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SOUTH AFRICA TO COMMEMORATE THE WORLD WETLANDS DAY

Article by Kgomotso Mathuloe (Additional information by the Department of Environmental Affairs)
Picture by Emmanuel Jiyane

On 02 February 2021, South Africa will be joining nations of the world in celebration of the World Wetlands Day under the theme: 'Shines a spotlight on wetlands as a source of freshwater and encourages actions to restore them and stop their loss.'

This day has been set aside to commemorate the signing of the Ramsar Convention which took place at the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971. Each year since 1997, the World has been celebrating the Wetlands day with aim to help raise public awareness about the importance of wetlands for the people and planet. Wetlands are rich with biodiversity and provide habitats for variety of plant and animal species.

However, the latest Global Biodiversity Assessment indicates that wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests. This finding is in concurrence with recent National Biodiversity Assessment that places wetlands as the most threatened of all South Africa's ecosystems, with 79% of wetland ecosystems being threatened.

It is for this reason that the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries has invested over R320 million in rehabilitation and maintenance of various wetlands throughout South Africa since 2017.

The rehabilitation and maintenance of wetlands is coordinated through the Working for Wetlands Programme, an Expanded Public Works Programme Environment and Culture Sub-Programme that focuses on remedial interventions for maintaining healthy wetlands.

Since 2017, the Working for Wetlands Programme has rehabilitated over 360 wetlands countrywide, which equals to approximately 22 500 hectares, thereby contributing to increased healthier water supplies improving the economic benefits of natural and agricultural habitats.

This has created 11 764 work and skills development opportunities for South Africans. Wetlands plays a vital role by removing toxic substance and sediment from the water, while also improving downstream water quality and the overall health of the communities.

Working on Fire in Western Cape will be hosting an online webinar on the 2nd of February 2021 to discuss the importance of wetlands as part of our ecology and its relationship to fire awareness. Dr Piet-Louis Grundling from the Department of Environment Forestry and Fisheries will deliver the keynote address.

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NKANGALA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY HOSTS GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR EXISTING EPWP GRADUATES

Article by Michael Mokoena &
Pictures by Isaac Mothapo

In a bid to attract the youth into the field of agriculture, the Nkangala District Municipality in Mpumalanga has recently trained 29 young people in plant production. These young people, who were all trained through the assistance of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), received their certificate of completion during a graduation ceremony that was held recently in Middleburg.

The Divisional Manager for EPWP at the municipality Mr Tiro Mabunda, said the 29 participants successfully completed a one year Diploma in Plant Production. The course is accredited at NQF Level 5 by the Agricultural Sector, Education and Training Authority (AgriSETA). "The aim of the training was to provide local youths with skills in agriculture while also assisting them with income for the duration of the training," Mr Mabunda said.

The graduating participants were offered both theory and practical aspects of the learnership. For practical training, the participants were placed at Agriesy Trading Company at Goedehoop Farm Portion 10 in Middleburg.

Mr Mabunda explained that moving forward, the municipality has advised the graduating participants to form

cooperatives so that they can take advantage of business opportunities in the agricultural sector. The Municipality has also pledged to support the graduating participants with farming inputs and equipment once they have acquired a piece of land and opened businesses.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure's Manager for EPWP in Mpumalanga, Mr Isaac Mothapo commended the Municipality for implementing this learnership. He explained that the Department will engage its EPWP Enterprise Development Unit to assist the young graduates to form cooperatives and look for opportunities in the province's agricultural sector.

The graduation ceremony was officiated by the Executive Mayor of Nkangala District Municipality, Cllr Sarah Masilela who wished the graduating participants well for the future. One graduating participant, Ms Andile Mabena, thanked the government for the training opportunity.

The training gave us skills on how to manage and work on a farm. I believe that if we work together we will be able to establish cooperatives so that we can look for work in agricultural sector in the Province," she stated.