

NEWSFLASH #8: MANDELA MONTH CLEAR RIVERS CLEAN-UP MATATIELE, JULY 2017

On Friday 28th July, as part of their **68 minutes for Mandela** and 2017 **Clear Rivers Campaign**, 68 Life Sciences learners (grades 10 and 11) from FocusEd and King Edward high schools in Matatiele voluntarily tackled a stretch of river in the town, which runs through the western part of the suburbs from the Matatiele Nature Reserve. This river was cleaned up and monitored for river health indicators last year by local schools, and the participants looked forward to monitoring again using citizen science methods, hoping to find an improved situation.



To their horror, instead of finding a clean flowing river, they found a deteriorated situation: dozens of bags of disposable nappies and other personal hygiene items were clogging up the river, along with hundreds of plastic bottles and lids, shopping bags, old shoes, cardboard, tins, cigarette packets and chip packets. In total the group collected over 80 garbage bags of junk: nearly 55 of these were recyclable materials (plastic and paper, cardboard, tin and glass), which were collected by local recycling agent **umAfrika**, owned and managed by Zimasa and Thokozani Ndlela, who have been converting waste to wealth in Matatiele for the last 6 years, and making a good living from their small business, including supporting their four children through school. Zimasa joined the clean-up day, and encouraged the kids to think **#waste2wealth**.

The learners were saddened to find that local residents have been dumping in the river, and suggested a door-to-door awareness campaign together with the local municipality. Matatiele was once a finalist in the Cleanest Town awards for several years running, and this is achievable once more with increased awareness and responsibility by the citizens of Sweet Matat, in collaboration with the Local Municipality. Discussions with the Matatiele Municipality in response to the clean-up findings are helping both UCPP roleplayers and the Municipality to more cost-effectively address the water quality issues in the area, through improved collaboration for innovative recycling and waste management action.

This is the seventh water awareness event arranged by the locally based **uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership Programme (UCPP)** since early 2015 in the Matatiele area. This is a vital part of securing the upper catchment of the uMzimvubu river basin as a Strategic Water Source Area (SWSA), one of 22 around the country. These SWSAs form only 8% of the country's surface, and yet they provide over 50% of our national water supply. Healthy catchments help to buffer against extreme events such as floods and droughts. Their conservation is thus critical as we move into uncertain times of climate change and unknown rainfall patterns. Youngsters participating in these events are inspired to become citizen water ambassadors through increased understanding of the challenges and how to tackle them.



The event was co-ordinated by the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership in collaboration with the Matatiele Local Municipality, with support from the WWF Nedbank Green Trust, managed by local NGO Environmental & Rural Solutions (ERS). Facilitation was provided by Eastern Cape Parks & Tourism (ECPA), Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), Dept Environmental Affairs (DEDEAT), Transkinira Community Trust and ERS.