

## CO-ORDINATION OF A CATCHMENT-BASED RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION PLATFORM FOR ECOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE UMZIMVUBU RIVER CATCHMENT

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) is undertaking a project funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) to establish **research, development and innovation (RDI) platforms for ecological infrastructure** in two catchments. This project emerges from the understanding that there is a well-established knowledge-community in South Africa that has expertise relating to ecosystems and biodiversity, ecosystem services and sustainable natural resource management more generally. Some of this expertise rests in the research community whilst other experts work in more applied contexts such as municipalities, provincial government, the private sector and civil society.

Ecological infrastructure is defined for the purpose of this project as **naturally functioning ecosystems that deliver valuable services to people**. Whilst there is growing expertise and research in this space, this is often not very well shared or integrated, leading to overlap in efforts or gaps in research. Research is not always positioned in a way that allows for strategic uptake, use and implementation by the community of practise. This project focuses on the establishment of RDI platforms focusing specifically on ecological infrastructure in two catchments, including the uMzimvubu. The intention of the uMzimvubu RDI platform is to:

- 1. Deepen relationships and sharing within the community of practise across the catchment;**
- 2. Improve co-ordination, sharing and cross-pollination of research efforts in the wider catchment;**
- 3. Strategically position, pitch and package research in a way that will improve uptake and impact, particularly by bringing practitioners and researchers into contact on a shared platform;**
- 4. Share lessons between catchments by documenting projects, lessons learned, reflections and sharing these between other catchment RDI Platforms, with special emphasis on exchanging lessons between catchments;**
- 5. Deepen and expand the active community of practise around ecological infrastructure in preparation for a national learning event.**

Environmental & Rural Solutions (ERS), based in Matatiele, has been appointed by SANBI to co-ordinate the uMzimvubu RDI platform function, and we would like to introduce ourselves and invite you to participate in the process. Our overall strategy for the 27 month process is as follows:

- Build upon and expand the existing uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership network (UCPP), linking with the Ntabelanga Laleni Ecological Infrastructure Programme (NLEIP), and extending the current active spatial and institutional extent to include the central and coastal areas: currently, UCPP and NLEIP focus on the upper catchment zones;
- Link practitioners and researchers to meet the real needs of the catchment's ecological infrastructural challenges and associated socio-ecological issues, and ensure that best practise findings are fed back into planning, policy and implementation;

To this end, we invite you to indicate if you are interested in participating in this platform: this will involve several learning exchanges and meetings per year, production of policy briefs to promote best practise, links with an email-based network, etc. If you are interested please complete and submit the attached brief registration form indicating your areas of interest and suggestions, in order to make this forum as beneficial for as many stakeholders as possible, and of course to benefit the restoration of the wider catchment. The aim is not to replicate, but to complement and support existing efforts. All suggestions would be appreciated. Please share this information with any other stakeholders who may be interested.

Please contact Tsoanelo Shata at [tsoanelo@enviros.co.za](mailto:tsoanelo@enviros.co.za) or Nicky McLeod at [nicky@enviros.co.za](mailto:nicky@enviros.co.za) or on landline 039 737 4849 for queries on the RDI platform.

Further information on UCPP activities can be found at [www.umzimvubu.org](http://www.umzimvubu.org) or [tsoanelo@enviros.co.za](mailto:tsoanelo@enviros.co.za)  
NLEIP information can be accessed from Dylan Weyer [mvula.indlela@gmail.com](mailto:mvula.indlela@gmail.com)



**Please save the date for an initial RDI Platform introductory gathering between 6-8 March 2017 in Matatiele, when the UCPP partners will host their quarterly meeting, and strategic planning.**