



Strategic Water Source Areas Social Learning Network

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Garden Route Biosphere Reserve (GRBR) is an area covering approximately 700 000 hectares, extending from George in the Western Cape Province along the coastline into the Eastern Cape Province to include Jeffrey's Bay. The GRBR is a complex and integrated social-ecological system (SES) with over 450 000 inhabitants working and living within the bounds of the biosphere reserve, who are in one or another way reliant on the natural resources and services the system delivers.

Water is a key resource for sustainable development in complex integrated systems like the GRBR. Global policies and management requirements for sustainable development highlight the importance of the access to water for all through sustainable management of water-related ecosystems. This is also supported by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 15, that state attention should be given to the restoration and protection of water-related ecosystems and the associated benefits derived from the ecosystem services.

Much focus has been placed on Strategic Water Source Areas (SWSA) identified in South Africa. SWSAs are defined as water catchment areas that supply a disproportionately large amount of water to downstream urban centres and or economic regions of interest. In South Africa, 8% of the land area supplies over 50% of the river flow. This in turn supports 64% of the country's economy when linked to associated downstream urban centres. Of the 22 SWSAs in the country, the Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma SWSAs fall within the GRBR. The Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma SWSAs have a relatively high natural runoff supporting the region's population and economy. The Outeniqua water source area (326 372.53 ha) is situated in the south-

eastern region of the Western Cape Province and supplies water to the greater part of the Garden Route, including towns such as George and Mossel Bay. The Tsitsikamma water source area (351 410.84 ha) is situated in the south-western part of the Eastern Cape Province, and supplies water to Uitenhage and the Langkloof valley, as well as providing more than 70% of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area with water. Although Mossel Bay and the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan areas do not fall in the GRBR domain, the source waters do. Therefore, sustaining a good quantity and quality of water within these SWSAs is important even beyond the boundaries of the GRBR.

The GRBR with the support from the World Wide Fund for Nature, South Africa (WWF) is initiating a water partnership project to enhance the environmental and social wellbeing of people in the GRBR. The project aims to improve human livelihoods, safeguard the natural environment, and promote innovative approaches to economic development that is environmentally sustainable. It also aims to build long term institutional expertise around water resource management. Against these aims, the primary objective of the project is to facilitate improved security of the Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma SWSAs.

Water resource management within the Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma SWSAs is complex and requires a landscape level approach involving the collaboration of a great diversity of stakeholders from multiple sectors (e.g., agriculture, forestry, government sectors and non-governmental organisations), and from multiple levels (e.g., local, district, provincial, national). As a starting point, the GRBR is hosting the first SWSAs Social Learning Network engagement to introduce the project and to bring together the diversity of stakeholders in the GRBR to learn from one another through conversations around water, the economy, risk and human wellbeing.