



PROMOTING A GREEN ECONOMY IN THE MARICO RIVER CATCHMENT

22 March 2016

Start

Today is World Water Day, and the Endangered Wildlife Trust is embarking on a new project to empower Groot Marico's emerging farmers, working alongside them to promote conservation agriculture and water use efficiency in the arid, water-stressed Marico River Catchment area of the North West Province. This is a unique catchment and one of the National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas of South Africa. The headwaters of the Marico River are one of the few remaining free-flowing stretches of river in the country, making this a river of national importance due to its good condition and high biodiversity and cultural value. Groot Marico is also known as 'Bosman Country', as it is in this picturesque tourist attraction that author Herman Charles Bosman set most of his stories.

The Marico River supplies water to the town of Groot Marico, the commercial farmlands downstream of the town, and the traditional communities, including Koffiekraal, Uitkyk and Pachtsdraai as well as to Gaborone through the Tswasa Agreement. It is also the headwaters of the Limpopo Basin and is currently under severe pressure due to the country-wide drought. The Endangered Wildlife Trust, working in partnership with the Koffiekraal Community Property Association and the African Pride Nature Conservation Association, will not only target emerging farmers but will also empower women and youth in the surrounding traditional communities, training individuals in a range of skills, from eco-agriculture to financial management, incorporating IT and business skills into the training sessions to ensure that they are able to actively participate in the local economy.

Bridget Corrigan, Manager of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Source to Sea Programme, explains the importance of the project. "The project was named: *A Re Itireleng* which translates to 'Let's do it ourselves' in Setswana by a local community focus group in the spirit of empowerment and independence. It is very much a community-led approach to enhancing sustainable water management and green economy for the benefit of people and the environment in the Marico River Catchment. This project will provide communities with much-needed skills to address the risks they face from climate change, and will ultimately improve their livelihoods. Our primary focus is to co-create climate change adaptation strategies which will be developed through on-farm demonstration and experimentation. This will include conservation agriculture practices including rain water harvesting, suitable crop selection, permaculture and the facilitation of mentorship and market linkages."

We recognise the need for active collaboration in order to tackle freshwater conservation issues holistically. This project is a collaboration that brings together relevant skill sets, expertise and experience and maximises conservation impact in an area that is often

overlooked. In an effort to address the challenges of food and water security, as well as increasing human populations coupled with very limited access to economic opportunities, the project aims to protect and manage this key river catchment while at the same time stimulating change in conservation perceptions and driving local green economies. By combining conservation with education, business development and healthcare; we work towards a shared vision for the catchment and its communities.

The project had its conception in August 2015 and will span 5 years. It is currently supported by the Foundation for Human Rights and the Elizabeth Wakeman Henderson Charitable Foundation.

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