



Quarterly Newsletter - June 2021, Volume 1

The KBRC supports and collaborates with numerous NGO's whose goals and objectives strive to address the 17 Strategic Development Goals of UNESCO. From time to time we will share information on these organisations in our newsletters. This month we would like to tell you more about the newly established Grabouw Development Agency NPC.

The Grabouw Development Agency NPS (GDA) was established in 2020 through a collective private sector-led response in the Grabouw and Elgin region (the Valley) to address conditions of increasing inequality and rising unemployment. The GDA's board is chaired by Mcebisi Jonas, and its CEO is Cornelis van der Waal, seconded from Wesgro.

Economic realities of the valley

The Valley's economy exceeded R15 billion in 2020 with an output growth of nearly four times that of the national average. This is based primarily on agricultural and agri-processing, which together make up more than 85% of the local economy, with apples, pears and grapes predominantly grown in the valley, primarily destined for export. This has created a high demand for seasonal workers. As a result, there is high unemployment for large portions of the year. Economic conditions elsewhere in South and southern Africa have prompted, too, an increase in the influx of people into the Valley. This is contributing to increased unemployment and a co-ordinated response is required to ensure the sustainable development for all in the region. The economic development efforts of government have not, to date, been sufficient alone to solve this crisis of employment given the paucity of resources. Furthermore, municipalities are not sufficiently empowered to drive large scale job creation. Development initiatives are often delayed or suspended, too, as a result of red-tape. This calls for a co-ordinated response underpinned by improved collaboration between government and the private sector to kickstart sustainable economic development. Hence the GDA.

What we do

The focus of the GDA is to identify and develop commercially sustainable projects to enable large scale economic diversification and job creation in the Valley.



The generation of projects and mobilisation of resources is to be driven by a thorough and consultative process of identification, formulation, packaging and investment attraction. The GDA's role is to oversee this project chain, and to drive speedy implementation by facilitating access to municipal decision makers and other enablers. Simultaneously, the staff of the GDA will monitor global developments to identify new opportunities that aligns to the economy of the Valley. Tourism is, for example, a particularly important enabler of job creation. The GDA will also venture to enable people to leave the Valley in search of more economic opportunities. This includes identifying highly talented youth and assist with searching for and applying for bursaries and financial aid. It is important to emphasise that the GDA will actively pursue inclusive projects in order to not only create jobs, but also ensure people are included in the gains of investment. There are myriad opportunities that can be developed in the region. However, projects complimentary to the economy of the Valley have the highest probability of success. This includes the expansion of agriculture projects, tourism, agri-processing, construction (housing), training, light industrial and services.

GDA funding

Funding for the GDA is raised from a variety of businesses including players in the agriculture, agri-processing and transportation industries. Through the efforts of Dr Greg Mills of the Brenthurst Foundation, a powerful board made up of local and national experts and businessmen was established under the Chairmanship of former deputy finance minister Mcebisi Jonas. The GDA does not represent any political party nor the exclusive interest of the funders. Funding the GDA enables it to achieve the operational requirements of a development agency, whilst reducing the overheads of each project. Funds will be allocated to the development of feasibility studies and related promotional material, salaries and creating marketing content to attract further investment to the area. The funding will not be used for any project investments. Project investments will come from private (or public) sector interest in profitable projects. The GDA is not involved in philanthropic projects but can in specific cases assist in those projects which are aligned to its mission.

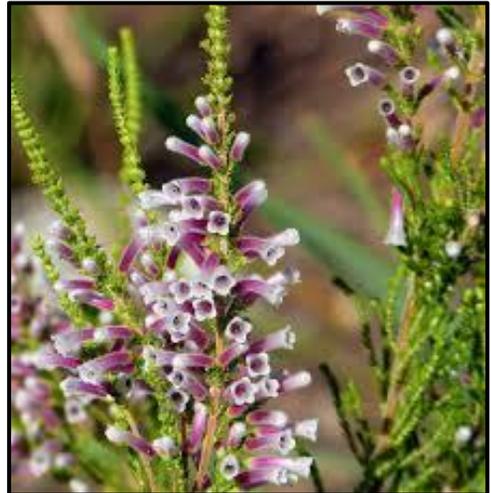
Other partners and stakeholders

Key participants include government (at all levels), private sector, educational institutions, NGOs, relevant local bodies and international donors. The GDA will interact and lobby these partners as is required. The GDA will work closely with local agencies such as the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve Company (KBRC) that manages the UNESCO designated Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve where sustainable development and the UNESCO 17 SDGs are high priority. Focusing strongly on environmentally sustainable projects will allow the GDA to unlock international donor and development funding and thereby promote those projects with a strong empowerment and conservation goal.

Erica perspicua – Prince of Wales heath

The Kogelberg Biosphere is well known for its plant diversity, with ericas being plentiful, and amongst them the *Erica perspicua*, which is the most well known.

This is an erect shrub growing to a height of about 1 m or more, and flowering from February to June. The flowers, which are tubular, vary in colour from white through pink and white, red and white, dark red or purple and white, to uniform red. It is found in marshes and vleis at low altitudes and is very common from Betty's Bay through to Hermanus on the Cape coast. It is pollinated by birds, bees and other insects.



Pink and white *Erica perspicua*.
Image from SANBI.

Erica perspicua acquired its common name (Prince of Wales heath) from its resemblance to the plumes on the crest of the Prince of Wales' coat of arms.



Erica perspicua in marsh area. Image from SANBI.

Winter days are not for staying inside but for being outside!

During the month of May, Contour Enviro Group's Environmental Education team, together with CapeNature staff, conducted a guided hike at Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve. This involved young adults and learners from Kleinbegin who are currently involved with the Leadership programme being run by Alfra Cox and Babalwa Hopa at Kleinbegin Community Centre in Grabouw.

The outing afforded 25 young adults the unique opportunity to be out and about in nature, discovering and learning all there is to know about fynbos diversity and Western Cape ecosystems. The learners were given the opportunity to visit and hike at CapeNature's Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve, a first time for some of them. The participants hiked the full 5km Palmiet trail in the rain. But none of them complained or wanted to turn back. The experience gave the learners a chance to test their own limitations in an outdoor setting.



Participants hiking the Palmiet Trail.
Image supplied by Catherine Kuhn.

We covered a range of topics including biodiversity of the Western Cape, fauna and flora, fynbos diversity, fire ecology, predator-prey relationships, geology, threats to biodiversity including alien vegetation, human encroachment, and the harmful effects of inhumane practices such as illegal wire snaring.



Participants educated about conservation.
Image supplied by Catherine Kuhn.

In March the H2O Leadership Group of Kleinmond run by Jackie Jacobs hiked the Three Sisters Trail of about 12km to reach the mountain peak of 634m above sea level. Through mist, rain and heavy wind the 11 teenagers enjoyed the adventure and learned about biodiversity and conservation.



Participants being educated about biodiversity and conservation.

Image supplied by Jackie Jacobs.

Most of what the young participants encountered on these programmes were firsts and we hope that through this experience, these aspiring young leaders will begin to see nature through a different lens. We try to inspire a love for nature whilst bringing across the message of conservation. It is not only the environment that is negatively affected by poor land-use practices and unsustainable and harmful practices that affect ecosystem functions, but we as humans also suffer. Therefore, it is imperative that more young people begin to realise that we benefit from healthy functioning ecosystems.

Both programmes formed part of the 50th anniversary of the UNESCO MAB Programme. We hope to conduct many more environmentally focused initiatives with the learners in the Kogelberg Biosphere.



Participants hiking the Three Sisters Trail.

Image supplied by Jackie Jacobs.

Are mole rats engineers?

The common mole rat is a burrowing rodent found in Southern Africa, particular in the Western Cape. They can range in size of 10 – 16 cm long with a tail of 1.2cm to 3.8 cm in length. They have ungrooved chisel-like incisors that are used for digging as well as feeding and fighting.

They are social animals living in small groups of up to ten in a burrow. Mole rats are herbivorous and through their digging and mounding activities, these animals change both the chemical and physical soil properties which in turn modifies plant characteristics.



Common Mole Rat and mound of soil excavated.
Images from iNaturalist.

The mean volume of mound soil excavated by these small animals is 1470cm³, ranging between 57 – 81g in size. These mounds can cover close to 39% of the ground within landscapes which classify them as ecosystem engineers.

For more information:

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