

uMngeni Ecological Infrastructure Partnership (UEIP)

UMngeni Ecological Infrastructure Partnership

The eThekweni Water and Sanitation (EWS) Unit's ability to deliver the volume and quality of fresh water required within Durban and to provide sanitation services is becoming increasingly compromised by catchment conditions and dynamics external to the Municipal boundary, specifically in the uMngeni, upper Mooi and Mkomazi catchments.

Additionally, it has been recognised that the current version of the KZN Water Reconciliation Strategy has not included the valuable contribution that investments into the rehabilitation and management of natural infrastructure can make to enhance water security. The concept of investing in ecological infrastructure represents a new way of looking at development projects, which in the past focused on built infrastructure without considering the role of ecological infrastructure. The ecological infrastructure enhances built infrastructure; strategic investment in ecological infrastructure lengthens the lifespan of existing built infrastructure and can reduce or delay the need for additional built infrastructure; thereby reducing the cost of maintenance or of building new structures.

The UEIP coordinating committee are currently overseeing implementation of the Global Environment Facility-funded Biodiversity and Water Security Project. The Coordinating committee met twice in 2021, in May and November. The meeting discussed current projects within the catchment and how they can be aligned to foster institutional collaboration, which is one of the objectives of UEIP. For more information on UEIP, visit the SANBI webpage: [UMngeni Ecological Infrastructure Partnership](#). The focus of UEIP is *collaboration around ecological infrastructure interventions and opportunities in the Greater-uMngeni River Catchment. This ranges from actions on the ground to governance and institutional development, capacity development and applied research.*

Palmiet Catchment Rehabilitation Project

The Palmiet Catchment Rehabilitation Project (PCRP) aims to achieve the goals of climate change adaptation response and securing water using capacity building and an innovative shared-governance approach, which manifests as a Community of Innovation (CoI). The project's implementation design responds to at least five Sustainable Development Goals (**1. Clean water and Sanitation, 2. Climate Action, 3. Sustainable Cities and Communities, 4. Life on Land and 5. Partnership for the goals**). This is in line with the Paris Agreement that was approved to deal with climate change and accelerate the actions and the investments needed for a sustainable future. The CoI brings community members, including leadership from the Quarry Road West Informal Settlement, into steering and decision-making processes for the PCRP. The PCRP is a demonstration project for the broader uMngeni Ecological Infrastructure Partnership and has been active since 2014.



The Palmiet Community of Innovators (COI) members comprise of municipal officials, UKZN, Local conservancies, community members.

This collaborative approach has brought different stakeholders into a shared governance framework that opened communication channels to collate existing data, prioritised actions and helped to avoid duplication of efforts. The project rests upon the collaborative efforts of residents in the catchment and other stakeholders, addressing pressing challenges and increasing community resilience towards climate change impacts. For example, project stakeholders have created a WhatsApp group which acts an early warning system in the case of a possible flooding in the area. The project has been significantly strengthened through real-time monitoring of storm events through the City's radar system, with guidance given to informal settlement residents on the severity and persistence of storm events, real time.

One component of the PCRIP is the IIPSA Ecological Infrastructure project. eThekweni Municipality acquired loan funding through the [Infrastructure Investment Programme of South Africa \(IIPSA\)](#) to address water-related challenges where the existing bulk water supply infrastructure has reached the limit of its capacity. The city has a contractual condition to address land use management practices from the Facility Agreement between eThekweni Municipality and the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), which stipulates that the City as a grant recipient should invest at least R5 million on the integrity of the ecological infrastructure (EI) within the Municipality.



Selected Enviro Champs during the training organised by Ground Truth

EThekweni Municipality appointed the service provider, GroundTruth in June 2019 to fulfil the conditions of the IIPSA grant and develop guiding knowledge for investing in ecological infrastructure. These outputs can be used to rehabilitate and manage water resources across the city using communities within the catchment. The Terms of Reference for this work were developed under the guidance of the DBSA and are inclusive of the PCRPP Col governance model to establish a close working relationship with the various stakeholders within the catchment, as well as expanding upon the existing relationship with the informal settlement communities.

In 2020, a project Advisory Group was formed to oversee the implementation of the IIPSA project and to act as a decision-making advisory group for the project. The AG consists of key Col members to ensure that all stakeholders are represented along with the funders. The project Advisory Group meet quarterly to monitor the implementation of the project and to assist the appointed service provider.

Implementation of the IIPSA EI project in 2020 was seriously affected by the global pandemic COVID 19, where the necessary nationwide lockdown and extended regulations have hindered meetings and training workshops and prevented ground operations from commencing. This has affected the implementation of deliverables such as the Invasive Alien Plant (IAP) clearing component, but most significantly, the progress with community capacity building through employment of the Enviro-Champs. However, innovative ways of conducting meetings and training through online meeting platforms were employed. As the COVID 19 restrictions eased early in 2021, in person meetings and field training commenced.



Enviro Champs doing bio-monitoring within the Palmiet River

The employment of Enviro Champs within the informal settlements assists in education awareness campaigns to minimise disasters, such as fire and flooding. There have been two fire incidents in the space of two months within the Quarry Road Informal settlement, with the first incident having three fatalities. These cases show how much work is still needed in addressing the difficult situation most of the poor communities find themselves in while trying to pursue opportunities that cities offer.

Although there have been challenges this year, there has been substantial progress made:

- **GroundTruth has updated the project action plan after getting approval from core COI members.** The updated action plan included the monitoring and evaluation component and measurable indicators to monitor progress for each action item. The updated action plan was circulated to the Col on the 11th of June 2020.
- **The COI members distributed food parcels and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as part of the efforts to prevent the spread of COVID 19 and minimise the impacts.**
- **The early warning system continued to be an effective tool in minimising the risk associated with flooding within the downstream settlements.** There is an active WhatsApp group which continued to alert community about the possibility of floods, and is supported by information supplied by the Catchment Management department using their radar system.
- **Ground Truth completed the Alien Invasive Clearing plan.** 30 ha of land have been cleared of invasive plants along stretches of the Palmiet River.

- **Appointment of 15 Enviro Champs from informal settlements within the Palmiet catchment.** Environmental Champions comprising of 10 female and 5 male community members have been selected from 3 wards which form part of the catchment. Through Amanzi Ethu Nobuntu project there have been additional employment of 10 more Enviro Champs for two months.
- **The first draft of Kingfisher Rehabilitation plan has been completed and circulated to all stakeholders for comment.** Meetings have been held between GroundTruth as the service provider and various stakeholders (Cleansing and Solid Waste, EDTEA, etc.) to begin the development of the Wyebank landfill site rehabilitation plan.
- **The appointment of the Advisory Group for the IIPSA project has been finalised with the first meeting held on 2nd December 2020 where the Terms of Reference were adopted, and it has been meeting quarterly.**
- **Durban Green Corridor piloted a waste management programme within Quarry Road West Informal settlement.** The main aim of this programme is to understand the dynamics and challenges of collecting waste within the informal settlements. Lessons learned from this project will assist Cleansing and Solid Waste in their planning.
- **Durban Green Corridor have implemented three litter booms to deal with solid waste challenges. These litter booms are managed by community members who were appointed.**

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