

INTERACT-BIO DIALOGUE

LESSONS LEARNED: WATERBERG DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO



April 2024 | South Africa

INTERACT-Bio
Integrated action on biodiversity



1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

INTERACT-Bio is a Global South initiative focused on integrating biodiversity objectives into sub-national actions, supporting the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI), implemented by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) and the Federal Foreign Office (AA), the project aims to bridge the gap between national governments and city-regions in biodiversity management, aligning with global targets such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The INTERACT-Bio project aimed to support local biodiversity actions in the Waterberg region. Through the project finance mechanisms were explored and developed for the Waterberg District Municipality and a Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan was developed based on the needs and priorities of the Waterberg District Municipality (WDM).

This session provided a comprehensive exploration of the project's journey, focusing on two key areas: lessons learned and the opportunities for public-private partnerships. This session aimed to foster a collaborative learning environment where diverse perspectives converge to drive innovation, inform future endeavours in support of sustainable development.

2. DIALOGUE ON LESSONS LEARNED

This dialogue forms part of a series of dialogues. The series of dialogues are intended to bring together national, sub-national, local and private sector actors for a vertically and horizontally integration. The gender mainstreaming dialogue was hosted in April 2024 in Modimolle, Limpopo and was facilitated by the ICLEI Africa. The dialogue took a presentation style format where organisations and individuals were invited to speak about their experience of the project. Additionally, a cafe style conversation was facilitated around a suggested project.

The session focused on the opportunities presented for the Waterberg District Municipality, specifically unlocking Public Private Partnerships in support of the areas sustainable, nature-positive development.



3. EMERGING THEMES

Lessons learned from Waterberg District Municipality

The Waterberg District Municipality's Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (LBSAP), developed under the INTERACT-Bio project, places a strong emphasis on urban and sustainable development, with a specific focus on unlocking economic opportunities. As part of this initiative, a biodiversity finance mechanism was developed in collaboration with the finance consultancy Adaptive Management and Finance (AMAF). This work led the Waterberg District Municipality (WDM) to prioritise Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a key approach to securing funding for local biodiversity projects.

Informed by feedback from a previous dialogue held the year before, the following topics were purposefully included for discussion:

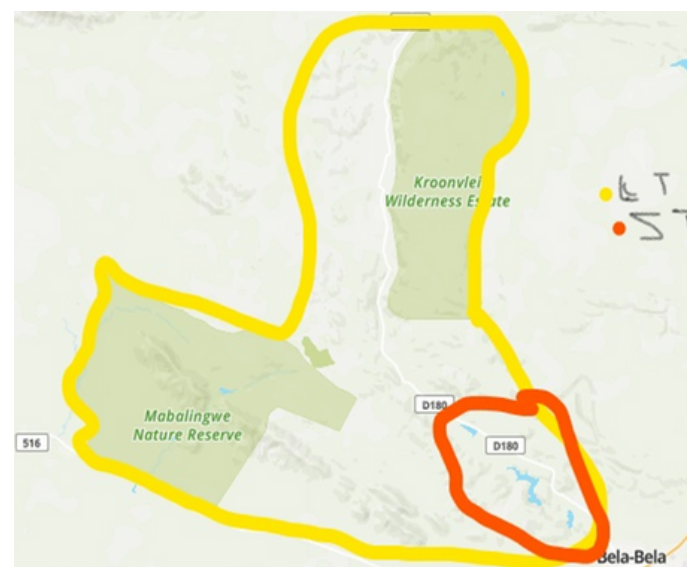
- The need for project implementation that delivers tangible benefits to local communities.
- The need for capacity building among middle management within local municipalities.
- The importance of strengthening communication channels between municipalities and private stakeholders.

Through the activities conducted as part of the INTERACT-Bio project, including the multi-stakeholder forum and series of dialogues, communication was significantly improved. These platforms created opportunities to collaboratively address local challenges and co-develop contextually relevant, locally driven solutions.

Opportunities for Public Private Partnerships

Members of the Waterberg community proposed the establishment of the Bela-Bela Game Reserve, an initiative presented to local officials during the dialogue. The vision is to create and manage this reserve through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) between the Bela-Bela Local Municipality and the Waterberg Development Initiative NPO. The reserve aims to protect the town's freshwater dams and catchment areas by designating them as a sustainable-use conservation area, whilst also protecting the unique flora and fauna of the Waterberg Biome which can be conserved, studied, and enjoyed by all. In doing so, the municipality and its residents can benefit from the responsible and sustainable use of natural resources.

This initiative seeks to contribute to the President's District Development Model by serving as a fully integrated PPP. The Bela-Bela Local Municipality owns significant land, which could be incorporated into the reserve to create an initial conservancy of approximately 1,700 hectares—including the Bela-Bela dams. Securing these areas is essential for ensuring long-term water security, protecting biodiversity, and creating jobs and income for the local population, laying the foundation for a self-sustaining, nature-based local economy.



Suggested site for the proposed
Bela-Bela Game Reserve

The dialogue unpacked the following questions posed to groups of diverse stakeholders:

1. What is the value proposition of this project?
2. What does this PPP ideally look like? Who should be included in this partnership?
3. How can we draw all partners together?

The dialogue yielded the following insights:

1. The project's value proposition lies in its sustainability and multifaceted benefits. It aims to conserve vital water resources and biodiversity while fostering a stronger connection between people and nature. Additionally, it offers significant potential for job creation, community upskilling, and economic growth—contributing to the broader success of the Waterberg region's thriving tourism sector.
2. The envisioned partnership emphasizes collaboration among local communities, government entities, and private sector stakeholders. Central to the project is the integration of local communities into all stages of development and planning, ensuring they are the primary beneficiaries. The local government will be responsible for regulatory oversight, approvals, and provision of the project site. Meanwhile, private partners will lead efforts in capacity building, community empowerment, and mobilizing funding through domestic and international channels. Key stakeholders to be engaged for the project's success include:
 - Non-Governmental Organisations
 - Farmers (livestock, game etc.)
 - Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME)
 - Government departments such as SANBI
 - Youth
 - Traditional authorities
 - Private landowners
 - Tourism

The key considerations for the proposed project were mapped out by the groups according to the following diagram:



3. Effectively engaging all stakeholders begins with securing the support of high-level authorities, whose endorsement can help bring others on board. A strong foundation for collaboration should be built through the development of a robust business plan and the establishment of clear Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). The business plan must articulate the value proposition for all stakeholders, with particular emphasis on social impact. Engaging traditional leaders or appointing a dedicated community liaison can further strengthen local support. Throughout the process, consistent assurance and transparent communication will be essential to maintaining trust and momentum.



4. OUTCOMES OF THE DIALOGUE

- Waterberg, located within a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and home to some of the richest platinum deposits in the world, is a region of exceptional ecological and economic significance.
- The INTERACT-Bio project has been a dynamic and valuable experience for the region, highlighting both opportunities and areas for growth. Notably, the District Municipality acknowledged the need to strengthen communication and stakeholder coordination to maximize impact.
- A shared understanding of biodiversity and the benefits of a nature-based economy is essential for advancing sustainable development within the local municipality.
- Strong collaboration exists between the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and local municipalities, enabling mutual support and coordinated action.
- A key challenge remains the development of project ideas backed by robust, investment-ready business cases.
- The importance of nature-based solutions (NbS) is widely recognized, prompting critical questions such as: What package of NbS can we assemble to attract meaningful business partnerships? How do we ensure each step prioritizes ecological mindfulness and long-term sustainability?
- A coherent, integrated approach is essential to align planning efforts and successfully achieve district and municipal development goals.

5. CONCLUSION

The Waterberg dialogue demonstrated that inclusive partnerships and well-supported finance mechanisms are key to unlocking the value of biodiversity for sustainable development. Building on these lessons, a shared commitment to nature-based solutions and transparent collaboration across sectors will be critical in realising resilient, locally driven green economies.

“Now more than ever, humanity is summoned back to the beginning as the plausible route to our desired future, where nature and its resource opulence is the basis on which our shared sustainable livelihoods can be harnessed. The Waterberg LBSAP is therefore a necessary strategic instrument through which the District in its entirety is able to leverage proficient management and use of our natural resources to enhance sustainable local economies and livelihoods.”

Mr P Raputsoa, Municipal Manager, Waterberg District Municipality

The Waterberg District Municipality is registered to the CitiesWithNature initiative and is taking steps to contribute to the Kunming- Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Municipality's profile can be viewed [here](#).

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INTERACT-Bio project at a glance

Full title: Integrated subnational action for biodiversity: Supporting implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans through the mainstreaming of biodiversity objectives across city-regions

Funded by: The INTERACT-Bio project is funded through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) implemented by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Climate Action (BMWK) in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry for the Environment, and the Federal Foreign Office (AA).

Project duration: Seven years - January 2017 to April 2024

Project countries: Brazil, India, Tanzania, China, South Africa and Colombia