

Watershed services refer to the role nature plays in channelling water down to streams and rivers in the catchment area of a dam. When these natural watershed services are degraded, they need to be rehabilitated. Much of the work to do this is unskilled and labour intensive. The Hartbeespoort Dam Remediation Programme of the Department of Water Affairs is an integrated plan to address multiple water quality problems that affect the dam. The Community Work Programme (CWP) Watershed Services pilot programme is a component of the wider Hartbeespoort Dam Remediation Programme. This aimed to test whether the savings on water purification costs that result from using labour for these services are sufficient to cover the costs of the employment, and therefore whether such employment could be funded on a sustainable basis from the existing water tariff.

Implementing organisation: Seriti Institute

EMPLOYMENT CREATION FUND

WATERSHED SERVICES RIVER CLEANING PROGRAMME – RESTORING OUR RIVERS

The delivery of watershed services by the CWP in the Hartbeespoort Dam catchment area not only created employment and improved the quality of water flowing into the dam, but also raised awareness of the importance of rivers as a natural resource.

People who live in Diepsloot, Bez Valley, Alexandra, Munseville and Ivory Park all live near the Jukskei River. Instead of the scenic beauty associated with rivers, this one is filthy. In some places it looks as if a garbage truck dumped its contents into the river: plastic bags float around. Then there are the cold-drink bottles, milk cartons, soiled nappies, dead animals, animal and human excrement, and even worse. Sometimes, sadly, dead babies are thrown into the river.

It doesn't stop there: "There are some people who throw IDs here, they also throw people's photographs, we don't know what they have done to those people, we don't know if they are alive or dead," Pemi Xhentsi, a Bez Valley resident, says.

When the summer rains arrive this debris floats down the river. The Jukskei River is one of four rivers flowing into the Hartbeespoort Dam, a popular tourist attraction – and a vital source of drinking water for most of Gauteng Province and North West Province. However, the dam is battling the effects of the pollution flowing in from the rivers, as well as the alien invader plants, hyacinth and Caribbean weed. When these plants cover the surface of the dam, the oxygen level in the water decreases.

This lack of oxygen, combined with the pollution, kills fish and other living creatures in the dam. It destroys the ecosystem.

It's not only the fault of individuals ... irresponsible industries and business owners dump hazardous waste products and chemicals into the river as well. This makes the pollution problem a deadly one.

The Hartbeespoort Dam Remediation Programme of the Department of Water Affairs is an integrated plan to address multiple water quality problems that affect the dam. The Community Work Programme Watershed Services pilot programme is a component of the wider Hartbeespoort Dam Remediation Programme and was implemented in eight sites: Munsieville, Mogale 2, Bokfontein, Joburg Region A, Joburg Region E, Joburg Region F, Erasmus and Randfontein.

Over time, the programme was sustained in four sites where there was the biggest impact. The three sites were City of Joburg Regions A, E and F as well as Bokfontein. From January 2011, a total of 2904 people had gone through the programme – and if there had been more opportunities there was potential for many more people to participate.



The number of young people participating was 2160, together with 744 adults, with a gender breakdown of 2008 women and 896 men.

More than 60 kms of river banks were worked on and 1400 ha of dam area was cleared. As a result of these efforts, 2035 tons of debris was removed and 731 tons of hyacinth and Caribbean weed were removed.

The difference is visible. After visiting Hartbeespoort, Water and Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa was reported as saying: "The initiative has led to a significant cleanup of the once heavily polluted dam and there is a real improvement in its overall condition, with no more unpleasant smells and the water becoming clearer."

The programme has also increased the awareness of residents around environmental issues. "People must take care of water. People must respect water. Water is sacred. People throw soiled nappies in the water thinking it will just go away with the water, but where it goes it creates cholera, a disease caused by filth," says Gabriel Letsoalo, a CWP worker from Diepsloot.

Basimane Bogatsu, a Munseville resident, agrees. "The most important thing to ask is, 'How do we take care of our water?' Our water must be clean, so that our people can live a normal life, so that we can live longer ... because water is our life. Without water, we are nothing."

The CWP workers from Alexandra township saw a huge difference in the river after their team got down to business. "When you came to this river before it was very filthy, it had a bad smell, a horrible odour came from this river, but now we are able to sit here

and talk. The smell is gone, as you can see the children playing here. They weren't able to play here before," says Sibusiso Mkhize of Seriti Institute.

The effect is improving the quality of life – as well as providing much needed work. Diepsloot participant Luthando Mugibi explains: "I have never worked before. I hope this project will give me experience for work like gardening. I want to work and earn money to buy things my child needs, and to take him to crèche. Since I left school in 2007, I haven't done anything. I have no other way of making money. I want to complete my education. I want to earn enough money so I can go back to school, so I can get a decent job."

Evidence Matomakoena, another participant, had been looking for work for a long time. "I'm grateful for this project. I wish they could keep it going."

A woman who was busy pulling branches out a river had this to say: "I'm a single parent to five children, I have no husband. If I was not on this project, I would be struggling, not knowing what my children will eat before they sleep. That kind of thing causes stress. I wish I could encourage many people to also leave their houses and shacks and sign up for this project. They will see their lives change."

CWP participant Mapula Pule is also grateful to the programme. "This project has really helped us a lot because with the money I can buy electricity, I can buy water, I can buy what my children need, and I can give them lunch money. I wish this programme could continue – it really supports us because I have really struggled in my life."

Taking responsibility for the environment

Betty Siwele lives in Ivory Park. This single, 28-year-old woman joined the project in March 2011 after her dreams of completing a computer literacy course were shattered because of financial constraints.

When Betty first heard about the CWP Watershed Services River Cleaning Programme, she decided to join as way of passing time while hoping that, somehow, she would find a way to get a "decent job". The project changed her focus ... she now realises how important the river project is, and while she helps her family by taking home money to support them, she is eager to see more environmental campaigns up and running that clean up more rivers, "for the sake of a healthy community". She now strongly supports the idea that community members must take responsibility of their own environment.

Working on the project has also inspired her to rethink what she wants to do with her life. "I have started research on career opportunities that exist in nature conservation and environmental management, and with the cleaning experience that I am gaining through CWP I am confident I will do well in my studies", she says as she moves on to join other participants taking refuse bags to the other side of the river.



This profile is part of a series that looks at local innovation in the South African government's Community Work Programme (CWP). It was produced by Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) for the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). For more information about the CWP go to www.cogta.gov.za/cwp.