

INTERACT-BIO DIALOGUE

SCALING SUB-NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION: A DIALOGUE SHOWCASING LINKS BETWEEN POLICY AND ACTION IN THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

May 2024 | South Africa



INTERACT-Bio
Integrated action on biodiversity



1. FRAMING THE CONTEXT

INTERACT-Bio is a Global South initiative (2017-2024) 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 as set out by the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The project aimed to enhance learning and exchange of knowledge and this session showcased the pivotal role of provincial and local governments in translating national policies into biodiversity protection and conservation efforts. Specifically, it aimed to unpack the implications of provincial plans on local government, delving into the practicalities of implementation at grassroots level.

The Western Cape is one of nine (9) provinces in South Africa. This dialogue focuses on biodiversity policies and actions within this province as well as implementation challenges and achievements by one of its local municipalities.



Escarpment rising above the plains and trees of Elandsberg Nature Reserve.

2. THE DIALOGUE METHODOLOGY

This dialogue forms part of a dialogue series. The series intended bringing together national, sub-national, local and private sector actors for the purpose of aligning sector (horizontal) and governance level (vertical) alignment and integration of policies and objectives. The dialogue on scaling biodiversity was an in-person event, hosted in May 2024 in Century City, Cape Town and was facilitated by ICLEI Africa. It took a presentation style format where organisations and individuals were invited to speak about their experiences from both a local and provincial level. This was followed by a question and answer session.

2.1 PRESENTATIONS BY



Bongwiwe Simka (Facilitator)

Professional Officer: Nature, Biodiversity and Health: ICLEI Africa.

The facilitator opened the session and provided an overview for the audience on the work that ICLEI Africa does.



Ursula Wellmann

Manager: Biodiversity and Nature: ICLEI Africa.

The speaker unpacked the outcomes and achievements of the INTERACT-Bio project and the hopes to further the work of the project through scaling it to a provincial level.



Boyd Escott

Capability Manager: Cape Nature.

This speaker walked the audience through the Western Cape's Biodiversity (and Ecological Infrastructure) Spatial Plan 2023 and how the development of it came about.



John Wilson

Biodiversity Manager: Western Cape Government.

This speaker outlined the Western Cape's Ecological Infrastructure Investment Framework: Nature-based solutions for sustainable & resilient settlements.



Frances Balayer

Control Environmental Officer (Biodiversity) at Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (Western Cape).

This speaker highlighted the relationship between national and provincial biodiversity strategies & planning tools and shared the outcomes of the review of the Provincial Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to date.



Liezl De Viliers

Divisional Manager: Environmental Management and Conservation: Overstrand Municipality.

This speaker presented a case study of policy and implementation paralysis and the consequences for the Onrus River and Catchment in Overstrand Municipality.

3. THE DIALOGUE SUMMARY

3.1 WESTERN CAPE POLICIES AND PLANS

The dialogue explored the policies and initiatives of the Western Cape Government and CapeNature, focusing on the Provincial Biodiversity Spatial Plans, the Provincial Biodiversity Sector Action Plan (PBSAP), and the Ecological Infrastructure Investment Framework. The key discussion points are summarised below:

- The Western Cape Provincial Spatial Plans are being translated for the first time into IsiXhosa and Afrikaans. This demonstrates strides towards inclusivity. This plan informs a national plan.
- Systematic biodiversity planning is the nationally-endorsed approach to mainstreaming biodiversity priorities into planning and decision-making by all spheres of government. A systematic biodiversity plan

includes a map of priority areas and guidelines for appropriate land use. Every province in South Africa has, or is in the process of producing, a systematic biodiversity plan to inform any (and ideally all) multi-sectoral planning and decision-making processes.

- The methodology used to develop these provincial spatial plans was unpacked.

Methodology Overview

1. Map

- Planning units & status
- Land cover & remnants
- Features
 - Biodiversity Pattern
 - Persistence

2. Set targets

3. Analyse

4. Interpret

5. Product distribution



Methodology for the development of the Draft Western Cape Biodiversity Spatial plan.

- The contents of the Biodiversity Spatial Plan was further outlined and it was highlighted that the implementation of the Biodiversity Spatial Plan aims to ensure that:
 - Development is more sustainable;
 - Ecological infrastructure is maintained thereby increasing water security and ecological resilience;
 - Risks posed by climate change to biodiversity and human well-being are reduced;
 - Conflict in land use decision making is reduced and decision making is consistent and defensible.

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- This plan will undergo public review:

Ecosystem goods and services are:

The goods and services that people enjoy, often free of charge, that result from interconnections between components within our natural systems, which are complex.

Four types: Provisioning, Regulating, Cultural and Supporting all underpin human wellbeing.

Context:

- An overarching framework (way of thinking) that aims to frame our relationship with nature
- Coined in 1970s with increasing prominence as the human-nature divide increases (including a rise in externalizing costs to the environment)
- A useful tool for incorporating oft overlooked natural inputs into decision-taking
 - Draws parallels between ecological and built infrastructure, which can be useful in valuing these goods and services.

Ecological infrastructure:

The ecological and social components of the system that are largely responsible for the realising of the desired ecosystem good or services.

Box showing definitions for ecosystem goods, services and ecological infrastructure.

- Ecological Infrastructure Investment Framework highlights that investing in the improved management or enhancement of ecological components and their interrelationships leads to sustained or enhanced ecosystem service delivery. For goods and services that depend on engineered solutions, like potable water, investing in ecological infrastructure offers an alternative and/or an enhancement to traditional built infrastructure. This approach typically has shorter project lead times, is more dynamic in nature, and provides multiple co-benefits, such as a wide range of ecosystem goods and services, job creation, skills development, and improved resilience to climate change.

- This was demonstrated using the example below:

**R49 million investment in
clearing catchments of pine**



=

**R88 million estimated value of
water saved** (Coldrey et al, 2022)



Example of clearing pine and the effects it has on saving water.

- Municipalities are increasingly involved in landscape initiatives that address risks like flooding, fires, and water insecurity within their regions, often contributing in-kind to raise the profile of these efforts. This participation implies recognising ecological infrastructure in municipal planning. Many municipalities are also acknowledging the role of ecological infrastructure in service delivery and have started identifying key areas for intervention and investment to enhance ecological infrastructure. Notable examples include projects like Drakenstein's nature-based solutions, Overstrand's Catchment to Coast project, and the City of Cape Town's Greater Cape Town Water Fund. Additionally, some municipalities are directly investing in ecological infrastructure to achieve specific outcomes, such as improved water security, with initiatives like Cape Town's R125 million commitment to the Greater Cape Town Water Fund and invasive species control programs.
- The first Generation Provincial Biodiversity Sector Action Plan (PBSAP) was focused mostly on delivery of Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) CapeNature and

Biosphere Reserves; the intention is to seek a broader partnership in driving the outcomes in how partner organisations align their work to achieving these objectives. The PBSAP must be a whole of government and society approach.

- The plan is informed by gender and human rights gap analysis
- The structure and content of the PBSAP are guided by frameworks like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and the National Biodiversity Strategic and Action Plan (NBSAP). A key focus is on localising international and national priorities to suit the local context at provincial, municipal, and organisational levels. A significant decision within this structure was to incorporate the Provincial Biodiversity Economy Strategy (PBES) into Strategic Objective 3 (SO3) of the PBSAP, aligning biodiversity management with economic development goals. Given the rapidly changing circumstances, priorities, and funding availability, the plan adopts a flexible, multi-year program framework instead of relying on a rigid 10-year strategic scale. This shift allows the PBSAP to remain responsive to changing needs by focusing on higher-level, long-term goals and operational activities that align with the established indicators and targets, rather than attempting to incorporate detailed annual or three-year operational plans that may quickly become outdated.



Western Cape's iconic lighthouse.

3.2 THE CASE STUDY: CATCHMENT 2 COAST, ONRUS, OVERSTRAND SOUTH AFRICA

Nestled in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, Overstrand Local Municipality is a relatively small coastal municipality spanning 1 708 km². Here, the biodiversity-rich areas include a 230 km coastline bordered by a towering mountain range and large tracts of natural vegetation, with globally significant plant diversity and uniqueness. Recognising the ecological value of their area, Overstrand Municipality remains committed to protecting the environment and supporting the community, thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Map showing Overstrand Municipality and its surrounding municipalities.

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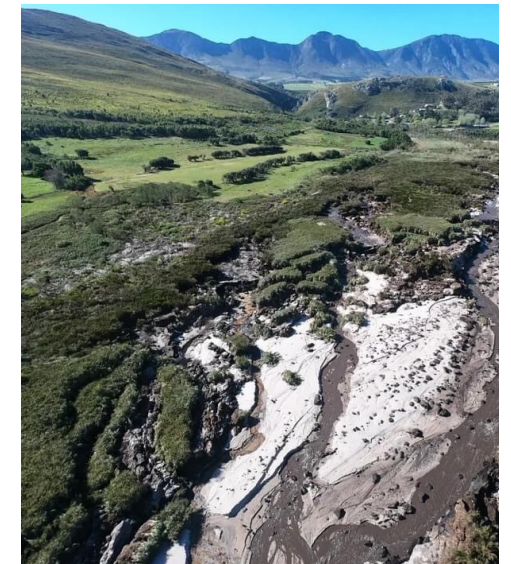
Image showing how the Onrus catchment runs through Overstrand.

The Catchment 2 Coast (C2C) project aims to improve the integrated management of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems, using a cross-boundary approach that spans the entire catchment-to-coast continuum. Focusing on the impacts of climate change, the project seeks to generate critical knowledge for developing more comprehensive, ecosystem-based management plans, with the Onrus C2C project serving as a potential model for the Overberg Region and beyond. Integrated catchment-to-coast planning is complex, requiring the balancing of environmental, social, and economic data to meet objectives like soil conservation, carbon storage, and water quality. With limited resources for natural resource management, decision-makers must carefully weigh investment strategies, navigate competing conservation goals, and make difficult trade-offs.

In 2019, a devastating wildfire, exacerbated by strong winds, spread into the Onrus Catchment and ignited a peat fire within the Onrus Wetland, prompting an urgent response from the Municipal Fire Department and the Environmental Department to assess and manage the underground blaze, which posed significant challenges for both firefighting efforts and environmental protection.



The effects of the 2019 wild fire on the Onrus catchment.



Over thousands of years, natural processes caused the wetland to gradually dry out, but anthropogenic factors, combined with climate change impacts such as rising temperatures, more frequent droughts, and increased wildfire activity, have accelerated this transformation. As a result, the peat wetland lost its ability to retain water and became more vulnerable to fires. In 2023, heavy winter rains washed away burnt peat, and a flash flood in June carried much of the wetland downstream. A catastrophic 1-in-200-year flood in September swept away two-thirds of the already fragile ecosystem.

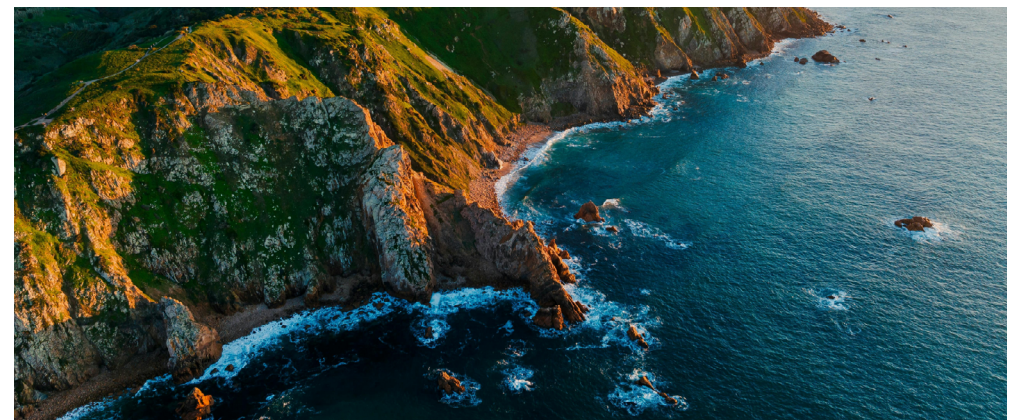
While South Africa has a supportive policy framework for peatland conservation, enforcement remains a challenge due to fragmented legislation. Efforts over the past three decades, such as the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, the National Environmental Management Act, and the Water Use Licence Authorisations, have helped reduce development and peat extraction in wetland areas, but stronger enforcement is still needed. Addressing peatland challenges requires raising political awareness, investing in research, building local capacity, and enhancing monitoring efforts, while also engaging local communities in sustainable management practices to ensure long-term preservation and restoration of these critical ecosystems.



The picturesque landscapes of the Western Cape region of South Africa.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the challenges facing South Africa's biodiversity and ecosystem management require a coordinated, whole-of-government approach. While significant strides have been made, such as the translation of the Provincial Spatial Plans into multiple languages and the development of the Provincial Biodiversity Sector Action Plan, the success of these initiatives hinges on seamless collaboration across all sectors and levels of government. The integration of ecological infrastructure and biodiversity planning into broader planning and governance frameworks, alongside continuous investment in research, capacity building, and public awareness, is critical. To address the urgent threats of climate change, land use conflicts, and ecosystem degradation, it is essential that government entities, municipalities, private sector partners and local communities work together to implement sustainable solutions that protect and restore vital ecosystems, like those demonstrated in the Catchment 2 Coast project. Only through a unified approach can South Africa safeguard its biodiversity, ensure long-term ecological resilience, and meet the pressing demands of both environmental protection and human development.



Western Cape's Atlantic seaboard.



The Western Cape region of South Africa.

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

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