

**Celebrating World Water Day 2020 with a parting song: IWMI-Southern Africa cleans up the Klip River in Johannesburg as a final activity just before implementing mandatory telecommuting**



In many ways, it felt like a parting song – the final act before institutions in South Africa instituted ‘Operation Virtual Underground’ – the codename some are using for the new telecommuting procedures many institutions are implementing in the water sector. It was a grim rainy day. It was Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup>! Should we go ahead or should we cancel? In the end, the group of partners: IWMI, the Klip River Water Stewardship Initiative (KlipWaS), the South African Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), the Strategic Water Partners Network (SWPN), Klip River Nature Reserve, Pikitup, Coca-Cola, Shoprite, and Plastics-SA, decided to acknowledge the few determined volunteers who came out on the day, and conducted a river clean-up in commemoration of World Water Day.

World Water Day is well-known and celebrated annually on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March as a way of focusing attention on the importance of freshwater. This year’s WWD emphasized the link between water and climate change - adapting to the water effects of climate change will protect health and save lives - using water more efficiently will reduce greenhouse gases - we cannot afford to wait - everyone has a role to play.

To celebrate this day, several institutions partnered together to clean up the Klip River which passes through the densely populated urban area south of Johannesburg. The Klip River is one of South Africa’s major urban water work horses and its basin includes the Johannesburg CBD and Soweto. The Klip River wetland area plays a vital role as a purifier of polluted water that flows into the river from the urban-mining-industrial complex. However, the ability of this wetland to perform this crucial role has been compromised and faces a number of challenges including pollution due to illegal dumping by the river side. In an effort to raise awareness on

the importance of this urban river, rehabilitation and conservation efforts, the dedicated group of just over 20 volunteers diligently removed heaps of waste illegally dumped on the river banks and which pose a threat to the proper functioning of the ecosystem. This event galvanised support from government, the private sector, the research community and civil society to advocate working together to help fight climate change with better water management practices.

Two days later, South Africa implemented robust and restrictive measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, and institutions and individuals in the water sector, now go virtual to pursue this mission.

