



Photo: D. Weyer

Newsletter: 6th NLEIP Science-management meeting

Held at Arminel Inn, Hogsback on 15-16 May 2018.

This was the first time that this meeting was held outside of Grahamstown. Hogsback was selected because of its proximity to the University of Fort Hare (UFH). The meeting's clear success encourages us to not be afraid of holding further meetings nearer other Eastern Cape universities or their branches, or at times in the actual catchment. Because new "NLEIPers" (first-time attendees) are a constant and desirable reality, we held the first ever well-attended induction on Monday afternoon 14th May at the venue. It was attended by about 44 people, most of whom were postgraduate students (mainly in biophysical and agricultural fields) and their supervisors from UFH, and, encouragingly, several government officials. The NLEIP organising team fielded several experienced NLEIPers to interact with the attendees, and much interest was shown, and lively discussions held.

A formal welcome the next morning was given by Dudu Soginga from the Department of Environmental Affairs: Natural Resource Management (DEA: NRM) and a short opening address by Prof Michael Aliber from UFH.

Day One (15th May)

Soils and Degradation

The first day consisted of a range of speakers, many from or associated with UFH, including their particular affiliation regarding soil/crop science collaboration, with University of the Free State. There was particular emphasis on soils and degradation in the first session. Cassie du Plessis is using state of the art machine-learning algorithms based on Scorpan (soil class, climate, organisms, relief, parent material, age and position) with three



Participants at the meeting

different statistical approaches for digital soil mapping in the catchment, while Gcobisa Kanuka examined relationships in detail between various soil properties and erosion indices and the known gully prevalence under different spatial classifications. All this provided a better basis for a highly nuanced and eminently useable interpretive talk by George van Zijl, on the links through to management recommendations in our context.

Keynote: Rural development models and realities

This meeting's keynote address was given by Prof. Paul Hebinck from Wageningen University (he is a regularly visiting associate professor at UFH). His provocative message concerned how we (the scientists, officials, even NGOs etc.) seem to, in the many countries from which he has experience, often be stuck in a conventional linear top-down development model. Yet so much that happens and often makes a difference materially, is driven (often entirely) bottom-up and largely outside of this development model. He then compares whether NLEIP can in any way escape this, or what it should do to try. If you are interested (especially if you didn't attend), rather than just looking at the PowerPoint, do yourself a 50-minute favour and watch the streamed pre-recorded talk (which contains all the important live cues) at <https://wurtv4.wur.nl/p2gplayer/Player.aspx?id=cAO7v9>. A panel discussion followed, the record of which will give you even more background and points of view. We at NLEIP were left feeling we have a fighting



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chance of enhancing the bottom-up approaches, and where appropriate blending these meaningfully in with more top-down realities we live in or face. At least now we cannot say we haven't been warned about a pervasive trap Paul believes exists.

Livelihoods, cropping and old land rehabilitation

Paul's talk was followed by ideas on **land-based livelihoods research** (Akinyemi Babatope) which attracted some challenging discussion, and then a talk (given by George van Zijl on behalf of Johan van Tol) which dealt with baselines in the Ntabelanga region around both **perceptions and biophysical parameters relating to crop production**. Peoples' identity as farmers is one determining issue, as is the shortfall in expected production of maize - seemingly related to non-use of hybrid varieties.

Afternoon talks included an update on the long-in-development (and now containing some concrete early community voice) **integrated rehabilitation plan** (Bennie van der Waal) and a possible extension of the WRC Green Village project at Sinxaku, which will focus on implementation (Kate Rowntree). Old lands were a key topic mentioned throughout the day, and Alen Manyevere floated a proposed **experimental design for rehab of such old lands** – much discussed in question time.

Some current and potential future DEA: NRM approaches

Japie Buckle took us through a fun photo-tour of possible **new alternatives to clear-felling, the emphasis on getting vegetation cover**, especially grass back by more thoughtful and gradual or partial removal of woody aliens.



Dudu Soginga

Dudu Soginga, also on behalf of Michael Kawa, gave an exposition of team deployment and activities in the catchment, and the difference the dam announcement had made to approaches. She gave a **candid and forthright assessment** (in line with what we know about complex natural resource management of such issues) of all the non- or partial achievement of goals. She spoke about the often siloed or conflicting actions of the players, and all that had been done to try to improve this situation, including the NLEIP prototype with its research (and thus inevitable lags) and its continuing adaptation emphases. She and Japie stressed that the resultant action plans had to be practically apportionable to implementers, and measurable. Their Department was roundly recognised in discussion time for "doing their work" and for these brave efforts.

Helen Fox (the Cape Parrot Project based in Hogsback) gave a talk on **Reforestation, Protection and Community Collaboration**. She emphasised "working with" not only communities, agencies and nature, but also with aliens – the latter almost a "negotiation" to shift the balance such as thinning and debarking to allow the system to shift less disruptively to a more desired state.

Day 1 ended with a late tea and snacks, especially because most UFH students and staff had chosen to commute daily from Alice and needed to travel while still light. Whilst this did not afford the same opportunities for joint camaraderie as the evening meals at previous meetings, it did give some chance for meaningful informal mingling and discussions.



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Day Two (16th May)

Day two was, as usual, more “internal” but with cognisance that we had a large part of the audience who were new to NLEIP, and the organisers wanted to ensure they too, drew value from the day. From the audience participation and alertness, and from comments we received later, this appeared to be the case.

Two central new NLEIP products

Two major new NLEIP products required presentation and discussion, the first one in detail. Harry Biggs presented these. The well-circulated glossy book produced by DEA: NRM in 2016, called NLEIP’s “Research Investment Strategy” (or RIS), needed updating because of the rapid development and evolution in NLEIP. Whilst the basics from Volume 1 are all maintained (and included upfront in summary form in the new Volume 2) the new volume is now entitled **“Tsitsa Research and Praxis Investment Strategy 2018-2020”** [Tsitsa is the provisional new name for NLEIP]. Praxis, the back-and-forth interface between research and management, receives far more attention in this second volume. The volume contains an objectives tree, which is the strategic adaptive management replacement of the theme and project lists. It has major sections on community voice and governance (including NLEIP’s internal governance); participatory monitoring, evaluation, reflection, and learning [so-called PMERL]; towards embedding climate change responses in NLEIP; emergent transdisciplinary mini-projects that allow multiple players to “get going” and plan and work together; and several embryonic initiatives. The second key product is an early draft peer-reviewed paper on **internal reflection and learning in NLEIP**, which comes across as an honest appraisal of what is working, what we are struggling with or is taking longer, and what this means for NLEIP. The presentation was on behalf of lead author Jessica Cockburn who will present fully at the next meeting. A key message is that the social-ecological systems formulation was deemed enabling. If we turn out “successful”, the framing here suggests it might be because we are perhaps getting correct the joint act of using all five of our major underlying principles *together*.

Stakeholders; governance; communities of practices

The second phase of NLEIP concerns the catchments supplying the proposed Lalini Dam, an area considerably larger than those supplying the proposed Ntabelanga Dam. Nina Rivers gave the final **Lalini Stakeholder Assessment** presentation at this meeting, a product which shows some similarities but many differences (from Ntabelanga) and which will form a backbone on which we hope to build trust as we start gently moving into Phase Two. The full report is available to anyone interested. Nosi Mtati then gave an update of the many ways in which NLEIP has made **repeated contact and built early co-operation with residents in the Ntabelanga Dam catchments** in the last year and especially recently, and how some resultant “community voice products” were being incorporated into our integrated plan. Nosi herself represents a common face for the project, and internal (and hopefully more external, though we have no ultimate control over this) visitors such as researchers or officials, can and mostly do work through her, reducing confusion amongst the resident communities. Importantly, joint visioning at a proto Land and Water Management Forum resulted in an overarching mission statement similar to NLEIP’s. Margaret Wolff took us through this vision and **several joint governance principles** and some possible configurations, building largely on existing structures. NLEIP is planning to have an associated catchment co-ordinator resident in the catchment plus sufficient community liaison officers to each work at multiple villages. The entire engagement and co-construction process is complex (but not impossible) requiring trust-building and taking time (therefore slow, as per her talk’s title). We need to understand and accept this if we are looking for enabled sustainability. The “what when we leave?” question was posed by several - the unusually favourable planned length of NLEIP, plus its multiple strategies to try to build intrinsically motivated resilience and continuity, were held up as possible reasons for hope.



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NLEIP's internal governance has thrived partly because of the emergence of three existing communities of practice (CoPs) – enthusiasts for a particular theme who want to work and share voluntarily together on an ongoing basis. These three (in brief Sediment and Rehabilitation; Governance and Community Voice; and Livelihoods and Ecosystem Services) now spend almost more time working together (and with a wide range of stakeholders and sectors) than on their own as CoPs, reflecting the growth of transdisciplinarity. Right through the meeting, more inter-linkages and feedbacks than at any previous meeting, became apparent. This trend, which will be followed by NLEIP's PMERL, is probably attributable in large measure to this growth of transdisciplinarity, and to the enabling attitude of senior DEA officials. Against this background, three new CoPs were proposed at this meeting, though much of the discussion contested whether the CoP framing was the most appropriate. Call them what we may, these are the three initiatives discussed: (1) Tony Palmer presented: a proposed CoP for **Grassland and Fire Management** in service of SES (this included a report back of a fruitful visit to similar activities at Matatiele - see presentation); (2) Alta de Vos and Kyra Lunderstedt : a **Knowledge Management** CoP built on two pre-existing (but rather in the background till now) foundational initiatives which can now provide a launchpad for meaningful overall more inclusive and participatory use; and (3) Rozanne Bester: a **Systems Thinking** CoP which aims at widening the use of holistic interconnected thinking and its habits, right through the various layers of our expanding influence – in the belief that this will be a major way to bring differing rationalities in natural resource management, closer together.

Forthcoming events and closure

Two (in this case connected by a joint field trip) upcoming meetings in the catchment were mentioned - one for an oversight committee of senior officials and one for advising experts. No date or venue was announced yet for the next science-management meeting, partly because of our intention to first hold a more lay science-management type meeting especially in wider societal context, probably later this year in the catchment. There is also a one-day more scholastic annual science colloquium for postgraduate students working on NLEIP issues – date to be announced.

The meeting ended with lunch, with appeals for more inclusion of presentations by other departments' and municipalities' officials; for an associated site visit; and for appropriate respect to be paid to residents – a good start being the correct spelling and pronunciation of place and personal names.



Nosi and Ayabulela

We were pleased to be joined at the meeting by Ayabulela Madikana. Ayabulela was born and grew up in the Tsitsa River catchment, in the Ngcele A/A village under the eLangeni Traditional council. She attended the local secondary school (Grades 1 – 9) and completed Grade 12 at Mthatha International High School. Currently she is doing Honours in Soil Science under the supervision of Alen Manyevere at the University of Fort Hare and is hoping to further her studies.



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Reflection

In the good habit of PMERL, a subgroup of the organising committee held a short reflection session over lunchtime. In addition to obvious reflections already included above, some thoughts were:

- There is an increase in practical activities – we are increasingly moving from the thinking to the doing phase. Having said that, our “thinking” foundation is also a key strength and needs some maintenance – such as evidenced by the inclusion of the Hebinck talk.
- NLEIP faces obvious outward “expansion” from its earlier more narrowly scientific and science-management nature, now into the implementation (such as the leadership of Working For teams), into the wishes of residents, their activities related to natural resource management (NRM), and relevant parts of municipal and provincial and national governance (even interfacing international treaties and related funding). Discussion suggested that we should be clear we not a development agency – rather more connectors and facilitators. This also means we are not *prescribing* particular pathways, rather helping set up multi-stakeholder platforms with appropriate principles, to help those achieve *their* NRM goals.
- NLEIP appears to be entering a wider phase of recognition and becoming more attractive as a cause and an initiative – and this leads to increasing demands on our own capacity.
- This expansion and seemingly increasing popularity should be counted as a success, but will need to be sensibly managed, else NLEIP will explode in a puff. One goal in the new objectives tree which deals specifically with this need to manage our expansion.
- We were delighted with the stronger UFH participation, actually surprised at its extent. It would be great if this interest could extend further into the social sciences at UFH. Although Universities have conventionally bid separately for funds, we should seek ways of in the longer run of assisting each other to find funds. NLEIP letters of support i.e. endorsements (these always need to be carefully considered and constructed) to any university make be one important such mechanism.



Participants on the final day of the 6th Science-Management meeting, Hogsback, 2018