

## South Africans urged to protect biodiversity

The Local Government Support Strategy provides a platform for a more coordinated and structured mechanism dealing with sustainable environmental management in local government.



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The strategy will propel government initiatives aimed at advancing sustainable development projects in South Africa as they are implemented at the grassroots level. It is in line with this objective that this year's International Day for Biological Diversity is celebrated under the theme, 'Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'.

The Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs, Barbara Thomson, has recently launched the Environment Sector Local Government Strategy as part of the International Day for Biological Diversity celebration in uMgungundlovu District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal.

Deputy Minister Thomson highlighted the relevance of biodiversity to the achievement of sustainable development. "Our vast wealth of biodiversity, our variety of life from genes, species and ecosystems offer a suite of natural solutions in the face of unemployment, rising poverty levels and climate change."

### Critical benefits

She also reflected on some of the critical benefits offered by the biological diversity, including protecting areas from soil erosion, provision of food security, medicinal products as well as reducing the risk of local and global climate change.

The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), in partnership with various entities, is running several biodiversity initiatives aimed at solving water security challenges and promoting sustainable development in the catchment areas of the municipality. These initiatives include 'Save the Midmar Dam' project and the WESSA 'Working with Traditional Leaders in the uMgeni Catchment Programme'. This area has also attracted various international projects focussed on biodiversity and climate change adaptation through making use of ecological infrastructure for poverty eradication and improvement of livelihoods.

The launched strategy will activate the Global Environment Facility (GEF5) project 'Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Land Use Regulation and Management at the Municipal Scale'. The project is implemented through the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). GEF is a partnership for international cooperation where 183 countries work together with international institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector to address global environmental issues. This is done to support activities related to biodiversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, chemicals and waste in the context of development projects and programmes.

## Land use decisions

It is through these initiatives that the DEA aims to address biodiversity challenges at local government level by strengthening cooperation, coordination and capacity of municipal and other regulatory authorities dealing with land use decisions to incorporate criteria to avoid/prevent, minimise and/or offset impacts on biodiversity, and improve compliance monitoring and enforcement.

The initiatives will also introduce mechanisms in collaboration with private and communal land owners to better protect critical biodiversity areas, while demonstrating the potential of biodiversity to create jobs and contribute to economic growth.

Deputy Minister Thomson urged all South Africans, from rural to urban, rich and poor to step up their efforts to protect the country's biodiversity for the benefit of the present and future generations.

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