

Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) Small Grants Programme



The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) Small Grants Programme is supporting organisations involved in conservation on the Agulhas Plain. The ABI Small Grants Programme is supported by the Table Mountain Fund, an associated Trust of WWF-South Africa. Through the Programme, funding of up to R20,000 is being provided to community-based projects. The aim of the programme is to bring about local action in conservation through community involvement. However, a key part of this is to raise awareness of these conservation initiatives at municipal level helping to focus local Integrated Development Plans on the needs of the rural areas.

To date, ABI has supported eight projects through the programme. The programme has one more year to run. The projects selected must also link up to one or more of ABI's four themes. The themes according to which ABI runs are: Integrated Land-Use Planning; Responsible Tourism; Transitioning to a Green Economy and Environmental Education.

The projects being supported include the Whale Coast Frog Project, where citizen scientists from local communities are being upskilled to monitor frog populations. The project is implemented by the Whale Coast Conservation. It has allowed young people from across the Overstrand to collect crucial data on the types of frogs found in the wetland areas around the Hermanus Golf Course. The frog monitoring project will now be taken to new areas, such as Stanford, which is home to the endangered Western Leopard Toad. Crucially, the presence of frogs is also an indication of the health of the wetlands in which they're found.

The Greyton Transition Town, also a beneficiary of the ABI Small Grants Programme, is a community-based non-profit organisation that is bringing communities in and around Greyton together to respond to environmental, economic and social challenges. The group is undertaking projects that are

creating employment through environmental businesses, protecting the natural environment and implementing food security and waste management activities.

Through the Greyton Transition Town, the Greyton dump site was converted into a park where environmental education is now offered. The community now hopes to make Greyton the first town in South Africa to phase out plastic shopping bags. The Greyton Transition Town is one of many similar initiatives being rolled out across the world.

A third project aims to bring practical learning support to rural and farm schools, through a Mobile Laboratory unit. ABI's environmental education theme leader, Gretha Louw, is making use of laboratory equipment to ensure children in primary schools across the Overberg receive practical learning opportunities. The aim is to develop interests in life science and environmental learning through practical experimentation.

In the second year, the Programme selected five new projects. In the first project, by introducing ACE Biomass Cooking Stoves, the Skills Exchange Cooperative aims to use biomass from the chopped aliens in the project. The cooking stoves burn the wood, twigs and pellets well. The stoves will be made available to families. This project will also create an additional micro-industry for wood contractors.

A second project that has been approved facilitates a Masters student at the University of Cape Town to document the practices and discourses of landowners involved in the ABI Alien Clearing Project. The aim is to better understand the conservation and sustainability efforts of the landowners, and community communication and perspectives of these landowners on conservation practices.

Two projects provide environmental education support. The Dibanisa Environmental Education Programme, run by the Grootbos Foundation, encourages after-school edutainment that combines sport and natural education excursions, to promote environmental appreciation. Children learn

about the environment through fun and practical ways, while cultivating a love for nature.

The Whale Coast Conservation's project, Stripes the Eco-Cat, also introduces children from an early age to environmental conservation concepts. The stories are told by a naïve and uninformed cat that offers conservation messages to children. The stories are aimed at children who use English as a second or third language.

And the Nuwejaars River Nature Reserve is working to promote the unique biodiversity of the Agulhas Plain, in an effort to boost the number of tourists to the region. The project also seeks to create additional job opportunities linked to responsible tourism and conservation.

The third phase of the ABI Small Grants Facility will be launched in 2015, when new projects will be encouraged to apply for funding.

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