Showcase of sustainability practices in South Africa #5

Taking back our rivers with eThekwini Municipality

IT ALL STARTED DURING A CLASS DISCUSSION

Ethekwini has 18 major river systems. Our life in the city is very connected to water. Two million people live or work on these riverine corridors.

Why do we need rivers?

Fun!

OUR RIVERS ARE IN CRISIS

Fresh water!

Exactly! But solid waste and alien vegetation is taking over our rivers.

Spiritual activities

I FELT CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR RIVERS. I DECIDED I NEEDED TO TAKE ACTION.

Lets take back our rivers!

BUT WHERE TO BEGIN?

Municipality

Good day sir,

I want to know more about what the municipality is doing to tackle the problem of rivers in the eThekwini Municipal Area?

We are doing exciting things. Our Transformative Riverine Management Programme (TRMP) involves changing the way people and economic activities relate to the river system. In various projects, communities are taking responsibility. We are rehabilitating 7400 kilometres of various riverine systems together.

But each project has its own team, its own objectives and its own funding plans.

Go and see some of the projects for yourselves. They will appreciate your help!

SO OFF I WENT AND I LEARNED A LOT!

THIS IS A COMMUNITY-LED PROJECT TO REMOVE SOLID WASTE AND ALIEN PLANTS FROM RIVERS IN THE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPAL AREA

1. Sihlanzimvelo Stream Cleaning Programme

THIS IS WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE BEFORE.

The problem was the blocked streams and culverts because of illegal dumping.

The municipality employed community co-operatives to clean 300km of stream banks and culverts from waste and invasive species. The project started in 2012 and is still underway.

The project has already employed 600 people through 86 community co-operatives and 11 city departments are participating in a project steering committee.

THIS IS US WORKING ON THE PROGRAMME

I helped the co-operatives remove litter and invasive plant species from stream areas by hand and with hand tools. This helps reduce flooding and blockages and saves the City money.

It was interesting to learn that the co-operatives receive training in:

- Stream cleaning methods
- Business management and marketing management
- Book keeping
- Health and safety
- Alien vegetation removal
- Construction mentorship

THIS IS WHAT IT LOOKS NOW!

The programme involves a lot of elements such as:
- Alien plant removal
- Litter clearing
- Community employment
- Improved monitoring and reporting of storm water blockages

I saw the impact of the programme. It improved the quality of the natural environment and ecosystem services. It reduced storm water and road maintenance requirements. It improved the health and wellbeing of communities and also reduced damage to homes.

The co-operatives are using glass and unrecyclable plastics to make paving stones at the KwaMashu Waste Beneficiation Centre.

THEN I HAD A LOOK AT THIS PROJECT:

2. Palmiet Catchment Rehabilitation Project

The problem facing this community is that the critical wetlands and riparian zones have been severely modified as a result of the massive informal settlements built in wetland areas and along the banks of rivers such as the Palmiet River. The deteriorating condition of ecological infrastructure is compromising the volume and quality of freshwater in the river system.

In order to sort this out, artificial wetlands will emulate the features of natural wetlands and act as bio-filters, removing/trapping sediments and pollutants before water enters the river system. BUT before they are constructed, there needs to be a massive clean up to remove solid waste and alien vegetation.

IT WAS SO INTERESTING, I LEARNED THAT:

- the Municipality needs to provide adequate services to informal settlements in the eThekwini Municipal Area.

- the Municipality also needs to prevent pollution from upstream municipal sewerage systems and from industry.

- artificial wetlands should be recognised and funded as part of the municipal storm water management system.

THIS IS ANOTHER BRILLIANT PROJECT:

3. Aller River Pilot Project

The Aller River Pilot Project is getting local people involved in cleaning and maintaining the river and forested area around it. The project employs local 'Eco-Champs', who are trained to raise awareness and educate their communities about riverine management.

Eco-champs do wonderful work. They work with project partners to spread the word by establishing eco-clubs at local schools.

They also monitor river health, report sewer spillages, clear invasive plants and plant endemic indigenous plants to restore biodiversity.

This project has many **partners:**
- eThekwini Conservancies Forum
- eThekwini Municipality
- University of Cambridge
- Water-based communities in the Norfolk Broads
- National Lotteries Commission
- EDANA
- UPM Raflatac
- and me :-)

I WAS WELCOMED ONTO THE TEAM.

AN IMPORTANT PROJECT WITHIN THIS PROJECT:

Disposable Nappies project

Another important initiative is the Disposable Nappies project. This project works to keep nappies out of the environment. Ablution block monitors raise awareness amongst communities. Bags and buckets are provided for nappies so that community members don't throw them into the river or toilets.

During the three months of the trial over 21 272 disposable nappies (3,5t) were safely diverted to landfill!! Isn't that amazing?

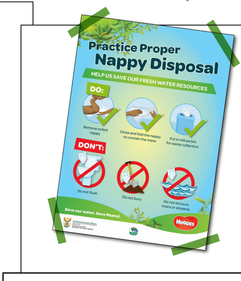
This project won many awards:

2018

The 2018 Mail and Guardian's Greening Awards. Aller River Pilot Project was the winner in the category: Community Conservation and Resilience.

2019

The Aller River Pilot Project got two awards at Enviropaedias' Eco-logic Awards in Cape Town in 2019: It was awarded the Silver in the BioDiversity category and Gold in the Municipality category.



BECAUSE OF THEIR SUCCESSES IN TRANSFORMATIVE RIVERINE MANAGEMENT, ETHEKWINI OFFICIALS ARE SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHER MUNICIPALITIES IN KWAZULU NATAL AND ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA. THEY HAVE SHOWN ME HOW WE CAN PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT AGAINST FLOODS AND PREVENT DAMAGE TO INFRASTRUCTURE.

WE CAN REPAIR OUR RIVER SYSTEMS AND LEAD THE WAY IN THE COUNTRY AND THE CONTINENT!!

But..

BUT - Our river water is also damaged because our infrastructure fails!

We must **maintain our waste water treatment works**, we must **stop sewer leaks** and **prevent overflowing manholes**.

Let's **stop illegal connections**. And **provide services**!

And now I have to go and tell my classmates!! Bye!

More information see links below

Credits

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