



# Celebrating International Mother Earth Day 2021

## UNDP South Africa's restoration stories

**South Africa**, the 3<sup>rd</sup> most biodiverse country in the world is faced with growing populations, high levels of poverty and mounting pressures on natural resources. The [Decade of Ecosystem Restoration](#), and the actions required will be crucial for sustainable development, especially in the post Covid-19 green recovery. Through several large projects, the UNDP South Africa Country Office works with strong partners who are at the forefront of addressing social-ecological challenges to enable the sustainable use, recovery and protection of our biodiverse natural and productive landscapes, whilst simultaneously enhancing livelihood security.

With resources mobilised from the Global Environment Facility and in partnership with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE), the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and South African National Parks (SANParks) – UNDP in South Africa highlights three projects for their contributions to the 2021 theme for the [International Mother Earth Day](#) – “Restoring our Earth”.

**April 22 marks the International Mother Earth Day.** This year, stronger than ever, mother earth is clearly urging a call to action to take care of our common planet. [2020 was one of the warmest years on record](#), reminding us of the pace of climate change. Oceans are filling with plastic and turning more acidic, and extreme weather like heat, wildfires and floods affect millions of people and their livelihoods.

The Covid-19 pandemic has showed us the link between human health and healthy ecosystems and the importance to live in peace with nature. As the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres said in the [State of the Planet speech in 2020](#): “*Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top priority for everyone, everywhere.*”

International Mother Earth Day is celebrated to remind each of us that the earth and its ecosystems provide us with life and sustenance. The day is also aimed at recognising our collective responsibility to balance economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations of humanity, as called for in the 1992 Rio Declaration.

The [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP) works in over 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion, to stimulate action towards the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). Nature underpins the SDGs in a profound and indivisible way, and is hence a central pillar to UNDP’s work that spans over climate change; disaster risk reduction and recovery; environment and natural capital; and sustainable energy. In the era of Covid-19, all of UNDP’s work is also framed by the approach of building back better and greener from the pandemic.

***The 2021 Earth Day is more important than ever in the light of the climate crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic where there is need but also great potential to build a sustainable and low-carbon future that is green, nature-based as well as socio-economic just and inclusive for everyone. UNDP in South Africa is proud to work with partners like the DFFE, SANBI and SANParks in various projects that contributes to ecosystem restoration, while creating sustainable livelihoods. We are also looking forward to together with our partners, accelerating work in this space, as we officially enter the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration later this year.***

**– Dr Janice Golding, Focal Point: Nature, Climate and Energy, UNDP South Africa**



## Job creation through clearing of alien invasive vegetation

The UNDP South Africa and SANBI [\*Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Land Use Regulation & Management at the Municipal Scale\*](#) (BLU) project, in collaboration with the Table Mountain Fund, completed the implementation of the first set of Ecological Infrastructure Challenge Fund projects in the Cape Winelands District Municipality in 2019 and 2020. The two projects were with Bredekloof Wine and Tourism and Witzenburg Local Municipality and both of these projects involved the clearing of alien invasive vegetation in the Boland Strategic Water Source Area.



*Improved water flow of Holsloot River, Western Cape, after alien vegetation clearing.*

The projects were able to clear 967 ha of alien plants during the initial clearing and an additional 206 ha during the follow up clearing resulting in a total of 1173 ha cleared. In addition, 6069 person day jobs were created during the implementation of these projects, which exceeded the project's targets. The projects also managed to secure commitments from all the relevant landowners to maintain the areas and carry out further follow up clearing as and when required.

## Plant Rescue Mission at the Richtersveld



*SANParks rangers on a rescue mission to preserve local plants.*

and in need of protection. The Vyftienmylseberg (485 meters above sea level) within the Klein Duin Section has a very particular climate in terms of temperature, mist and rain fall that only appears in that area and allows certain plants to grow.

When the derelict fence was removed and replaced with a new high-quality game fence as part of the PA project, many of the plants were rescued from the disturbed area over the mountain. Field rangers from the PA project helped to transfer the plants to the Richtersveld Desert Botanical Gardens. According to Pieter van Wyk, nursery and herbarium curator at the |Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, the plants took on well. "They are growing happily at the moment," said Pieter.

One of the objectives of the UNDP in South Africa and SANParks [\*Improving Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network\*](#) (PA) project was to expand the Richtersveld National Park protected area by securing a state-owned neighbouring area, important for biodiversity representation and climate change resilience. To ensure the protection of biodiversity, it was decided to upgrade and extend the existing fence of the Klein Duin Section. The previous fencing of the property was extremely degraded and not fit for purpose.

A high richness of plants are specifically endemic to the region and many are at risk



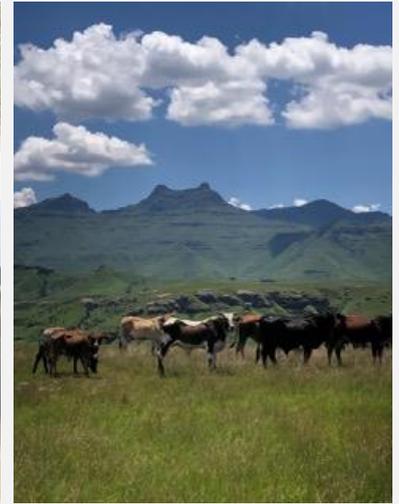
*Tylecodon rediculatus, also known as Sifkopkandelaar in good shape at the nursery.*

## Declaration of the Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi Protected Environment

Six traditional authorities in the Upper Umzimvubu Catchment Area (Maloti Drakensberg Conservation Corridor Protected Area) have initiated the process of declaring a Protected Area. This process is taking place in collaboration with the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership Programme (UCPP). The Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) as one of the implementing partners of the PA project is supporting the development of the protected areas management plan. This will be completed in terms of NEM:PAA (2003) in consultation with the relevant land users and stakeholders. At a meeting in 2020, the community leadership agreed to the name of the new protected area as "Maloti Thaba tse Metsi Protected Area" (MTTMPA).



*ECPTA water source: Water collected at a spring that will be secured for better water usage*



*ECPTA Maloti mountains: The Maloti mountains in the Maloti Thaba tse Metsi Protected Area.*

Chief Nkosana, of the Nkosana-Mafube Traditional Authority who works closely with Environmental and Rural Solutions, a local NGO in the area, praises the work that has been done so far. He explained that a protected environment will assist in saving grazing land. This helps his community to do farming better and get an income from selling stock at auctions. It will also protect the springs for communities. "We get lot of water in our area that is just running but we don't know how to use it. Now we get help to protect the springs for clean water," he said.

### Agroforestry and home gardening as a restoration approach

Arable land that remains fallow is a missed opportunity for food production. To reduce the persistence of unutilised land, the [\*Securing multiple ecosystems benefit through Sustainable Land Management in the productive but degraded landscapes of South Africa \(SLM\)\*](#) project has identified that in rural, communal and traditional areas, home gardening through conservation agriculture and agroforestry are key to ensuring improved agro-ecosystem function and enhanced human well-being through food security at the household level.

In Macubeni in the Eastern Cape, together with Rhodes University, the project has successfully established 25 rain and tank-fed home gardens largely women-led, enabled the development of 52 Vetiver grass nurseries and trained community members in conservation agriculture and permaculture techniques. In Limpopo's Sekhukhuneland, with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), a total of 96 community members were trained in agroforestry prior to launching a school and household tree planting and vegetable garden program where over 1 400 exotic and indigenous fruit trees have been planted.



*From L-R: Learning from a home garden champion in Macubeni, EC; Proud farmers in the community garden in Loxton, NC; School garden project that will contribute to the school feeding scheme at Mphanama Primary School in Sekhkhune, Limpopo.*

While in the arid Karoo with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), the community manage and have taken ownership of a productive perma-culture vegetable garden.



*A beautiful Oxalis species in Macubeni.*

In all landscapes, the multi-produce home gardens contribute to improved ecosystem functioning by reducing land degradation and improving water infiltration, soil organic matter and enhancing carbon and nitrogen cycling. The home gardens are important for livelihood food security and household income in the face of climate change but have been a lifeline following the crippling of economies in the Covid-19 pandemic. In the Eastern Cape, the SLM team met with Ncebekhazi, a beneficiary of the project who has a very successful home garden of maize and other vegetables, permaculture mounds, tower gardens and composting sites. She specifically expressed how the home garden has kept her busy, fed her family and members of the community and enhanced her mental well-being.

**As UNDP we are proud of our partners work** and recognise that it is such stories of impact that motivate others to engage in activities to "Restore our Earth" and provide solutions to address social and ecological issues of sustainable development importance.

Want to learn more about **UNDP in South Africa's work?**

Visit our website <https://www.za.undp.org/>

Our Wikipedia page: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNDP\\_South\\_Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNDP_South_Africa)

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#### **What can you do to help restore our earth?**

- **Plant something!** Plants and trees are the lungs of earth that absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants (also called sequestering) and produce oxygen through photosynthesis. Plants and trees also help improve soil and water conservation, moderate local climate by providing shade, regulate temperature extremes, increase wildlife habitat and improve the land's capacity to adapt to climate change.
- **Reduce, reuse, and recycle** your waste. Unfortunately, a lot of waste that is not biodegradable and cannot be properly recycled is ending up in our oceans and landfills, negatively impacting climate change, wildlife and the natural environment. Follow the three "R's" and try to cut down on what you throw away to decrease the pressure on landfill space and waste management systems, and avoid waste ending up in the nature.
- **Learn more and empower yourself to be a Planet Champion!** When you further your own education, you can help others understand the importance and value of our natural resources. Read an article, a book, watch documentary or ask a teacher/someone knowledgeable you have in your network. Once you have learned something new you can pass it on to someone in your family, your friend or your co-worker.

**Want more tips on what you can do? The Earth Day website has a list of '51 ways to restore our earth':**  
<https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-tips/>

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**Photo credit:** First page banner photo, youth in the organic farming programme - Willinton Makanatlang; Holsloot River- Ryno Pienaar; SANParks rangers - Image supplied to the PA project; Tylecodon rediculatus - Oscar Osberg; ECPTA water source - Nicky McLeod; ECPTA Maloti mountains - Nicky McLeod; Learning from a home garden champion in Macubeni - Kyra Lunderstedt; Farmers in the community garden in Loxton - Ingrid Schoffman; School garden project at Mphanama Primary School - Willinton Mak; Oxalis species in Macubeni - Kyra Lunderstedt.