



INTERNET ARTICLE

Protecting wetlands for human wellbeing and to mitigate impact of climate change in the City of Mbombela

19 February 2024

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) in partnership with the City of Mbombela and other stakeholders which included Ehlanzeni District Municipality, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs, Inkomati-Usuthu Catchment Management Agency, Kruger National Park, South African National Biodiversity Institute, Working on Fire, and Real Shift celebrated World Wetlands Day through an activity filled day on 16 February 2024, under the theme “Wetlands and Human Wellbeing”.

The action filled day started with a public education programme and the planting of indigenous trees at Mgcobaneni Primary School, followed by the cleaning of a wetland in the area which was coupled with educating the passing community members of the importance of keeping the wetland and other water resources clean and healthy, and the day concluded with a public education community engagement at Manzini Hall.

World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on the 2nd of February. World Wetlands Day is an important day in the environmental calendar as it aims to raise global awareness and create people’s understanding of the critical importance of wetlands. The day also makes a clarion for the protection, restoration and preservation of this critical ecosystem for ensuring water quality, water security, health and wellbeing.

This year’s theme “**Wetlands and Human Wellbeing**” highlights the interconnectedness between wetlands and human life and wellbeing. The theme underscores how all aspects of human wellbeing are tied to the health of the wetlands. Wetlands are central to human wellbeing. Healthy wetlands equate to human wellbeing, whether it is through the provision of clean water, as a source of food, or protecting humans from extreme weather events. Human beings have depended on wetlands for centuries, drawing sustenance, inspiration and resilience from these productive ecosystems. This theme is therefore a call to value and steward wetlands.

Mr Themba Khoza from DWS Mpumalanga highlighted the importance of wetlands for water security, especially as South Africa is a water scarce country. “It is important that we protect our wetlands and all other water resources to ensure water security for our current and future generations. Take care of the water resources, especially the wetlands and they in return will take good care of you. Remember that water is life and has no substitute, therefore it is our

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responsibility to take care of all water resources and use the available water in a wise and sparing manner as water has no substitute which makes every drop count”, he said.

In addressing the community, the acting Executive Mayor of the City of Mbombela, Councillor Morris Mazibane called on the community to work with the municipality and stakeholders to take care, protect and treasure the wetlands in their areas as wetlands have critical functions for human wellbeing. He started his engagement by sharing the results of a research conducted by the municipality and German scientists which shows that in the coming years, the area of Mbombela will experience very high temperatures and flooding.

“Very hot temperatures results in high evaporation resulting in water losses, therefore it is important to protect wetlands as they are able to absorb and store water which can be used during droughts. Wetlands also mitigate the impacts of flooding as they are able to reduce the intensity of water flows thereby reducing serious flood damages downstream. We are lucky in our area as we have just above 2700 wetlands, it is therefore important that we protect them so that they can also assist us in the future against the negative impacts of climate change”, he said.

Councillor Mazibane called on the community to stop dumping waste, especially disposable nappies into the wetlands and other water resources as this pollutes water leading to the death of living creatures and causes illnesses for community members. He further called on the community to prevent the unsustainable sand mining and the building of houses which basically leads to the destruction of wetlands.

It is crucial to protect our wetlands as they provide essential freshwater, contribute to global food production, and act as natural shock absorbers mitigating rainfall impacts and reduce flooding. Wetlands have numerous important benefits which include increased biodiversity, replenished and filtered water supply, enhanced protection against floods and storms, more local and sustainable livelihoods reducing poverty, increased tourism and higher quality leisure time, increased carbon storage and avoided emissions.

Themba Khoza

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