

NEWSFLASH #14: WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

#beatplasticpollution RIVER CLEAN-UP

MATATIELE, JUNE 2018

In celebration of the World Environment day that takes place annually on the 5th June, UCPP partners celebrated the event on the 19th June 2018 with a river clean up event focusing on this years' theme **#beatplasticpollution**. The theme contemplates to make awareness on the impacts of plastic pollution on the environment especially that they end on the aquatic life. About 58 (grade 10 and 11) learners from local schools i.e. King Edward high and St Monicas Diocesan School, who were filled with ambition to learn more and making a difference voluntarily cleaned a stretch of a river just below St Monicas School in Matatiele town, which runs from the mountains, under a bridge under the busy R56 road, and through a residential area. Students were divided into their respective groups that they got to name, each with a facilitator who guided them to clean a section of the stream. Students were provided with brief about the event and its purpose, linked with World Enviro Day, as well as with cleaning equipment such as dust masks, gloves, aprons and steel pick-up sticks to maintain hygiene. They then ventured to their different river sections and started the clean-up, while doing citizen science experiments along the way, miniSASS (determining aquatic life), temperature and sediment load.



This was followed by session of group feedback, where each group gave results of the above experiments, views of how to influence communities to effectively play their part against plastic pollution, and suggested ways for people to start respecting and complying with the municipal by-laws, especially where there are "no dumping" signs but people still dump... how do we start educating people around protecting our valuable water resources.

Within two hours, students managed collect about 22 bags of litter that were separated into recyclable and non-recyclable waste, and identified problems the stream is facing, and solutions to beat plastic pollution. The main factor they found was pollution as a result of the illegal dumping sites in town. They reported a number of alien plants, soil erosion around the banks and lack of indigenous plants in the area. They believe that if the municipality enforces stricter laws against pollution through fines, providing recycling options and more bins around town, and educating communities about the effects of pollution, as well as secure dumping sites to lessen the pollution.



Students indicated that they found the event a wonderful experience, as they were given an opportunity to make a change in their own town, and the activity supports their curriculum and correlates with what teachers constantly tell them at school: that they are the future of the world and a clean environment starts with them.