

BIODIVERSITY **STEWARDSHIP**
& **ECONOMY** NEWSLETTER

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In this issue

About the Biodiversity Economy Project	1
About the Biodiversity Stewardship and Biodiversity Economy Newsletter	1
SANBI convenes a capacity-building workshop for biodiversity stewardship facilitators.....	2
Unlocking sustainable economic development through biodiversity stewardship for community livelihoods: the Greater Kruger-Limpopo community learning exchange.....	4
Brakfontein Community Reserve participates in the Biodiversity Economy and Investment Indaba.....	6
Youth driving change in the Biodiversity Economy Project.....	7
The power of partnerships: SANParks convenes the second Addo-Amathole Multi-stakeholder Coordination Forum	9
A story of change: the Emcakwini Community Trust driving the success of Babanango Game Reserve.....	10
Training for co-operatives within the Greater iSimangaliso biodiversity economy node.....	12
Peer-to-peer learning between communities of the Greater Addo Amathole biodiversity economy node and the Emcakwini Community Trust	13
Changing the narrative of conservation by rolling out biodiversity stewardship workshops for communities in the Greater iSimangaliso	15
The power of collaboration: A community’s journey to revitalise a lodge	17
A successful hunting season for Brakfontein Community Reserve.....	18
Insights from the 7 th technical working committee meeting for the Biodiversity Economy Project.....	19
Bonwaphala Game Farm, a successful Communal Property Association model in Limpopo	21
South African National Biodiversity Institute convenes the wildlife economy workshop.....	23



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iSimangaliso
Wetland Park

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PARKS & TOURISM AGENCY



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About the Biodiversity Economy Project

The Biodiversity Economy Project is a five-year project, funded by the Global Environment Facility, that aims to boost the biodiversity economy around protected areas in South Africa. The project builds on South Africa's *National Biodiversity Economy Strategy*, which seeks to balance the conservation of biodiversity with sustainable use and achieve economic development and equitable distribution of benefits. The project is focussed on increasing benefits to local communities who are involved in conservation by improving the capacity to implement initiatives within the biodiversity economy.

The World Bank is the implementing partner for the Biodiversity Economy Project, which is executed by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), South African National Parks (SANParks), South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) and iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority (IWPA).

Project activities will focus on three landscapes spread across the country in areas with strong potential for vibrant biodiversity economies. They include the Greater Addo-Amathole node in the Eastern Cape, the Greater Kruger-Limpopo node in Limpopo, and the Greater iSimangaliso node in KwaZulu-Natal. The project will work with communities in these nodes to bring biodiversity rich areas under conservation through the biodiversity stewardship programmes. It will also increase economic opportunities by providing support to small businesses, improving governance capacity, and benefit sharing to communities neighbouring protected areas.

For more information on the Biodiversity Economy Project, please contact Aimee Ginsburg at A.Ginsburg@sanbi.org.za and Lucia Motlounge at LMotlounge@dffe.gov.za.

About the Biodiversity Stewardship and Biodiversity Economy Newsletter

The Newsletter serves as an informative communication of the initiatives and activities being implemented in areas related to biodiversity stewardship and the biodiversity economy. It contributes to raising awareness about the impact and benefits of conservation, to increase involvement and share knowledge with a broader audience.

For more information on the Newsletter, please contact Mpho Gumula Ratshikhopha at M.Gumula@sanbi.org.za and Zoleka Mkhize at Z.Mkhize@sanbi.org.za.

Biodiversity stewardship is an approach to securing land in biodiversity priority areas through entering into agreements with private and communal landowners, led by conservation authorities, with non-governmental organisations often playing a key supporting role.

Biodiversity economy encompasses the businesses and economic activities that either directly depend on biodiversity for their core business or that contribute to conservation of biodiversity through their activities.

SANBI convenes a capacity-building workshop for biodiversity stewardship facilitators

By Zoleka Mkhize, edited by Mpho Gumula

A capacity-building workshop was held to equip biodiversity stewardship facilitators with essential skills and knowledge for implementing biodiversity stewardship on communal and land reform sites. The workshop focused on the legal, practical and procedural aspects of biodiversity stewardship, fostering a community of practice among facilitators to support conservation and community development...

The Biodiversity Economy Project is making progress in expanding wildlife habitats by supporting landowners to secure valuable biodiversity through community stewardship. The project is implemented in three biodiversity economy nodes across the country, with a key objective of increasing investment to grow the biodiversity economy and provide benefits to local communities. Core to this, is to support communities to participate in biodiversity stewardship agreements and expand land under conservation. Understanding the processes of biodiversity stewardship is a priority to be

able to apply the full suite of protected, conservation and partnership areas with communities.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), in partnership with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE), responded to a call to capacitate the newly appointed biodiversity stewardship facilitators under the Biodiversity Economy Project. A capacity-building workshop, themed *Empowering Biodiversity Stewardship Champions Towards Conservation and Community Development*, was convened in May 2024 in KwaZulu-Natal. The workshop provided facilitators with the knowledge and skills needed to understand and implement biodiversity stewardship on private and communal lands.

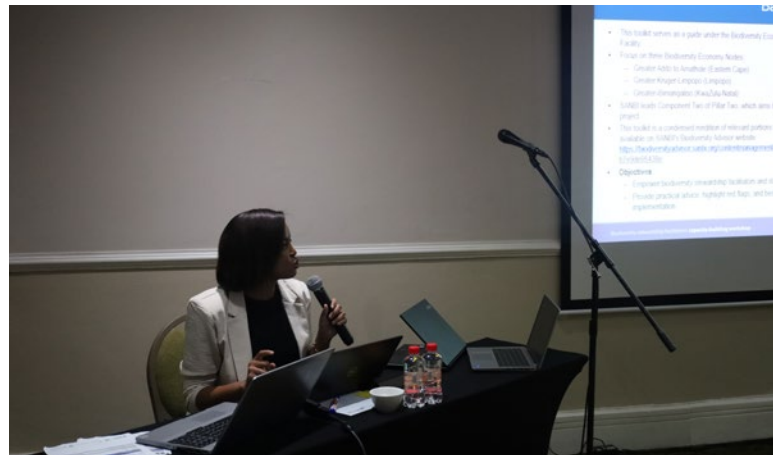
Biodiversity stewardship is a voluntary approach to securing land in biodiversity priority areas through agreements with private and communal landowners, led by conservation authorities. Successful implementation of the programme requires a deep understanding of its processes, legal frameworks and landownership complexities. The contextual background to the



Delegates at the capacity building workshop for biodiversity stewardship facilitators.



Lactitia Tshitwamulomoni (DFFE) providing feedback on post-declaration support to communal and land reform sites in the context of the biodiversity economy nodes.



Ntwanano Mendes (SANBI) presenting the toolkit developed for facilitators on navigating red flags and best practices when implementing biodiversity stewardship.

biodiversity stewardship approach was provided at this much-needed workshop, coupled with an overview of the legal framework for biodiversity stewardship by DFFE. Facilitators were also provided with an in-depth look, by Conservation Outcomes, on matters around biodiversity assessments, management plans, and assigning of management authorities.

A highlight of the workshop was the discussion around the detailed process flow for declaration of protected areas under the Protected Areas Act on communal and private land. Provincial representatives from KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape explained the provincial procedures to assist in the finalisation of declarations in the three provinces. Presentations provided information on post-declaration support for the various biodiversity economy initiatives at communal and land reform sites.

The workshop facilitated interactive discussions and presentations from various practitioners in the non-governmental, national, and provincial sectors. Participants engaged in group exercises to identify challenges in implementing biodiversity stewardship with communities, noting issues like lengthy processes and differences with traditional law. The workshop highlighted the importance of advocating for biodiversity stewardship at all community levels, exploring funding opportunities, and understanding carbon credits and biodiversity offsets. Capacity constraints were acknowledged as a significant challenge in supporting the implementation of the programme.

Participants were taken through a toolkit developed for the facilitators when implementing biodiversity stewardship in the nodes. The toolkit is a condensed version of the *2018 Biodiversity Stewardship Guideline*, developed with the aim of providing practical advice,

highlighting red flags and best practices to navigate complexities during implementation, ultimately contributing to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in local communities.

The participants appreciated the comprehensive coverage of topics during the workshop. One facilitator reflected, *“The workshop covered everything. Now it’s up to us to implement what we’ve learnt.”* Another added, *“It exceeded my expectations. I’m now better equipped to implement biodiversity stewardship projects.”*

The workshop fostered a strong community of practice, encouraged networking and relationship-building among facilitators, and inspired participants through case studies. By hosting workshops like this the Biodiversity Economy Project continues to drive conservation and community development, ensuring a sustainable future for South Africa’s rich biodiversity.



Provincial representatives unpacking provincial procedures to assist in finalising declarations.

Unlocking sustainable economic development through biodiversity stewardship for community livelihoods: the Greater Kruger-Limpopo community learning exchange

By Tshifhiwa Mandaha and Zoleka Mkhize, edited by Mpho Gumula

A community learning exchange for the Greater Kruger-Limpopo biodiversity economy node was hosted at Ndou Safari Lodge in Limpopo in June 2024. The event aimed to promote biodiversity stewardship and economic sustainability, bringing together diverse stakeholders for mutual learning and sharing of best practices. Key discussions included governance, land management, and investor support for community-driven projects. Participants engaged in peer-to-peer learning, site visits, and panel discussions, leading to future collaboration opportunities ...

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and South African National Parks (SANParks) joined forces to host a community learning exchange for the Greater Kruger-Limpopo biodiversity economy node. It was held at Ndou Safari Lodge in Limpopo in June 2024, under the theme “Unlocking Sustainable Economic Development through Biodiversity Stewardship for Community Livelihoods”. The event aimed to facilitate mutual learning and sharing of best practices, where communities can inspire and support one another, enhance their

understanding of the biodiversity economy and the benefits of biodiversity stewardship.

The event brought together about 100 people, representing Communal Property Associations (CPAs), tribal authorities (Amakhosi and iNdunas), non-government organisations, national and provincial departments, and private investors. The event was graced with the presence of Chief Nxumalo of Gidjana village, Chief Mabuella from the Bela Bela CPA, Chief Bevhula of Bevhula village and Chief Makuya from Ha-Makuya village. Worth mentioning is the participation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the provincial Commission on Restitution of Land Rights in the Limpopo province. They shared valuable insights regarding the Communal Property Association model with the community beneficiaries.

The workshop provided participants with a deep understanding of the biodiversity stewardship programme in South Africa, including its benefits, challenges and processes. The learning exchange emphasised land management, governance, and dispute resolution for land under tribal authority and CPA custodianship. It gave



Tshivhula Communal Property Association members welcoming the delegates to their game farm.



Traditional authorities providing their key highlights at the learning exchange.



Delegates at the learning exchange.

SANParks a platform to present beneficiation packages for communities. Key to discussions was an interview session with a private investor, who explained all the necessary information for obtaining investor support. Considerations for establishing a successful business include the characteristics of 'bankable' projects, and identifying potential obstacles that might hinder investor support for community-driven projects.

The event served as a focal point for collaboration by fostering dialogue, sharing knowledge, and highlighting practical examples. It brought together diverse voices and united stakeholders from various sectors to promote biodiversity stewardship and community livelihoods. A key component of the learning exchange was sharing success stories and challenges among participants who are actively involved in biodiversity stewardship programmes. This interactive session cultivated peer-to-peer learning, enabling attendees to gain insights from one another's experiences and achievements.

Pivotal to the Land Reform and Biodiversity Stewardship Programme is meeting and engaging with projects where they are based. These engagements help to get real feedback, and understand the experiences that motivate rural communities to get involved in the biodiversity economy. For example, using community accommodation and conference facilities to increase revenue generation. This approach steered a visit to the Ndou Safari Lodge operated by Bono Holdings in partnership with the Tshivhula CPA to showcase real-life stories of how communities can thrive while safeguarding biodiversity.

The site visit was a highlight of the learning exchange, providing firsthand exposure to a biodiversity stewardship site. Delegates toured the Ndou Safari Game Farm, showcasing the ecotourism initiatives, luxury lodges

and the various wildlife activities. Delegates learnt about trophy hunting and game meat production processes. They were also served with game meat in their dishes for the duration of the learning exchange. The delegates were impressed by the abundance of Mopane trees within the reserve, which led to strong recommendations for the Tshivhula community to explore bioprospecting opportunities.

Through a panel discussion, five CPAs shared the importance of having a fully functional governance structure and looked at better ways to strengthen community governance. This was coupled with market stalls where three CPAs offered a tour of their projects, providing insights into their economic activities, business strategies, accomplishments, and challenges during



Mr. Simon Mafela explaining different biodiversity economy activities on the farm.

project implementation. Participants had the opportunity to explore these stalls, gathering valuable information and insights as they 'filled up their shopping baskets' with knowledge from each stall.

The learning exchange provided a platform for communities to identify training and capacity building needs, leading to a request for a learning session between

the Gidjana community and communities from southern Mpumalanga and Northern KwaZulu-Natal to share insights on conservation, crop farming, and rangeland management for improved rural livelihoods. Additionally, one community expressed interest in ranger and anti-poaching training, with potential follow-up engagements to be pursued through DFFE's Community Rangers Programme.

Brakfontein Community Reserve participates in the Biodiversity Economy and Investment Indaba

By Tshimangadzo Nndwakhulu, edited by Mpho Gumula and Zoleka Mkhize

The Likhayaletu Communal Property Association represented Brakfontein Community Nature Reserve at the March 2024 Biodiversity Economy and Investment Indaba. The event aimed to mobilise investments in the biodiversity sector and advance sustainable economic development for small and medium enterprises...

Representing Brakfontein Community Nature Reserve, the Likhayaletu Communal Property Association (CPA) participated in the Biodiversity Economy and Investment Indaba hosted by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE) in March 2024. The event was attended by various dignitaries, including His Excellency the President of the Republic of South Africa, ministers from different sectors, deputy ministers, the Premier of Gauteng, Members of the Executive Council (MECs) from various provinces, traditional and Khoi-San leaders, board chairpersons, as well as representatives from business, civil society, organised labour, non-governmental organisations, and community members.

The primary objective of the Indaba was to mobilise investments within the biodiversity sector. It would also advance the implementation of the four goals of the *White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity* to promote the sustainable biodiversity economy, especially for small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in both communal and private sectors.

The event provided a platform for various sectors to interact, network, and forge new partnerships to advance the biodiversity economy. The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) provided support by identifying Land Reform and Biodiversity Stewardship projects, and facilitating the development of business

case proposals. The nominated projects were afforded an opportunity to pitch their business case proposals to investors and showcase their work through exhibitions.

The Likhayaletu CPA from the Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node represented the Brakfontein Community Reserve at the prestigious event. It is one of the identified community projects receiving support to operationalise its wildlife economy activities through the Biodiversity Economy Project. The Likhayaletu CPA was given an opportunity to pitch their business aspirations at the Indaba. Brakfontein Community Reserve is situated in Alice, Eastern Cape province. The nature reserve spans approximately 1 280 hectares of land. It has established a co-management partnership with the Great Fish River Nature Reserve, and Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) currently oversees the biodiversity stewardship work under the agreed co-management agreements.

At the Biodiversity Economy Indaba, the Brakfontein Community Reserve revealed its plans for aloe bioprospecting, wildlife game viewing and trophy hunting. ECPTA, through the Biodiversity Economy Project, has also assisted the community with writing a proposal that awarded them funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) small grants fund to operationalise an abattoir and other on-site activities.

Other Land Reform and Biodiversity Stewardship projects that participated included Ndou Safaris from Tshivhula CPA, Somkhanda Community Game Reserve of the Emvokweni CPA, Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi Protected Environment, uKuthanda uKhukhanya Community Farm, and Bambanani Community Farm. These enterprises showcased products derived from natural resources, including plant and animal items, contributing to the prosperity of bioprospecting, biotrade, ecotourism, and wildlife initiatives.

Key insights from the various commissions at the Biodiversity Economy Indaba highlighted the importance of government’s intervention to facilitate access to training and financing, ensure inclusion of traditional leaders, women, and youth, and promote meaningful community participation in policy development through a streamlined approach (‘one stop shop’). Discussions also emphasised the role of the state, private sector,

communities, and traditional leaders in adopting South Africa’s successful conservation model to expand the biodiversity sector. There was a call for greater efforts to involve local communities in decision-making processes and empower them with knowledge about sustainable biodiversity use, resource management, and the significance of biodiversity conservation. Working collaboratively will advance the biodiversity economy.

Youth driving change in the Biodiversity Economy Project

By Tshifhiwa Mandaha, edited by Zoleka Mkhize and Mpho Gumula

Mondli Mdletshe

Mr Mdletshe oversees communication and knowledge management for iSimangaliso’s portion of the Biodiversity Economy Project. He collaborates with the iSimangaliso communications team to ensure the effective implementation of communication initiatives. His daily tasks include managing social media, digital channels, and print media, as well as maintaining the iSimangaliso website. He also develops communication strategies for stakeholder consultation and citizen engagement, organises knowledge exchange events, and assists with

the biodiversity stewardship programme. Engaging with diverse communities and sharing project outcomes through various media forms is what excites him the most. He looks forward to showcasing the project’s positive impacts on local communities.

Wisani Lubisi

Ms Lubisi is involved in various roles aimed at enhancing biodiversity stewardship and the biodiversity economy within the three nodes of the Biodiversity Economy Project. Part of her work involves supporting the development of knowledge products, and convening learning exchanges and capacity-building workshops to share lessons from the project’s implementation



Mondli Mdletshe, Communications and Knowledge Management Assistant Manager (iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority).



Wisani Lubisi, Biodiversity Stewardship Officer (South African National Biodiversity Institute).



Kagiso Mohulatse, Project Administrator (iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority).



Zoleka Mkhize, Project Knowledge and Learning Officer (South African National Biodiversity Institute).

and promote best practices. Additionally, she assists in convening national biodiversity stewardship communities of practice, which provide platforms for technical and legal advice. Her role also involves leading efforts to update and manage the land reform and biodiversity stewardship sites or projects database across the provinces. This initiative aims to create a spatial distribution map of these sites, showcasing valuable insights into the impact of biodiversity stewardship efforts nationwide, which is the most exciting part of her work.

Kagiso Mohulatse

Ms Mohulatse coordinates day-to-day operations, budgeting, financial reporting, and event scheduling for the iSimangaliso component of the Biodiversity Economy Project. Her efforts to streamline administrative processes have improved efficiency and cost savings. Kagiso is motivated by the professional growth opportunities her role offers. She has developed a solid foundation in administrative skills, improved her communication abilities, and values teamwork, humility, and empathy.

Zoleka Mkhize

Ms Mkhize supports implementation of the monitoring, evaluation, reflection, and learning plan of the Biodiversity Economy Project. This work entails monitoring, collecting, and documenting key lessons within the biodiversity economy and biodiversity stewardship work, drawing from the three project nodes. Ms Mkhize is passionate about integrating biodiversity considerations into local practices. She values the opportunity to engage with communities and learn from their experiences and perspectives.



From left; Ntwanano Chauke, Musa Mabasa, Zandile Ngobeni (SANParks-Kruger).

SANParks Kruger

Ms Chauke is a Greater Kruger-Limpopo node administrator who contributes a lot to efficient financial accountability, budgeting and project administration support. Mr Mabasa (intern) supports the resource economist by building meaningful relationships with stakeholders to support socio-economic opportunities linked to the communities and partners in the immediate periphery of the Kruger National Park. Ms Ngobeni (intern) supports the work of the biodiversity stewardship manager in coordinating the project stewardship activities in the Greater Kruger-Limpopo Node.

The power of partnerships: SANParks convenes the second Addo-Amathole Multistakeholder Coordination Forum

By Phunyuza Xhegwana, edited by Zoleka Mkhize and Mpho Gumula

Sustainable biodiversity strategies, the socioeconomic impact of conservation, the importance of community involvement and integrated landscape approaches were key highlights from the Greater Addo-Amathole Multistakeholder Forum held in May 2024 in Port Alfred...

In May 2024, the second Multistakeholder Coordination Forum of the Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node took place in Port Alfred. More than 80 people attended, comprising many community representatives, as well as various groupings of partners in the sector. The forum serves as a coordination structure, fostering knowledge sharing, networking, and policy guidance. It was a continuation of the first engagement which was hosted in 2023, where key parties were first identified. They were now engaged in initiating the Greater Addo-Amathole Node Master Plan, emphasising integration and collaboration.

In recognition of traditional authorities, the Amandlambe Traditional Council's leadership, including Chief Andile, was in attendance and was introduced by the prince of the tribe. In his introduction, the prince briefed the audience on the Amandlambe legacy, expressing the council's excitement in being part of the forum. The chairperson of the forum, Andrew Muir, acknowledged the forum's role

as a catalyst for change in the Eastern Cape and noted its relevance to national programmes of biodiversity policy review processes.

Naledi Mneni, the project coordinator for the Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node gave an overview of the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy. The presentation advocated for sustainable use of natural resources for economic activities like wildlife and ecotourism. It offers an approach to develop biodiversity economy nodes nationally to address societal concerns. Candice Eb, SANParks Economist gave an analogy using the economic effects of Kruger National Park. Surrounded by private, communal, and provincial nature reserves, the greater Kruger resulted in R5 billion in revenue generation and 19 000 employment opportunities for the region in 2018.

Conservation Landscape Initiative representative Peter Chadwick presented the uniqueness of South Africa's Albany bioregion, as a global biodiversity hotspot. The presentation detailed the goal of a new, integrated, and improved landscape approach that focuses on creating biodiversity linkages with existing conservation zones. The linkages result in the movement of species, biological processes, resilience against climate change, and socioeconomic benefits. The presentation highlighted the importance of developing interconnected corridors through efficient management and restoration while expanding habitats for priority species.



Delegates at the 2nd Addo-Amathole Multistakeholder Forum.

SANParks Senior Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Building Manager, Happy Nhlanguwini enlightened the audience on the People and Parks programme, relaying the benefits and achievements of the programme since its inception in 2003.

Fanie Fouché of the Ndlambe Local Municipality engaged the audience on municipalities being willing partners and emphasised that alien invasive vegetation is an evident environmental challenge in the area. An opportunity for collaboration was identified in mitigating such environmental challenges, as well as supplementing governance in managing commonages and municipal farms.

Dr Matthew Child presented a study that investigated the factors that contributed to the success of wildlife economy businesses through the Sustainable Wildlife Economies Project. The study helped to identify successful strategies by surveying both new and established wildlife ranches.

Greg Martindale and Kiera Schoeman presented on the methodology and approach used by Conservation Outcomes, to develop the Master Plan for the Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node. The master plan focuses on protected area expansion and opportunities in the biodiversity economy, promoting community-owned protected areas by linking sustainable human livelihoods with the concept of conservation. The Conservation Outcomes team delivered three breakaway sessions that covered the themes: livelihoods and small businesses



Kristal Maze (SANParks) opening and welcoming the stakeholders to the Multistakeholder Forum.

(including tourism), agri-wildlife, and conservation and land-use planning.

This forum ensured collaboration and integration of sustainable development in the region; while the discussions and presentations highlighted the potential of the biodiversity economy to create meaningful socio-economic opportunities while conserving critical ecosystems. The insights gained from this forum will help shape the future direction of the biodiversity economy node, fostering resilience, growth, and long-term sustainability.

A story of change: the Emcakwini Community Trust driving the success of Babanango Game Reserve

By Tshimangadzo Nndwakhulu and Zoleka Mkhize

The Emcakwini Community Trust (ECT) successfully co-manages the Babanango Game Reserve, fostering both environmental conservation and community development. The reserve, co-managed with a German investor, provides significant employment and support to community beneficiaries, small businesses, and students.

Despite early challenges in the reserve, government support and community involvement have accelerated Babanango to national and international recognition...

The Emcakwini Community Trust (ECT) is at the heart of the success and growth of Babanango Game Reserve, located in rural Zululand of KwaZulu-Natal. Like any

successful venture, the Babanango Game Reserve has a rich history behind its development and establishment. The journey began in 1998 when the Emcakwini community initiated a land claim. The community gained the land in 2008 following government verification of their claim. To manage this valuable asset and preserve it for future generations, the community established the community trust. As a result, the Babanango Game Reserve was officially launched on behalf of the beneficiaries of the land.

The ECT's robust governance structure ensures the fair distribution of benefits and the protection of land. Mr. Kenneth Buthelezi, chairs the Board of Trustees for the ECT, working closely with the founder, Mr Eric Buthelezi. Their vision includes safeguarding the land and developing

strategies to benefit the community. The ECT co-manages the Babanango Game Reserve with a private investor from Germany, while three trusts – Emcakwini, Esibongeni, and KwaNgono Community Trust – collectively play a vital role in running the business alongside the private investor.

Owning 74% of the 13 000-hectare reserve, the ECT declared Babanango as a nature reserve following the introduction of the big five: lion, rhinoceros, elephant, leopard, and buffalo. The reserve operates on a wildlife

and ecotourism business model, featuring four luxurious lodges rated four to five stars.

Babanango Game Reserve is the second largest employer within Ulundi municipality in the southern part of Kwazulu-Natal, employing over 260 people, including both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries which has strengthened the relationship between the community and the game reserve. The reserve also supports small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) creating



Babanango Game Reserve Business Enterprise.

opportunities for contractors, taxi services who deliver staff members to the reserve, road and fence maintenance, and land management.

The ECT assists over 35 university-bound students with their registration fees and donates approximately R175 000 to local schools for top achievers within the community. In addition, the game reserve is committed to community development, with ongoing discussions focusing on committing funds to uplift local community members through skills development initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty. Beneficiaries also receive nearly half a million rand annually through community trust vouchers from income generated through the trusts from Babanango Game Reserve.

At first, the reserve faced significant opposition from individuals who did not benefit from the game reserve and opposed its establishment, leading to an attempt to damage the fence when it was erected. Farmers also faced difficulties, particularly regarding grazing their livestock. However, due to the success of the reserve, people who initially opposed the creation of the game reserve have since become interested and some have even gained employment in the reserve.

Despite facing numerous challenges during its establishment, Babanango Game Reserve received

significant government support in the form of animal donations, funding, skills development and motivation. The government, with assistance from Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, donated black and white rhinoceroses, giraffes, and elephants, making Babanango a prime destination for wildlife enthusiasts both nationally and internationally.

Inspired by the achievements of Babanango Game Reserve, countries such as Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia have invited ECT members to share their expertise. The ECT has shared its practices with other Communal Property Associations. It has participated in the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Indaba which is hosted annually in May, offering opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking.

Looking ahead, the ECT plans to bring together all community trust beneficiaries, attract more investors, and establish a nursery to distribute seeds for community and personal gardens, prioritising the elderly, people in need, and orphans. They also plan to build two-star lodges to attract more national clients through government support.

The Emcakwini Community Trust continues to drive the success and sustainability of the Babanango Game Reserve, ensuring a prosperous future for both the land and its people.

Training for co-operatives within the Greater iSimangaliso biodiversity economy node

By Mloni Mdletshe, edited by Zoleka Mkhize and Mpho Gumula

The Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme awarded US\$135 000 to three co-operatives in the Greater iSimangaliso biodiversity economy node. The funding supports Nibela Fisheries, Siyazama St. Lucia Market, and Dukuduku-Khayelisha Fisheries, focusing on enhancing local fishery and craft businesses. A report writing workshop was held to ensure proper fund usage, reinforcing the commitment to community development and conservation...

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme is implemented in South Africa by the United Nations Development Programme. It provides grant funding to communities and civil society organisations to enable them to implement projects in the conservation of the environment and climate change while improving their livelihoods.

In partnership with iSimangaliso Wetland Park, it signed grant funding agreements totalling US\$135 000 (approx. R2 529 million) to three co-operatives in the Greater iSimangaliso biodiversity economy node in January 2024. As part of ensuring the proper use of funds, iSimangaliso and GEF Small Grants Programme hosted a report writing workshop for the three grantees that covered the requirements for narrative and financial reporting. It follows an earlier workshop in 2023 that supported civil society organisations and local small business owners to complete their project proposals.

The successful grant applicants are Nibela Fisheries Co-operative, Siyazama St. Lucia Market Primary Co-operative, and Dukuduku-Khayelisha Fisheries Co-operative. Nibela Fisheries Co-operative and Dukuduku-Khayelisha Fisheries Co-operative are small community projects which focus on trading raw fish and processed fish products. Through this grant support, they intend to buy fully equipped



Ms Anele Moyo from United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) Small Grants Program with the successful co-operatives in the iSimangaliso Node.

fishing boats and material which will assist them to be commercial fishers. Siyazama St. Lucia Market Primary Co-operative is a women-owned craft market situated in St. Lucia town. They offer craft work and fresh produce products to tourists. They intend to use the funding to renovate their market structure which was becoming a safety hazard to tourists and crafters.

Mr Nkuna, the chairperson of Nibela Fishing Co-operative, spoke on behalf of the three co-operatives in the meeting and said they appreciate the continued support that they receive from iSimangaliso and the GEF Small Grants Programme. *“I would like to thank all parties involved in this programme, I can see the intention is to change our lives for the better. I would also like to appreciate that our proposal was approved and we have received the first tranche.*

Honestly speaking, our project just started working because we did not have money. There is a lot that is going to change in our business and our lives”, said Mr Nkuna.

The three projects are part of the first 15 community wildlife economy projects supported by the GEF Small Grants Programme across the nodal areas of iSimangaliso Wetland Park, Kruger National Park and Greater Addo-Amathole, contributing towards the implementation of the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy. There are various projects still to be implemented within iSimangaliso through the Biodiversity Economy Project. These projects include the rehabilitation of the Mabasa community conservation area, Makhasa community conservation area and Kosi Bay tourism precinct development, and more.

Peer-to-peer learning between communities of the Greater Addo Amathole biodiversity economy node and the Emcakwini Community Trust

By Senzo Dunywa, edited by Zolela Mkhize and Mpho Gumula

A learning exchange was held between communities of the Greater Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node and the Babanango Community Game Reserve. The learning exchange focused on various valuable topics which included conversations about governance, management, leadership, conflict resolution, and beneficiation models for the communities...

Learning spaces fuel the seeds of greatness. The Greater Addo-Amathole node was inspired to conduct a community learning exchange for the committee and community members of the Brakfontein Communal Property Association (CPA). The idea for the learning exchange arose from the earlier learning event conducted by SANBI in 2023 with community representatives from Babanango Game Reserve, Ndou Safaris, Bonwa Phala Game Farm, Donkerhoek CPA, Bambanani and uKuthanda-uKhukhanya community farms. A further, in-depth



Delegates at the Learning Exchange.

learning exchange was held between the communities of the Greater Addo-Amathole Node and the highly successful Babanango Community Game Reserve.

The learning exchange took place in June 2024 and was aimed at exposing the Brakfontein CPA committee and other community leaders of the Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node to the experiences of Babanango Game Reserve. Babanango Community Game Reserve is one of the biodiversity stewardship projects located in rural KwaZulu-Natal. It is one of the thriving community projects where sustainable conservation, eco-tourism, and community development intersect. It was perfect to share their experiences with the communities of the Greater Addo-Amathole area.

The two-day learning exchange focused on various valuable topics which included conversations about governance, management, leadership, and conflict resolution. It looked specifically at the beneficiation

model for the communities and the support provided by the neighbouring communities towards the project. Discussions also covered the mobilisation and management of the concession agreements. These were discussion points that were raised by the Brakfontein CPA to shed light on how Babanango Game Reserve has dealt with some of these issues in their project.

On the first day, the group met at the Emcakwini Trust offices in the town of Babanango where they were welcomed by the founder of the Emcakwini Trust, Eric Buthelezi, and Andrew McGill. Both Mr Buthelezi and Mr McGill gave a brief background about the reserve and their respective roles in this community project. Mr Buthelezi indicated that there are three trusts that represent each community with land in the reserve, with Emcakwini, Esibongweni and KwaNgono community trusts holding about 74% of the land. He also emphasised the huge role that is being played by their German investor without whom Babanango Game Reserve would not have achieved its current success.

On the second day, the conversations and presentations continued at Matatane River Lodge which is within the Babanango Game Reserve. Mr Buthelezi presented the role of non-governmental organisations, management authorities, and the private sector in supporting community projects.

The delegation was impressed with the fact that the community and investor have a 35-year concession agreement which covers the building, maintenance, and transfer of fixed assets at the end of this period. The trustees are elected in a free and fair process every three years and some members have had an opportunity to receive training in financial and conflict management.



The delegation comprised community representatives from Yandella, Lower Blinkwater (Maqoma); AmaNdlambe (Mhala Traditional Authority), uMthontsi, Longvale Farm, Mayibuye Trust, Brakfontein and Enon Beersheba, as well as the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA), South African National Parks, and the World Wide Fund for Nature- South Africa (WWF-SA).

They also learned about the African Habitat Conservancy Foundation, which was formed to support the Babanango community and which supports local youth with tertiary tuition fees.

In his presentation, Mr Ayanda Cele from WWF highlighted the role of non-governmental organisations in the conservation sector and detailed the range of conservation options available to communal landowners from Protected

Environments to Nature Reserve status. By way of an example, he explained how the Mgundeni community in northern KwaZulu-Natal started their journey with a Biodiversity Management Agreement and over time opted for Protected Environment status for their land.

The communities and partners from Greater Addo-Amathole expressed their appreciation for the support that enabled the learning exchange.

Changing the narrative of conservation by rolling out biodiversity stewardship workshops for communities in Greater iSimangaliso

By Mloni Mdletshe, edited by Zoleka Mkhize and Mpho Gumula

Biodiversity stewardship workshops for communities were held adjacent to iSimangaliso Wetland Park. These three-day workshops aimed to educate community stakeholders about the importance of conserving nature and the benefits that communities can derive from the biodiversity economy. The workshops helped to foster collaboration with communities and to promote compatible land-use practices adjacent to the park. They also aimed to support the upliftment of youth and women, and the development of community-based initiatives...

iSimangaliso Wetland Park and Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife hosted biodiversity stewardship workshops with communities neighboring iSimangaliso. The three-day workshops were attended by various stakeholders, such as

representatives from the national government, traditional authorities, community trusts, fishing co-operatives, non-governmental organisations, traditional healers, and other community structures. The first workshop was attended by the traditional leadership and trust members of Makhasa, Jobe, and Ngwenya communities at Hluhluwe Community Hall. The second workshop was attended by Mabasa and Tembe traditional authorities at the Mabasa traditional tribal court, and the last was attended by Nibela traditional authorities held at the Nibela traditional tribal court.

The biodiversity economy includes the businesses and economic activities that either depend on biodiversity for their core business or that contribute to the conservation of biodiversity through their activities. It includes businesses related to bioprospecting, ecotourism, wildlife ranching and conservation. Mr Sibusiso Zondi



Greater iSimangaliso node coordinator (Mr Sibusiso Zondi) welcoming delegates to the workshop.



Community member at Nibela reflecting on the biodiversity stewardship workshop.

of iSimangaliso Wetland Park highlighted the objectives of the biodiversity stewardship programme as he was elucidating the purpose of the workshops. *“Through this initiative, iSimangaliso and Ezemvelo are not trying to take community-owned land. However, this programme will assist communities to start reaping benefits from their land by creating businesses which will create employment for community members, and benefit communities through bioprospecting, or ecotourism, and the wildlife economy.”*

iSimangaliso is in the process of assisting the three communities (Makhasa, Mabasa, and Nibela) to get involved in biodiversity stewardship, with the communities deciding the category suitable for them. The scope of work for Mabasa includes the erection of a perimeter fence, access gate, and security kiosk, facilitating game donations, and capacity building for community-owned initiatives. The scope of work for Makhasa community conservation includes social support and community stewardship, construction of conference and ablution facilities, kitchen, and swimming pool, as well as facilitating game donations and capacity building for community-owned initiatives. The scope of work for Nibela includes the development of community stewardship, social support, and capacity building for community-owned initiatives.

The workshops were facilitated by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, as they maintain the biodiversity stewardship programme in the province. Leading the presentations, Ms Tembisa Jordaan of Ezemvelo presented to the communities the procedures for having land declared as a biodiversity stewardship site. This included the detailed process of site identification, initiation of landowner interactions, biodiversity assessment, review of the property, contract negotiations, drafting

a management plan with the landowner, internal approvals, cost analysis, submissions, and finally formal proclamation following the endorsement by the Member of the Executive Council (MEC), with support provided to protected areas following declaration.

Mr Thokozani Mlambo, a member of Makhasa Trust and Makhasa Traditional Leader expressed his gratitude for the learning from the workshop. *“I appreciate iSimangaliso and all its partners for initiating such programmes. As the Makhasa Community, we have a land that iSimangaliso is assisting us with some of the activities through the Biodiversity Economy Project. I have learnt a lot from this workshop, and I hope it won't be the last one. I request that you provide such training to communities, so that we are clear about the processes, challenges to expect, and benefits that we can gain through this initiative”,* said Mr Mlambo.

Representative of Mabasa traditional council, Mr Eric Nxumalo, also appreciated the efforts made by the government structures to ensure these workshops became a success. *“This was a very informative workshop and I believe it will benefit our community. I would like to thank all those who participated and raised relevant questions to seek clarity before the community takes a decision. I sincerely request that iSimangaliso and Ezemvelo schedule another workshop which will focus on the Mabasa community”,* said Mr Eric Nxumalo.

“Recently, iSimangaliso employed youth from our communities through the Groen Sebenza programme and the EPWP programme, which assisted many disadvantaged families. I plead with iSimangaliso to keep creating job opportunities and businesses that will develop Nibela and fight against poverty”, said the Prime Minister of Nibela, Mr MH Ngubane.

The power of collaboration: A community's journey to revitalise a lodge

By Ntwanano Mendes, edited by Lucia Motloung

In the heart of the Mahlathi community, within the vibrant Greater Kruger-Limpopo area, a remarkable story of collaboration is unfolding. Various stakeholders have united to breathe life into a lodge built in 2014 but never opened. The lodge, envisioned to create jobs and support the local economy, stands as a testimony to what can be achieved when communities and partners come together. Its future success, however, hinges on the continuation of this collective effort...

The journey began in 2003, driven by the determination of a group of women to create a tourist lodge to benefit the community. They secured initial funding of R1.5 million from the Department of Tourism. Despite significant setbacks, the community's resilience shone through. In 2012 and 2016, they received an additional R15 million and R3.4 million to keep their dream alive. The total investment of R19.9 million was completed in 2016.

Yet, the lodge faced obstacles that prevented it from operating. The challenges started when the potential operator and the community could not agree on the share per organisation. The absence of the operator led to an accumulating electricity bill, lack of water, dilapidating infrastructure, and an unsecured lodge. The Department of Tourism assisted in paying the initial electricity bill, which has since accumulated. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) assisted with a hydrogeological study and drilling of the borehole. Despite these efforts, water is still not enough to service the lodge. It is speculated that the water table is too low at the location of the borehole since it is in close proximity to the municipal borehole that supplies the entire community.

In July 2024, a diverse group of stakeholders, including the DFFE; Department of Tourism; Department of Land Reform and Rural Development; South African National Parks; Limpopo Economic Development, Environment and Tourism; Industrial Development Corporation; and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), gathered to tackle these challenges and come up with solutions. The outcome of this meeting was an action plan, stipulating activities, responsible organisation and the time frame. A meeting to report on progress is planned for October 2024. SANBI played a supporting role in this meeting, capturing the challenges, interventions, and



Various stakeholders with the Mahlathi community.

lessons learnt. This information will contribute to SANBI's ongoing efforts in monitoring, evaluation, reflection, and learning for the Biodiversity Economy Project.

The meeting was followed by a tour inside the lodge to assess the existing infrastructure and a visit to the area earmarked for inclusion to the Kruger National Park. The visit highlighted the lodge's strategic importance for attracting tourists and integrating with the broader biodiversity economy. The community's unwavering dedication to maintaining the lodge showcased their commitment to improving their lives. Their efforts in keeping the facility in good condition are a powerful testimony to their determination and hope for a better future.

The future of the lodge relies on continued stakeholder collaboration. Repackaging the business case to attract investment is another strategic move to ensure the lodge's sustainability. The Mahlathi community stands on the brink of transforming their lodge into a beacon of opportunity and prosperity. Thanks to the combined efforts of government departments, government entities, local authorities, and the community itself, a strong foundation has been laid, yet, the journey is far from over. Continuous partnership, resource mobilisation, and unwavering commitment are essential to bring this vision to life.

The power of collaboration shines brightly, offering hope and progress for the Mahlathi community, proving that together, they can overcome any challenge and build a prosperous future.

A successful hunting season for Brakfontein Community Nature Reserve

By Zoleka Mkhize

The Brakfontein Community Reserve is rapidly developing into a model for a successful community-led wildlife enterprise. Recent milestones include selling hunting packages and conducting hunting activities, securing furniture donations from nearby private game reserves, and ensuring operations of the abattoir. The Likhayaletu Communal Property Association is well-positioned for growth, with additional game on the way...

Just a week after the successful hunting operations took place at the Brakfontein Community Reserve, the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) team visited the project in August 2024, to witness the impressive progress made by this dynamic conservation project. The timing was perfect as Ms Aimee Ginsburg, the newly appointed Biodiversity Mainstreaming Director of SANBI made her first official visit to the community reserve, where she was introduced to the Brakfontein community team. The visit was crucial for SANBI as it oversees the support provided to Brakfontein, through the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA), as part of the Biodiversity Economy Project. The project focusses on incubating small businesses and facilitating community stewardship to expand wildlife habitat. Since the last visit in early 2023, Brakfontein has made remarkable strides in operationalising the community reserve.

The Brakfontein Community Reserve, a 1280-hectare property situated on the northern border of the Great Fish River Nature Reserve, is on its way to becoming a model for community-led wildlife enterprises. Initially acquired by the Likhayaletu Communal Property Association (CPA) to establish a community-owned wildlife and hunting venture, the reserve has seen tremendous development over the past few years.

Thanks to a Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programme (EPIP) grant from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), fencing, staff accommodation, a buffalo boma, and other essential facilities were constructed. The ECPTA also introduced 132 game animals, including buffalo, eland, kudu, and zebra, between 2018 and 2021. Further infrastructure upgrades were funded through the Expanded Public Infrastructure Programme which included the development of hunting lodges, an abattoir, and the improvement of internal roads.

Brakfontein has now entered a new chapter. Two hunting packages, sold at ECPTA's recent auction, mark the reserve's first step into formal business. One of these packages was successfully completed in August 2024 comprising of an eland, kudu, zebra, two warthogs, and a red hartebeest. The hunts will set a tone for future ventures. The partners are hard at work ensuring



Chalets at the Brakfontein Community Reserve.

everything is in place, from procurement of furniture for the chalets through donations from three private reserves, to final touch-ups around the property.

Moreover, electricity installation and cold storage facilities are being completed through the Biodiversity Economy Project to ensure the site is fully operational. The Global Environmental Facility Small Grants Programme awarded this community a whopping US\$ 50 000 to fully equip Brakfontein’s abattoir for processing game meat. This ensures a sustainable income stream for the community and solidifies Brakfontein’s position as a key project incubation site under the Biodiversity Economy Project in the Greater Addo-Amathole biodiversity economy node.

In addition to infrastructure developments, the Likhayaletu CPA has participated in high-profile events like the Biodiversity Economy and Investment Indaba, showcasing Brakfontein to potential investors. Key leadership positions, including a reserve manager and livelihoods manager, will soon be filled to further drive growth, adding to the two gate guards that have



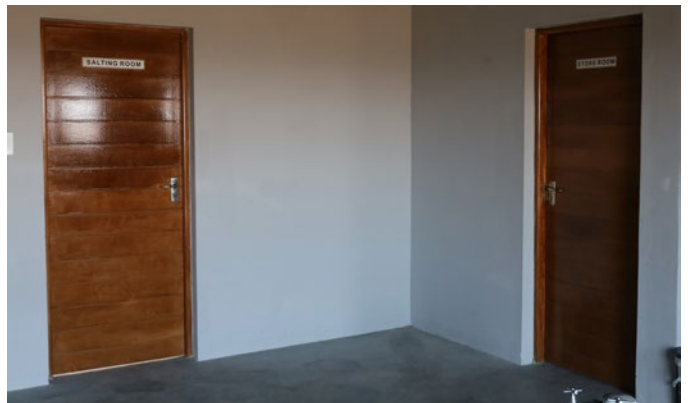
A buffalo boma developed through the DFFE Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programme.

successfully been appointed. Game expansion plans are also in place, with more buffalo and kudu set to arrive.

With a strong foundation, Brakfontein Community Reserve is poised for success, bringing both economic benefits and conservation opportunities to the Likhayaletu CPA and the broader community. The future looks bright as this reserve grows into a thriving, community-led venture.



An abattoir at the Brakfontein Community Reserve.



Insights from the 7th technical working committee meeting for the Biodiversity Economy Project

By Wisani Lubisi, edited by Mpho Gumula

The 7th technical working committee meeting for the Biodiversity Economy Project brought together key stakeholders to review progress, address challenges, and plan for future activities. Site visits to community projects highlighted both successes and challenges, inspiring action plans to support ecotourism and biodiversity initiatives. The meeting emphasised the importance of addressing

procurement delays and fostering partnerships to drive sustainable development in the biodiversity economy...

In the Greater Addo- Amathole biodiversity economy node in August 2024, stakeholders gathered in Port Alfred, Eastern Cape, for the 7th technical working committee meeting of pillar 2 of the Biodiversity Economy Project. The meeting brought together project entities, including



Delegates attending the Technical Working Committee.

the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), South African National Parks (SANParks), Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA), iSimangaliso Wetland Park, World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners to review project progress, discuss challenges, assess budget expenditures, and plan for upcoming financial quarters.

As a practice for the technical working committee, the group conducted site visits to local community projects supported under the Biodiversity Economy Project. Stakeholders visited the Mhala Traditional Council and Yandella Farm, gaining firsthand insights into how conservation and economic development activities are integrated within the communities. These visits provided

an essential platform for stakeholders to reflect on the work happening in their respective nodes, drawing inspiration from the challenges and successes observed.

At the Mhala Traditional Council, stakeholders observed efforts to promote ecotourism but also identified challenges such as non-operational accommodation facilities and a lack of tourism infrastructure. On the other hand, Yandella Farm showcased its potential as a key contributor to the biodiversity economy, highlighting infrastructure issues such as lack of proper housing and electricity, as well as lack of skills and capacity preventing effective utilisation of their farming resources. Both of these sites are earmarked for community biodiversity stewardship and biodiversity economy activities to support improved rural livelihoods. Inspired by these



Site visit to Yandella Community Farm.



Site visit to Mhala Traditional Council.

challenges, stakeholders committed to developing an action plan with timeframes to support these communities in addressing their challenges, reinforcing the project's commitment to achieving both biodiversity conservation and economic development objectives.

The project management unit commended entities for meeting their reporting requirements, but highlighted an issue with slow spending on their budgets. Therefore, entities were encouraged to make use of their budgets. Progress on the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme led by UNDP has been made. The UNDP provided financial support to small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) within the project nodes, where the projects have already begun to derive benefits from the programme with tangible results, demonstrating its potential to foster growth and empower local economies. This marks a critical milestone for the project, as it continues to move towards creating sustainable biodiversity economy nodes.

One major issue highlighted in the progress reports was procurement, which has hindered entities' ability to procure the necessary goods and services for the project, causing delays in project implementation and creating frustration among stakeholders. In response to these challenges, the meeting emphasised the need for entities to address procurement bottlenecks to ensure that project activities can proceed without further delays.

The last day was dedicated to capacity-building sessions focused on financial reporting and the Biodiversity

Investment Portal, highlighting its role in promoting bankable investment opportunities within the biodiversity sector to facilitate financing and sustainable growth. The meeting concluded with a learning session, which further highlighted key challenges and opportunities encountered by the nodes as they are engaging with communities. These included conflicts within the communities over land-use priorities, with some prioritising conservation while others focus on farming.

The learning session also presented opportunities, including the potential for partnerships among communities, the private sector, non-governmental organisations, government departments, and entities implementing the project. These collaborations could pool resources and expertise, driving sustainable development through biodiversity economy. Continuous learning exchanges among communities were also highlighted as a crucial opportunity to promote knowledge sharing, allowing communities to collectively address challenges and adopt best practices.

The technical working committee continues to serve as a vital platform for fostering collaborations, unlocking bottlenecks with implementation of the project's activities, provision of technical expertise and policy advice, learning, and inspiration. As the Biodiversity Economy Project moves forward, addressing the highlighted challenges and leveraging the identified opportunities will be essential to building a thriving biodiversity economy that supports both conservation and community development.

Bonwaphala Game Farm: a successful Communal Property Association model in Limpopo

By Tshifhiwa Mandaha, edited by Mpho Gumula

In July 2024, a bilateral meeting on biodiversity stewardship was held at the Sasavona Hotel Retreat, which is a partnership between the Bela Bela Communal Property Association (CPA) and Sasavona Hotel Group. The meeting focused on aligning activities for the next financial year and strengthening partnerships. Highlights included a presentation by Chief Mabuela on the Bela Bela CPA's diverse land restitution initiative, as well as a tour showcasing the Ankole Nguni farm, wildlife conservation efforts, and Mamashianuka Hill, a sacred cultural site. The visit successfully blended biodiversity, community development, and cultural heritage...

In July 2024, the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) convened their quarterly bilateral meeting under the ambit of the biodiversity stewardship programme. The meeting aimed to share progress and updates on the various workstreams, and align activities for the 2024/25 financial year. It discussed new and emerging work for both organisations and strengthening partnerships in supporting the Land Reform and Biodiversity Stewardship Initiative.

The meeting took place at the newly established Sasavona Hotel Retreat, a luxurious venue characterised by elegant villas and breathtaking views of wildlife roaming freely. SANBI and DFFE had the privilege of being the first guests



Delegates at the Bonwaphala Game Farm.

at this classy hotel owned by the Bela Bela Community Property Association (CPA) in partnership with the Sasavona Hotel Group. *“This is an example of integrating resources”*, says the proud Chief LB Mabuela.

Bonwaphala Game Reserve is one of the stewardship sites under Limpopo Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET). The chief executive officer, Chief Mabuela, delivered an insightful presentation providing a detailed overview of their project. It is a land restitution initiative covering 6 000 hectares of land in the Bela Bela

Municipality. The CPA operates through its business entity called Mahlohonolo Investments, a diverse enterprise incorporating ecotourism, hunting, poultry production, livestock, and crop farming. Chief Mabuela emphasised the CPA’s collaboration with the University of Venda, its support for internships, and its commitment to empowering youth through skills development programmes. The project’s beneficiation model has a significant impact on the community, benefiting 250 families. Annually, the project allocates R2.5 million to its beneficiaries as Christmas bonuses, where each household receives a payment of R10 000.

Bela Bela CPA took delegates around the Ankole Nguni farm where they were introduced to the farm’s unique operations. During this tour the significance of the Ankole breed was emphasised, including how it is carefully maintained alongside other mixed breeds on the farm and its notable economic benefits, resilience to diverse weather conditions, and the distinct qualities of its milk and meat compared to local cattle breeds.

The highlight of the tour was the opportunity to observe the reserve’s majestic wildlife up close. Delegates were amazed by the sight of buffaloes and giraffes, along with other animals roaming freely across the vast terrain. The reserve is home to numerous avian inhabitants, and the delegates enjoyed spotting colourful birds in their natural habitat. The visit offered delegates not only a chance to witness the incredible biodiversity but also to appreciate the efforts made in preserving such a vital ecosystem. This



Delegates taken through the Ankole Nguni Farm.



SANBI and DFFEs bilateral team members at one of the fancy establishments in Sasavona Hotel Retreat.

was a memorable experience that showcased the reserve's commitment to conservation.

The field trip included a remarkable visit to Mamashianuka, an ancestral hill named after a massive nest. The hill is known for its distinctive geological formations that leave a lasting impression on visitors. This majestic hill is considered sacred, and access to the hill is

deeply rooted in tradition. The CPA members had to ask the elders' permission to enter. At the heart of the hill lies a cave containing natural spring water, which is exclusively accessible to the chiefs.

Overall, the visit to Bonwaphala game farm was a memorable experience, blending luxury, cultural heritage, conservation, and the wildlife economy.

South African National Biodiversity Institute convenes the wildlife economy workshop

By Ayaka Peter

In February 2024, SANBI hosted a wildlife economy workshop at the Assegaai Conservancy, focusing on the game meat value chain through the Sustainable Wildlife Economies Project (SWEPE). Key stakeholders discussed infrastructure investments, business models, and the role of conservancies in advancing the wildlife economy. The event emphasised collaboration, sustainable land management, and the need for a formalized game meat sector to support socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation...

With the goal of understanding the Assegaai Conservancy as a case study for unlocking wildlife economy enterprises, particularly those related to the game meat value

chain, the South African National Biodiversity Institute hosted a pivotal two-day wildlife economy workshop in February 2024 under the ambit of the Sustainable Wildlife Economies Project (SWEPE). The objective of SWEPE is to understand how wildlife land uses contribute to sustainable land management, socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation. It is enabled through funding from the JRS Foundation, the French Development Agency (AFD), and the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP), implemented by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) and South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

The workshop took place at Umbono Private Game Lodge within the Assegaai Conservancy in Alexandria, Eastern Cape. It was aimed at mapping business models and



Delegates at the Wildlife Economy Workshop.

enhancing infrastructure investment in South Africa's wildlife economy. The event gathered key stakeholders, including the SWEP research team, South African National Parks, Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency, and Wildlife Ranching South Africa, to unlock the potential of the wildlife economy through multistakeholder collaboration.

Two presentations were given by South African National Parks (SANParks). The first highlighted the role of the Biodiversity Economy project in establishing the Addo-Amathole node and the necessity of a multistakeholder forum for effective landscape planning. Anchor projects focusing on existing ranches and infrastructure investments were identified as critical components. The second presentation touched on the feasibility study targeting meat processing facilities for emerging wildlife ranchers, emphasising the need to understand existing infrastructure and value chain gaps to avoid duplicative efforts and foster collaboration. The goal is to unlock the wildlife economy through informed investment.

Matthew Child from SANBI highlighted the potential of the game meat production sector. Although many properties engage in game meat production, revenue generation is minimal. The workshop discussed the importance of exploring mixed wildlife business models, which offer resilience and opportunities for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs). The conservancy model was considered a viable approach to enhance profitability and sustainability within the wildlife economy.

Representing the Assegaai Conservancy was Melt Heyneke who shared insights into the conservancy's growth and governance model. He detailed how the conservancy blends game ranching with livestock and crop farming, creating an environment conducive to both private and public land management. The flexibility and voluntary nature of the conservancy model were highlighted as key factors in its success and a critical pathway for being able to assist emerging game farmers to access the wildlife economy in partnership with established enterprises.

The plenary discussions addressed the capacity and roles within the game meat production value chain. Participants recognised the importance of creating high-quality products before focusing on job creation, emphasising training in meat processing facilities. Discussions also delved into the potential of leveraging the Biodiversity Economy Project investments to influence policy changes and resolve inconsistencies between departments. The need for a formalised game meat sector and opportunities for retail market expansion were underlined. Using government investment to help new market entrants increase wildlife production that can then feed into existing value chains, through a conservancy arrangement, was also highlighted as a priority.

A site visit was conducted to tour the registered rural abattoir located inside the conservancy, which operates under the strict governance of both the municipality and the Department of Health. The abattoir exclusively

processes game meat (venison) from local hunting activities, as mixing game meat with livestock poses regulatory challenges. The facility is regularly inspected to ensure compliance with the health and safety standards. We were shown various sections of the abattoir, starting with the receiving area where game meat is brought in, followed by the dripping section, which allows the blood to drain before further processing. In the cutting section, meat is trimmed and prepared for packaging. Hygiene is a top priority, with all cutlery and tools sterilised to meet stringent health requirements.

The abattoir primarily sells its venison to local butcheries and smaller establishments, as it does not yet have the necessary permits to supply larger retail chains such as your Spar or Pick n Pay. The game meat is sourced from the conservancy's landowners, who practice controlled hunting to maintain sustainable wildlife populations. In addition to supporting local food systems, the abattoir plays a key role in the community by providing employment opportunities for locals.

The site visit tied into the broader conversation around the game meat production value chain, discussed in the plenary session. The conservancy's efforts extend beyond basic ranching; they form a critical link in a value chain that begins with sustainable culling to maintain wildlife numbers and culminates in providing high-quality products for the local market.

The second day began with John Hurter reflecting on the origins and insights of the conservancy model. He recounted how conservancies, initially seen as administrative solutions, have grown into critical mechanisms for biodiversity conservation and economic opportunity. The session emphasised the importance of securing habitat and reducing poverty through sustainable wildlife management.

Further plenary discussions explored the process of establishing a conservancy, the importance of local official involvement, and the challenges in securing financial support for wildlife-focused projects. Participants discussed opportunities for inter-agency cooperation, the creation of mentorship programmes, and the potential for SANParks to focus investments on governance structures and game stock building.

The workshop concluded with a series of actionable steps, including developing a comprehensive report to be shared with stakeholders. A conservancy guideline document and knowledge products from AFD will also be circulated. The workshop underscored the importance of consolidating understandings and increasing production bases through conservancy structures, ultimately aiming to catalyse land reform and game donation programmes. It further provided a crucial platform for dialogue and collaboration, setting the stage for impactful investments and sustainable development in South Africa's wildlife economy.