



AN OVERVIEW OF THE TSITSA PROJECT



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Where leaders learn



University of Fort Hare

Together in Excellence

Restoring land and water in the Tsitsa River Catchment, Eastern Cape,
South Africa.

Shifting our approach to use governance principles that include the
voices of resident communities.

The Tsitsa Project is a novel approach to restoring and managing land and water sustainably in the Tsitsa River Catchment



The idea for the Tsitsa Project (previously known as NLEIP*) was born when two dams were planned on the Tsitsa River – provisionally called the Ntabelanga and Lalini Dams. These dams are a key part of the Mzimvubu Water Project and intended to supply water to communities as far away as Mthatha and to irrigate an area near Tsolo. However, key parts of the Tsitsa Catchment (~494 000 ha) are degraded, posing the possibility that the dams will fill with sediment and silt within a few decades. The solution? Repair the catchment by restoring the landscape to prevent the silting and, at the same time, improve the livelihoods of the people who live there.

Since its beginning in 2014, the Tsitsa Project has grown considerably and now aims at developing and managing both land and water in a sustainable way. Sustainability involves improving the land, the water, and the lives of the people who live in the catchment. The project approach has been different from most other, similar projects because:

- it deliberately seeks out the community's ideas and participation as a starting point;
- it recognises that physical, biological, human and social factors are inextricably linked together and;
- it recognises the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing in achieving successful natural resource management and sustainable land management.

Many development facilitators have started from this point and recognise how much background work, how many meetings and how much effort it takes to implement a programme based on these starting points. At the time of writing (late 2018), we feel we have made a good start and are gradually building trust and are optimistic about improved collaboration.



*Ntabelanga and Laleni Ecological Infrastructure Project (NLEIP)



Figure 1. A Participatory Mapping workshop held with the Lower and Upper Tsitsana traditional council, where the participants outlined their land use (left) and prioritised their top natural resource problems for intervention (right). This mostly included alien invasive species, erosion features and overgrazing.

We have held many meetings, especially in the communal part of the upper Tsitsa catchment. The active participation of the residents help to build trust, collaboration and optimism. Without their input, the project would be unsustainable. [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)

Everyone who participates brings specialist knowledge to share with the whole group: NGOs, national, regional and municipal officials, senior traditional leaders, community representatives, scientists, students, commercial and subsistence farmers and businessmen, all of whom have something to contribute to building a comprehensive picture of the catchment, an understanding of the problems, and ideas for solutions. Working together – sometimes with a project liaison or engagement officer to assist with avoiding and clarifying confusion and listening to the wide range of knowledge the participants bring to meetings - builds respect and trust.

The project makes a special effort to skill participants in ways of thinking, planning and acting together. Sustainability depends on the interest and empowerment of local residents, and on the continued presence of the other ‘experts’ to help us all adapt to a changing world.





Project role-players and expectations

What can catchment residents and participants expect?

The project is soon to appoint a permanent catchment co-ordinator and ten or more local catchment liaison officers to strengthen ongoing community and involvement. Ideally, a catchment co-ordinator could be based in Maclear, a major base for catchment activities, and the catchment liaison officers should be deployed throughout the catchment area. They would act as on-the-ground ambassadors between government and residents.^{5,6} Already, one of the tasks carried out by selected local residents is sediment monitoring (Figure 2), a task that could extend to other useful monitoring such as that of water quality and veld condition.⁷

The next important step to sustainability is establishing a **Land and Water Forum** of all role-players, which will seek to produce a **Participatory and Integrated Land Management Strategy** to turn the vision of the project into reality.

The Tsitsa Project vision is:

“To support sustainable livelihoods for local people through integrated landscape management that strives for resilient social-ecological systems and which fosters equity in access to ecosystem services.”

Local and district municipalities, industry, NGOs and other local role-players will be involved. Although such meetings are focused on the Tsitsa area at present, they will extend to other nearby catchments with similar challenges, and to government, and even to potential international funders.⁶



Figure 2. Demonstration of citizen-science monitoring of sediment during a Wisdom Trust meeting to the catchment.

Scientists and postgraduate students (mainly from universities in the Eastern Cape: Rhodes, Fort Hare and Walter Sisulu) and others including Free State and Pretoria Universities will continue to be involved. Research has been established as a sub-component of the project for many years, and two Science-Management Forums are held annually. Now the project is broadening out to share knowledge with society at large.^{5, 6, 8, 9}

The Department of Environmental Affairs, partnered by the Department of Science and Technology and the Water Research Commission started the Tsitsa Projects. Prior to the projects inception, the Expanded Public Works Programme teams (Working-for-Water, Working-for-Ecosystems, Working-on-Fire, Working-for-Wetlands and Working-for-Forests teams) took a significant early lead in rehabilitating the catchment. Through their implementing agencies, ways will be found to promote the entrepreneurship necessary to sustain the slow, careful work of restoring and protecting the landscape and rivers so that they support better human health and prosperity.¹⁰

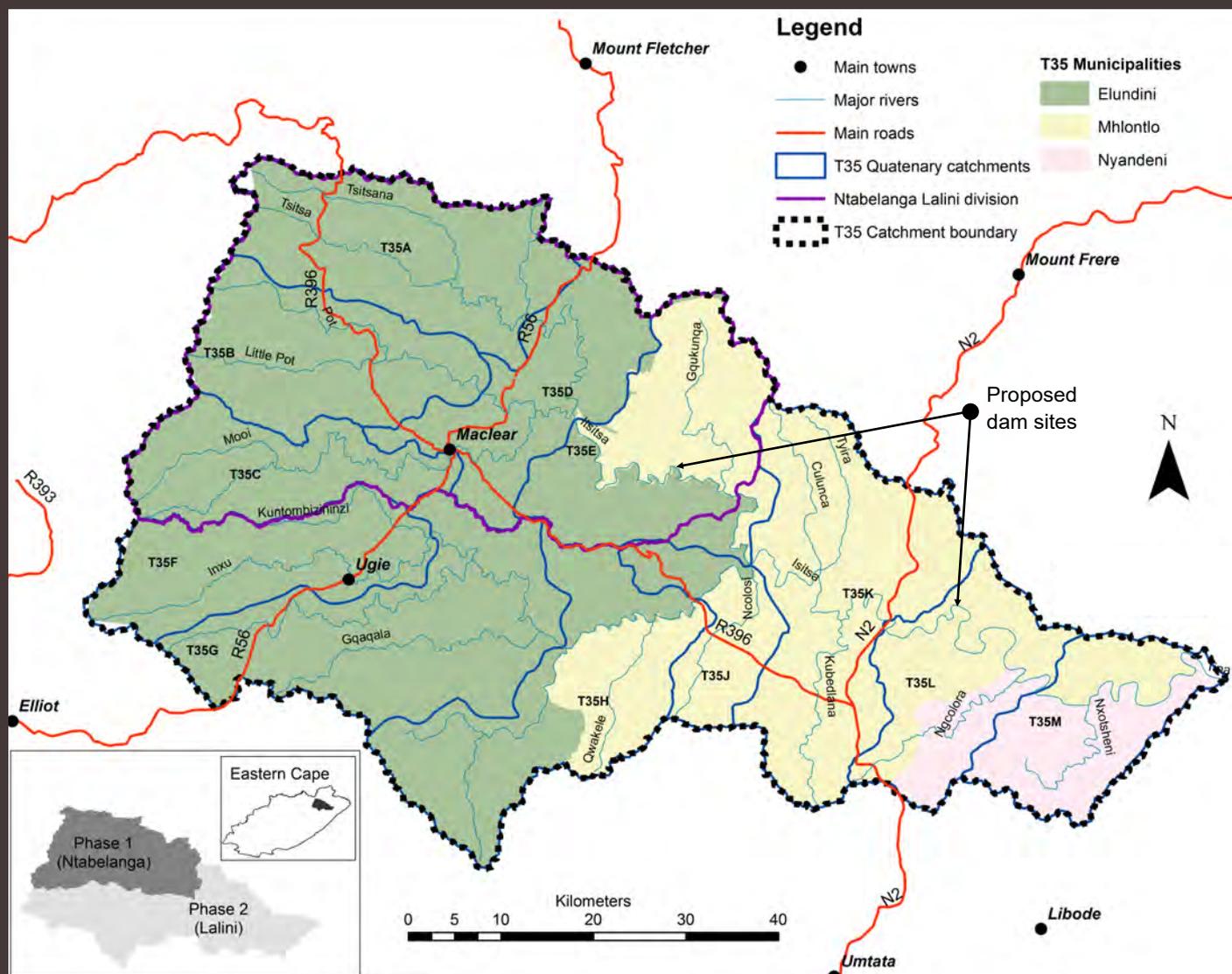


Figure 3. The Tsitsa Project boundary with municipal borders and the implementation phases, see insert – map courtesy of Kyra Lunderstedt.

Collaborating a way forward



R eal community engagement deepens democracy and sustains progress. The Tsitsa Project aims to give stakeholders and rural residents the level of representation and skills to manage the natural resources, improve the quality of their lives, and foster a culture of inter-generational equity.

Many parties and funders play an essential role in the ambitious attempt by a large group of people and organisations passionate about proving that collaboration and effective co-operative governance is possible. Working together meaningfully like this takes time; trust is not built overnight, nor are new skills picked up immediately. For this reason, we seek longer-term ways to support and sustain this resilient behaviour.

We hope that the on-going learning built into our approach through knowledge sharing and collaboration will keep us on an adaptive pathway to achieving our aspirations in an ever-changing world.



Photo credits:
Nosi Mtati: front and back cover, pg 2 footer, pg3 footer, all pg 3. & pg 5 top left and right & bottom left.
Kyra Lunderstedt: pg1, fig1, Aloe pg 5.
Margaret Wolff: pg5 top centre, middle left & bottom centre.
Sentinel. Pg.5
Mike Powell: pg1 flower & pg6.

Referenced material

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- 2 **Biggs H (2018).** The Tsitsa Project – Research and Praxis Investment Plan (ver2)
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- 10 **Van der Waal (2017).** The Tsitsa Project - Restoration Plan (ver1).
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The Tsitsa River

For further information and access to project resources, please contact the Knowledge Management coordinator k.lunderstedt@ru.ac.za



DISCLAIMER

The capacity building, implementation and research has been funded by the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF), Chief Directorate: Natural Resource Management Programmes (NRM), Directorate: Operational Support and Planning

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Website

<https://sites.google.com/view/tsitsa-project/home> (under construction)
www.tsitsaproject.org (in development)

