



Fenceline contrast between restored and degraded thicket, Eastern Cape

RESTORING LANDSCAPES IN SOUTH AFRICA (ReLISA)

Project name:

Restoring Landscapes in South Africa: Nature-based solutions for climate, biodiversity and people

Short name:

ReLISA

Funding:

EUR 14,989,360 funded by German Federal Ministry for the Environment Nature Conservation Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), through the International Climate Initiative (IKI)

Duration:

Five years
November 2024 - October 2029

Country:



South Africa

Biomes:

South Africa's terrestrial ecosystem extent:



18%
Grasslands



28%
Savanna



3%
Thicket

Thematic focus:

- Ecosystem restoration
- Land degradation neutrality
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction
- Biodiversity conservation and protected area expansion
- Gender equality
- Strategic water source areas
- Just transition and green jobs
- Monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV)
- Private sector investment mobilization

SDGs:



Background

Millions of hectares in biomes which are key for climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and livelihoods in South Africa have been degraded by unsustainable livestock, agriculture and mining practices. These degraded areas now face increasing pressure from drought and fires, bush encroachment and unprecedented spread of invasive alien plants. A significant upscaling of ecosystem restoration is needed for effective climate change adaptation and to address the country's water crisis and biodiversity loss, whilst enhancing the resilience and livelihoods of rural communities in a gender-responsive manner.

Most restoration initiatives, however, lack coordination and are limited both in overall scope and the involvement of the private sector. As a result, restoration has not reached the required scale to reverse degradation and restore vital ecosystem services. Technical, financial and policy bottlenecks need to be addressed comprehensively to allow for the just, transformative change of the land use sector that South Africa aspires to, leveraging different financial mechanisms and laying the ground for the ecological restoration at landscape level, while recognizing socio-cultural context and land tenure systems.

Key indicators by project end



100,000 ha of degraded areas in **grasslands, savannas** and **thicket** biomes are under **restoration** in strategic key water catchments.



Restoration and conservation of the three biomes is upscaled through mobilizing **3rd party funding** (private sector and suitable multilateral funding programs).

Objectives

The objective of ReLISA is to address the degradation of grassland, savanna and thicket biomes in South Africa by making the economic case for restoration and creating the enabling conditions essential to mobilise investment at scale.

The intended outcome is that proven nature-based restoration solutions are implemented in grasslands, savannas and thicket biomes, through closing data gaps on socio-economic and environmental impacts, Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV), impact monitoring, and leveraging finance from different private and public sources. Through transformational, gender-responsive, large-scale restoration, ReLISA will contribute to South Africa's sustainable economic development, land degradation neutrality, climate and biodiversity targets and global development goals, including the SDGs, Rio Conventions and UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. ReLISA will also enhance the provision of vital ecosystem services – in particular hydrological services, carbon sequestration, soil health and biodiversity – and enhance livelihoods of local communities and farmers in strategic water source and other priority areas.



Samson Phakathi, a community engagement specialist and one of EWT's longest serving field officers, surveying the Drakensberg Foothills

Approach

ReLISA's core approach is to upscale investments by creating the basis for restoration at scale through e.g. natural capital assessment in savanna, grassland, and thicket biomes, while simultaneously developing targeted restoration strategies and bankable projects for specific sites. This will be achieved through:

- Generating evidence on the costs and benefits of restoration through biophysical modeling and economic valuation of ecosystem services. This includes analyzing socio-economic indicators to identify areas with the highest returns on investment as well as opportunities to reduce social, gender and income inequalities
- Preparing the groundwork for investors through pre-feasibility studies, assessment of potential sites, pilot demonstrations and the development of bankable restoration projects
- Establishing the enabling conditions for investment via a range of private sector investment mechanisms, including: voluntary carbon markets (VCM); biodiversity credits; climate, community and biodiversity credits (CCB), water funds and payment for ecosystem service (PES) schemes
- Consulting with diverse stakeholders (communities, farmers, investors, authorities) to gain buy-in and create 'readiness' for restoration interventions
- Providing demonstration effects via implementation of direct landscape-level interventions and on-the-ground via restoration activities
- Developing targeted capacity building for service providers, farmers, communities and restoration practitioners on how to implement restoration protocols in a cost-effective manner
- Establishing a new biosphere reserve
- Enhancing South Africa's Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) and carbon reporting system
- Implementing a gender action plan that includes strategies to consult with women and ensure participation in project decisions; specific activities targeting training of women and communication of women's role in restoration

Consortium Partners

The ReLISA Consortium comprises national and international organisations with expertise in the domain of ecosystem restoration.

Lead:

- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Partners:

- Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) (www.csir.co.za)
- The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) (www.ewt.org.za)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (www.undp.org)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (www.unesco.org)
- C4 EcoSolutions (C4ES) (<http://c4es.co.za/>)
- Unique land use GmbH (Unique) (<https://www.unique-landuse.de>)

Project Steering Committee


The Project Steering Committee is comprised of key policy stakeholders who will be regularly consulted about project activities and progress, including:

- Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME)
- Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE)
- South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)
- Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA)

Supported by:



based on a decision of the German Bundestag

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