

Communities urged to explore opportunities in biodiversity economy

Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa has challenged communities to awaken to the possibilities available in the biodiversity economy.



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The minister was speaking at the official handover of Kgoroši Recreational Park to the community of Ga-Kgoroši in Matlala, Polokwane, on Thursday, 20 April.

The R12m project was funded and implemented through the Department of Environmental Affairs' Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programme (EPIP), with the aim of creating jobs, skills development and empowerment of small businesses.

The project was implemented using labour intensive methods, as per the requirements of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). It created work opportunities for at least 171 local people – mostly women and youth, and four people with disabilities.

The project, which commenced in December 2014, included the construction of a perimeter wall, an education centre and storage building, the construction of two ablution facilities for men and women, as well as the installation of paving and braai areas.

Part of the project also included the construction of a control house at the access gate, the installation of a water and reticulation system that utilises septic tanks with French drains, and the planting of trees and general landscaping.

National Biodiversity Economy Strategy

Molewa said that given the country's rich biological diversity, which offers huge economic potential, government has adopted the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy. The strategy is at the heart of promoting guardianship of wildlife within communities.

"The strategy seeks to increase the biodiversity contribution to the gross domestic product, while conserving the country's ecosystems. It also aims to contribute to the transformation of the biodiversity economy through inclusive economic opportunities, thereby ensuring equitable benefit of natural resources.

"We realise that we must translate policies into action. To help us achieve that, we have designed our Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programme to fund and implement projects that seek to ensure that this programme is focused on interventions like greening and open space management, Working on Waste, Working for Land, Working for the Coast, People and Parks, Wildlife Economy and Youth Environmental Services projects," said Molewa.

The minister said that by planting indigenous trees and beautifying the area, the department has contributed to improving the integrity of the natural environment, adding significantly to biodiversity conservation.

Both accredited and non-accredited training opportunities were created for local community members, and those employed in the project have been equipped with the necessary skills that will enable them to find other employment opportunities upon exit from the projects, or even start their own small businesses.

"Other initiatives that we committed to implement in Limpopo over a three-year Medium Term Expenditure Framework, include Wildlife Economy and People and Parks projects. We are delivering on our commitment to working with communities in empowering them through job opportunities and skills development.

"People and Parks invests in infrastructure development and biodiversity conservation for economic benefits by ensuring the local communities are involved in the management of protected and surrounding areas.

"This programme serves as a means of redress to the injustices of the past. Through the People and Parks Programme, we invest in infrastructure development and biodiversity conservation for economic benefits. In this mechanism we promote biodiversity values in the proclaimed protected and surrounding areas," the minister said.

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