

## **A. Rural Eco-Warrior community workshops**

The EWT/Conservation Leadership Group's Rural Eco-Warriors (REWs) began rolling out community workshops in the beginning of this year. The primary objective of these workshops was to afford community members an opportunity to discuss environmental issues as well as pressing issues around the implementation of their environmental related community projects. The nature of REWS support for the implementation of these community projects is that of not providing quick solutions all the time but rather allow community members to discuss challenges and project implementation in an open forum. This approach has been quite effective as the community members feel part of the whole process and that often translate to an aspect of sustainability.

### **Facilitation process**

The reality of community meetings, particularly in remote areas where REWS work is that of formalised meetings and workshops. These formalised meetings are often dominated by facilitators and quite a few community members, often prominent community leaders. As a result of this teacher centred facilitation processes, community members are not often given a chance to express their understanding and perceptions about their immediate environment as well as the practicality of what needs to be done based on their capabilities and an understanding of a local context.



***A local Chief, sharing historical understanding of environmental changes that have taken place in and around the community.***

The role of REWS during these workshops is that of bringing the discussions into context. This is done in a manner which ensures that most of the workshop outcomes are met. Workshop outcomes in this approach are set by the community members based on the challenges they might be facing on the ground when implementing projects. This approach has been a very effective as it has provided an opportunity for a broad participation by all community members, including women, who are often sidelined by un-accommodative facilitation processes which focus on those who are most vocal.

### **Audience**

For the past two years, the REWS have been focusing on their selected environmental issues, which they carefully selected, along with community members and based on their sensitivity to the community welfare as well as on the practicality of addressing them. They organise workshops, which are then facilitated along supporting an understanding of these issues as well as assigning tasks towards researching and addressing these issues. As part of the outcomes, community members are encouraged to establish community committees, which are given the tasks of following up on issues that community members might have raised.

### **Jozini community workshop (Bongisiwe Khoza)**

Jozini is part of the Maputaland area of endemism, which is blessed with a wide range of indigenous plants. This region provides Southern Africa with a number of valuable medicinal plants. The impact of HIV/AIDS is now being felt in these areas due to increased demand for medicine, and important medicinal plants in Jozini such as the Fever trees which are becoming threatened due to this pressure. The Mkhanyakude (Zulu name for a Fever Tree) District Municipality was named after these culturally significant trees. This being said, it must be noted that these trees are threatened by human activities as they are the subject of debarking for a variety of reasons which are mostly linked to medicinal use. The rate in which the debarking has taken place strongly suggests that it is a matter of time before the Mkhanyakude District Municipality joins a long list of areas named after treasures that are no more.



***Community members sharing amongst themselves***

The Jozini community workshop targeted medicinal plant harvesters and traditional healers. It transpired from the discussions that the illegal and greedy harvesters are the major contributors to the loss of fever trees. It was decided as an outcome that a community law enforcement strategy be designed. This would serve as a community watchdog in terms of ensuring that people harvest sustainably. Seeing that illegal harvesters were the main contributors to the decline of fever trees as they harvest in bulk and also unsustainable, it was decided that governmental environmental authorities have to provide answers in terms of what are they doing with the illegal harvesters who are running the muti markets. People also emphasised the need for tree propagation within their homesteads which would be an extension of a newly established community nursery. Seeds have been purchased and it was hoped that people would be taught propagation methods but unfortunately the weather did not accommodate such activity. The discussions also expanded to other environmental improvement aspects. These aspects were related to the community concern about the soil erosion along Phongola River. It was suggested that the Municipality should be informed about this community concern and also the fact that community members should discuss possible solutions for this. A team of community members were selected, where their role would be that of seeing to it that the follow up on community concerns is attended to.

### **Dullstroom community workshop (Peter Masilela)**

The Dullstroom workshop was about seeking ways of enhancing township tourism. As an outcome of the workshop, a Sakhelwe Township Tourism Development Committee was initiated where Peter (REW) would serve as the coordinator of the committee and its activities. The community members identified quite a number of issues which would require a follow up. The committee members were mandated to ensuring that assigned tasks are achieved. These tasks included exploring environmental improvement opportunities, heritage attraction within the township, and assessment of tourists needs when they visit Dullstroom etc.



***Dullstroom community members listening attentively to a community suggestion***

### **Learning from others**

The EWT/Conservation Leadership Group employed a Breyten Rural Eco-Warrior (Thandeka Khumalo) from the 15<sup>th</sup> of November last year. As part of our REW project facilitation we have always believe that we should support newly employed REWS towards finding their destiny in terms of how do they see themselves conducting REW work in their areas. This is an important training for newly engaged REWS.

As part of this process Thandeka Khumalo visited three REW sites where she was to observe and learn from the other REWS as they conduct their normal duties. This was an important training for her as she would be able to adopt and adapt some of the approaches. She was part of these community workshops and as her confidence grew she began facilitating some of the sessions. She is still relatively new in this field but we are confident that she would soon find her feet.

### **Memel community workshop (Mpinda Radebe)**

Zamani Township of Memel is situated along Pampoenspruit River which feeds Seekoeievlei Nature Reserve which is the Ramsar site. Seekoeie use to support a pair of Wattled Cranes. The close proximity of the township and dumping site to the river make it easy for trash to be washed down. The extent of pollution in the Pampoenspruit River poses a threat to immediate communities particularly farm workers who rely on this river for water. According to the local clinic, there have been quite a number of cases where community members including children have suffered the consequences of this even to an extent of the loss of lives. It is a known fact that most of the municipalities have not managed to plan the infrastructural development properly, as a result of this environmental aspects end up being affected by the consequences.



***Pollution in Pampoenspruit River***

A community workshop was conducted where 25 people took part. The whole idea behind this workshop was to bring stakeholders together including the municipality whom the community had once taken to court for the mismanaged dumping site. These stakeholders focussed on the way forward regarding the improvement of Pampoenespruit River. During the planning session for this workshop it was realized that there were many pressing issues regarding the community's interaction with the river and reserve and it was through this that the Police were seen as an important stakeholder. Although the workshop did not intend to provide a platform for people to point fingers but people unexpectedly attacked the municipality constructively as people felt that most of the environmental injustices are as a result of poor infrastructural development by the municipality.

All in all this was a good workshop and it was hoped that the personal agendas would gradually fade away and the really work of rehabilitating the river aggressively would pursue. Planning for the follow up workshop is in a pipeline where stakeholders agreed to use that meeting as a platform for conducting physical work towards the improvement of Pampoenspruit Riiver

Summing up these community workshops we have to say that community members are exposed to a variety and number of meetings and workshops. These community workshops and meetings are facilitated in a manner that does not afford community members an opportunity to participate equally. The REWS are attempting to bridge that gap by ensuring the community workshop structures and settings are conducive for ensuring full participation. It is hoped that these workshops will lead to tangible activities on the ground that both REWS and their community members can be proud of.

## **B. First ever community clean up campaign for the Breyten area.**

A newly engaged Breyten REW (Thandeka Khumalo) worked with various stakeholders in staging the first community clean up campaign for the Breyten area. The campaign targeted schools, local churches, municipal workers as well as the giant mining company (Xstrata). The turnout was good and the excitement was unbelievable. The whole event attracted no less that a thousand people.



*A briefing prior the community cleaning up campaign*

The local REW worked tirelessly in coordinating some of the activities. The people of Breyten expressed that it was such a worthwhile activity and that there need to be more of its kind in the greater Breyten area which is surrounded by important wetland for cranes. A huge task lies ahead for Thandeka and her colleagues in ensuring that through education and awareness; community members are able to understand that clean up campaign should translate to their daily practices.



Community members with cheer enthusiasm

## Summary

The last six months have been characterized by excitements in the development of REW community workshop but they have also at the same time meant another transition as far as the management is concern. This period saw some of the REWS excelling in their community projects which have largely benefited the local communities. There is now a sound community project in most REW areas and these projects continue to grow from strength to strength.

## Other

- Samson Phakathi and Bongisiwe Khoza participated in a three weeks Tata Jagriti Yatra in India where they learnt an incredible amount of things when it comes to social entrepreneurship.
- Steven Segang is currently doing eight months internship at the International Crane Foundation in America.

## A) Overall total of schools, learners and teachers engaged (October 2008 to April 2009)

<u>Area</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Learners</u>	<u>Teachers</u>
Memel	13	1073	56
Natal Midlands	4	202	8
Jozini	4	92	9
Dullstroom	13	868	17
Babarspan	6	81	10
Vaalwater	6	436	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>2752</b>	<b>113</b>

**B) Overall total of stakeholder engaged and number of community members who participated (October 2008 to April 2009)**

<b><u>Area</u></b>	<b><u>Number of stakeholders engaged</u></b>	<b><u>Number of community member who were engaged</u></b>
Memel	132	3227
Natal Midlands	35	268
Jozini	16	88
Dullstroom	99	997
Baberspan	13	36
Vaalwater	87	449
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>5065</b>

- More details of the reasons for engagement are attached in the REW community stats