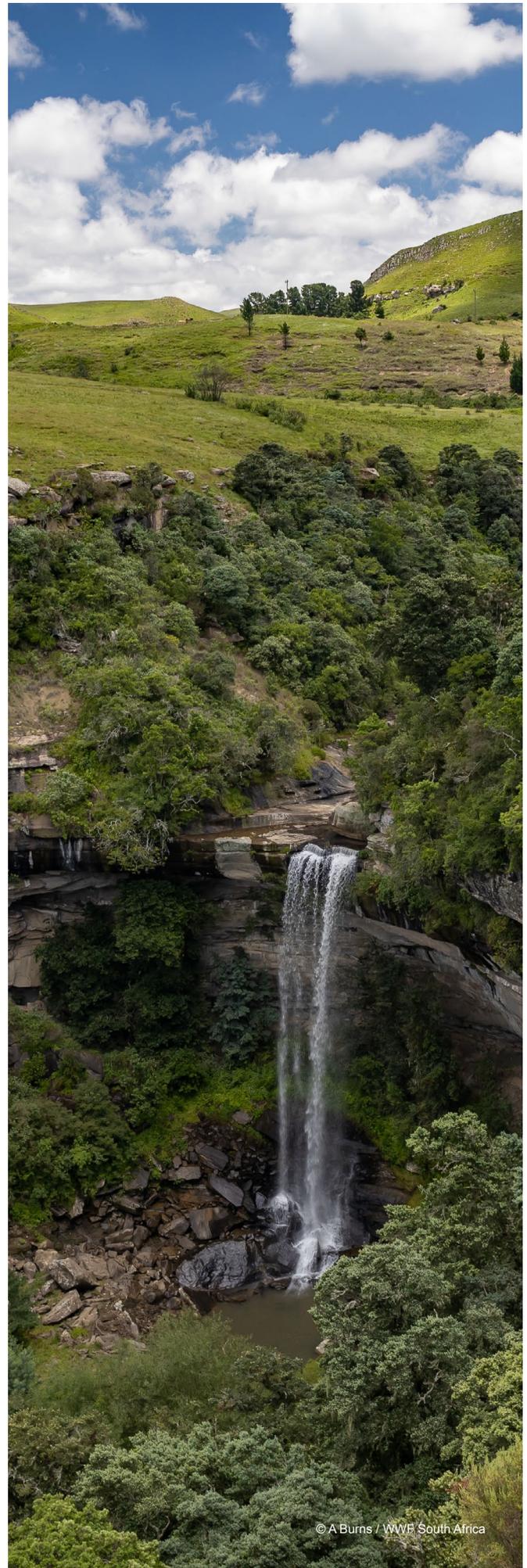
- ✔ Supported ongoing research for futures planning and land-use decision-making in the region.
- ✔ Oversaw the development of a comprehensive MEL framework to track the ongoing progress of the partnership (at UCP landscape level and between WWF and Nedbank partners), measurable delivery and the scale of impact.
- ✔ Documented delivery and the scale of impact.
- ✔ Identified relevant academic forums, studies and joint presentations at seminars and conferences to promote scientific rigour in the partnership's work.

Project

- Monitoring, evaluation and learning (page 38–40)

“THERE IS NOT A SINGLE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE THAT IS NOT ALSO A SOCIAL ISSUE.”

- Dr Morné du Plessis, CEO: WWF South Africa



© A Burns / WWF South Africa

PROTECTING THE uMZIMVUBU CATCHMENT

Thanks to Nedbank's five-year core support, a partnership between WWF South Africa and Environmental and Rural Solutions (ERS) is proving to be an excellent model for catalysing meaningful landscape impact through collaboration.



© A Burns / WWF South Africa

TRANSFORMING LANDSCAPES AND LIVELIHOODS: A PARTNERSHIP FOR CONSERVATION SUCCESS

In the foothills of the majestic Drakensberg mountains, nestled in a forgotten corner of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province, lies the town of Matatiele. Here, amid deeply rural landscapes, people have long relied on natural resources for their livelihoods. However, the absence of effective governance and essential services has led to a troubling spiral of landscape degradation and economic hardship.

Recognising the need for change, WWF South Africa and Environmental and Rural Solutions (ERS) joined forces to start an innovative conservation project. Supported by the WWF Nedbank Green Trust,⁹ the journey began in 2016 with a shared vision: to rejuvenate landscapes and uplift communities through collaborative efforts.

ERS, though modest in size, showed remarkable potential and leadership from the outset. Its inclusive, livelihood-centred approach offered a beacon of hope, providing elusive solutions to community-based conservation challenges. Witnessing the tangible impact of the initial Green Trust project, Nedbank recognised the transformative power of partnerships and subsequently invested further in the landscape and ERS through the WWF-Nedbank partnership in 2019.

At the heart of this story lies the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership, a multi-stakeholder alliance comprising local communities, traditional authorities, NGOs, government agencies, academia and the private sector. This partnership epitomises the notion that collective dialogue breeds collaboration, innovation and sustainable solutions. It serves as a catalyst for improved landscape management, unlocks funding opportunities and enhances overall governance.

From this partnership a plethora of complementary activities, each addressing the root causes of environmental degradation while simultaneously improving livelihoods and fostering positive behavioural change has emerged. One such initiative is the innovative rangeland management approach, developed in collaboration with Conservation South Africa (CSA) and Meat Naturally. This innovative approach helps rural pastoralists to take care of their ancestral lands, resulting in over 17 000 hectares of better management and generating millions of rand in income for local farmers.

Moreover, efforts to combat invasive alien plants, which disrupt water availability and biodiversity, are under way.

Clearing these invasive species and developing business models to use cleared biomass not only restores productive grasslands but releases billions of litres of water back into the system.

Recognising the vital importance of natural springs as a water source, particularly for marginalised communities, project teams have worked tirelessly to protect and enhance 44 springs in the area. These interventions not only improve water quality but also reduce the burden on women and children, who previously had to collect water from contaminated sources.

Integral to the partnership's approach is the empowerment of local youth. They have received training and are being mentored to help equip them with marketable skills and to nurture their role as environmental change-makers. Altogether, 95 young people are actively engaged. They are the new generation of conservation leaders who will continue to drive positive change in their communities.

Throughout this journey, WWF South Africa has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the ERS team, providing support, guidance and access to influential networks. Mobilising over R30 million into the landscape and collaborating on strategic initiatives have brought about the remarkable achievements of the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership.

Nedbank's visionary investment in this project exemplifies a commitment to long-term sustainability. By embracing the idea that collaboration breeds innovation, they have enabled the partnership to exceed expectations and become a beacon of hope for community-based conservation initiatives.

Today, the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership and ERS stand as shining examples of what can be achieved through collaborative conservation efforts. Their impact resonates globally, with media coverage and case studies heralding their success. WWF South Africa and Nedbank are proud to have played a role in this journey and remain committed to replicating these successes in landscapes across the country.

Amid environmental challenges, the WWF-Nedbank partnership stands as a testament to the transformative power of collaboration, demonstrating that together, we can indeed create a more sustainable future for all.



The uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership, one of the oldest voluntary partnerships in South Africa, has been lauded by the Department of Water and Sanitation as a model Catchment Management Forum.

⁹ About Us - WWF Nedbank Green Trust

IMPACTS FOR THE REPORTING PERIOD

Securing springs

Altogether 44 springs were secured to provide clean water to villagers. Sixty-four per cent of villagers live less than 1 km from a spring. The protected springs are maintained by local villagers, assisted by technicians from the Alfred Nzo District. Technical artisan work is sourced from participating villages; no contractors are used.

The Matatiele Local Municipality (MLM) invited ERS to demonstrate the use of the washable nappies supplied by Bidykins, a local company. MLM has also secured a fleet of trucks and skips to remove solid waste from remote villages. This will reduce the negative effects on freshwater quality.

Supporting land-use management and production practices

During Phase 3, 21 Conservation Agreements were signed in five of the Traditional Authorities in the upper catchment to continue the support for better land-use management and better production practices for livestock and crop farming.

Auctioneers are showing interest in buying livestock in the Mzongwana area in response to the increased quality and availability of livestock.

ERS is applying to the Japan Social Development Fund for a \$3 million grant for livelihood-based work that builds on existing activities.

Developing alternative livelihoods and internships

The youth Ecochamps model, based on targeted internships, reaches young rural people with no tertiary qualifications, through intensive engagement, work experience and mentoring. The model has multiple positive outputs, including increasing investment returns for donor funds.

The youth Ecochamps have been lauded by research and media groups for their passion, dedication and insights (see “uMzimvubu catchment in the media” on the right). They provide feedback on vital perspectives from residents and leadership. Figure 2 on page 19 illustrates how the Ecochamps spent their time in 2023. The analysis was based on their timesheets.

Building effective local partnerships

The UCP collective meets every quarter for its strategic review and to plot the next few years ahead. ERS has developed its own strategic plan for the next five years, based on three key pillars: conservation, conversation and livelihoods.

Visitors to the area included a group of traditional leaders and the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON), a long-term environmental observation and research facility of the National Research Foundation.

Under the Water-Energy-Food Nexus project, the UCP participates in highly productive research partnerships with global and local universities. The UCP knowledge hub task team promotes the concept of participatory research and learning through co-creating approaches and themes.

60% OF SOLID WASTE CONSISTS OF DISPOSABLE DIAPERS

A Nedbank-hosted media visit highlighted the dire solid waste issue in the upper UCP catchment villages and provided an opportunity for the Matatiele Local Municipality officials to communicate their waste-management plans.

Disposable nappies pose an enormous threat to water security and rangeland integrity. To reduce nappy waste, ERS is partnering with washable nappy producer, Bidykins, which provides online training for promoter-distributors identified through ERS and SaveAct.

uMZIMVUBU CATCHMENT IN THE MEDIA

Various media articles show the broader reach of what the WWF-Nedbank partnership has achieved in the uMzimvubu Catchment area:

Project to heal the land a success

Mail&Guardian: <https://bit.ly/3JFzNmt>

How environmental conservation is being inspired among Matatiele youth

Mail&Guardian: <https://bit.ly/3QeosOg>

Protecting SA's water sources

SABC News: <https://youtu.be/QY9u5EoDSlo>

These are the people who look after our water

African Farming: <https://bit.ly/4aQOSxx>

Growing local guardians

BBC: <https://bit.ly/3Uyevha>

Women and youth in South Africa tackle water scarcity together with researchers

NWO: <https://bit.ly/3UwiryR>



Although Nedbank's support for ERS does not pay for materials and staff time for specific projects, such as spring protection and alien plant clearing, it provides an operational hub for ERS. From this hub, ERS can optimise its effective engagement in the upper catchment, convene partners and role-players, foster better monitoring and learning, and implement more effectively.

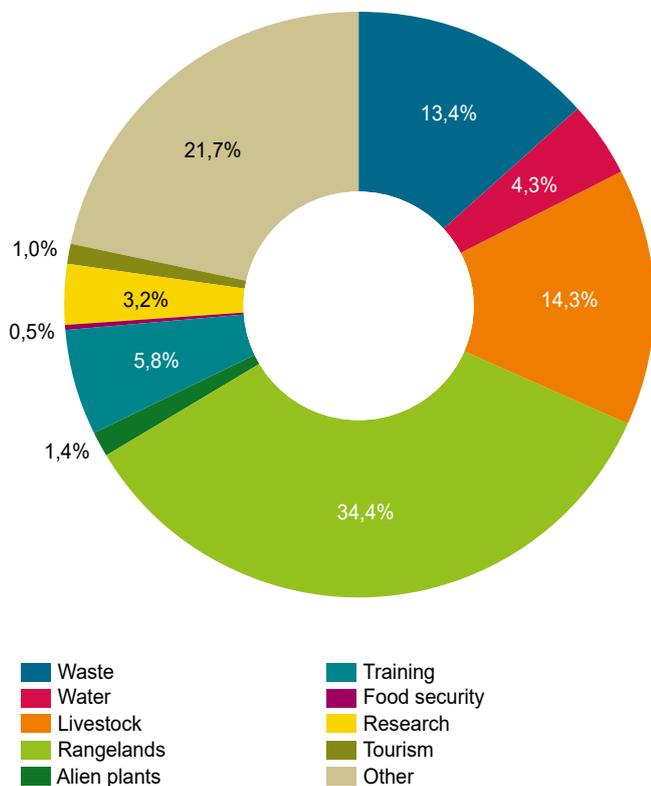


Figure 2: An illustration of how Ecochamps spent their time in 2023

YOUTH ECOCHAMPS – AGENTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

The nine youth Ecochamps are an essential extension of ERS. They meet regularly with the rangeland associations, provide para-veterinary services and help with veld monitoring using a citizen-science-based method. They also facilitate auctions and shearing events. Through their efforts, the rangeland association membership base has broadened to include non-livestock owners and a growing number of youths.

The Ecochamps also assist with spring protection, raising awareness about water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and waste-management issues, doing research and surveys and initiating outreach activities at schools. Their stipends are partially covered by a range of projects similar to ERS staff costs.



Stakeholders in the UCP include the state, local and traditional leadership, NGOs, donors and others. Together, they spend learning time in the field and smaller interest-group sessions, including mapping alien vegetation, research projects, water-supply issues and wetland days. Their aim is to collectively address the negative impacts of unsustainable land use and poverty.

44 springs protected.

R190 is the average cost of lifelong water security per person.

60 000 people in villages now have year-round water.

64% of these villagers live < 1 km from a spring.

> 50 supporters of the UCP gather quarterly.

> 12 research and implementing partnerships between ERS and other partners.

21 seasonal Conservation Agreements signed by local livestock farmers.

19% of these are new agreements.

94% of these are signed with WWF-Nedbank support.

44 rangeland associations formed and growing.

51 mobile auctions since 2017.

9 youth Ecochamps deployed and mentored.

6 chiefs from the Matatiele area attended the international Water-Energy-Food Nexus seminar in Pretoria.

> 13 000 people reached by Ecochamps in 2023.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Rangeland management is an innovative approach to securing key water source areas. WWF and Environmental and Rural Solutions (ERS) worked together in the Eastern Cape, focusing on land degradation, soil erosion and the spread of invasive alien plants and wildfires.



© A Burns / WWF South Africa



RANGELAND MANAGEMENT: ANOTHER INNOVATIVE WAY TO SECURE GRASSLANDS

WWF South Africa has committed to supporting ERS and communities with the capacity to improve rangeland management through the WWF-Nedbank partnership.

To address the key environmental challenges of wide-scale land degradation, ERS has been collaborating with local communities to use Conservation Agreements to manage grazing. Overgrazing and wetland transformation, soil erosion and the spread of invasive alien plants and wildfires are the main causes of land degradation.

WWF is contributing significantly to better grassland management at the broad strategic level, as well as directly to farming communities regarding livestock grazing. The manager of WWF South Africa's Land Reform and Biodiversity Stewardship Programme, Ayande Cele, is the chairperson of the UCP. The UCP is the management body at stakeholder level for conservation activities in and around Matatiele. WWF has also played a crucial role in preparing for the declaration of the 49 500 ha Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi (MTTM) Protected Environment. The intention to declare the MTTM Protected Environment has been approved by the MEC in the Eastern Cape.

The WWF-Nedbank partnership is also funding the operations of the land-reform programme. The partnership has made a significant contribution to the recognition of the programme at a national level under the National Land Reform and Biodiversity Stewardship Initiative.

In collaboration with other funding streams, such as the Nedbank Green Trust, the land-reform programme declared the Afrikan Farms Protected Environment in 2021. This area in the Amersfoort area in southern Mpumalanga measures just over 1 357 ha. The Mkhothane (Charlestown) Protected Environment north of Newcastle in northern KwaZulu-Natal was also declared. This area measures 2 628 ha. The veld condition assessments at the Afrikan Farms Protected Environment were concluded, a management plan was developed and the Annual Plan of Operation was finalised. A management plan was also developed for the Mkhothane Community Protected Environment.

The funding also assisted the land-reform programme in maintaining the Bambanani Communal Property Association (CPA) and Ukuthanda Ukukhanya CPA in southern Mpumalanga. These are biodiversity agreements. Talks were initiated to reassess these properties and determine whether they would qualify for a higher category.

The biodiversity stewardship site assessments for two sites in northern KwaZulu-Natal, namely Nkwelo and Koningsburg, respectively north and south of Newcastle, were concluded. Both sites qualified for a biodiversity agreement category.

Engagement with the Bergville projects, measuring 43 000 ha, under the Amangwane and Amazizi traditional authorities, has been put on hold because of staff shortages. The work will continue as soon as there is capacity.

As a whole, the programme in Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape has reached a plateau: at this stage, the projects just need to be managed, supported and maintained.

IMPACTS FOR THE REPORTING PERIOD

Funding sources

Funding was secured through Conservation International / Mitsubishi and WWF / H&M for much of the rangeland work, with the WWF-Nedbank partnership funding used as the core.

Growth in rangeland associations

Most of the rangeland associations have grown in membership. Over 30% have signed seasonal agreements since 2019, with three new associations joining this season.

The membership of rangeland associations has grown in number and diversity. It now includes 30% women, 8% youth and an increasing number of traditional healers interested in biodiversity conservation to protect valuable medicinal plant sources.

There is a growing focus on including small stock, not just cattle, with links to the textile market for fleeces sold under the Regenerative Wool Standard.

Animal health support for participating farmers has shown impressive results. Mortality has declined and fleece and livestock weights have increased, generating more income for farmers selling wool and cattle.

Supporting green business value chains

The value of livestock is increasing through the Meat Naturally partnership, which holds mobile auctions and supports rangeland associations to improve their governance of communal grasslands. The members of these associations include farmers, traditional healers using medicinal plants from the rangelands, women harvesting thatch and other plants, and youths wanting to become farmers.

Wool and lamb production has increased markedly, thanks to greater vaccination support from the Ecochamps.

Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi Protected Environment

The proposed 49 500 ha Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi (MTTM) Protected Environment is under a declaration process, supported by the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA). The process is championed by the UCP MTTM core technical team, led by ERS.

The 30x30 targets

The 30x30 NGO collaborative has been making substantial progress with including conservation NGOs. ERS has joined a group that has applied for Green Trust funding to drive this target. Sharing the experiences of governance in communal landscapes is proving to be a valuable component of the expansion of protected areas through OECMs (other environmental conservation measures) to help meet the 30x30 targets.



TARGET 3 (30x30)

The Global Biodiversity Framework's Target 3 is known as "30x30" – the commitment to conserve 30% of land, freshwater and oceans by 2030.

> 30 rangeland associations signed Conservation Agreements with ERS.

27 rangeland associations signed Conservation Agreements with CSA and Meat Naturally.

15 850 ha secured under Conservation Agreements.

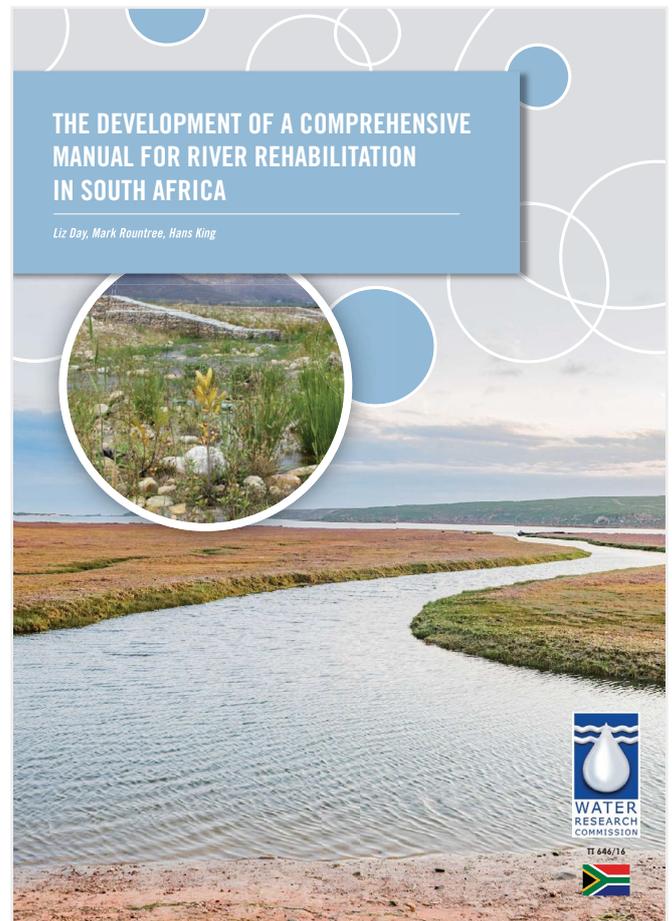
10 areas of 2 795 ha rested.

> 4 000 sheep sheared.

25% increase in fleece weight per year.

Productive collaborations and learning visits

- ERS has hosted several learning visits by groups from other communal catchments, including the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON) and the African Conference on Agricultural Technology (ACAT) from KwaZulu-Natal, and an Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) stewardship learning exchange.
- Collaboration with Meat Naturally, WWF, Conservation South Africa (CSA) and the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEDEAT) remains important. It plays a significant role in the regenerative rangeland approach that aims to secure grasslands in strategic water source areas.
- A Water Research Commission (WRC) project on watershed governance, led by ERS, used the UCP and MTM journey as a lesson-deriving case study. The outcome has been a handbook for inclusive, participatory approaches to landscape restoration. The WRC reference group, drawn from a wide spectrum of water, governance and research stakeholders, has hailed the handbook as groundbreaking for the sector.



BETTER PRODUCTION PRACTICES FOR DAIRY AND FRUIT

Dairy and fruit production are two key agricultural commodities in the Eastern Cape. Before, WWF South Africa worked with these two sectors at a national scale. The Nedbank partnership created the opportunity to deepen the implementation of projects in this region to demonstrate and promote the adoption of better production practices.



© Jacques Marais / WWF South Africa

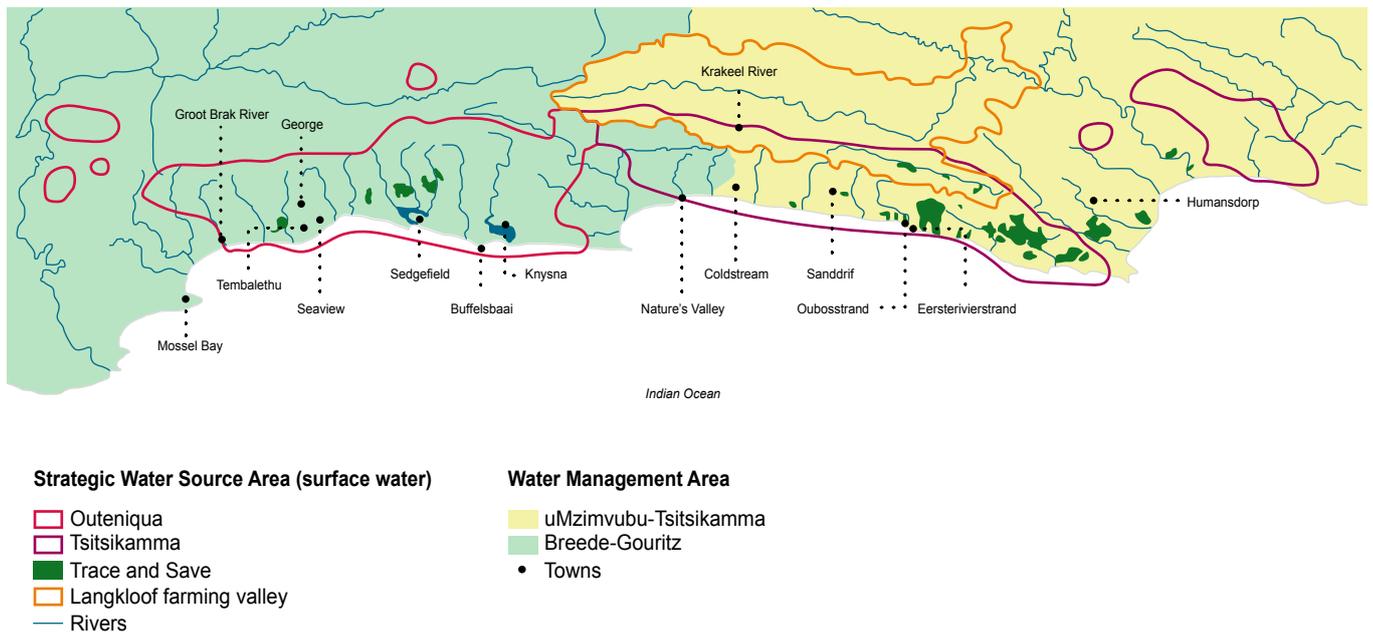


Figure 3: The Eastern Cape project areas: dairy in the Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma regions, and fruit in the Langkloof.

WATER STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE EASTERN CAPE

The Eastern Cape province is one of the largest coastal dairy-producing provinces in South Africa (see Figure 3). This region produces 28% of South Africa’s milk and the average herd size is 1 121 cows per herd. The Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma regions are prime areas for dairy production because of the high rainfall and the flat coastal plain that is suitable for pastures. The nearby Kouga Strategic Water Source Area is a key fruit-producing region, containing the well-known Langkloof valley where fruit production predominates. The commonality between these regions is that water availability is a limiting factor for agricultural production. This has been exacerbated by a multi-year drought that gripped a large part of the Eastern Cape from 2015 to 2022.

This prolonged drought was one of the worst in the region’s history, prompting its declaration as a disaster area in October 2019. The five storage dams in the area form part of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality water-supply region and supply 40% of the Metro with water. The Nelson Mandela Bay Metro is a nationally important economic and industrial hub that includes the ports of Ngqura (Coega) and Port Elizabeth.

Dairy production is a water-dependent sector that requires large volumes of clean water to clean dairy parlours, irrigate pastures and provide drinking water for cattle. WWF has been engaging with this sector since 2014, bringing together a cross-section of the dairy industry value chain to share lessons and information on various water and environmental stewardship topics through field trips, meetings and workshops.

Woodlands Dairy, on the outskirts of Humansdorp, is one of the largest milk-processing facilities in South Africa. It has been leading in sustainability monitoring and reporting at farm level for several years. Woodlands was the first milk buyer to support Trace and Save by offering the sustainability management and monitoring system and associated consulting support to all their milk suppliers at no cost. Most of Trace and Save’s clients are Woodlands suppliers in the Eastern Cape. It therefore made sense to use these dairy farms in the various case studies that were conducted.

The overall aim of all the activities conducted during Phase 3 of the WWF-Nedbank partnership was to promote the quicker uptake of water stewardship and sustainable dairy practices on farms by providing credible, researched data and real examples and case studies from South African farms. Promoting the uptake of Trace and Save as a tool to improve performance in environmental sustainability was therefore important.

WATER-METERING CASE STUDY PROJECT FOR DAIRY FARMS

The 2021 water-metering case study project was initiated in collaboration with Trace and Save. The aim was to demonstrate to dairy farmers how they could improve efficiency and waste less water by using water meters to measure water consumption for irrigation.

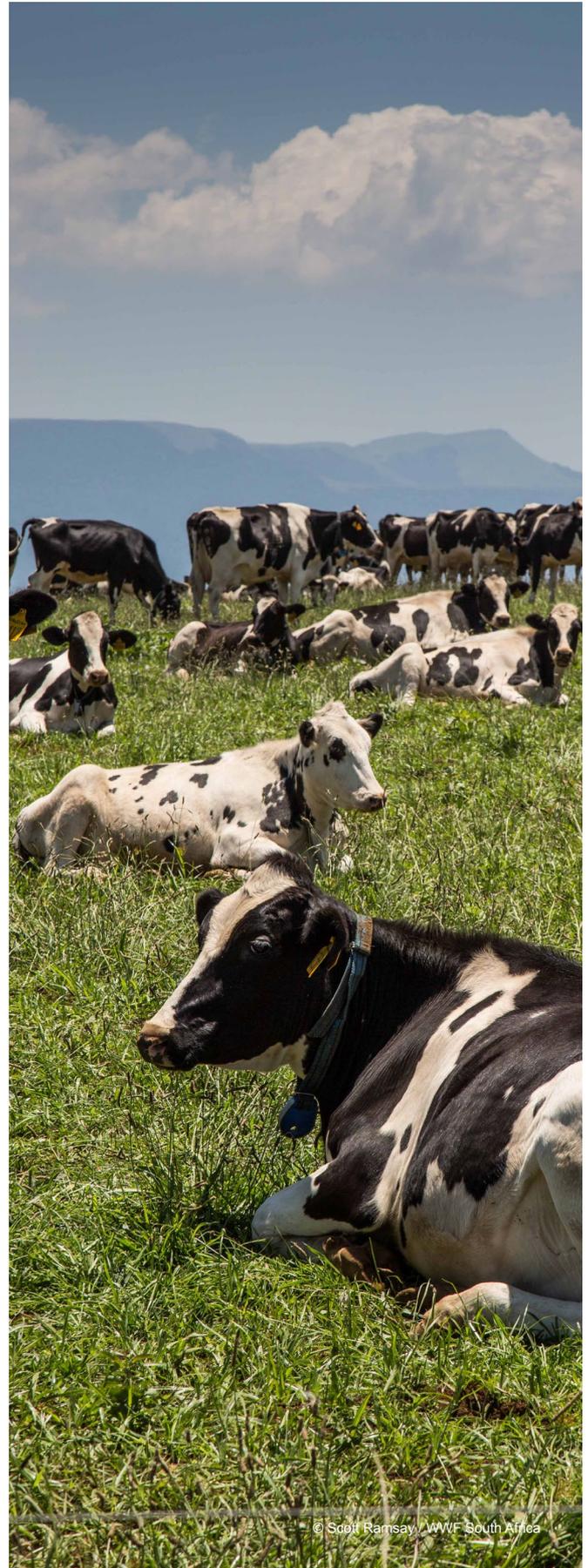
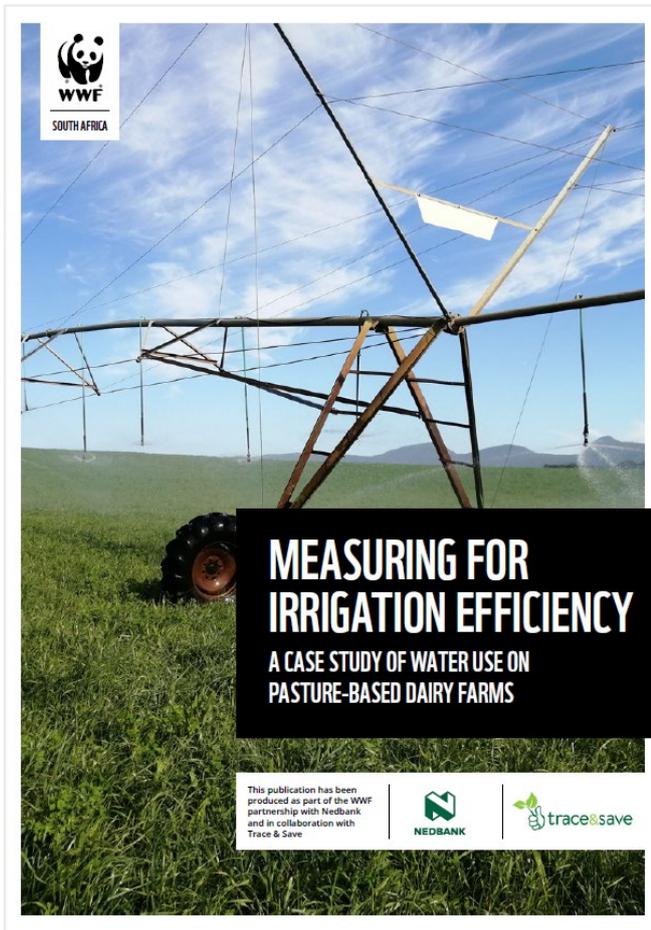


Water meters were installed and monitored on 15 centre-pivot irrigation systems on six pasture-based volunteer dairy farms over a year. The results were presented in a publication that was launched in September 2022, titled *Measuring for irrigation efficiency: A case study of water use on pasture-based dairy farms*.

The case study insights were shared during a three-day road show for Eastern Cape dairy farmers from 20 to 22 September 2022. Trace and Save gave a presentation on the case study. WWF provided input on the importance of water measurement and advocated for better self-regulation in the agricultural sector.

Farmers Day events were held in Wilderness on 20 September, Cookhouse on 21 September and Tsitsikamma on 22 September 2022. These events were well attended by approximately 150 farmers over the three days.

Among the six volunteer farms that took part in the case study, four have already invested in several irrigation system upgrades. They also fixed leaks after seeing the inefficiencies in their systems. One of the large farms has installed another 12 water meters after seeing the value of water monitoring. Another farm joined the project afterwards, completely at its own cost.



© Scott Ramsay, WWF South Africa

DAIRY STEWARDSHIP AWARDS

The Milk Producers' Organisation's Dairy Stewardship Awards recognise and reward dairy farmers who are adopting and raising awareness of best practices. Nedbank's sponsorship of these awards reflects the company's commitment to sustainability, to the stewardship of natural resources and to human capital.



© Scott Ramsay / WWF South Africa

Through the WWF-Nedbank partnership, WWF once again participated as adjudicator of the environmental component of the Dairy Stewardship Awards (started in 2019), assisting with the shortlisting, farm visits of finalists in different provinces and adjudication results.

The 2021 winner of the MPO Nedbank Dairy Stewardship Awards¹⁰ was Nedbank client Andrew Morphew from Colbourne Farm in Karkloof, KwaZulu-Natal. Colbourne is the only organic dairy in South Africa, having converted from a conventional dairy to a profitable organic farm in just two years.

The 2022 winner was Nedbank client Dean Biggs from Suiderland Farm in the Eastern Cape. He has been a Trace and Save client for several years. The Biggs family has significantly improved soil health on the farm. Suiderland Farm had previously won a Sustainability Champion award from Trace and Save by achieving excellent results with their sustainability monitoring results for Soil, Water, Atmosphere and Nutrients (SWAN). Both the awards event, which was sponsored by Nedbank, and the winning farm provided excellent marketing exposure for Nedbank. WWF's role in increasing the awareness and uptake of environmental stewardship in the primary dairy sector was acknowledged at the event.

The 2023 winner was Niel Wilke from Glentana Farm in the Eastern Cape. He is also a Trace and Save client.

THE WINNERS OF THE MPO NEDBANK DAIRY STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Recognition and awards are powerful, positive ways to reward and promote best production practices.



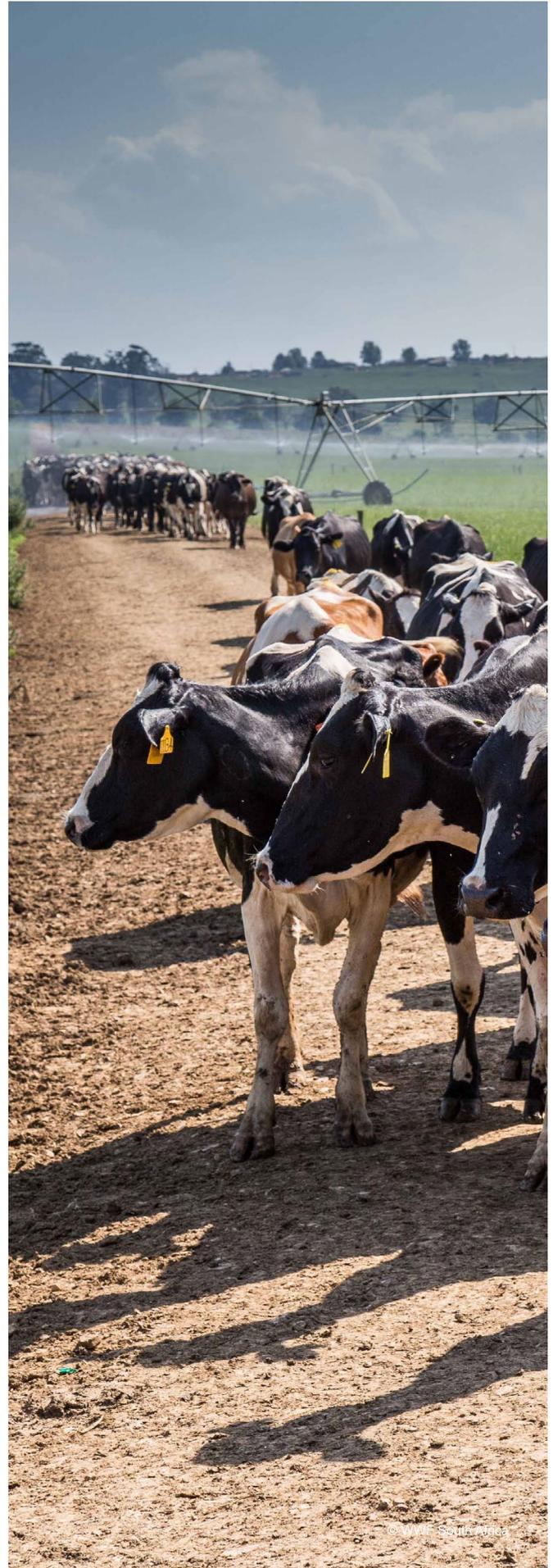
2021: Andrew Morphew,
KwaZulu-Natal



2022: Dean Biggs,
Eastern Cape



2023: Niel Wilke,
Eastern Cape

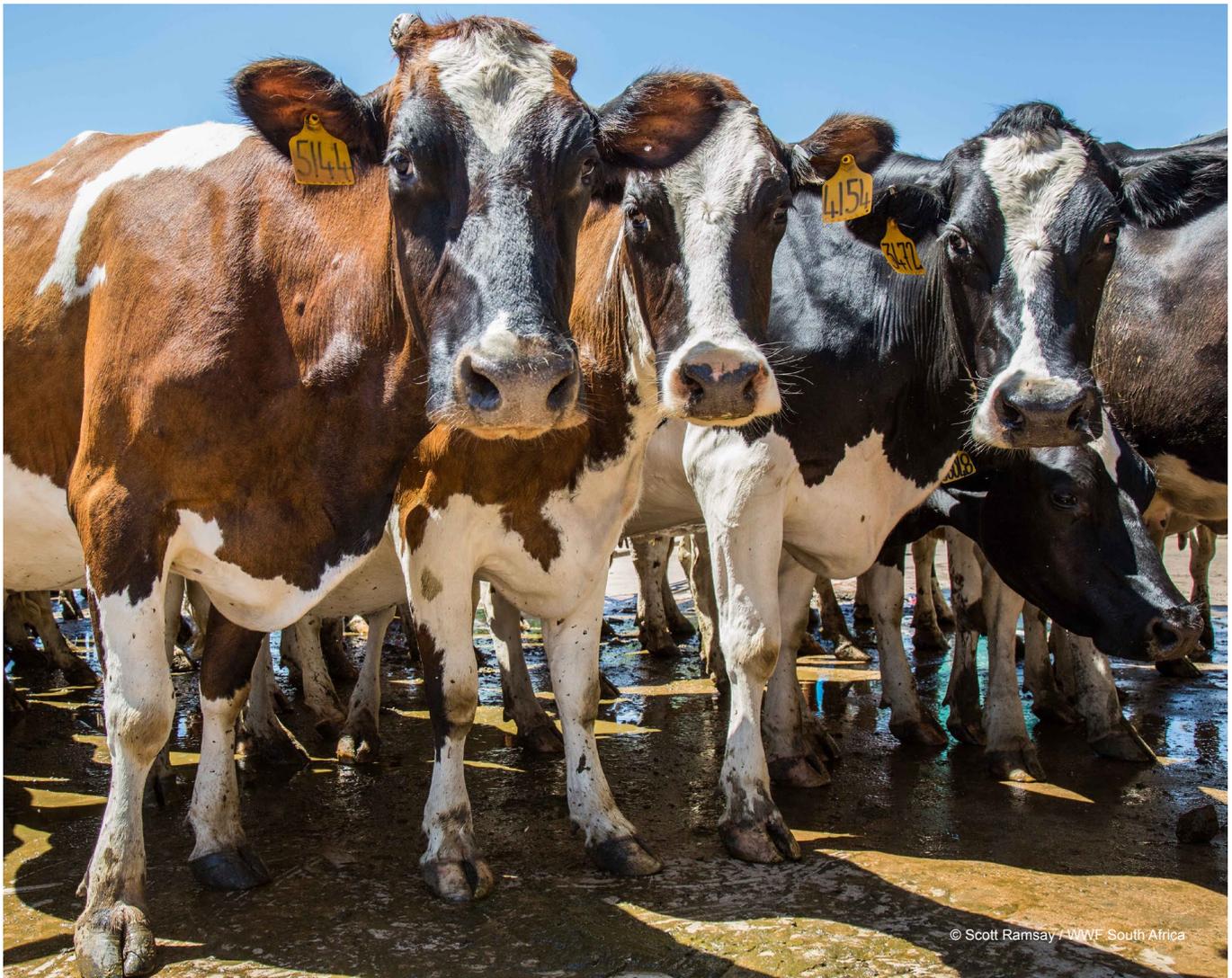


© WWF South Africa

¹⁰ MPO Nedbank Stewardship Awards 2020 – 19 Nominations received - MPO

ASSESSING THE BANKABILITY OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE PRACTICES IN DAIRY FARMING

This project was started in response to the Dutch Fund for Climate and Development's (DFCD's) call for applications for bankable projects that require investment and have the potential for a net positive impact on a priority landscape from a social or environmental perspective.



© Scott Ramsay / WWF South Africa

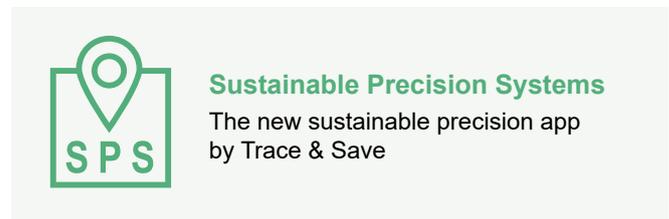
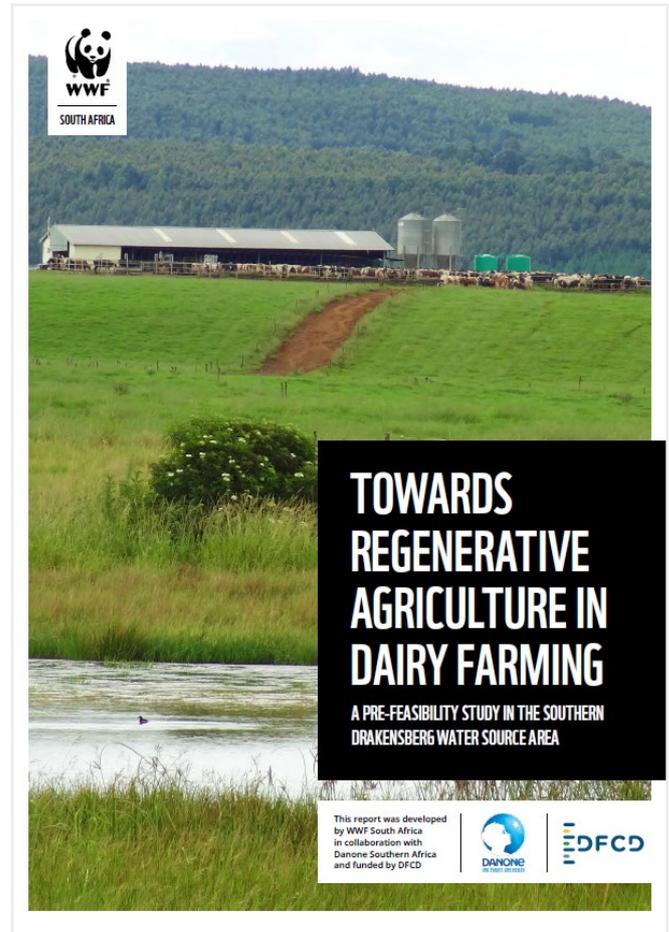
The work was conducted between 2021 and 2023 for the DFCD in partnership with Danone. The development of the final publication was co-funded by Nedbank. The initial results were shared at two Nedbank-sponsored Farmers Days in 2023.

The project was regarded as the first phase in a scoping and financial pre-feasibility assessment and used case study results from dairy farmers in the Southern Drakensberg Strategic Water Source Area. The project aimed to identify potentially scalable bankable projects that could be taken forward into a more in-depth feasibility and piloting phase with further investment. Because of interest from the Danone Communities Fund, water access for local communities also became a focal point. The potential for a small-business opportunity to provide clean bottled water to rural communities with inadequate municipal water supply was investigated.

For the dairy component, cost-benefit assessments were conducted for two specific practices:

- The beneficial use of slurry on pastures for more effective effluent management (conducted by Trace and Save).
- The use of solar and other technologies for improved energy and water efficiency (conducted by Shockwave Technologies).

The results of the slurry management assessment were shared at two Farmers Days in 2023: on 19 September at Karatara in the Western Cape and on 15 November at Cookhouse in the Eastern Cape. The new Trace and Save App, called SPS (Sustainable Precision Systems), was launched at these events.



BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SUSTAINABLE DAIRY PRODUCTION

Safeguarding nature and biodiversity requires a fundamental change in business models, transparency in disclosure and substantial financial investment. To this end, the WWF-Nedbank partnership funded a study to build the business case for sustainable dairy production.



A business case study for sustainable dairy production was completed. This study was the first of its kind in South Africa to demonstrate that reducing environmental impact through sustainable farm management practices makes business sense. The WWF publication, *Making a business case for sustainable dairy production*, was launched during a Nedbank online seminar on 1 September 2021. The event was co-hosted by the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO) and the *Dairy Mail/AgriConnect*. Trace and Save conducted this comprehensive study by drawing on data collected from 62 dairy farms between 2013 and 2019. The aim was to assess the relationship between the economic and environmental facets of sustainability on pasture-based dairy farms. The results showed that sustainable dairy production is good for the bottom line, dispelling the myth that sustainable or regenerative approaches mean sacrificing profitability.

A video was produced showing interviews with farmers on the value of Trace and Save for their business, and was shown at the online seminar launch. Altogether 316 people had registered for the launch and 182 attended. Several media representatives who attended the online seminar produced at least nine media articles afterwards. A Nedbank dairy thought leader article, based on the key messaging from the business case, was released on 11 October 2021. More than six media articles appeared in various media based on the thought leader.



NEDBANK FUNDING IN THE FRUIT SECTOR

Through the WWF-Nedbank partnership, the following activities were supported at various levels of negotiations, collaborations and on-the-ground work:

- Enhancing the criteria in the Sustainable Agriculture in South Africa (SIZA) environmental standard to include more biodiversity aspects, and participating in the alignment with international requirements through collaboration with the WWF-UK office.
- Providing support to local extension officers in the Langkloof (upper Kouga catchment) to drive more holistic land management practices in partnership with Living Lands¹¹ as the local implementing partner.
- Providing the necessary co-funding for priority follow-up activities after alien vegetation was cleared from 700 ha in the Kromme and Kouga River catchments in 2024. This work was done in partnership with the Gamtoos Water Users Association between the funding cycles of other governmental and corporate partners.
- Growing the awareness of adopting the Conservation Champions programme in the wine industry to include an additional 20 new champions who met the prominent level of biodiversity conservation and best production practice criteria. Together, the Conservation Champions have committed to conserving over 15 000 hectares in the Cape Floral Kingdom.
- Testing innovative mechanisms of funding restoration in agricultural landscapes through Farming with Biodiversity, a WWF Nedbank Green Trust project. This was done in collaboration with Boland Cellar, Nedbank and GreenPop¹² and has evolved into the Forests for Life programme.¹³ Contributions from commercial sales from wine will be donated to a fund for further expansion of fynbos restoration projects to help build up forage sites for bees and other insects.

¹¹ www.livinglands.com

¹² <https://bee-effect.co.za/nedbank-joins-our-tree-hive>
www.nedbank.co.za/content/nedbank/desktop/gt/en/news/press-room-media-centre/Pressroom/2020/nedbank-unites-boland-trees-bees-safeguard-honeybees.html

¹³ <https://greenpop.org/forests-for-life>

FOOD SECURITY AND AGROECOLOGY

The Seriti Institute and the Mahlathini Development Foundation supported agroecology activities in Limpopo, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. The aim was to improve livelihoods, income and food security by expanding existing structures and starting new initiatives.



SERITI INSTITUTE

Project areas and participants

The Seriti Institute conducted the following agroecology activities:

- **Limpopo:** Bela, Waterberg – 127 farmers were identified.
- **Gauteng:** Sedibeng, West Rand – A survey was conducted among 99 producers.
- **KwaZulu-Natal:** uMshwathi, uMgungundlovu – A core group of 28 producers was identified.
- **KwaZulu-Natal:** eThekweni – A core group of 30 farmers was identified.

Market linkages

A number of recalibration / local market opportunities were identified. These included efforts to connect with supermarkets (Pick n Pay, SPAR), organisations in Midvaal Local Municipality and Sedibeng District Municipality, municipal agrihubs and the soup kitchen network in eThekweni, street traders and farmers' own markets.

In uMgungundlovu, farmers linked up with consumers in wealthier areas to create a market. The results have been ad hoc sales, and the beginnings of more regular informal farmer markets in Gauteng and uMgungundlovu, although these remain small and tenuous.

Agroecological inputs supplied

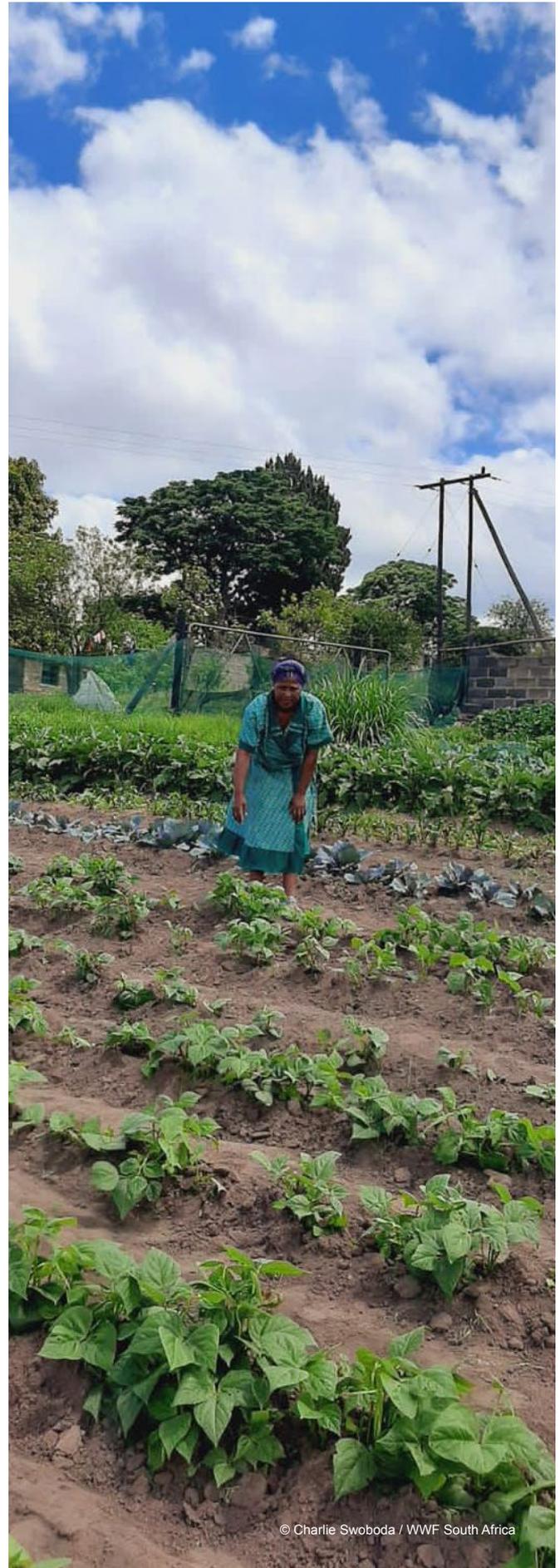
A cumulative total of 198 participants (71% women, 69% youth) received inputs via the project. Three local nursery enterprises received support to establish or expand their operations to provide seedlings to local farmers. Farmers overwhelmingly indicated that the provision of inputs helped them to increase the scale and quality of production, improved access to water, and boosted sales. Some farmers mentioned the need for more direct communication and consultation before procuring inputs, including proper needs assessments.

Agroecological training conducted

A total of 28 training/learning events were facilitated, with a cumulative total of 560 people attending (69% women, 45% youth). Two-thirds of partners and 88% of farmers in the assessment survey indicated that farmers had adopted ecological practices because of the project. This has helped them to increase their production.

Food safety

Food safety activities involved a cumulative total of 77 participants (35% women), including farmers, NGOs, government officials and food safety practitioners. These activities raised the profile of the importance of food safety issues among partners and farmers.



Stakeholder dialogues

The project partners facilitated at least 10 farmer dialogues plus several smaller, more regular planning meetings with farmers; four multi-actor learning journeys; and four multi-actor dialogues. Cumulative participants totalled 590 (71% women, 31% youth). Learning journey reports were compiled to document insights and learnings.

Market sales

Reported sales were R333 619 towards the end of the project. More than 80% of partner and farmer respondents reported that farmers had increased sales of vegetables, fruit, poultry and eggs because of the project.

MAHLATHINI DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Altogether 378 participants from 19 villages participated in the agroecology activities conducted by the Mahlathini Development Foundation. Participation in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape was as follows:

- **KwaZulu-Natal:** Bergville, Midlands, southern KwaZulu-Natal – 234 participants.
- **Eastern Cape:** Matatiele – 144 participants from Mzongwana, Rashule, Nkau, Mechachaneng and Nkasele/Nchodu villages.

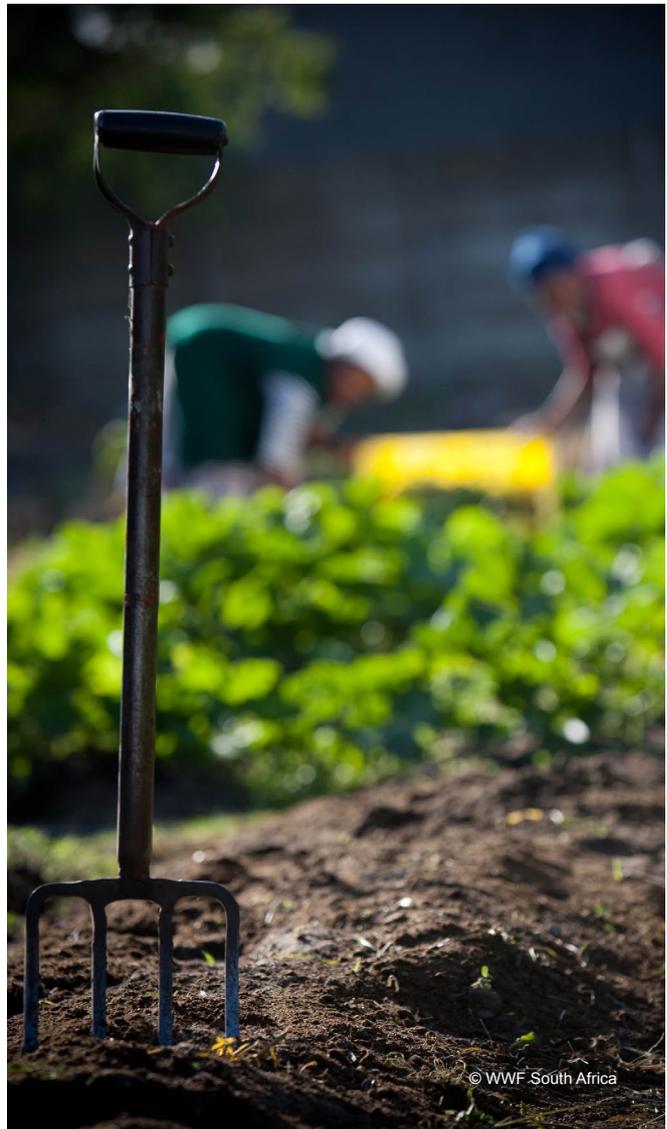
Agroecological inputs supplied

The following inputs were supplied to support agroecological activities in the project areas:

- **Gardening:** Micro-tunnels, drip irrigation, mixed cropping, natural pest and disease control, trench beds and eco-circles, tower gardens and greywater management.
- **Conservation agriculture:** Experimentation with close cropping, inter-cropping crop rotation, cover crops, perennial fodder crops, short-season maize varieties and two-row tractor-drawn no-till planters.
- **Livestock integration:** Continuation of poultry micro-enterprises (broilers and layers); procurement of brush cutters for more intensive veld grass baling. Altogether, 98 small broiler units and 50 egg-production units were supported.
- **Tunnels:** In total, 114 tunnels were installed and are operational across 14 villages. In Bergville and Matatiele, participants have been the most enthusiastic, with 42 and 45 tunnels, respectively.

Smallholder farmers involved in the project

At the end of the project, there were 378 participants in the programme, 234 from KwaZulu-Natal and 144 from the Eastern Cape. In KwaZulu-Natal, the learning groups are well developed, but in the Eastern Cape, they are new. For all the activities, farmers were initially supported with a proportion of the start-up inputs; after that, they contributed their own inputs. This included day-old chicks, point-of-lay hens, maize seed, fertiliser and seedlings. It should be noted that input prices have escalated dramatically.



Project impact

By expanding and intensifying production and productivity, participating smallholders have increased both the availability of food in their households and their income. The total value of production averages about R3 060 per household per month, a 68% increase in production and income. About 80% of participants still produce for household consumption first and sell the surplus. Participants have increased their crop diversity by 10 crops per participant and each has also included about 10 new practices for climate-resilient agriculture into their farming system.

Membership of the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) has increased to 510 participants. Six new VSLAs and one Bulk Loan Fund Association were formed. The overall annual value of these VSLAs is R1 117 420, with an individualised value of about R3 342 per year.

Market sales

The total sales by the end of the project were R96 627 for vegetables, field crops, fruit (bananas, avocados, naartjies and lemons), meat (pork, broilers and chicken pieces), eggs and processed and cooked food (bottled chillies, mealiebread and vetkoek). Herbs such as coriander, parsley and fennel were also grown.



© Luyanda Njalo / WWF South Africa

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) are indispensable in developing efficient, evidence-based and impactful interventions in landscapes. While still a work in progress, significant strides have been made towards crafting a robust MEL framework for informed decision-making in the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership landscape.



© Natasha Prince / WWF South Africa

SOPACT IMPACT REPORT AND DASHBOARD

Together with Sopact, an impact amplification consultant, WWF and Environmental and Rural Solutions (ERS) compiled a framework for monitoring impacts in their investment areas, using Matatiele as the case study pilot. Despite learnings, a significant outcome of this first phase of the Sopact collaboration was the development of a simplified and replicable data strategy and framework. This process has become valuable in thinking about and developing a broader, more comprehensive MEL framework for the WWF-Nedbank partnership.

The impact journey

In August 2023, the WWF-Nedbank partnership embarked on the first phase of the impact-learning process that was developed with Sopact. This led to the compilation of the impact report after consultative input from WWF and ERS, the implementing partner.

Quantifying the impact of the long-standing efforts in the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership (UCP) landscape presented a challenge. The report therefore focused on key activities and data collected during the five years of the project. Collective stakeholder efforts for protecting natural springs, rangeland management and youth employment (Ecochamps) were included in the scope of this report.

The first step of the impact journey was to develop a data strategy by collecting and consolidating all the relevant data from WWF and the project partners. The resultant data was mapped, analysed and visualised in a dashboard interface and in the UCP impact report. Following this, data outputs were continuously analysed to incorporate insights and learnings in the final report. The report has enabled WWF and ERS to evaluate the achievements of the project goals in hindsight.

Learnings and observations

The central idea was that data is a crucial element in making informed decisions and driving strategic impact, especially in conservation initiatives. The following points were identified as key learnings from the impact reporting process:

- A data strategy with relevant project metrics should be developed and implemented. To achieve this, it is essential to establish the capacity for and a team specialising in data management and analysis. In the case of the UCP, the existing youth Ecochamps can be leveraged to secure data capacity.
- The Ecochamps model is showing positive impacts, both as a co-creating deep-engagement approach and to amplify the impact of investments made through ERS in the uMzimvubu catchment. The Ecochamps are proving to be powerful agents of change in the landscape and beyond, and also contribute to a rich citizen-science research process with local and global academic institutions.



© WWF South Africa

- As this project continuously evolves, it is important for the impact strategy to remain adaptable. The project and local content are primary determinants of the data that will be available during the implementation.
- The involvement of many partners can make it challenging to attribute impact to specific partners in the landscape. This aspect presents an opportunity for collaboration in developing the data component of the project. Collective monitoring of impacts also requires mandates to share data, especially if bigger organisations are involved.
- The process has been useful in helping ERS to refine its baseline, monitoring, data-capture and storytelling systems and formats. The final impact dashboard has provided a strong framing for why and how monitoring is done.

The way forward

Measuring the impact of the WWF-Nedbank partnership’s work and achievements is not easy. However, it is extremely valuable to evaluate the effectiveness of the work being done in the landscape as it contributes to evidence-based conservation initiatives. Looking ahead, the focus should be on further scaling up the impact data strategy and developing a MEL framework to track the partnership’s progress.

Additional and dedicated MEL capacity and funding are required to enable the project partners to represent the impact of their work. WWF has already started working towards this by recruiting a MEL manager and partnering with a leading data and software company, Microsoft. WWF might contract Sopact to begin the second phase of the impact journey to strengthen the current evidence base and outcome learning for the WWF-Nedbank partnership.



© Natasha Prince / WWF South Africa



The cumulative impact of WWF and Nedbank’s investments through ERS in the uMzimvubu Strategic Water Source Area in the Eastern Cape was staggering; much of it was made possible by the convening power and relationships fostered through the core support of this project, which has also enabled ERS to partner with other donors to continue the landscape work.

SUSTAINABLE FINANCE IN THE WWF-NEDBANK PARTNERSHIP

WWF's work in sustainable finance has focused on many exciting aspects, such as environmentally sustainable investment solutions, impact investing, blended finance, innovative finance for biodiversity, best practice in environmental disclosures and sustainable finance policy. WWF shared many of its learnings and expertise with Nedbank.

WWF has had many engagements with Nedbank over the past five years on diverse topics, including fossil-fuel lending policies. The bank identified the need to have a fossil-fuel financing policy that aligns with the latest science and bank targets. Nedbank tapped into WWF's expertise as a trusted partner with deep scientific knowledge and financial sector expertise.

Nedbank has positioned itself as a leader in sustainable banking and a champion of environmental sustainability. The bank wants to continue to grow in this space and is therefore using continual learning about topics that are at the forefront of environmental and financial sustainability. WWF has been proudly working with Nedbank to host and participate in staff information sessions, webinars, training courses and workshops where key issues about sustainability are addressed.

In the many years that Nedbank has been a WWF partner, the sustainable finance space has grown exponentially. Many new sustainability issues have become relevant in the South African and global financial sector, contrary to any other period. WWF has extensive knowledge of environmental issues, with a dedicated sustainable finance team in South Africa, as well as a global finance practice. WWF is also at the forefront of many of the new and major developments in sustainable finance and has exchanged much of the information and knowledge about key issues, such as the Taskforce for Climate-related Financial Disclosures, the Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures, science-based targets, biodiversity finance and related themes.

Sustainable Finance Coalition

A key theme that has emerged in the finance sector over the past few years concerns biodiversity. WWF and the Wilderness Foundation Africa founded the Sustainable Finance Coalition, which is a multi-stakeholder platform driving new and innovative financial solutions for the

conservation of landscapes, seascapes and South Africa's most threatened biodiversity. As a council member of the coalition, Nedbank plays a role in determining the strategic direction of the coalition and in providing guidance to achieve the coalition's goals of attracting more finance for biodiversity conservation. Nedbank has also participated in the coalition's finance solution incubators to bring new finance solutions from ideation through incubation into a pilot stage. Nedbank representatives have also participated in various knowledge sessions hosted by the Sustainable Finance Coalition, both as speakers and as attendees.

In a previous phase of the WWF-Nedbank partnership, WWF and Nedbank worked together to create a new financial product for Nedbank's agriculture clients. The Nedbank Shade Netting Facility is a lending facility for farmers who want to install shade nets on their farms. Shade nets provide benefits for both farmers and the environment as they help farmers to achieve a better yield, lower water usage and improve soil health. Installing large-scale shade nets requires a significant financial outlay, and the Nedbank Shade Netting Facility is a financial solution designed to assist farmers with this. From the creation of this facility many years ago to now, WWF remains a trusted partner regarding sustainable finance.



As a founding member of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), WWF is committed to supporting financial institutions and businesses on their journey to integrate nature-related risks in investment and finance. In 2023, various organisations, including the Banking Association of South Africa (BASA), the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), the National Business Initiative (NBI), FSD Africa and WWF South Africa, partnered to launch the TNFD in South Africa.

LOOKING AHEAD: PHASE 4

Building on the sturdy foundation established through collaboration with the Nedbank sustainability, strategy and agriculture teams, Phase 4 of the WWF-Nedbank Partnership aims to expand connections with additional Nedbank business units, notably those engaged in sustainable finance.



© A Burns / WWF South Africa

Against the backdrop of a heightened global focus on biodiversity, particularly following the ratification of the Global Biodiversity Framework, and considering South Africa's status as one of the world's 17 mega-diverse countries, the next phase of the WWF-Nedbank partnership will concentrate on supporting Nedbank to formulate biodiversity strategies, commitments, policies and disclosures. This specifically entails exploring avenues for cooperation in nature-based solutions.

The activities envisaged in Phase 4 aim to enhance client engagement to maximise the reach and efficacy of WWF and Nedbank's collaborative efforts. WWF will use this partnership with Nedbank to spread the latest environmental science and sustainable finance information in order to inspire Nedbank's staff, clients and stakeholders to prioritise sustainability.

The partnership acknowledges the significance of social concerns and their intricate connection with environmental issues, and recognises the pivotal role of jobs, particularly green jobs. In the upcoming phase of the partnership, one aim will be to bolster the creation of green jobs and green businesses across South Africa. Various initiatives are under way to enhance job growth in the country; the WWF-Nedbank collaboration wants to create synergies with these initiatives to bolster new green and sustainable employment opportunities. This entails emphasising the potential of the green economy, spotlighting burgeoning green sectors, and actively contributing to the expansion of the green sector to stimulate job creation, foster youth employment and generate positive environmental outcomes.

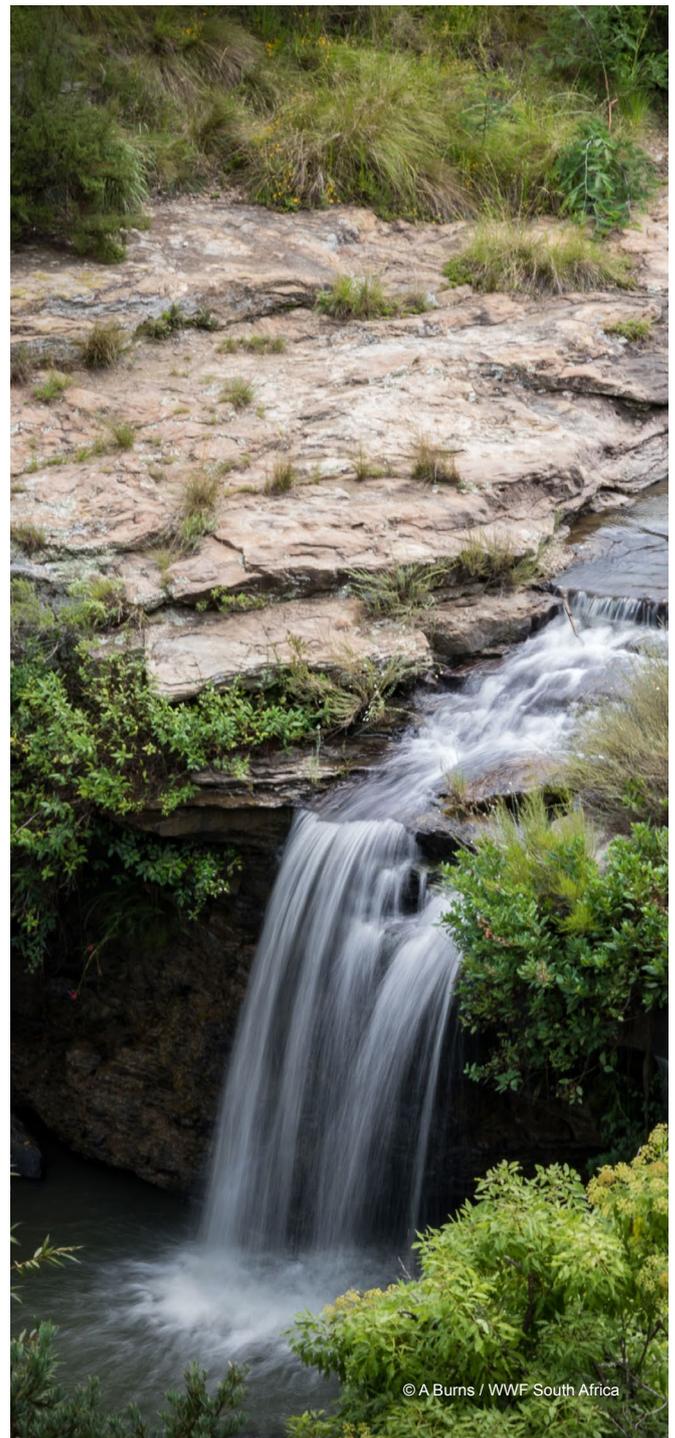
Promoting innovation to advance sustainability in South Africa remains a key aim for Nedbank, and WWF is committed to sustaining ongoing initiatives. WWF will continue its support of and collaboration with Environmental and Rural Solutions (ERS), which spearheads conservation endeavours and green economy initiatives around Matatiele and the uMzimvubu Catchment in the Eastern Cape. ERS plays a pivotal role in convening diverse stakeholders to ensure the preservation of the landscape and its ability to support local communities.

The uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership has refreshed its strategic plan for the next five-year period with the help of an external facilitator. Seven serious issues in the catchment were prioritised:

- Governance
- Fundraising
- Communications and advocacy
- A research and knowledge hub
- Wattle and alien-vegetation clearing
- The Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi Protected Environment
- Water access, quality and rights.

Phase 4 of the WWF-Nedbank partnership will bring a deeper integration of environmental sciences and finance, reflecting the evolving global agenda that increasingly recognises climate and biodiversity as interconnected crises. Anticipating swift policy and behavioural shifts over the next five years, we foresee heightened collaboration between WWF and Nedbank on pertinent issues in this expanded context, building upon our long-standing partnership.

The WWF South Africa team is grateful for the support from and collaboration with Nedbank. It is rare that a partnership includes employees, clients and other NGOs in its focus. We are excited to continue this stakeholder-led approach into the next phase and achieve even more impact together.



© A Burns / WWF South Africa



THE WWF-NEDBANK PARTNERSHIP FOCUSES ON SUSTAINABILITY TO MANAGE THE INTERCONNECTED CRISES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS.

© Jaques Marais / WWF South Africa



Lasting positive outcomes for people and nature in the places where we work and from priority environmental challenges we focus on.

FOR NATURE. FOR YOU.

wwf.org.za

WWF South Africa is a registered non-profit organisation, number 003-226 NPO
© 1986 Panda symbol WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly World Wildlife Fund)
® “WWF” is a WWF Registered Trademark.

1st Floor, Bridge House, Boundary Terraces, Mariendahl Lane, Newlands, Cape Town.
PO Box 23273, Claremont 7735 T: +27 21 657 6600 E: info@wwf.org.za W: wwf.org.za