

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Farmer Support Group – through its Mlazi River Catchment Programme – was commissioned to develop a framework for community participation in catchment management in South Africa. Over the past seven years, a multi-disciplinary team helped to start twenty four water efficient organic community gardens, thirty three school environmental action clubs, seven craftwork groups and a number of subcatchment committees, local environmental committees and conservancies. Of these, about half are functioning well, while about a quarter are likely to be able to sustain themselves without further external assistance. Thousands of young people and hundreds of decision makers are more aware of the fact that they live in the Mlazi River catchment, and that their activities impact upon this ecosystem.

Programme goal for phase 3 was to finalise a framework document for community participation in integrated catchment management. During this phase, the programme aimed to help members of subcatchment committees (and of other interest groups, including commercial farmers, community gardeners and craft groups) to learn more effective participation in the activities of the catchment management agencies.

Earlier phases of the programme identified four major areas needing intervention:

1. The development and promotion of ecologically sound farming and land use practices
2. Working with local communities to enable them to pursue their own development
3. Promoting and enabling networking and collaboration among local leadership and multiple stakeholders, and
4. Awareness raising among youth and adults about social, ecological and economic issues impacting on the catchment.

Given the provisions of the National Water Act, these four major areas make up the most important aspects of achieving the aim of phase 3. Ecologically sound land use practices included rainwater harvesting using swales, mulches, compost and wetlands. This was found to reduce water use dramatically during the earlier phases of the programme. Local communities were best helped with their own development through participatory techniques, which helped them to analyse their problems, and to find solutions to these problems. Collaboration was promoted by bringing diverse communities together into small local “platforms” where they could discuss common problems, and begin to understand the other person’s perspective. Awareness among youth and adults was raised through the activities of school environmental action clubs, through discussions and presentations to a large number of local groups, and most importantly, through introducing a large number of people to the riverine environment and teaching them about stream life practically. These practical biomonitoring activities were reported in a regular catchment newsletter, which helped many catchment residents to develop a catchment identity.

Many people were helped to generate money through craft activities based on wetland 7

conservation, and these constitute a contribution towards sustainable livelihoods based on sound natural resource management. Others were able to improve household food security through direct production of food, and some are selling surplus production locally. Organic certification could help these people to sell their produce at a higher price, and the eThekweni Municipality has recommended that small-scale farmers should be assisted with organic production and certification for export.

As a pilot programme, the Mlazi River Catchment Programme has enjoyed a relatively high level of resources. It has shown that even after seven years of facilitation, neither catchment management nor sound land use has been well enough established to continue without further outside support. However, the programme has also demonstrated that it is possible to bring communities together in a way which allows them to relate better to one another and to their local

environment. Quantifying this improvement and evaluating its worth is very difficult, but the use of many local people in the programme team means that human capacity has been improved in the area, and also that team members are still available to contribute to on-going development activities.

However, community participation has been poor in the process of establishing a local catchment management agency for the Water management Area. People feel that they will not be helped by an agency that is too remote to achieve anything practically on the ground. Collective action at local level is considered a more likely route to bring about improvement. It is expected that some of the local groups will continue to work towards improved management of their environment, while others will collapse without dedicated support and facilitation. Attempts have been made to set up more permanent local institutions, and these may continue to support local initiatives. The main conclusion of the programme is that intervention at local level is far more likely to achieve real progress, even if this is quite modest. Effective intervention at large-scale catchment level takes a very long time. Thus, integrated catchment management should focus on enabling people to work together and take collective decisions at local level