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Information Leaflet

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER RESOURCES: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN WATER, ECOSYSTEMS AND SOCIETY THROUGH SPATIAL MAPPING OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

Research Project C2019/2020-00150: 2020-2023

Communities involved: Mhlwazini, Stulwane, Ezinbomvini

About the project:

In this project we like to learn more about managing our natural resources and water resources in a way so that the communities can benefit from these resources, now, and in many generations to come. A common issue in South Africa, and in other countries, is that society are using these resources faster than they can recover, so that land becomes degraded and water sources are depleted.

In a farming community like the ones here in the Drakensberg, most families directly depend on land and water for food and for their livelihoods. This can be through farming crops, herding livestock, finding building material, traditional medicine, hunting or harvesting plants for food or for cultural uses and traditions.

Aims:

What this project is aiming to do, is to hear from the community, what is it that you want to use your land for, what are the benefits that you want to get, as individuals and as a community, from the natural and water resources that are available. We want to understand what changes have happened regarding these resources that makes it difficult for the community to use your land in the ways that you want to.

We also want to go out in the community and see what the condition of the land is – what vegetation is there, what is the health of the soil and the water, and what do the community members do – and can do - to make sure the lands maintain healthy.

After we have an understanding of this we would like to – together with the community – discuss what plans can be made to maintain the resources for the community today and for future generation.

The project team:

We have put together a team of researchers and practitioners with a very diverse knowledge. We have a hydrologist (Michele Toucher, SAEON, UKZN) who is specialized in the weather and the water, and colleagues (Tim O'Connor, SAEON), who has knowledge about the vegetation, soil and the different kinds of plants and grasses. We have a community development practitioner (Erna Kruger, Mahlathini Development Foundation), who has many years of experiences in working with communities in agriculture and land issues, and in her team also Nicholas Madondo and Michael Malinga. We have a student (Mdoda Ngwenya, UKZN, CWRR) who has experience in community projects both on water and land management and on conservation of biodiversity. Lastly, it's Rebecka Henriksson (UKZN, CWRR), who is specialized in understanding the relationships between people and the environment – how people are dependent on nature, and how we in turn shape the environment we live in.

This team, which I have just introduced would like to also build a team with the community, with community leaders and community members, to together learn more about how the community use the land and the water, what solutions can be found to make sure the resources can be there also for future generations. We believe that one way of assuring this, is to build a plan together.

Methods:

The ways we would like to carry out this project, is through a series of workshops, focus-group discussions, individual interviews and village walks. The focus groups, interviews and village walks are for us to get a deeper understanding of the ways the communities use and are dependent on the lands and what the needs of the communities are. The workshops are for bigger groups to get together, we can feed back what we have learnt from the research, get questions from the communities, and together discuss possible solutions.

We hope at the end of the project, the communities will have a better understanding of how to manage and maintain resources, protect water sources, and maintain livelihoods and food for future generations.

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