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African Conservation Trust Tackles Soil Erosion to Protect Water Supply

BY STAFF WRITER [@GOODTHINGSUY](#) MARCH 22, 2024



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Many parts of South Africa's landscape are scarred by evidence of soil erosion, but the African Conservation Trust is working to change that.

KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (22 March 2024) – The KwaZulu-Natal-based NGO, the African Conservation Trust (ACT), continues conserving important freshwater sources in the province. As World Water Day falls on the 22 March, Francois du Toit, CEO of ACT, says it is an opportune time to reflect on project gains.

The purpose of World Water Day is to raise awareness of those with no safe drinking water and to promote the goal of clean water and sanitation for all. In the foothills of the Drakensberg mountains, teams of Social Employment Fund (SEF) participants work to mitigate soil erosion and sedimentation in nearby rivers, which ultimately safeguards water quality in a key watershed and catchment area for KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

Controlling soil erosion improves water quality in several ways – by reducing sediment runoff which clouds the water and degrades its quality; through retaining nutrients in the soil to prevent excessive levels accumulating in the water, causing eutrophication, leading to fish kills and algal blooms; by protecting infrastructure such as reservoirs, treatment facilities, and pipelines from damage; and protecting riparian zones (areas next to waterways), helping to stabilise river banks.

Du Toit adds, “Dam siltation is a critical issue for South Africa, with various dams losing between 25 to 50% of their water-holding capacity since construction, to date. There are major environmental and infrastructure costs involved in new dam construction and the country cannot afford to lose capacity at this alarming rate.”

The African Conservation Trust is a Strategic Implementing partner (SIP) for the Social Employment Fund, which is managed by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). SEF Participants work on projects for the common good of the country. In the amaNgwane and amaZizi Traditional

Authority Areas, participants build erosion barriers across deep gullies, preventing sediment from accumulating in nearby waterways and decreasing dam capacity.

Du Toit recently accompanied Bhavanesh Parbhoo (IDC Programme Manager) and Dumisani Gumede (IDC Senior Account Manager) to the amaNgwane Traditional Authority project site, near Cathedral Peak, to assess the progress.

“The 250 participants, divided into 12 teams, spend four days collecting rocks and cutting alien invasive trees, and the next four days creating erosion barriers, in an ongoing cycle. The erosion barriers comprise plant material and suitably sized rocks. Soil collects behind the barriers as it washes down from higher ground, filling the depressions. Some gullies are 10 meters deep,” says du Toit.



The method works effectively in the steep terrain, rehabilitating the landscape and forming a bridge for residents and livestock. Landscape restoration is important as the erosion gullies decrease the available land for agriculture and livestock grazing, in addition to affecting water quality.

The black wattle plants, used to construct the erosion walls, are plentiful and are provided by a parallel alien plant-eradication project. However, the demanding environment leads to extreme challenges. Suitable rock is scarce in the amaZizi area, necessitating tractor transport to the location. High summer temperatures, the difficult terrain, and the remote location of some sites push the SEF participants to their physical limits.

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An impressive 9400 m² of erosion control was implemented in the latter part of 2023, and the SEF participants continue protecting two of our country's most valuable assets – soil and water.

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