

Capacity Building for Civil Society

Social Learning for Management of the Olifants Catchment

PROJECT SUMMARY



Project partners

Environmental Monitoring Group



EMG is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established in 1991. The staff of 12 is based in Cape Town, Nieuwoudville, Grahamstown and Mpumalanga.

Their mission is to awaken the potential in themselves and others to engage powerfully, mindfully and creatively in their relationship with the natural environment and resources that sustain life.

They aim to encourage environmental practices that lead to a more human relationship with each other and the natural environment.

They believe that society's relationship with the natural environment is inextricably bound to our relationships with each other, and that true "sustainable development" is not possible without economic and social justice. Their focus is thus on helping to build democratic and fair decision-making processes that relate to the use and management of natural resources.

Environmental Learning Research Centre



The Environmental Learning Research Centre is the home of a vibrant and diverse community of scholars and environmental education practitioners, and forms a regional hub of environmental learning innovation. It is based at Rhodes University in the eastern Cape.

The centre hosts a postgraduate research programme of between 50-60 scholars, approximately 20 of whom are PhDs. The ELRC works with local, national, regional and international partners to develop research-informed and research-led short and certificate courses. The Centre enjoys collaborative partnerships with over 50 partners across the world.

South African Water Caucus



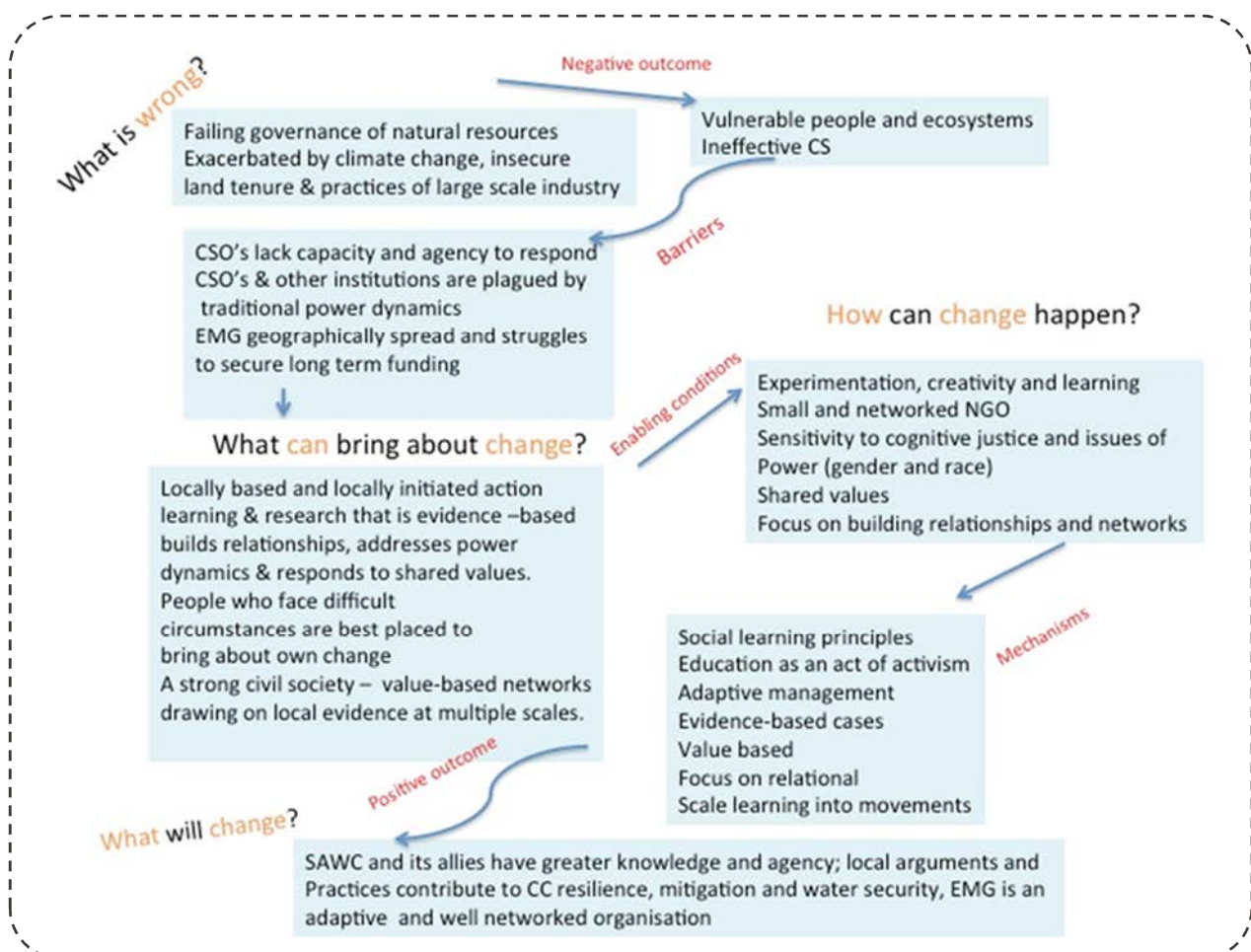
The South African Water Caucus is a network of NGOs, CBOs, and individual activists in the South African Water Sector. It has been active since 2001 and members of the SAWC are bound by a set of values and guiding principles.

SAWC campaigns revolve around issues such as services, pricing and tariffs, climate change, water for food and livelihoods, plantations, institutional reform and the inclusion of traditional healers in water governance. SAWC is involved in monitoring water policy, such as the National Water Resources Strategy, and participates in catchment management forums around the country. It consists of the national SAWC plus eight provincial water caucuses, which exist in Mpumalanga, Western Cape, KZN, Gauteng, Free State, Eastern Cape, Limpopo and North West Province.



Introduction

The **Changing Practice programme** is an accredited course drawing on the expertise held within the Rhodes University - Environmental Learning and Research Unit (ELRC). This Changing Practice course is situated within a wider call for education for sustainability and within the context of natural resource management challenges on the African continent. One of the key themes in environmental education research has been to develop more appropriate ways of mediating and facilitating change-oriented learning in the context of climate change and land use practices.



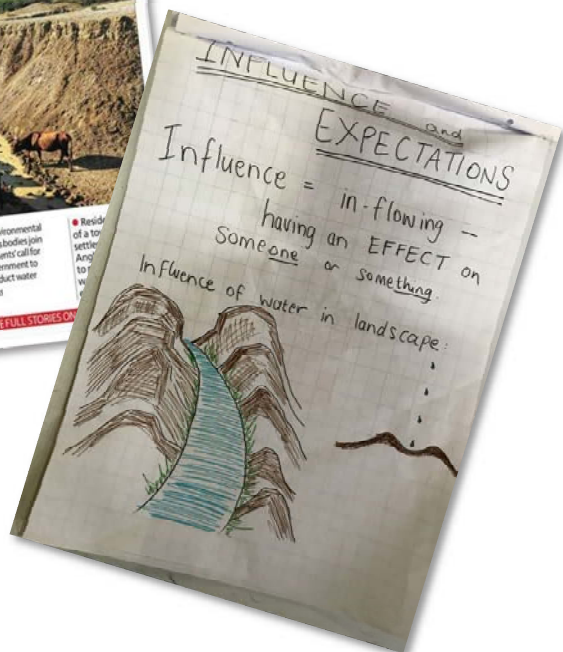
The capacity development process was built around a semi-structured accredited course for approximately 18 individuals embedded within nine community-based institutions, which in turn, are active members of broader networks including the RESILIM-O CSO Indabas. The Changing Practice Training Programme was designed to enable CSOs to build on and enhance their local knowledge, strengthen their support networks and build collective action at various levels, including local change, movement building and policy levels so that they are more aware of local land use changes that result in biodiversity losses as well as the impacts of climate change.

Project Purpose

Complex environmental issues demand that we move beyond institutional silos and learn to work collectively towards change.

The Change Projects that form the core of the Changing Practice programme become platforms for partnership, dialogue, sharing and learning between programme participants, with other stakeholders (such as NGOs, academics and government officials) and at broader scales of engagement such as at local, regional and national forums and meetings.

Ideally, the Change Projects generated by the Changing Practice programme do not end once the Changing Practice course has finished, but become institutionalized within their specific organisations and within the programmes and campaigns of the regional and national Water Caucus groupings.



For example, the Change Project on traditional spiritual practitioners' use of the polluted water of the Vaal catchment has been taken up as a core campaign of the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance and has led to the start of Indigenous knowledge and water exchange visits between the Mpumalanga Water Caucus and the Gauteng Water Caucus.



Activities

How the course worked

The course followed a ‘work-away, work-together’ design where each module activated deeper questioning and learning as/in action. Each module was guided by a question and was followed by an assignment where the participants got to practise what was learnt through dialogue at the module. The ‘work away’ work was guided through mentorship.

Module 1: Investigating Context & Practice *‘What is happening?’*

- Participants explored the context of their Change Project through observation, photographs and interviews which they turned into stories of practice



Module 2: Identifying Challenges & Opportunities and Building Knowledge Networks *‘How has this come to be?’*

- Summarizing all that has happened so far in their Change Project
- Identifying key questions that are being explored in the Change Projects

Module 3: Develop Arguments to Support Action *‘What does this mean?’*

- Develop case studies



Module 4: Moving into Transformation *‘How do we transform?’*

- Work plan workshop that participants ran with their communities/organisation/network
- Final case report

Module 5: *What Have We Learnt?*

- Reflection on what was learnt from the course
- Final presentations of the cases to the facilitators, invited members from the SAWC, representatives from AWARD, ELRC and other partners such as Benchmarks, Centre of Environmental Rights and the Legal Resource Centre



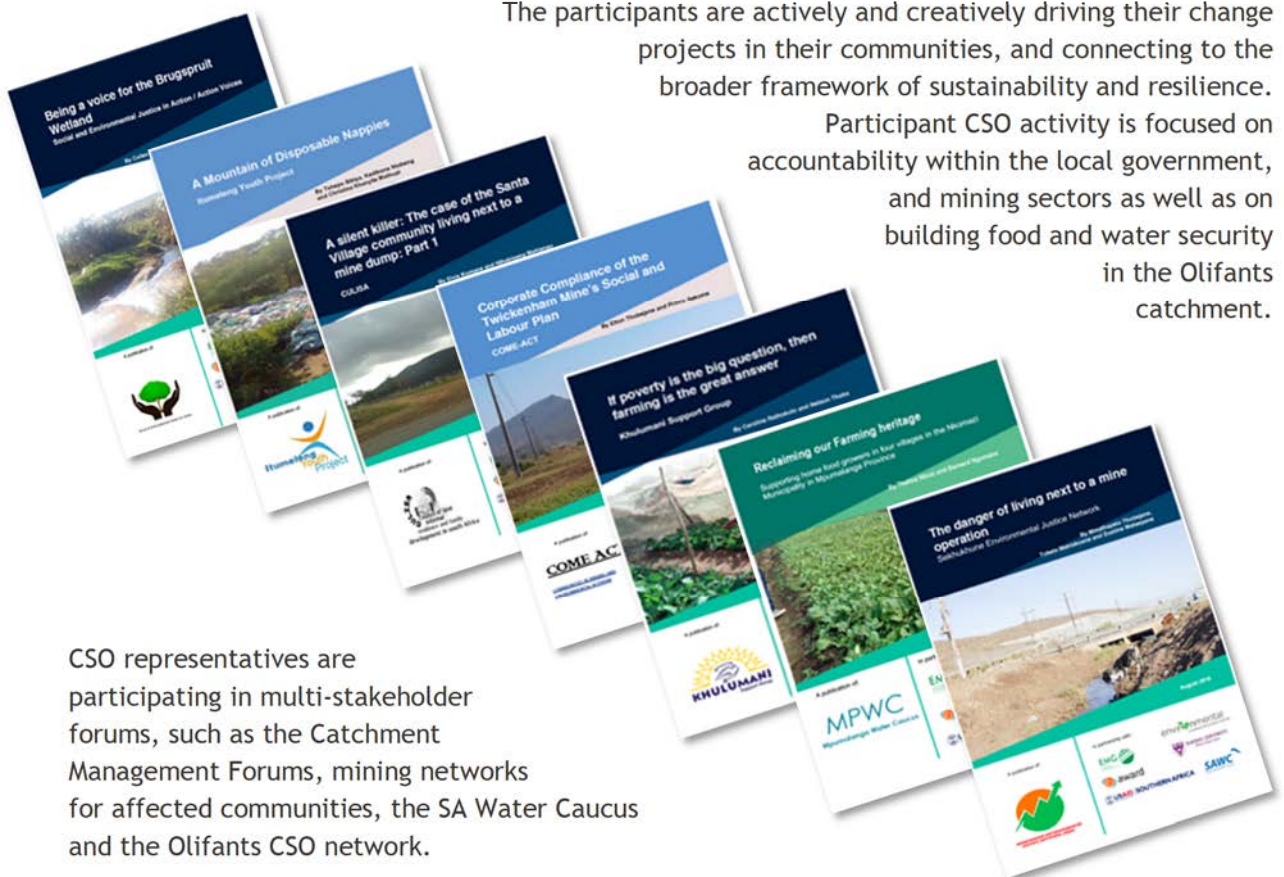
Results

- 17 individuals representing 7 different institutions completed the course and graduated
- 7 case study booklets were produced
- 7 knowledge network booklets were produced
- 3 organisations were formalized as NPOs during the course (Itumeleng, SEJN and Action Voices)



The participants are actively and creatively driving their change projects in their communities, and connecting to the broader framework of sustainability and resilience.

Participant CSO activity is focused on accountability within the local government, and mining sectors as well as on building food and water security in the Olifants catchment.



CSO representatives are participating in multi-stakeholder forums, such as the Catchment Management Forums, mining networks for affected communities, the SA Water Caucus and the Olifants CSO network.



Recommendations

The Changing Practice course has built a network of community-based activists that allows participants to participate in ways that they could not before. In the Olifants catchment this is clearly the case with participants still collaborating and engaging.

The Changing Practice course created an opportunity for participants to learn how to document their work in a way that is seen by professional networks and government. This is not the main intention of the course. The intention is to strengthen and nurture a solidarity network of organisations that are working at the coal face of environmental injustice.

The aim is to help equip them to continue doing this work as well as to say:

‘We notice you,
we see you,
you matter and
your work is invaluable even
though in our current economic
context it is not valued.’

This is what is known as **epistemic justice**.

From three Changing Practice courses (the Olifants: Changing Practice course being one of these three), a changing practice network of activists has formed, who can be drawn into courses or run their own courses. VEJA from the previous course runs a version of the Changing Practice course in their communities; two of the participants on the last course facilitated on this one. This is not just a course; it is a learning coalition which is catalyzed by an accredited course.





award

The Association for Water and Rural Development

AWARD is a non-profit organisation specialising in participatory, research-based project implementation. Their work addresses issues of sustainability, inequity and poverty by building natural-resource management competence and supporting sustainable livelihoods. One of their current projects, supported by USAID, focuses on the Olifants River and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems to sustain livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment.

P O Box 1919, Hoedspruit 1380, Limpopo, South Africa

T 015-793 0503 W award.org.za

Company Reg. No. 98/03011/08

Non-profit org. Reg. No. 006 - 821

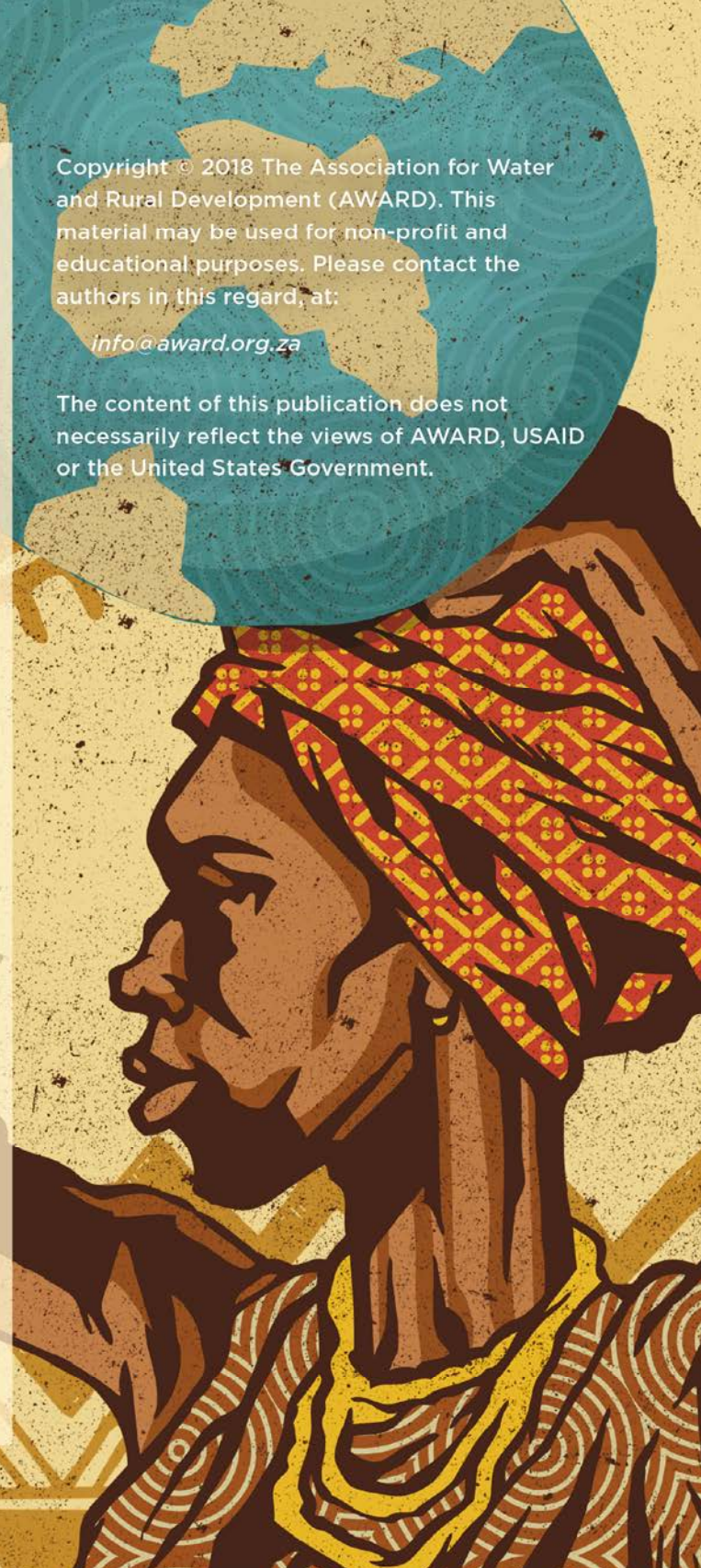
About USAID: RESILIM-O

USAID: RESILIM-O focuses on the Olifants River Basin and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems that support livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment. The 5-year programme, involving the South African and Mozambican portions of the Olifants catchment, is being implemented by the Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD) and is funded by USAID Southern Africa.

Copyright © 2018 The Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD). This material may be used for non-profit and educational purposes. Please contact the authors in this regard, at:

info@award.org.za

The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of AWARD, USAID or the United States Government.



Acknowledgements: Project funding and support

The USAID: RESILIM-O project is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under USAID/Southern Africa RESILIENCE IN THE LIMPOPO BASIN PROGRAM (RESILIM). The RESILIM-O project is implemented by the Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD), in collaboration with partners. Cooperative Agreement nr AID-674-A-13-00008



USAID | **SOUTHERN AFRICA**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE