



**GEF 8 Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega
Living Landscapes Project (GEF ID: 11347)**

**Annex F – Environmental and Social Management Framework &
Process Framework & Social Inclusion Planning Framework**

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List of Acronyms

ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
ESMP	Environmental and Social Management Plan
ESS	Environmental and Social Safeguards
ESSF	Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework
FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
IPP	Indigenous Peoples Plan
IPPF	Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework
LRP	Livelihood Restoration Plan
PAP	Project Affected People
PF	Process Framework
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
SIPF	Social Inclusion Planning Framework
SIPP	Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

1. Introduction

The “Mega Living Landscapes” (MLLs) are envisioned in South Africa as large-scale, interconnected expanses of landscape incorporating a mosaic of land uses, including biodiversity conservation, restoration, and biodiversity-sensitive production, and in which all people who live and work in the landscape are engaged in managing them wisely and benefiting from doing so. These MLLs form the heart of SANParks’ recently launched Vision 2040 (See Box 1) and will be a central pillar of South Africa’s Biodiversity Economy, as laid out in the recently approved White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa’s Biodiversity.

Vision 2040 encapsulates a transformational shift in the approach to the establishment and management of National Parks and biodiversity conservation in general, which will bridge the gaps that still exist between communities and conservation and herald a new era in which South Africans are interconnected with nature and invested in its protection and restoration.

Box 1 – Vision 2040

SANParks Vision 2040 is the result of a 2 year-long, highly consultative process led by the SANParks Board and management. It is a dynamic, reimagined conservation vision for achieving South Africa’s targets under the Kunming-Montreal Protocol 30 X 30 target, in which National Parks and other protected and other effectively conserved landscapes are connected across broad swathes of landscape – called Mega Living Landscapes – where nature and cultural heritage flourish and where people live in harmony with nature. Under this Vision, National Parks serve as the core that anchors, sustains and nurtures these expansive areas, that supports the physical well-being, economic prosperity, social cohesion, and spiritual enrichment of the South African nation. Key tenets of the Vision are that:

- Conservation areas will shift from being islands that exclude people (“fortress conservation”) to expansive, connected stretches of land incorporating a diversity of natural resources, wildlife and wild lands, in which people use the proceeds of nature wisely and cultural heritage is safeguarded.
- All South Africans have a stake in conservation and will tangibly benefit by protecting landscapes and species, through greater connectedness with nature, economic opportunities and enhanced resilience.
- National Parks become anchors for vibrant socio-economic development and job creation, natural centres for learning, research and human capital development, and levers for unlocking sponsorship and funding.
- Traditional Leaders are custodians of indigenous knowledge and guide and facilitate participation of communities in MLLs, shaping content and benefits that underpin collaboration with other role players.

The SANParks Mega Living Landscape Initiative – catalysed by the GEF-funded MLL and Global Biodiversity Framework Fund projects - will assist in breaking the barriers blocking both the expansion of protected areas to secure critical biodiversity areas and cultural heritage and people-centred, nature-based development that benefits local communities and drives a sustainable, biodiversity economy by building on innovations that combine science, technology and human capital. The initiative will create Mega Living Landscapes (MLL) that contribute to the realisation of a dynamic, reimagined national conservation vision for South Africa that will become an integral part of the country’s sustainable development and nature-based economic future, resulting in thriving people and nature.

Box 2 – Defining the concept of Mega Living Landscapes

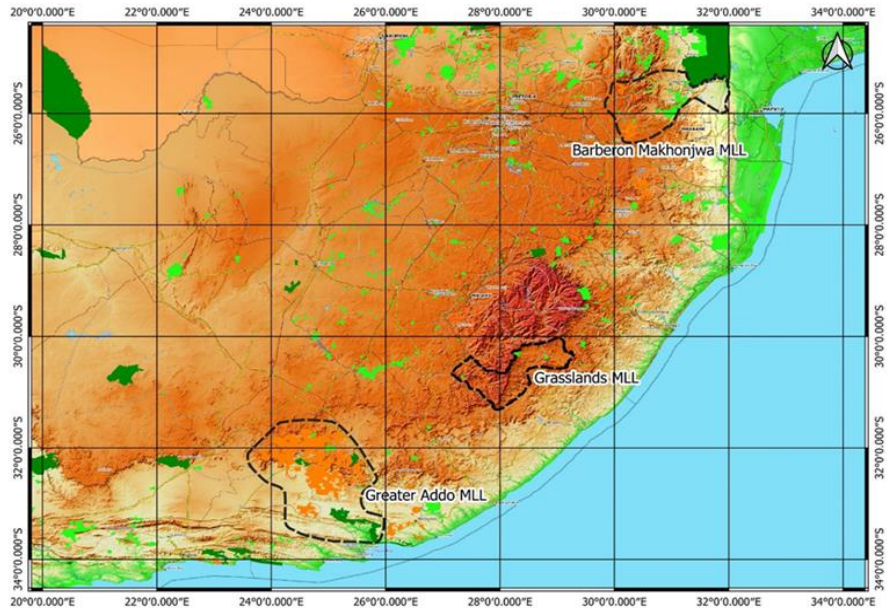
Mega Living Landscapes: SANParks has, based on science, identified eight large areas in the country where it seeks to catalyse the establishment of Mega Living Landscapes, which it defines as follows:

- “Mega” thinking at larger scale.
- “Living” people and nature going co-existing together harmoniously.
- “Landscape” different elements like land and water, biodiversity, livelihoods and heritage can be included as parts of the whole.

1.1. One integrated Mega Living Landscape Initiative encompassing two projects.

The MLL initiative will establish three MLLs (Greater Addo; Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa); and Grasslands) through two projects: 1) GEF 8 funded *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes* Project (GEF ID 11347); and 2) GBFF funded *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Leveraging Durable Financing Mechanisms for Mega Living Landscapes (MLL) to achieve Target 3 in South Africa* (GEF ID: 11588).

The MLL initiative will impact at three levels within the MLLs, with SANParks and nationally. Within the three MLLs targeted sites, the quality of life of local people and communities will improve. Further, additional land for biodiversity conservation will be secured while progressively, biodiversity loss will reverse and improve ecosystem functioning, which delivers valuable ecological services. For SANParks, MLL implementation lessons from the pilot will inform the establishment of five new MLLs, which aim to double the 4.6 million hectares SANParks currently protects and conserves. Nationally, cumulative learnings and insights gained from these three MLLs will inform the future model for the design and development of MLLs and demonstrate an “all-of-society” approach to undertaking sustainable development.



Map 1 – The three MLL sites

The establishment and, hence, financing of Mega Living Landscapes (MLLs) lies at the core of South Africa’s response to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework’s Target 3, aiming to conserve 30% of the world’s terrestrial, inland water, and coastal landscapes by 2030 - popularly referred to as the 30 x 30 target (GBF Target 3). This means expanding SA’s conservation lands by an additional 14 million hectares as a vast network of interconnected, ecologically representative and economically vibrant areas, with national parks and other effectively conserved areas connected, wisely managed and sustainably used by South Africans.

This GEF project is focused on building durable financing for the three MLLs - a) the Greater Addo stretching from the coastal town of Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) from the Addo National Park (and its adjacent marine protected area) inland to join up with the Mountain Zebra National Park near the town of Craddock and the Camdeboo National Park surrounding the town of Graaff Reinet, all in the Eastern Cape Province; b) Greater Kruger (Barberton/Makhonjwa) which stretches from near the town of Barberton to south of the Kruger National Park in the Mpumalanga Province; and c) the Eastern Grasslands which encompasses the formal declaration of Grasslands National Park in the Eastern Cape highlands.

The **Project Objective** is stated as follows:

By 2030, we aim to have pioneered the establishment of three groundbreaking Mega Living Landscapes (MLLs) that will conserve 2 million hectares of biodiversity-rich land through innovative contractual and collaborative partnerships, which will simultaneously foster sustainable economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs, focusing predominantly on women and youth, elevate socio-economic empowerment via enterprise and skills development, build robust conservation management institutions, and bolster the conservation capacity and skills of partner organizations, thereby concretely demonstrating the transformative potential of the MLL concept.

The project has the following components with associated outcomes:

Project Component 1: Creating sustainable MLL institutional mechanisms and governance structures

1.1 MLLs established through inclusive institutional and governance structures (MLL Hubs), vision and planning frameworks.

1.2 Capabilities of SANParks, MLL governance members and management teams, local community leadership increased for effective management of MLL.

Project Component 2: Fostering and enhancing sustainable economic opportunities & socio-economic empowerment

2.1 Increased biodiversity-positive sustainable socio-economic empowerment and development, owned by local stakeholders and benefiting local communities in the 3 MLLs

Project Component 3: Improving Inclusive Conservation in the MLLs.

3.1. Increased area of PAs newly created, and area of existing PAs with improved effective management, delivered through a new inclusive and collaborative conservation model in the 3 MLLs

Project Component 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

4.1 Increased awareness & enhanced conservation knowledge and practices amongst SANParks, MLL partners and local communities on inclusive conservation topics and experiences in the 3 MLLs.

1.2. Environmental and Social Safeguards: Risk Category and Applicable Standards

The GEF requires that all projects comply with the environmental and social standards and safeguards policies of the applicable GEF Implementing Agency. In developing the project's environmental and social safeguards architecture, the WWF Environmental and Social Safeguards Risk Framework (ESSF) and its supporting Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) have been applied, also taking into consideration national regulatory and policy instruments that may be applicable. Regarding the Environmental and Social Safeguards risk categorisation, the project falls within Category B under the WWF SIPP due to the project's location, the nature of the project activities, and the types of potential impacts these might have on people and the environment. Category B applies to projects that could have moderate possible adverse effects, which can be effectively avoided, minimised or mitigated through effective design or the development of targeted social and environmental impact assessments and management plans.

The project's safeguards architecture includes this Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), which incorporates a Process Framework and Social Inclusion Planning Framework. It is supplemented by a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) and Gender Action Plan (GAP).

Through the application of the Safeguards Screening Tool under the WWF ESSF, it has been determined that impacts are expected under the following Standards (as per the WWF Social and Environmental Safeguards: Integrated Policies and Procedures): Protection of Natural Habitats and Community Health and Security. Risks and impacts associated with these Standards will be addressed through targeted social and environmental impact assessments (in line with WWF SIPP requirements and any relevant national regulatory instruments), with mitigations built into Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) or achieved through the application of established procedures and best-practices (e.g. procedures for achieving voluntary consent for bringing land under conservation management under the SA Biodiversity Stewardship approach).

Depending on the exact location and nature of site-based activities (to be fully elaborated during the implementation phase), the following Standards may also apply: Involuntary Resettlement¹ and Restriction of Access, Cultural Resources, and Pest Management. Once sites are selected, communities are consulted, and activities are designed, screening and assessment of these types of impacts will be carried out during early implementation.

Further, the Standards on Stakeholder Engagement, Public Consultation and Disclosure, and Accountability and Grievance Redress apply. The project has developed a Stakeholder Engagement Plan; all ESS documentation will be publicly disclosed to communities and CSOs, and a project-level Grievance Redress Mechanism will be implemented².

The project's ESMF describes the steps and procedures for conducting further risk assessments and developing appropriate management plans.

The WWF Standard on Indigenous Peoples has not been triggered, and an Indigenous Peoples Plan has not been developed since the project landscapes do not include communities that fit the concept of indigenous people, ethnic or tribal minorities. However, many Local Communities³, several of whom are vulnerable or marginalised, live in the project landscapes. To ensure that the rights and interests of all project-affected communities are meaningfully addressed (including different land-user collectives, traditional leaders, indigenous knowledge groups, indigent communities, and other social groupings) a Social Inclusion Planning Framework (SIPF) has been prepared as part of the project's ESMF. This SIPF provides guidance to ensure that communities are actively engaged in culturally appropriate ways and are meaningfully consulted in determining the comprehensive community engagement strategy to be followed during implementation and involved in the co-design of project activities. If during site-based screenings and assessments, it is determined that there are communities that fit the concept of Indigenous people present in a landscape (e.g. Khoi-San), then steps and procedures consistent with the requirements under WWF's Standard on Indigenous People and the WWF Network's Policy on Indigenous Peoples and Conservation: WWF Statement of Principles, and any applicable national

¹ Note that the WWF Standard on Involuntary Resettlement incorporates both physical resettlement and restrictions on access to resources. While no involuntary resettlement is expected in this project (and GEF resources cannot support activities leading to involuntary resettlement), restriction of access to resources may result when areas are brought under more regulated biodiversity management or land-use.

² The GRM will not replace any national-level grievance redress systems but will need to align with the WWF Project Complaints Resolution Policy so that WWF, as the nominated GEF Agency, can meet its accountability requirements to the donor.

³ Please note that use of the acronym IPLC has been avoided in this document to avoid conflating the needs and interests of indigenous peoples (who have distinct origins and development histories, governance concepts and customary rights – collective and individual) with those of other, unspecified local communities, which are not homogenous in nature. Local Communities stand at the core of the project's strategy as key agents of change for driving the transformational vision and actions needed to catalyze MLLs as the vehicles of the SANParks Vision 2040.

policies and standards, will be followed. These include applying Free, Prior and Informed Consent and the development of an Indigenous Peoples' Plan before impact-causing activities are implemented.

A yearly ESS screening process will be undertaken as part of the development of the Annual Work Plan to ensure that project safeguards, including consultation and consent processes, are followed. The ESS screening tool is included as **Appendix 1** to this ESMF.

1.3. Objective of the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)

This ESMF has been prepared per requirements of the WWF's Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF) and in line with guidance and procedures described in WWF's Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) Manual to identify and manage the environmental and social risks and impacts of the "*GEF 8 Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project (GEF ID: 11347)*" project. Since the precise scope and exact location of project activities will only be determined during the implementation phase, site-specific social and environmental impacts can only be estimated at this stage (based on currently available information). This also means that the development of site-specific Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) is presently not feasible, and an ESMF is necessary to set out principles, procedures and mitigation measures for addressing potential adverse social and environmental impacts that may occur during the project implementation. Site-specific audits, assessments, and management plans will be developed according to the guidance provided in this ESMF per the WWF ESSF and in alignment with applicable laws and regulations of South Africa.

The specific objectives of the ESMF are to:

- Conduct preliminary identification (e.g., audit or screening) of the positive and negative social and environmental impacts and risks associated with implementing the Project, including any SEAH risks.
- Outline the legal and regulatory framework relevant to Project implementation and management of potential social and environmental impacts.
- Specify appropriate roles and responsibilities of actors and parties involved in ESMF implementation.
- Propose preliminary recommendations and measures to mitigate any adverse impacts and enhance positive ones.
- Develop a screening and assessment methodology for potential activities that will allow the classification of environmental/social risks and the identification of appropriate safeguard instruments.
- Set out procedures to establish mechanisms to monitor the implementation and efficacy of the proposed mitigation measures and
- Outline requirements related to disclosure, grievance redress, capacity-building activities, and budget required to implement the ESMF.

1.4.Objective of the Process Framework (PF)

The project does not involve the resettlement of communities. Establishing Protected and Conservation Areas may result in communities experiencing some restrictions in terms of access and livelihoods. However, this is not anticipated considering the options provided through NEM: PAA and the available Biodiversity Stewardship approaches. The Project, therefore, triggers WWF's Standard on Access Restriction and Resettlement⁴ with caution. This Process Framework (PF) describes the process by which affected communities will proactively participate in identifying, designing, implementing and monitoring relevant project activities and mitigation measures. This PF aims to ensure the participation and consent of Project Affected People (PAP) while recognising and protecting their rights and interests and ensuring that they do not become worse off due to the project. Specifically, the PF will:

- Describe activities that may involve new or more stringent restrictions on use of natural resources in the project area.
- Establish the mechanism through which local communities can contribute to the project design, implementation and monitoring.
- Identify the potential negative impacts of the restriction on the surrounding communities, including any gendered differences or SEAH risks associated with access restriction or differing uses of natural resources.
- Specify the criteria for eligibility of economically displaced persons to receive compensation benefits and development assistance (no physical displacement will be allowed under this project or any WWF project).
- Describe the mitigation measures required to assist the economically displaced persons in their efforts to improve their livelihoods, or at least to restore them, in real terms, while maintaining the sustainability of the three Mega Living Landscapes, will be identified.
- Describe the grievance procedure or process for resolving disputes regarding natural resource use restrictions.
- Describe the participatory monitoring arrangements with neighbouring community members.

As the project intends to enhance the livelihoods and resilience of local communities, the equitable allocation of project benefits among local community members is critical. The framework intends to ensure transparency and equity in the planning and implementation of project activities. This framework details the principles and processes for assisting communities to identify and manage any potential negative impacts of the project activities. Since the exact social impacts will only be identified during project implementation, the PF will ensure that mitigation of any negative impacts from project investments occurs through a participatory process involving the affected stakeholders and rightsholders. It will also ensure that any desired changes by the communities in how they exercise their land rights in the project sites would not be imposed but should emerge from a consultative process.

⁴ The WWF Standard on Access Restriction and Resettlement incorporates both physical resettlement and access restrictions leading to economic displacement. No physical resettlement is anticipated as part of this project.

1.5. Objective of the Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF)

The target project areas do not include Indigenous Peoples with land tenure or cultural practice rights.

Based on WWF's Standard on IPs, the people affected by this project would not be considered Indigenous, ethnic, or tribal minorities. Hence, an Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework has not been prepared. Instead, a Social Inclusion Planning Framework has been prepared to ensure that all Project Affected People, including marginalised groups, are appropriately engaged in project implementation and benefit equitably from the project.

The Khoi-San, South Africa's IPs, were assimilated into colonial and apartheid society alongside various other groups⁵. Khoi-San were hunter-gatherers who roamed across Southern Africa. By the early 1800s, the Khoi-San were no longer a free society⁶ and had largely lost touch with their cultural heritage. Although Khoi-San communities may have lived in some parts of the project domain in previous centuries (especially in the Greater Addo and Grasslands landscapes), no self-identifying Khoi-San communities are now found.

The project takes the social inclusion approach to ensure that issues facing marginalised and vulnerable groups, including the IPs (where they are to be found during the development of site-level SIPs), are addressed. This is because vulnerability is a core social concern, cutting across all facets of African societies. The local communities identified for project intervention are considered vulnerable and are primarily dependent on nature for their livelihoods. Provision for self-determination and FPIC has been made in this ESMF, including steps for undertaking an FPIC process where IPs are to be identified at the site intervention level.

1.6. ESMF/PF Preparation Methodology

The ESMF/PF was prepared based on desktop research and extensive stakeholder engagement in South Africa, including within the three project MLLs. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan (**See Additional Annex 3**) includes details of the engagement processes followed and the participants, which are not repeated here. Below is a summary of key engagements, with notes on their significance in securing critical stakeholder support, shaping the development of this ESMF, and informing the project design.

National Technical Design Workshop: Stakeholder engagement commenced with a national technical design workshop from 19 to 22 March 2024 in Pretoria, South Africa. This was attended (see Additional Annex - SEP for Project Stakeholder Engagement Register) by 25 national and provincial government representatives, conservation agencies, and selected civil society organisations. The objectives of the workshop were to, inter alia:

- Build stakeholders' understanding of the project results framework & planning requirements.
- Inform and update stakeholders on the context and key issues in each landscape.

⁵ Rafael Verbuyst (2024) Sensing indigeneity: A sensory ethnography of the presence of the past among newly identifying indigenous people in South Africa. DOI: 10.1177/0308275X241268401

⁶ Magda Minguzzi et al (2023) Traditional dwellings and techniques of the First Indigenous Peoples of South Africa in the Eastern Cape. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4995/HERITAGE2022.2022.15019>

- Discuss key concepts and lessons about MLLs and reflect on good examples of existing landscape partnerships.

The meeting provided valuable guidance that informed the design process, including:

1. Be deliberate about designing meaningful economic opportunities for target communities.
2. Identify and approach potential co-financing partners early on regarding pro-nature economic development.
3. Engage with existing catchment and landscape partnerships to gather lessons to include in project design.
4. Engage with the Mountain Zebra – Camdeboo Protected Environment, who own a significant portion of land in the Greater Addo MLL early on during project design.
5. Assess stakeholders to be involved in the project at steering committee, landscape and implementation levels, including government departments, municipalities and civil society organisations.
6. Engage strategically and proactively with relevant economic sectors, including forestry, mining, and renewable energy projects in the MLLs.

Field-based and direct stakeholder consultations: The technical design workshop was followed by extensive stakeholder engagement between April and October 2024, including during field visits to all three MLLs and via targeted meetings (virtual and in-person), as set out in the stakeholder engagement plan prepared for the PPG phase. These engagements were critical for enabling the project to be designed through a collaborative process, in which objectives, outcomes, strategies and approaches were jointly formulated and agreed upon among the key stakeholders, including targeted communities and traditional leaders, among other groups. A summary of key features and outcomes of the stakeholder engagements include the following (see Additional Annex - SEP for Project Stakeholder Engagement Register):

~ 100 discrete consultation sessions were undertaken.

~ 75 different groupings/entities were engaged – national, provincial, local government, traditional authorities, local communities, NGOs, conservancies, management authorities, Protected Environments, and the private sector.

~ 325 individuals were engaged, of which 198 were women.

Stakeholder engagement took place predominantly at the national level (43 engagements), focusing on capabilities, durable financing and due diligence aspects of project design. Engagement at the MLL level focused on designing MLL-level activities, including livelihoods, socio-economic, and protected area expansion outcomes. The MLL level engagements were as follows: Greater Addo MLL (22), Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL (11), and Grasslands MLL (7). Design workshops were conducted in each MLL to develop the work programme for each landscape. Furthermore, engagements were undertaken with marginalised groups, including women and youth, to inform the Gender Analysis and Action Plan.

At the stakeholder engagements for Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL, representatives from WWF-US (the GEF Implementing Agency) and SANParks (the GEF Implementing Entity) participated in the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL design process from 12 to 16 August 2024. This engagement helped us work through complex design aspects and agree on possible project

implementation pathways. Critically, engagement during this week included a briefing meeting with Nkosi (Chief) Tikhontele Dhlamini, traditional leader of the Lomshiyo community who owns land within the Barberton Nature Reserve, which forms the core of the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL. The Lomshiyo community is a direct beneficiary of project activities in the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL. Nkosi Dhlamini, who is respected by the community he leads and other stakeholders in the area, supported the project on Lomshiyo community land.

Extensive consultation on the durable financing aspects of the project was undertaken with SANParks and NGOs involved in financing landscape-scale conservation and with the private sector. The private sector was actively engaged through finance institutions, agriculture commodity sector bodies, tourism operators, renewable energy and carbon project developers, and private landowners. Further information concerning the stakeholders who were consulted is available in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (Annex 5). Their inputs have been incorporated into the project design through Project Components 1, 2 and 3.

Final Design Workshop: Stakeholder engagement concluded with a Final Design Workshop convened on 2 October 2024 in Johannesburg. The objectives of this workshop were to present what the Mega Living Landscapes Initiative (comprising the GEF8 and GBFF projects), will do and how the goals will be achieved. The workshop was attended by 40 representatives from national and provincial governments, conservation agencies, and civil society organisations. The meeting outcomes were largely positive, with delegates supporting the proposed project plan and providing helpful input for refinement.

Further details of stakeholder engagement can be found in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

The ESMF/PF draws on the outcomes of consultations, the relevant laws and regulations of South Africa, and the WWF's ESSF and SIPP. The relevant laws and regulations of South Africa related to safeguards apply to the project since it is implemented within South Africa's jurisdiction. WWF's SIPP applies since WWF, an implementing agency of GEF, manages the project.

The SEP sets out plans for stakeholder engagement during project implementation, including developing MLL-level SEPs and further engagement with communities regarding detailed project interventions.

The ESMF and PF are combined into a single document to avoid duplications and for ease of reference.

2. Project Description

This section outlines the objectives of the “GEF 8 *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes*” project, its components, milestones, and significant supported activities.

2.1. Project Objective and Project Components

The project objective is stated as follows:

Pioneer the establishment of three groundbreaking Mega Living Landscapes (MLLs) that will conserve 2 million hectares of biodiversity-rich land through innovative contractual and collaborative partnerships, which will simultaneously foster sustainable economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs, focusing predominantly on women and youth, elevate socio-economic empowerment via enterprise and skills development, build robust conservation management institutions, and bolster the conservation capacity and skills of partner organisations, thereby concretely demonstrating the transformative potential of the MLL concept.

The project is designed to comprise three core project components (project components 1, 2, 3), which hinge on the Theory of Change (ToC) for this Project. The ToC is:

South Africa's pursuit of sustainable development and reversal of biodiversity loss is profoundly complex due to the intersection of environmental and socio-economic challenges. Biodiversity loss, climate change impacts, and pollution intersect with deep-seated poverty, unemployment, and inequality, forming a multifaceted web of issues. The legacy of race-based land dispossession and the prevailing linear economic model, promoting unsustainable production and consumption practices, further compound these challenges. Addressing these intricate problems necessitates an approach where social, environmental, and economic interventions are seamlessly integrated and co-created by key stakeholders, including productive economic sectors and local communities.

The GEF 8 funded project, alongside a sister project funded by the GBFF, “Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature—Leveraging Durable Financing Mechanisms for Mega Living Landscapes (MLL) to achieve Target 3 in South Africa” (GEF ID 11588), forms an integrated MLL initiative. The project will implement the core pillars of South African National Parks’ Vision 2040: creating Mega-Living Landscapes (MLLs) in biodiversity-rich areas, advancing economic development through conservation, and fostering community inclusion and social justice.

The MLLs to be established with GEF 8 and GBFF funding include the Greater Addo MLL, the Greater Kruger (Barbeton - Mathenjwa) MLL, and the Eastern Grasslands. GBFF interventions at these sites will encompass financial frameworks and mechanisms, revenue generation, and capacity and knowledge building. Key mechanisms of change include Inclusive Governance and Community Participation, Preferential Market Access and Value Chain Integration, Public-Private Partnerships, and Monitoring and Adaptive Management. These interventions will ensure the financial durability of the MLLs beyond the project investment timeline.

Against this backdrop, our Theory of Change for GEF 8 envisions a future where people and nature coexist harmoniously through the establishment of three groundbreaking Mega Living Landscapes (MLLs). Through innovative contractual and collaborative partnerships, these landscapes will conserve

approximately 2 million hectares of biodiversity-rich land. Concurrently, the project will foster sustainable economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs, with a primary focus on women and youth. It aims to elevate socio-economic empowerment through enterprise and skills development, build robust conservation management institutions, and bolster partner organisations' conservation capacity and skills. By 2030, the transformative potential of the MLL concept will be demonstrably realised.

The MLL initiative acknowledges that South Africa's intertwined environmental and social challenges exacerbate biodiversity loss. The MLL approach promotes inclusive participation in conservation activities and benefits sharing by local communities, including women and youth, fostering community ownership and pride in safeguarding biodiversity for current and future generations. Additionally, the legacy of past racial segregation policies, including land dispossession, has limited community participation and benefit sharing in mainstream conservation activities. The MLL initiative seeks to build partnerships that support landowners, including those in communal lands, in engaging in conservation activities and adopting sustainable practices.

Traditional conservation strategies focusing on isolated conservation areas, disconnected from productive landscapes, communal lands, and local communities' economic and socio-cultural interests, are no longer viable in South Africa. Such outdated strategies disincentivise private and communal landowners from contributing to biodiversity conservation and adopting sustainable land use practices. By establishing the MLLs, we aim to integrate conservation and sustainable land use practices to create cohesive and interconnected landscapes. This initiative will mitigate the risk of deterioration in already protected conservation estates, ensuring they remain effective in conserving biodiversity. It will contribute to fulfilling global conservation objectives, notably Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The core project components for the GEF 8 funded project represent strategic interventions to overcome barriers to successful biodiversity conservation integrated with an inclusive socio-cultural and economic dispensation. These components, encompassing outputs and outcomes, contribute to sustainable development goals in the selected MLL sites and demonstrate the MLL concept in practice.

Institutional Mechanisms and Governance Structures: Enhance institutional operational capacity, promote strong governance practices, empower local leadership, and ensure the sustainability of MLL institutions.

Sustainable Economic Opportunities and Socioeconomic Empowerment: Promote economic growth and socio-economic inclusion, empower women and youth, and improve access to finance and markets.

Conservation Management Institutions and Communities of Practice: Build capable conservation management institutions, improve conservation capacity and skills, enhance conservation knowledge and practices, and promote inclusive community participation.

By integrating these strategic components, the MLL initiative addresses South Africa's intertwined environmental and social challenges, ensuring biodiversity thrives in conserved and productive landscapes. This approach benefits nature and enhances local communities' socio-economic well-being, driving the country towards a sustainable and equitable future.

Our Theory of Change highlights the centrality of multistakeholder partnerships in achieving the desired results and impact. It envisions the development of institutional governance and relevant policy frameworks across the MLLs alongside active enterprise development programs, training, and capacity-building initiatives. Participating stakeholders and local communities, particularly youth and women, will

be represented and included in MLL decision-making and consultative initiatives. They will benefit directly from capacity-building programs for MLL governance members and conservation capacity and skills initiatives. Additionally, they will gain access to employment opportunities, finance, and trade agreements facilitated by the MLL institutions.

Partnerships and collaborative arrangements among Conservation Management Institutions across each MLL will be established, with operational Conservation Management Communities of Practice (CoP) enhancing conservation knowledge and practices within and across MLLs. Ultimately, MLL institutional arrangements will exhibit enhanced operational capacity and adopt strong governance practices, ensuring sustainability. Conservation Management Institutions across the three MLLs will be strengthened, resulting in measurable conservation impact. Local leadership, women, and youth will be more empowered, and sustainable livelihood practices will be widely adopted across communities in the three MLLs, leading to increased economic growth and socio-economic inclusion of local communities in the regions where the three MLLs are located.

Critical assumptions foundational to the Theory of Change must hold for the successful implementation and impact of the Mega Living Landscapes project. These include:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement, Participation, and Collaboration:** All relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, local communities, landowners, and governmental entities, are assumed to engage actively and sustainably. Collaboration is essential for co-creating solutions, integrating conservation with sustainable development, and ensuring the successful implementation of the MLL approach. The effectiveness of the MLL project depends on the participation, alignment, and cooperation of diverse stakeholders to comprehensively address intertwined environmental and social challenges.
2. **Community Ownership and Participation:** Local communities are assumed to participate actively in and own MLL biodiversity conservation initiatives, thereby realising meaningful local socio-economic benefits. Local community involvement is crucial for reversing historical marginalisation and ensuring equitable benefit sharing. The success of the MLL project hinges on fostering community pride and ownership in safeguarding biodiversity, which will enhance the sustainability and resilience of conservation efforts.
3. **Policy and Institutional Support:** National and provincial policies, institutional frameworks, and other relevant strategies are assumed to consistently support and enable the MLL project. This alignment provides a solid foundation for the MLL project, ensuring it is well-integrated into existing conservation initiatives and receives the necessary resources and regulatory support.
4. **Durable Financial Resources and Capacity Building:** Sufficient and durable financial resources, including those leveraged through the GBFF investment, are assumed to support the MLL project beyond the project period. Capacity-building efforts will strengthen conservation management institutions and practitioners, overcoming financial and human resource constraints and ensuring that protected areas are effectively managed beyond the project period.
5. **Adaptive Management and Ecosystem Resilience:** The MLL project is assumed to successfully implement adaptive management strategies that enhance ecosystem resilience to climate change and other environmental stressors. Adapting and responding to changing environmental conditions is essential for demonstrating the effectiveness of the MLL concept in practice and achieving long-term conservation and sustainability goals.

2.2. Project Strategies, Outcomes and Outputs

This section further explains the Theory of Change (ToC), emphasising the pathway from outputs to outcomes linked to the project components. The project components focus on creating sustainable institutional mechanisms, enhancing economic opportunities and empowerment, and building conservation capacity. Further, the ability to adapt and improve during project execution through continuous monitoring and evaluation is also described and planned for. Critical assumptions and risks to the project are assessed. For more details about the project strategy, including more detailed information on project activities, see Strategy Annex.

Activities will be implemented with a gender-sensitive approach, considering that men’s and women’s differential roles, responsibilities, and daily practices directly influence their uses and needs for natural resources and access to economic opportunities in the communities. The project will ensure that access to resources and opportunities for training, information, resources, and decision-making are equitable and transparent for all community members, including women, at the household, community, and landscape levels.

The project components, associated outcomes, outputs, and activities described below ensure coherent and measurable progress toward achieving the project’s goals:

Project Component 1: Creating MLL Sustainable Institutional Mechanisms & Governance Structures

Interventions under this component are intended to demonstrate substantial progress in creating sustainable institutional mechanisms, such as establishing the MLL Hubs and governance structures for MLLs by the end of the project. Collectively, these efforts will enhance institutional operational capacity, promote strong governance practices, empower local leadership, and ensure the sustainability of MLL institutions, contributing to the region's overall socio-economic and environmental well-being.

Table 1 below presents the detailed outcomes, outputs, and respective performance indicators of Project Component 1.

Table 1: Project Component 1 Outcomes, and Outputs.

Project Component	Outcomes (and performance indicators)	Outputs (and performance indicators)
Project Component 1: Creating MLL Sustainable Institutional Mechanisms & Governance Structures	1.1 MLLs established through inclusive institutional and governance structures (MLL Hubs), vision and planning frameworks.	1.1.1. MLLs formal governance structures, stakeholder participation platforms and partnerships established, with effective representation and participation of local communities, women and youth in decision making and consultative initiatives. 1.1.2. Unifying vision & Landscape level Framework Plans for each MLL participatorily developed and approved by MLLs governance structures.

	<p>1.2 Capabilities of SANParks, MLL governance members and management teams, local community leadership increased for effective management of MLL.</p>	<p>1.2.1. Bespoke leadership and management training, and ongoing coaching of SANParks in managing MLLs developed and implemented.</p> <p>1.2.2 Capacity building programs delivered at landscape level for local leaders in MLL governance structures, partner organizations, and management teams on inclusive conservation including adaptive and biodiversity conservation management, biodiversity monitoring, ecosystem restoration, amongst others, to ensure successful implementation and effective management of self-sustaining MLLs.</p>
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The desired outcomes for the project's first component focus on achieving institutional self-reliance and strong governance practices. By 2030, all MLL governance structures will be capable of independently managing conservation activities of the mega landscapes and mobilising resources, ensuring transparent and accountable governance. Additionally, the project aims to empower local leadership with a significant representation of women and youth in governance positions and improve conservation and management skills among local leaders. A growing collective commitment amongst stakeholders will be evident regarding the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Ultimately, the project envisions sustainable MLL institutions characterised by self-sustaining governance structures and an active national network fostering continuous collaboration and innovation.

Linked to the outcomes, the project outputs focus on developing robust institutional frameworks, promoting inclusive governance, and enhancing capacity. By 2026, interim governance bodies with clearly defined roles will be established for each MLL, and governance charters and operational guidelines will be approved. By the end of the same year, all three MLLs will be formally constituted in alignment with these charters and relevant laws. Policy alignment reviews will be completed by 2027, and by the same year, governance structures will adopt comprehensive institutional policies on financial management, good governance, transformation, inclusion, and socio-economic empowerment.

Stakeholder representation and inclusion are emphasised. By 2026, at least 60% of local community members, including 50% women and 50% youth, will be represented in governance structures. Annual stakeholder engagement forums will also ensure transparency and participatory decision-making.

Capacity-building efforts include conducting five workshops for governance members by 2029 and establishing a knowledge-sharing platform for best practices and lessons learned among MLL governance bodies by 2026.

Project Component 1-related activities will entail the establishment and maintenance of robust governance structures, while policy frameworks, the formalisation of governance structures, and the MLLs' fit-for-purpose operating models will be implemented by 2026.

First, the Project Management Unit (PMU) will be established and functional at SANParks, initiating the setup of interim governance structures in each MLL. Key activities include identifying and appointing interim governance members, defining roles and responsibilities, and conducting initial meetings to set up governance structures. Governance charters and operational guidelines will be drafted, and stakeholders will be engaged to provide input. Once finalised, these will be implemented. Formal governance structures will be established by aligning governance structures with charters, contractual agreements and relevant legal statutes before holding inaugural meetings. Policy alignment reviews with national and regional conservation laws will be conducted, and institutional policies on financial management, governance, transformation, and inclusion will be adopted.

Ensuring stakeholder representation and inclusion in decision-making processes is crucial. Local community members, with at least 50% women and 50% youth, will be identified and engaged for governance roles, with orientation and training provided for new members. Annual stakeholder engagement forums will be planned and scheduled for each MLL, inviting diverse stakeholders to facilitate participatory decision-making and transparency discussions. Five workshops per MLL will be designed and conducted to build governance members' capacity, focusing on governance skills, and a knowledge-sharing platform for best practices and lessons learned will be established and promoted among governance structures.

Project Component 2: Fostering and enhancing sustainable economic opportunities & socio-economic empowerment

By the end of the project intervention, significant advancements would have been made in fostering and enhancing sustainable economic opportunities and socio-economic empowerment within the three MLL regions. These interventions collectively enhance economic growth, promote socio-economic inclusion, empower women and youth, and improve access to finance and markets, contributing to the overall sustainable development of the three MLL regions.

Table 2 below presents the detailed outcomes and outputs of Project Component 2.

Table 2: Project Component 2 Outcomes, Outputs and their respective indicators.

Project Component	Outcomes (and performance indicators)	Outputs (and performance indicators)
Project Component 2: Fostering and enhancing sustainable economic opportunities & socio-economic empowerment	2.1 Increased biodiversity-positive sustainable socio-economic empowerment and development, owned by local stakeholders and benefiting local communities in the 3 MLLs.	2. 1.1. Portfolio of inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development initiatives developed and implemented, creating MLL-based opportunities for local community enterprises, cooperatives and livelihoods upliftment, with focus on women-led and youth-led initiatives. 2.1.2. Capacity building and skills development in SMMs establishment, employment, business incubation and livelihood income, with emphasis on women and youth in local communities in the 3 MLLs.

Project Component 2 aims to drive substantial economic growth and socio-economic inclusion in the regions where the three Mega Living Landscapes (MLLs) are located. The focus is on significantly enhancing household incomes and increasing the contributions of MLL-based enterprises to local economies, which will improve local economic indicators. This component also prioritises reducing unemployment rates among women and youth, promoting their economic independence and improving livelihoods.

Sustainable livelihood practices are championed, ensuring that 80% of supported enterprises adopt sustainable production and resource management methods, leading to a noteworthy increase in sustainable certification of products and services. Empowering women and youth through leadership roles and enhancing their decision-making capacities within local enterprises is a critical outcome, with 50% of businesses led or co-led by women and youth by 2030.

These integrated outputs collectively contribute to the overarching goals of economic growth, socio-economic empowerment, and sustainable development in the MLL regions. To achieve the desired outcomes under Component 2, the project focuses on driving economic growth and socio-economic inclusion within the three Mega Living Landscapes (MLLs) regions. This involves establishing women- and youth-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) or cooperatives, supported by sustainable business incubation hubs in each MLL region by 2026. Additionally, developing at least three value chains, such as ecotourism and sustainable agriculture, will be undertaken in collaboration with local communities.

Project Component 2-related activities will foster sustainable economic opportunities and socio-economic empowerment within the MLLs. To establish enterprise development programs, potential entrepreneurs and cooperative members within local communities will be identified and provided with training and mentorship to support business establishment. Sustainable business incubation hubs will be

developed in each MLL region and equipped with the necessary infrastructure and resources to attract entrepreneurs. Value chains for eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture, and other locally sourced products will be developed and informed by market research and through collaboration with local communities.

Increasing employment opportunities, particularly for youth and women, involves identifying job opportunities within conservation and sustainable economic sectors, developing targeted job placement programs, and deploying an annual employment monitoring system to track participation and inclusion.

Training and capacity-building initiatives include delivering skills development programs aligned to each MLL's needs analysis, such as business management, conservation-based tourism, and agroecology, and partnering with accredited institutions to offer certification programs. Establishing microfinance schemes, promoting funding opportunities, and creating digital and physical marketing platforms facilitate local enterprises' access to finance and markets. Community-owned assets will also be leveraged to generate additional financial resources, ensuring sustainable economic growth and empowerment across the MLLs.

Project Component 3: Building capable conservation management institutions, community of practices & improving conservation capacity and skills

By the end of the project interventions, significant progress will have been achieved in strengthening conservation management institutions across the three MLLs, resulting in measurable conservation impact. These efforts collectively strengthen conservation management institutions, enhance conservation knowledge and practices, increase conservation capacity, and promote inclusive community participation, contributing to the overall conservation impact in the MLL regions.

Table 3 below presents the detailed outcomes, outputs, and respective performance indicators of Project Component 3.

Table 3: Project Component 3 Outcomes, Outputs and respective indicators.

Project Component	Outcomes (and performance indicators)	Output (and performance indicators)
<i>Project Component 3: Improving Inclusive Conservation in the MLLs</i>	3.1. Increased area of PAs newly created, and area of existing PAs with improved effective management, delivered through a new inclusive and collaborative conservation model in the 3 MLLs.	3.1.1 Partnerships, collaborative and inclusive interventions implemented to facilitate new PA declaration via stewardship, voluntary land acquisition processes, including technical

		<p>assessments, safeguards, stakeholder engagement & legal processes.</p> <p>3.1.2 On the ground collaborative and coordination in implementation of MLL Plan activities to improve management effectiveness of existing Pas and improve management activities to benefit biodiversity outside of PAs.</p> <p>3.1.3. Capacity building programs in inclusive conservation management institutions, community of practices delivered within and across the 3 MLLs.</p>
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Project Component 3 focuses on strengthening conservation management institutions and enhancing conservation practices across the three Mega-Living Landscapes (MLLs). The desired outcomes include establishing capable and well-resourced institutions that can effectively manage MLL activities and partnerships. This component aims to establish one formal conservation partnership in each MLL and secure significant conservation program funding. The goal is to increase funding for conservation programs in the MLLs, with at least a 5% growth year on year in external financing secured or committed by 2030. This will ensure the timely and budget-compliant implementation of initiatives. The project seeks to reverse biodiversity degradation by securing approximately 2 million hectares of land under conservation across the three MLLs, improving key biodiversity indicators, and enhancing ecosystem connectivity.

Additionally, this component emphasises enhancing conservation knowledge and practices through evidence-based innovations and piloting new approaches and technologies. The aim is to document and implement practices that lead to measurable improvements in biodiversity management. Furthermore, increasing conservation capacity and skills within local communities is a critical outcome. In this regard, the project aims to empower local conservation teams to monitor and restore habitats independently, certify at least local trainers, and ensure significant participation of women and youth in capacity-building programs. A significant part of the program participants will be women and youth. This inclusive approach will foster local ownership and involvement in conservation activities.

To achieve the desired outcomes under Component 3, the project outputs focus on fortifying conservation management institutions across the three MLLs, creating collaborative partnerships, and enhancing conservation knowledge and practices. By 2030, each MLL will have established at least one formal collaborative partnership with strategic partners, such as conservation organisations, local governments, local communities and private stakeholders. By 2026, institutional conservation

strategies, encompassing collectively owned and co-developed landscape Vision & Framework Plans, will be adopted across the three MLLs. By 2029, conservation professionals will have received relevant conservation management training. The project also aims to facilitate protected area (PA) declaration through stewardship and voluntary land acquisition processes, covering 210,000 hectares, and improve the management effectiveness of existing PAs over 1,162,100 hectares. Interventions to improve biodiversity management outside PAs, such as sustainable agriculture and other effective conservation measures (OECMs), will span 630,300 hectares. Furthermore, formal partnerships for knowledge-sharing and resource mobilisation with national and international conservation organisations will benefit MLL-level conservation practitioners and constituent organisations by 2030.

SAN Parks will develop, at least, two significant cultural heritage infrastructure products at each MLL by 2029.

Project Component 3-related activities aim to enhance conservation management institutions and improve conservation capacity and skills within the MLLs. Establishing formal collaborative partnerships with strategic partners such as conservation organisations, local governments, and private stakeholders will enhance biodiversity conservation effectiveness. Institutional conservation strategies will be developed and adopted through stakeholder engagement and the creation of landscape Vision & Framework Plans. Conservation professionals will receive relevant training, while stewardship and voluntary land acquisition processes will facilitate PA declarations and improve management effectiveness. Additionally, cultural heritage infrastructure products will be developed to support conservation efforts.

Knowledge Management

Communities of Practice (CoP) will be established within and across the MLLs to enhance conservation capacity and skills. By 2026, an online knowledge-sharing platform will connect stakeholders, local communities, researchers, and practitioners across the MLLs. By 2030 workshops, webinars, or conferences for conservation stakeholders will have been held, and case studies, research papers, or best practice guidelines on operationalising MLL and its effect on conservation management will have been published. Membership in CoPs will grow, including conservation professionals, community members, and policymakers, by 2030. Conservation capacity will be improved by designing and implementing capacity-building programs per MLL by 2029, focusing on conservation management, biodiversity monitoring, and ecosystem restoration.

Knowledge-sharing partnerships with national and international organisations will be fostered. Conservation Management Communities of Practice (CoP) will connect stakeholders, researchers, and practitioners through an online knowledge-sharing platform will be established. CoP workshops, webinars, and conferences will facilitate knowledge exchange, while case studies, research papers, and best practice guidelines will be published to disseminate valuable insights. Membership drives and outreach activities will promote CoP participation. To build conservation capacity and skills, capacity-building programs will be designed and implemented, certification programs for conservation-related skills will be developed, and mentorship programs will pair local conservation practitioners with experienced mentors to support their growth and development within the MLLs.

Project Component 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

Project Component 4 emphasises Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) to ensure effective, informed, and adaptive project management. The primary outcome, Outcome 4.1, aims to achieve effective, informed, and adaptive project management. To this end, the project will produce several key outputs: M&E reports, including project progress reports, midterm evaluations, terminal evaluations (Output 4.1.1), and annual reflection workshops held between main stakeholders (Output 4.1.2). These outputs and their associated indicators will be meticulously tracked for reporting purposes to the GEF Secretariat, ensuring transparency and accountability. Additionally, this tracking will facilitate timely corrective actions and adaptations during the project's execution. To ensure alignment and effective implementation, a comprehensive M&E framework will be developed and socialised with key stakeholders, particularly those directly responsible for executing the project.

2.3. Project Area Profile

As indicated above, the project focuses on three Mega–Living Landscapes (MLLs): the Barberton-Mkhonjwa MLL in the Mpumalanga province, the Eastern Grasslands MLL, and the Greater Addo MLL, both found mainly in the Eastern Cape province. This section provides baseline data for these three MLLs, focusing on environmental and socio-economic parameters.

Barberton-Makhonjwa Mega Living Landscape

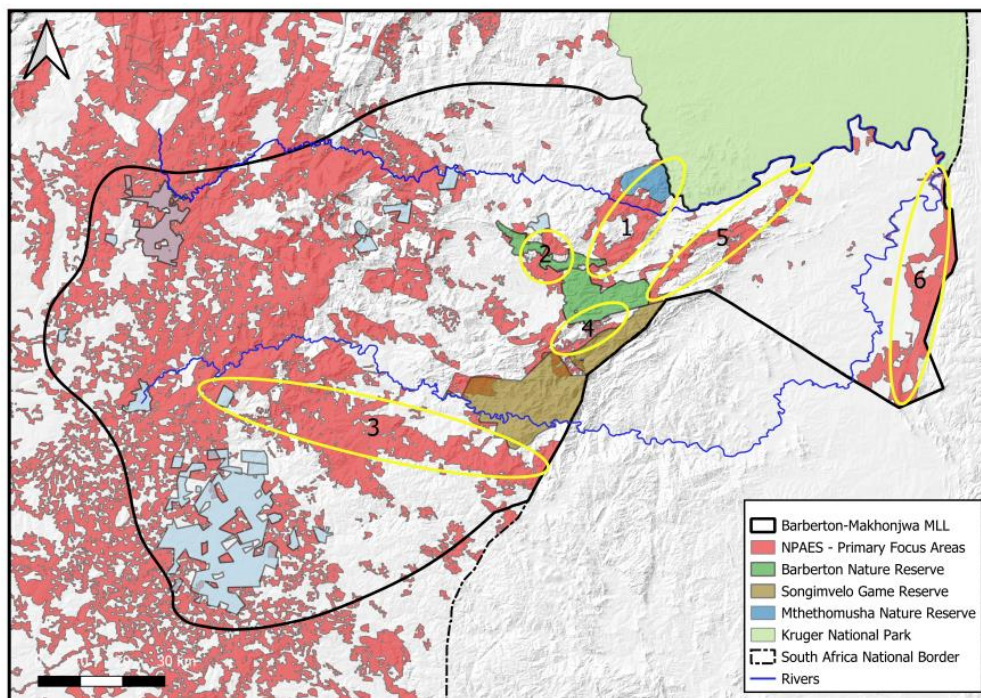
The Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL is in the Mpumalanga Province, bordering Eswatini. It includes several declared protected areas, including a world heritage site with three Centers of Floral Endemism.

Focal areas for implementation:

The protected area expansion programme will be implemented within six focal areas in the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) Mega Living Landscape:

- A region centered around the Crocodile Valley Conservancy.
- The consolidation of Barberton Nature Reserve – addressing design and fragmentation issues.
- Expansion of Songimvelo Game Reserve towards the Nkomazi Wilderness Area.
- Securing of Sappi (plantation forestry land) between Barberton and Songimvelo.
- Expansion from Barberton Nature Reserve towards the southern Kruger National Park.
- Establishment of a corridor from the south of Kruger National Park toward Eswatini along the Mozambique border.

The Biophysical Environment Context



Map 2: Barberton-Makhonjwa MLL with focal areas

Biodiversity: According to Mucina and Rutherford (2012) there are three different biomes represented in the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL (grassland, savanna and forest) and an array of vegetation types. Three centers of floral endemism occur partially within the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) Mega Living Landscape:

The **Barberton Centre of Plant Endemism** is largely a result of the surface outcrops of volcanic sedimentary rocks belonging to the Barberton Supergroup. Outcrops of serpentinite occur throughout the centre of endemism, and these rocks give rise to soils with unusually high magnesium: calcium ratios. These soils and those derived from ultramafic rocks are also associated with high concentrations of heavy metals, which can be potentially toxic to plants. At least 30 plant species of the centre of endemism are edaphic (influenced by soil) specialists adapted to serpentine soils.

The **Lydenburg Centre of Plant Endemism:** According to Lotter (2020), a floristic analysis of the vegetation along the Mpumalanga escarpment supports the recognition of a new centre of plant endemism, the Lydenburg Centre, with the proposal of two subcenters of plant endemism, namely the Long Tom Pass Subcentre and the Steenkampsberg subcentre. The Steenkampsberg subcenter has at least 15 endemic taxa.

The **Wolkberg Centre of Plant Endemism** has at least 81 species and infraspecific taxa that are endemic or near-endemic to the quartzitic and related rock types of the Black Reef Quartzite Formation, Wolkberg

Group and Timeball Hill Formation (c. 3880 km²) and a total of 32 species were recorded as endemic or near-endemic to the dolomitic Chuniespoort Formation (c. 2100km²).

According to the Mpumalanga Biodiversity Sector Plan (MBSP), which sets out the province's biodiversity properties, considerable areas within the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) Mega Living Landscape are classified as Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs). These areas are located primarily around Barberton and Mthethomusha Nature Reserves and scattered throughout the western part of the MLL. Critical Biodiversity Areas are considered irreplaceable, meaning that their loss through habitat transformation or degradation cannot be compensated for through the protection of another area of habitat.

The MBSP also provides for Ecological Support Areas (ESAs), which are buffer areas around declared protected areas, including near Barberton Nature Reserve and Songimvelo Game Reserve. These buffer areas are likely to include key focal areas for protected area expansion and the creation of conservation-compatible land uses within the Mega Living Landscape.

Regarding freshwater biodiversity, there are relatively limited freshwater CBAs within the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) Mega Living Landscape, with some areas classified within the southwestern part of the Mega Living Landscape. Still, there are considerable areas that are classified as ESAs.

Several threatened ecosystems within the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL are classified as Endangered according to the Revised National List of Ecosystems that are Threatened and in Need of Protection (2022). No Critically Endangered or Vulnerable ecosystems have been identified in the MLL. Threatened ecosystems are listed per Section 52 of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act No. 10 of 2004 - NEMBA).

According to the Register of Protected Areas of South Africa (www.dffeportal.environment.gov.za), there are a variety of declared protected areas (including Indigenous Forest reserves) within the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) Mega Living Landscape, declared on a state and private land.

Climate: The climate within the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL varies considerably due to its high topography, altitude, slope and aspect variability. The Lowveld region south and west of the Kruger National Park is sub-tropical with warm temperatures and experiences high summer rainfall of approximately 620mm between September and March. The escarpment areas of the Highveld have a highly varied climate. They also experience summer rainfall from September to March with variable temperatures, although these areas are generally considerably cooler than the Lowveld. Temperatures from April to August are much cooler than in the Lowveld, with frequent frosts and early morning and late evening temperatures below freezing.

Topography: The topography of the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL is highly variable, as it includes high-lying areas like the Makhonjwa Mountains and the Highveld escarpment areas in the west, which contrast with the much lower-lying Lowveld areas to the south and west of the Kruger National Park. The highest point in the MLL appears to be near to the source of the Crocodile River, where the altitude is 2,100 metres above sea level on the boundary of the MLL. In contrast, the altitude at the confluence of the Crocodile and Komati Rivers on the border between South Africa and Mozambique is

only 140 metres above sea level. This constitutes an altitudinal variation of 1,960 metres, significant for numerous ecological reasons, including the ability to adapt to climate change.

Geology: Due to the scale of the landscape, the geology across the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL is highly variable. The Barberton-Makhonjwa World Heritage Site falls within the MLL and was listed as a World Heritage Site because of its geological values. It is world renowned for the oldest, best preserved and exposed rock formations, dating back 3.5 billion years. The geological variation and the associated soils of the World Heritage Site also contribute significantly to the diversity of vegetation types within the nature reserve.

Hydrology: The Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL is located within a relatively wet area of South Africa. It is drained by two primary rivers, the Crocodile and Inkomati Rivers, which become the Incomati River in Mozambique at their confluence on the border. Numerous National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Area (NFEPA) rivers flow throughout the MLL. There are also numerous NFEPA wetlands located throughout the MLL. NFEPA rivers and wetlands are nationally recognised as important water resources and are considered priorities for biodiversity conservation. There are also clusters of NFEPA wetlands, particularly those recognised as part of the Mesic Highveld Grassland Group, which include some of the largest freshwater wetland systems in South Africa.

Four Strategic Water Source Areas occur partially within the MLL. Strategic Water Source areas comprise approximately 10% of South Africa's land area but supply a disproportionate quantity of mean annual surface water runoff concerning their size, providing more than 50% of the country's water runoff, and are considered nationally important ecologically and economically. Strategic Water Source Areas are prioritised for protected area expansion and achieving the 30x30 target.

Eastern Grasslands Mega Living Landscape

The Eastern Grasslands MLL is located on the border with Lesotho in the southern Drakensberg Mountains within the Eastern Cape Province, centred on the towns of Rhodes and Maclear.

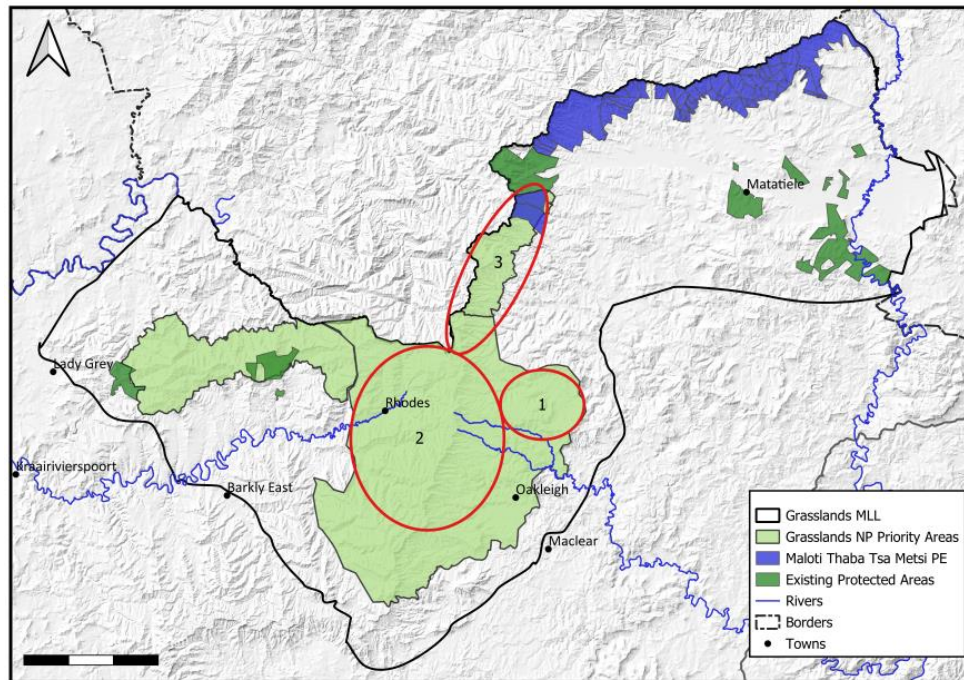
The aim of project activities within the Eastern Grasslands MLL is to establish, consolidate and expand a new national park within the Grasslands Biome and to work with landowners and land rights holders to expand other existing protected areas and develop new ones while delivering socio-economic benefits to communities in the MLL. The Grasslands Biome, the second largest in South Africa, is poorly represented in the country's protected area system (only about 2-3% of the biome is protected). Currently, the Eastern Grasslands MLL has the smallest number and area of existing protected areas within the project. There are only seven protected areas in the MLL, covering an area of 37,721 ha.

Focal areas for implementation:

The protected area expansion programme will be implemented within three focal areas in the Eastern Grasslands Mega Living Landscape:

- The Upper Tsitsana communal area and the Pitseng Farmers Association, which is an association of small-scale black farmers.
- Private commercial farmers within the focal area for establishing the Grasslands National Park.

- The Maloti Thaba Tsa Metse expansion area is a state-owned, communally run area along the border with Lesotho.



Map 3: Eastern Grasslands MLL with focal areas

Biophysical environment context:

Biodiversity: According to Mucina and Rutherford⁷, all the vegetation types represented in the Eastern Grasslands MLL fall within the Grasslands Biome with several Bioregions represented. The Drakensberg Grassland Bioregion dominates the central part of the MLL, whilst parts of the Mesic Highveld Grassland Bioregion occur in the western parts of the MLL, and the Sub-escarpment Grassland Bioregion is found in the eastern parts of the MLL. Within these bioregions are also alluvial vegetation, freshwater wetlands, waterbodies and zonal and intrazonal forests. The Grasslands Biome and its vegetation types are immensely important in terms of biodiversity values and ecosystem functions and processes that underpin numerous societal and economic activities in the country. The Grasslands Biome is, however, poorly represented in South Africa's protected area system.

The predominant vegetation type in the high-lying central parts of the Eastern Grasslands MLL is Lesotho Highland Basalt Grassland, with Southern Drakensberg Highland Grassland occurring at slightly lower altitudes. On the western side of the MLL at slightly lower elevations, Senqu Montane Shrubland and Zastron Moist Grassland occur, whilst on the eastern sides of the MLL, East Griqualand and Drakensberg Foothill Moist Grassland is found. Among these vegetation types, there are patches of Mabela Sandy Grassland, Eastern Temperate Freshwater Wetlands and the Northern Afrotemperate Forest and Southern Mistbelt Forest.

⁷ Mucina, L. and Rutherford, M.C. (eds.) (2006). The vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. Strelitzia 19, South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.

In terms of the Eastern Cape Biodiversity Conservation Plan, there are considerable areas within the Grasslands MLL that are classified as Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs), particularly along the eastern part of the MLL. Areas classified as CBAs are considered irreplaceable, meaning that their loss through habitat transformation or degradation cannot be compensated for through the protection of another area of habitat.

With regard to threatened ecosystems, most of the Eastern Grasslands MLL is classified as Least Threatened, although the eastern part of the MLL contains Critically Endangered and Endangered ecosystems, according to the Revised National List of Ecosystems that are Threatened and in Need of Protection (2022).

Climate: The climate within the Eastern Grasslands MLL varies considerably due to its high variability in topography, altitude, slope and aspect, as it includes some of the highest-lying alpine areas in Southern Africa. Within the Maclear and Matatiele regions, which are lower-lying, the weather conditions are characterised by a mild to moderate climate with high rainfall in the summer months and dry, cool-to-cold winters. The mean yearly temperature in these areas is 13.8°C, with a mean annual rainfall of 1,343 mm. Precipitation in both the lower and higher-lying areas can include rain, snow and hail. In the Rhodes region, the warmest month is January, with average low temperatures of 11.5°C and average high temperatures of 23.3°C. The coldest month is July, with average low temperatures of -0.7°C and average high temperatures of 13°C. The average precipitation in high-lying areas around Rhodes is 1,214 mm, with the wettest month being January and the driest month being July.

Topography: The topography of the Eastern Grasslands MLL varies with a general gradient of high-lying alpine areas along the Drakensberg mountains, on the Lesotho border, moving towards lower-lying regions on the eastern and southern parts of the MLL, with rivers that drain towards the Indian Ocean in the eastern parts of the MLL and towards the Atlantic Ocean in its south and western parts. The highest point in the Grasslands MLL is KwaDuma peak which is located to the south of Malekgalonyane (Ongeluksnek) Nature Reserve, on the Lesotho border, at a height of 3,019 metres. The lowest point in the Grasslands MLL is the Tsitsa River, which flows from the MLL at a height of 1,220 metres above sea level. This constitutes an altitudinal variation of 1,799 metres, significant for numerous ecological reasons, including the ability to adapt to climate change.

Geology: The geology of the Eastern Grasslands MLL forms part of the Karoo Supergroup, which consists of a sequence of units, mostly of nonmarine origin, deposited between the Late Carboniferous and Early Jurassic, a period of about 120 million years. The lithostratigraphy of the MLL is characterised by the geology of igneous and sedimentary origins, with the highest-lying areas consisting predominantly of Drakensberg basalts and the lower-lying areas consisting of Clarens, Elliot, Molteno, Tarkastad and Adelaide sandstones, siltstones, mudstones and shales. Among these geologies, there are Karoo dolerites that are predominantly intrusive into the Karoo Supergroup. This is significant because, generally, the vegetation on soils derived from geologies of an igneous nature is more resilient to impacts such as livestock grazing compared to vegetation derived from geologies of a sedimentary nature. As a result, vegetation on igneous geology tends to be in better condition than vegetation on sedimentary geology, which has generally been confirmed by the rangeland condition assessments conducted for properties earmarked for inclusion in the Grasslands National Park.

Hydrology: The Eastern Grasslands MLL is located within a relatively wet area of South Africa. Several primary rivers drain it and straddle a continental divide, with some of the rivers in the MLL draining into the Orange River and the Atlantic Ocean and others draining into the Indian Ocean on South Africa's east coast. Numerous National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Area (NFEPA) rivers flow throughout the

MLL. There are also numerous NFEPA wetlands located throughout the MLL. There are also clusters of NFEPA wetlands, particularly those recognised as part of the Drakensberg Grassland Group in addition to extensive NFEPA wetlands, in the upper Umzimvubu River catchment.

Two Strategic Water Source Areas occur partially within the Eastern Grasslands MLL. Almost the entire Eastern Cape Drakensberg Strategic Water Source Area occurs in the MLL, with parts of the Southern Drakensberg Strategic Water Source Area also located here. Strategic Water Source Areas are a national priority for protected area expansion and achieving the GBF Target 3 (30x30).

Greater Addo Mega Living Landscape

The Greater Addo Mega Living Landscape (MLL) is a unique region with rich biodiversity, vibrant communities, and significant conservation value. The MLL is uniquely situated at the confluence of six distinct biomes: Albany Thicket, Nama Karoo, Grassland, Fynbos, Forest, and Indian Coastal Belt. It is also located across two Biodiversity Hotspots – Cape Floristic Region and the Maputoland-Pondoland-Albany Biodiversity Hotspot, two of 36 internationally recognised biodiversity hotspots known for their exceptional species diversity and high levels of endemism.

The Greater Addo MLL presents a unique opportunity to link three national parks - Addo Elephant National Park (AENP), Mountain Zebra National Park (MZNP) and Camdeboo National Park (CNP) - through innovative conservation-compatible land use models. This integration will benefit existing production sectors, creating a robust, sustainable framework for regional development. The MLL essentially extends from the northern reaches of the Addo Elephant National Park northwards towards the towns of Cradock and Graaff Reinet.

Focal Areas for Implementation:

The protected area expansion programme will be implemented within five nodes of the Greater Addo MLL:

Node 1 – This will focus on improving the connectivity between Mountain Zebra National Park and Camdeboo National Park by pursuing opportunities to expand the Mountain Zebra National Park, specifically for additional habitat for Black Rhino and Cape Mountain Zebra and filling the gaps in the existing Mountain Zebra – Camdeboo Protected Environment, to create a more cohesive corridor between the two National Parks.

Node 2 – This will focus on the direct expansion of the Addo Elephant National Park as a means of improving management effectiveness (shape and form of the National Park boundary), providing additional habitat for species of conservation concern (specifically Desert Black Rhino), and providing opportunities for socio-economic development (mainly tourism opportunities – see Tourism section) of the National Park.

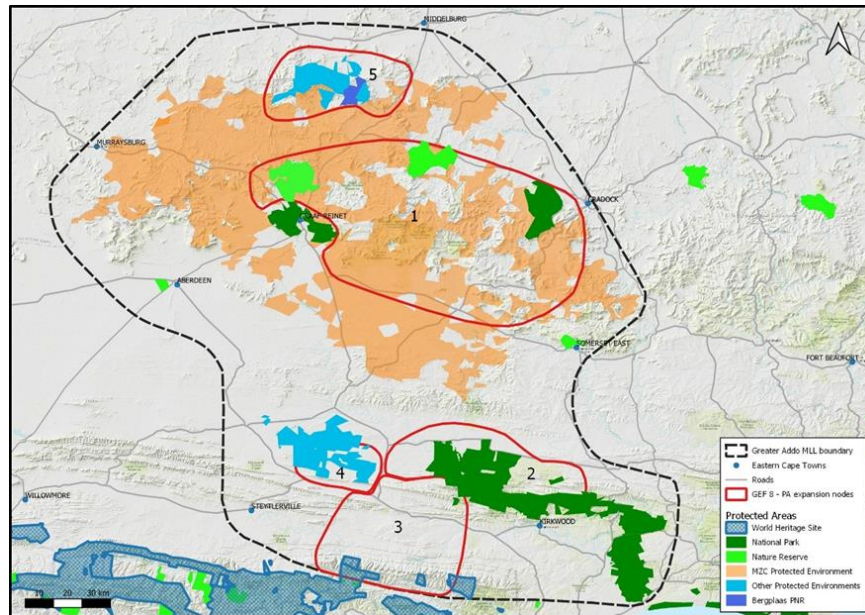
Node 3 will create a corridor between Addo Elephant National Park and the Baviaans Wilderness Area. Here, the focus will be on engaging with private landowners, who manage wildlife ranching properties, to establish new protected areas through the biodiversity stewardship mechanism. Eden will perform these activities to Addo, a partner NGO in the landscape with existing relationships with this region's landowners.

Node 4 – This node focuses on expanding the existing Noorseveld Protected Environment (47,925 ha), declared on 17 March 2014. Landowners adjacent to the Protected Environment have already expressed

an interest in becoming part of the existing Noorseveld Protected Environment, allowing the project to take advantage of this landowner's willingness.

Node 5 – Similar to the above, this node will focus on expanding the Compassberg Protected Environment (28,851 ha), declared on 6 July 2012. Landowners adjacent to the Protected Environment have already expressed an interest in becoming part of the existing Compassberg Protected Environment, allowing the project to take advantage of this landowner's willingness.

Biophysical environment context



Map 4: Greater Addo MLL with focal areas

Biodiversity: The Greater Addo MLL is located within a unique area of South Africa, at the junction of 6 different biomes. This diversity and complexity of vegetation provide the primary motivation for its inclusion as an MLL, providing both an opportunity to conserve threatened biodiversity and restore degraded areas to improve agricultural production and livelihoods. There are 37 different vegetation types represented in the Greater Addo MLL. The Eastern Upper Karoo and Eastern Lower Karoo vegetation types comprise approximately a third of the MLL. In contrast, other significant vegetation types include Karoo Escarpment Grassland, Sundays Arid Thicket, Upper Karoo Hardeveld and Southern Karoo Riviere.

There is one centre of Plant Endemism in the MLL – **the Sneeuwberg Centre of Plant Endemism**. With flora comprising 1195 plant species, 33 of which are endemics (2.8% of the flora), the Sneeuwberg compares well with other components of the Great Escarpment in terms of species diversity and endemism. Ten of the endemics represent species discovered since 2004, suggesting that more endemics may still be encountered. This Centre has affinities with the Albany Centre and links with the Cape Floristic Region.

There are considerable areas within the Greater Addo Mega Living Landscape classified as Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs). These are largely located within three regions of the MLL:

- Along the Sneeuberg Mountains, from west of Graaff Reinet, across to Middelburg and Cradock, north of Graaff Reinet. This corresponds to the Sneeuberg Centre of Plant Endemism.
- The area to the southwest of Mountain Zebra National Park, which essentially consists of grassland habitats, is one of the most under-protected ecosystem types in South Africa.
- An area along the Grootwinterhoekberge, just north of the Baviaans Wilderness Area, to the southwest of Addo Elephant National Park.

CBAs are considered irreplaceable, meaning that their loss through habitat transformation or degradation cannot be compensated for by protecting another area of habitat. Ecological Support Areas (ESAs), large buffer areas around existing declared protected areas, have also been identified, including north-south corridors and large tracts of land north of Addo Elephant NP in the central region of the MLL.

As per the National Protected Area Expansion Strategy (NPAES) and the Eastern Cape Protected Area Expansion Strategy (ECPAES), considerable areas within the Greater Addo MLL are identified as national and provincial priorities for protected area expansion. The provincial protected area expansion priorities fully inform the national priorities.

DFFE (at the time referred to as DEA) gazetted a Strategy on Buffer Zones for National Parks (2012), which comprehensively described the need to protect National Parks through a comprehensive range of buffer zone interventions in the surrounding landscape. One of the key mechanisms for securing buffer zones is the establishment of a protected environment. In 2012, the Mountain Zebra Camdeboo Corridor Project was established by SANParks in partnership with Wilderness Foundation Africa to investigate the opportunity to declare private land surrounding both the Camdeboo and Mountain Zebra National Parks as a protected environment. This Protected Environment aimed to support the consolidation of the Sneeuberg grasslands linking Mountain Zebra and Camdeboo National Parks through partnerships with private landowners. The Mountain Zebra – Camdeboo Protected Environment, incorporating 892,754 ha, was declared in 2014 and 2016. A third phase of additional hectares is currently in the process of being declared.

Climate: The climate of the Greater Addo MLL is extensively varied, considering its location between the summer and winter rainfall areas and its geography extending from the coastal regions inland to the highest peak (Compassberg) of 2502m above sea level in the Sneeuberg mountains. The climate is therefore considered within three areas within the MLL.

The climate of the northeastern region is best described as cool and arid. Mean monthly minimum and maximum temperatures vary from 6 °C – 28 °C in summer (September to March) and from 0 °C – 20 °C in winter (April to August) (Brown and Bezuidenhout, 2000). Rainfall averages about 400 mm, with most (70 %) falling in summer. Periodic light snow occurs during the winter months. Frost is common between May and October.

The climate of the north-western region is best described as semi-arid, with 32 % of the average annual total of 336 mm of rain falling between February and April. Fog occurs frequently over the higher areas, predominantly from February to April, and contributes to moisture availability in these areas. Frost is

usually experienced from April to September, and snow occurs sporadically in winter on the high plateaus. Maximum air temperatures during summer may exceed 43 °C, with winter minimums falling below -3 °C.

The southern region is situated in a zone between summer, winter and all-year-round rainfall. The maritime and continental climates and the altitudinal variation result in a variable type of climate. The area straddles the summer rainfall area lying predominantly north of the Zuurberg range and the all-year rainfall areas south of the mountain range. The climate is best described as warm temperate. One of the major correlates of Thicket vegetation is the absence of a pronounced seasonal pattern. During drought periods, fog may be a source of moisture, as evidenced by a high incidence of bark and ground lichens. Mean annual rainfall varies from 900 mm in the Alexandria forests to 450 mm in the AENP main camp complex to an excess of 600 mm in the Zuurberg Mountains. Temperatures range from 15°C to 45°C in January and 5°C to 18°C in July.

Topography: A key feature of the Greater Addo MLL is that it is bisected by the Great Escarpment, splitting the area into the highland plateau and the lower-lying coastal strip. The lowest point of the Greater Addo MLL is approximately 50m ASL, while the highest point is the Compassberg Mountain range, being 2502 m ASL. This distinct altitudinal variation has created diversity in all components of its biodiversity values.

Geology: The geological formations in the eastern section of the MLL consist of sandstone, siltstone and mudstone of the Beaufort Group of the Karoo Supergroup, with dolerite plates and dykes. The mountain highlands rugged landscape is strongly associated with rocky outcrops, which cover 60% to 80% of the mountainous area. The steep midslopes are the most prominent topographical position in this mountainous landscape, with the dominant soil-rock complex consisting of rock, while the Glenrosa soil form is subdominant. The geology of this landscape consists of dolerite with mudstone, shale and sandstone of the Balfour Formation, Beaufort Group of the Karoo Supergroup.

The western section of the MLL forms part of the southern portion of the Karoo Mountain complex, which is, in turn, part of the Great Escarpment. The mountains in this area contain dolerites forced through the older Karoo sedimentary rocks. These dolerite intrusions affect the adjacent mudstone, siltstone and sandstone, creating metamorphic rocks such as lidianite from the mudstone. Subsequent erosion of the weaknesses in the dolerite has resulted in the characteristic landscape of buttes and mesas. The rock terraces, mesas, buttes and needles are characteristic profiles of arid landscapes. The geological system consists of very thick layers of near-horizontal strata of sedimentary rocks. The largest part of the pediment is covered with alluvium, wash, gravel, sands, mud and wash stone of recent origin, with characteristic superficial calcrete. These tertiary to quaternary deposits are important features influencing the vegetation of the Karoo biome, as they represent the growth medium for many dwarf shrubs in the region.

The southern section is characterised by a complex mixture of geology supporting various South African vegetation types. The Kirkwood formation of the Uitenhage Group underlies this area. Mudstone of the Kirkwood formation give rise to deep, fine-textured, sandy clay loams, solonetic soils and well-drained soils of the Addo form. Central to the area is the east-west orientated Zuurberg mountain range, part of the Cape fold belt, which consists predominantly of quartzite and sandstone sediments. Immediately to the south, high ancient wave-cut platforms are made up of a mixture of conglomerates, tillites,

mudstones and sandstones. At the same time, further south-eastwards towards the coast lie extensive limestone areas.

Hydrology: The Greater Addo Mega Living Landscape is located within a moderately wet area of South Africa, between the summer and winter rainfall areas. It is drained by two primary rivers, the Sundays and Fish Rivers. Several small and isolated National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Area (NFEPA) wetlands exist throughout the MLL. NFEPA rivers and wetlands are nationally recognised as important water resources and are considered priorities for biodiversity conservation.

2.4. Demographic and economic information

Demographic and economic information is presented per Mega Living Landscape as the demographics and economies of the three MLLs vary greatly.

Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL

The Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL encompasses six host municipalities with a population of 1.69 million. This population is unevenly distributed, with the City of Mbombela hosting the largest share at 41%⁸. The Nkomazi Local Municipality, with 25% of the population, and Chief Albert Luthuli Local Municipality, with 13%, follow as second and third largest municipalities in terms of population size.

The population is nearly evenly split between genders, with males constituting 49% and females 51%. The area comprises 453 551 households, with an average household size of 3.6 persons per household. The predominant housing typology is freestanding brick houses/structures, accounting for 89% of all households (405 676 households). The population predominantly comprises Black Africans, who comprise 94% of the population, followed by the White (5%) and Coloured (1%).

The working-age population, which totals 1.1 million individuals, accounts for 65% of the total population in the region, comparable with the national average of 66%. The dominance of the working age group suggests a need for economic strategies focused on job creation and vocational training to retain working-age individuals.

The Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL is experiencing a steady increase in population density. The number of persons per square kilometre was 49.2 in 2022 and is expected to rise to 54.8 by 2032, 61.0 by 2042 and 67.9 by 2052. This reflects an average annual growth rate of 1.1% . A growing population density can exert pressure on the local environment and biodiversity.

All households have access to energy for lighting in terms of basic services. The majority, 95%, utilise electricity, while the remainder use gas (1%) or candles (4%). Water access is varied: 41% of households have piped water inside their dwellings, 32% have piped water within their yards, 8% rely on communal taps, 2% of households use boreholes, and 11% depend on water carriers or vendors.

⁸ Quantec EasyData, 2024

About 442 883 (40%) of the 1,1-million working-age population are employed. The MLL faces significant employment challenges, with 190 477 individuals classified as unemployed and 467 992 not economically active. The unemployment rate is 31.3%.

The child-aged population in the region stands at 30%, slightly higher than the national average of 28%. This indicates a need for educational resources, childcare services, and recreational facilities and services.

The education profile across the MLL indicates that 22% of the population has completed grade 12, with a further ~25% completing some form of higher education. 32% of the population has no formal schooling or only some primary schooling. National data released by Stats SA show an increase in children who do not attend school. In 2021, nearly 3% of 15-year-olds and almost 9% of 17-year-olds had dropped out of school. The region's relatively low overall education attainment suggests that a significant portion of the population may lack the necessary skills and qualifications for decent work.

Households in Mpumalanga, like in other rural provinces in the country, depend on social grants provided by the government to sustain livelihoods. Mpumalanga has a cumulative total of over 1.6 million grant dependents as of the end of May 2024⁹. The details of the grants are provided in the tables below:

	Female		Male	
Care Dependency Grant	12 098	1%	436	0%
Child Support Grant	654 337	59%	16 917	2%
Disability Grant	40 435	4%	41 261	4%
Foster Care Grant	11 643	1%	792	0%
Grant-In-Aid	22 458	2%	11 080	1%
Old Age Grant	185 999	17%	108 432	10%
War Veteran's Grant	0	0%	0	0%
Total	926 970 (84%)		178 918 (16%)	

Overall, females constitute a dominant 84% share of the total grant recipients, while males represent only 16%. Females predominantly access the Child Support Grant, with 59% of the 84% of females accessing this grant. This is in line with the area's high unemployment rate, which necessitates the need to access state funding to meet basic child support needs

Local Economy: Mpumalanga's economy is primarily driven by the mining sector, followed by manufacturing, making up 27.7% and 13% of the provincial output, respectively. The largest manufacturing sectors in the province are petroleum, metals, and food and beverages. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted employment in Mpumalanga. From the first quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2022, the manufacturing sector experienced a 30% reduction in jobs, and the construction sector saw a 21% decline. Conversely, employment in mining and agriculture increased by 13% and 10%, respectively, during the same period.

⁹ SASSA, 2024

In the year 2021, Mpumalanga contributed 7.7% to national production, an increase from 7.3% in 2020. Additionally, the province's share of the national GDP has risen slightly over the past decade, from 7.1% in 2010 to 7.7% in 2021.

Mining operations within Barberton Nature Reserve: The Barberton region has one of South Africa's longest histories of gold mining, extending to before the gold rush of 1884. More than 320 tons of gold has been mined in the region, and additional minerals, including talc, verdite and asbestos, have also been discovered and mined.

Pan African Resources owns and operates Barberton Mines (Pty) Ltd, which owns three mines in the Barberton area: Fairview, New Consort and Sheba Mines. These mines mill approximately 30,000 tons of ore per month at an average grade of 8g/ton, delivering 201 kg of gold monthly.

Barberton Mines' mining operations are inside Barberton Nature Reserve, with 97% of its mining right areas falling in the reserve. As such, Barberton Mines and Barberton Nature Reserve must collaborate within the terms of the legislative framework. This requires that Barberton Mines exercise the highest levels of environmental management and control in their operations, given the sensitivity of the environment in which they are operating. It also requires the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency and Care for Wild, as the co-management entities, to work closely with the mines to ensure that the nature reserve and mining operations co-exist. The draft revised management plan for Barberton Nature Reserve provides a set of principles for managing the relationship and responsibilities of the two parties.

The Eastern Grasslands and Greater Addo MLLs are primarily based in the Eastern Cape province.

The Eastern Cape's contribution to the national GDP has declined since 2011, accounting for 7.6% of the national GDP in 2021, down from 7.8% in 2020¹⁰. This makes Eastern Cape the fifth-largest contributor to national GDP. The province has a relatively high share of non-urban areas, with two metros but no secondary cities.

As the most significant economic sector, manufacturing accounts for 12% of the provincial GDP and is dominated by the food and beverage industry, making up 25% of the sector's output, followed by transport equipment and petroleum. Eastern Cape has relatively small mining activities, as the sector accounted for a modest 0.2% of the provincial GDP in 2021.

Eastern Cape has the highest level of unemployment in the country. Unemployment in the province has risen over the past decade, with the absorption rate – the proportion of the working-age population aged 15-65 years employed – declining from 32.2% in 2010 to 28.5% in 2021, compared to the national average of 37% in 2021.

Households in the Eastern Cape, like in other provinces in the country, depend on social grants provided by the government to sustain livelihoods. In the Eastern Cape, there is a cumulative total of over 2.8 million grant dependents as of the end of May 2024. The details of the grants are provided in the tables below:

¹⁰ TIPS. 2021. Trends, Development and Data: Provincial Review 2022

	Female		Male	
Care Dependency Grant	23 365	1%	922	0%
Child Support Grant	1 051 068	52%	29 986	1%
Disability Grant	79 650	4%	94 411	5%
Foster Care Grant	39 063	2%	2 784	0%
Grant-In-Aid	39 110	2%	19 474	1%
Old Age Grant	400 585	20%	227 859	11%
War Veteran's Grant	0	0%	1	0%
Total	1 632 841 (81%)		375 437 (19%)	

Overall, females constitute a dominant 81% share of the total grant recipients, while males represent 19%. The Child Support Grant is by far the most accessed grant at 53%, followed by the Old Age Grant at 31%.

The share of people with Grade 12 and a degree in the Eastern Cape is lower than the national average, with 30% of the adult population in South Africa having a matric, and 13% have a degree.

In 2022, local universities in the Eastern Cape reported a total enrolment of 88,024 students, with a gender distribution of 42% males and 58% females. Furthermore, the number of graduates for the same year was 21 030, comprising 39% males and 61% females. This data reveals a higher participation and completion rate among female students compared to their male counterparts.

The higher enrolment and graduation rates among females suggest a significant gender disparity in favour of women in higher education in the Eastern Cape. This could be indicative of various socio-economic factors, including gender-targeted educational programmes/strategies, increased awareness of the importance of education among women, and possibly better support systems for female students.

Eastern Grasslands MLL

The Eastern Grassland MLL encompasses three host municipalities with a total population of 472 201 residents. The area was under 'Bantu homelands' management under Apartheid and has suffered from disinvestment because of the Government of South Africa's political practices in the past. Across the Eastern Cape, 44% of the population lives in non-urban areas, compared to the national average of 26%. The area comprises 122 687 households, with an average household size of 3.8 persons. The region's population comprises mainly females, who comprise 54% of the population in the region, with males constituting 46%. The population is unevenly distributed, with the Elundini and Senqu local municipalities contributing 28% and Matatiele Local municipality hosting the largest share at 44%.

The average annual population growth rate is estimated at 0.74%. The population density, currently at 30.7 persons per square kilometre as of 2022, is expected to rise steadily, reaching 33.9 persons per square kilometre by 2032, 37.5 by 2042 and 41.4 by 2052. The population predominantly comprises Black Africans, who make up 98% of the demographic, followed by the Coloured and White population, each at 1%.

The working-age group accounts for the highest proportion of the population in the region at 55% (or 257,914 individuals) of the total population. However, this is lower than the national average of 66%. The higher percentage share of females in the working-age population (30%) compared to males (25%)

suggests a need for project design to factor in capacity development, support services and development of economic opportunities appropriate to this demographic group.

Regarding housing typology, most households, 73% (89 730), reside in a freestanding house/brick structure. This is followed by 20% (24 530) of households living in traditional dwellings. Basic services access in the MLL varies. All households have access to energy for lighting, with a predominant reliance on electricity (89%). However, a portion of the population depends on alternative sources such as gas (1%), paraffin (2%), candles (4%), and solar power (5%).

Water access is also varied, with 27% of households having piped water inside their dwelling and 25% having piped water inside their yard. Communal taps serve 18% of households, while boreholes account for 10%. 13% of the population source their water directly from dams or rivers.

Of the 257,914 individuals who make up the working-age population in the MLL, 60,928 (13%) individuals are employed, while 155,367 individuals (or 33%) are not economically active. The average unemployment rate stands at 40.6%. This data presents several important implications for the Grassland MLL and suggests a need for strategies focused on creating economic opportunities including through improved livelihoods, job creation and vocational training.

The child population in the MLL stands at 37%, which is higher than the national average of 28%. This indicates a young population with a growing need for educational resources, childcare services, and recreational facilities.

21% of the adult population in the Eastern Cape have completed Grade 12, and only 10% have a degree. The share of people with Grade 12 and a degree in the Eastern Cape is lower than the national average, with 30% of the adult population in South Africa having a matric, and 13% have a degree. In the Grasslands MLL, these figures are even lower, with 3% of the population having a degree and 12% having completed Grade 12. ~47% of the population have no formal schooling or some primary schooling.

The Eastern Grasslands MLL is predominantly rural, with large areas under communal land ownership where communities primarily engage in livestock production, focusing on cattle and sheep. This activity is a significant source of income for communities, who depend on it to cover various socio-economic needs like children's school fees, home construction, and general economic security. Consequently, securing rangelands, essential for biodiversity and productive grasses for livestock, is a shared priority for both communities and the Grasslands MLL.

These rangelands face threats from competing land uses, poor management, and insufficient resources for best practices. Nearby rangelands are at risk from cultivation and small-scale mining activities, such as sand mining which can be quite destructive in the landscape. Additionally, inadequate fire management and grazing planning lead to the spread of non-grass species, encroachment by local and invasive woody vegetation (including *L. sericea* & *A. mernsii*), and significant soil erosion, forming rills and gullies.

Communal rural communities also need a trust-building approach to addressing environmental and socioeconomic challenges. This requires extensive capacity building, focusing on skills development and employment opportunities through strategic programmes within these landscapes.

Greater Addo MLL

The Greater Addo MLL is predominantly located in falls mainly within the Eastern Cape province, extending partially into some presence in the Northern Cape and Western Cape. This diverse, broad geographical distribution domain highlights the MLL's extensive reach, underscoring its ecological significance and the need for coordinated conservation efforts across different administrative regions and bioregional zones.

The area comprises 81 638 households, with an average household size of 3.7 persons. The housing typology indicates a predominance of formal housing, with 90% of households living in freestanding houses. Traditional dwellings account for only 1% of the total.

Regarding basic services, all households have access to energy for lighting, with 95% relying on electricity. Regarding water access, 67% of households have piped water inside their dwellings, while 27% have piped water inside their yards. Communal taps are utilised by 3% of households.

The average population growth rate between 2012 and 2022 was 0.08%, highlighting a period of near stagnation. The population is evenly split between genders, with males constituting 49.9% and females 50.1%.

The working-age population totals 195 342 individuals, constituting 63% of the regional population, slightly lower than the national average of 66%.

Of the working-age population of 195 342 individuals, 86 195 individuals (or 44%) are employed. 25,919 individuals are classified as unemployed. This contributes to an unemployment rate of 24.3%. 83 229 individuals (or 42%) are not economically active.

40% of the population in the region have either no schooling or only some primary schooling. 16% of the population have completed grade 12, and only 4% have completed some form of higher education. 29% have some high schooling.

2.5. IPs and Vulnerable Groups

Overview of Indigenous Peoples Situation

Considering that no IPs are located in the three MLLs, the project takes the social inclusion approach to ensure that the issues of marginalised and vulnerable groups are addressed. This is because vulnerability is a core social concern, cutting across all facets of African societies.

The indigenous communities of South Africa are the Khoikhoi and the San, often jointly called the Khoi-San. The three main San groups the !Xun and the Khwe, are found in Platfontein, Kimberley, and the Khomani San in the Kalahari region. The Khoikhoi includes the Nama, who live in the Northern Cape Province, the Koranna in Kimberley and the Free State Province, and the Griqua, who reside in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces¹¹. Khoi-San peoples are the direct descendants of the first peoples of southern Africa, and their ancestry goes back to the earliest roots of modern humanity. Before the arrival of Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists from East and Central Africa¹², they existed for tens of thousands of years in the region. The impact of European settlement in South Africa led to the almost destruction of Khoi-San cultures and the

¹¹ IWGIA. 2024. Report of the Indigenous Navigator National Survey in South Africa
¹² Southern Africa - The Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (ipacc.org.za)

assimilation of the Khoi-San into colonial and apartheid society alongside various other groups¹³. By the early 1800s, the Khoi-San were no longer a free society¹⁴ and had largely lost touch with their cultural heritage.

South Africa has not yet ratified the International Labor Organization Conventions (ILO Conventions) 169 and 107. It has however voted in favor of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2016. As a state party to the African Charter on Human Peoples Rights (ACHPR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic and Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and its progressive Constitution, the Country is legally obliged to protect, promote, and fulfil the rights of indigenous communities¹⁵.

To a limited extent, the country has taken legislative and administrative steps towards advancing Indigenous communities' rights, which has been hampered by ineffective implementation in practice. The rights include self-determination, autonomy, land; territory, resource rights; rights to culture and cultural heritage, access to genetic resources and protection of traditional knowledge, and the recognition of the issues on the conflict between human rights and customary law, and the future of customary law within the national and the international legal pluralism. As a result, the Khoi-San are not yet able to fully realise their rights above or to have them enforced. The country still struggles to fulfil the rights to self-identification, political representation, land restitution, religion and language for the Khoi-San peoples^{16 17}. The Khoi-San currently do not have formal title or customary ownership of their ancestral lands, and the South African land restitution process presently excludes them from the process¹⁸.

In recent years, the country has passed into law the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act (2019), which, *inter alia*, sought to provide for the recognition of traditional and Khoi-San communities and leadership positions and for the withdrawal of such recognition. The Act has, however, been invalidated on the basis that full public participation was not undertaken, in line with South African legislative prescripts¹⁹. The government has 24 months to improve on or replace the Act.

IPs in project sites

The Khoi-San people were traditionally hunter-gatherers and largely roamed over most of the northwestern half of South Africa. As indicated above, because of colonisation, the Khoi-San people were integrated into communities and towns in South Africa²⁰ where, in many instances, they have lost touch with their cultural heritage. The Khoi-San are not located in the project MLLs.

¹³ Rafael Verbuyst (2024) Sensing indigeneity: A sensory ethnography of the presence of the past among newly identifying indigenous people in South Africa. DOI: 10.1177/0308275X241268401

¹⁴ Magda Minguzzi et al (2023) Traditional dwellings and techniques of the First Indigenous Peoples of South Africa in the Eastern Cape. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4995/HERITAGE2022.2022.15019>

¹⁵ IWGIA. 2024. Report of the Indigenous Navigator National Survey in South Africa

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ The Indigenous World 2024: South Africa <https://www.iwgia.org/en/south-africa/5358-iw-2024-southafrica.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.ipacc.org.za/southern-africa/>

¹⁹ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-05-30-major-victory-activists-and-civil-society-hail-judgment-declaring-traditional-and-khoi-san-leadership-act-invalid/>

²⁰ Interview with Paramount Chief Edmund Stuurman, Khoi-San historian, 22 October 2024

2.6. Gender

According to the 2022 Mid-year Population Estimates, the female population in South Africa was estimated at 31,0 million, amounting to 51,1% of the population. Despite there being more women in its society, South Africa is a highly unequal and largely patriarchal society, characterised by high levels of gender-based violence, poverty and exclusion. Women continue to be economically, socially and politically marginalised and disadvantaged due to social attributes and gendered norms that hinder their access to opportunities for employment and participation in social organisations. Women still earn 50 percent less on average than their male counterparts. This gender disparity is also evident in youth unemployment statistics. In 2024, the labour absorption rate for young men was 31.9%, compared to 24.2% for young women. The estimated unemployment rate for young females stood at 49.4% in 2024, reflecting an increase of 3.3 percentage points from 46.1% in 2004. Even though women's participation has increased in the informal economy, for most women this has not translated into economic empowerment²¹.

South Africa ranks 18th on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index²², which covers 146 countries worldwide. The Index annually benchmarks the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. The 2024 Index ranks South Africa highly (ninth) for political empowerment, 96th for economic participation and opportunity, 48th for educational attainment, and 29th for health and survival. However, the high level of political empowerment has not translated into gender parity across the other dimensions.

In alignment with the White Paper on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), DFFE works to tackle these complex social and economic factors by placing women and youth at the forefront of environmental and conservation management²³. Under the Goal of Transformation, the White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity, the country's policy response to the GBF, recognises the need to promote participation and the influence of women to enhance a gender-sensitive and responsive approach to biodiversity conservation.

Males still occupy most senior and middle management positions (SMS) in the public sector²⁴. Their composition ranged from 58,4% in 2018 to 56,2% in 2021, while their female counterparts occupied 41,6% in 2018 and slightly increased to 43,8% in 2021. This includes the biodiversity conservation sector, which has seen a marked increase in women in management and technical positions in recent years.

Furthermore, various multi-sectoral governmental Extended Public Works Programmes (EPWP), such as the Working for Water, Working for Land, Working for Wetlands, Working on Fire and LandCare programmes, deliberately support women's empowerment by linking biodiversity conservation with

²¹<https://www.dpme.gov.za/publications/20%20Years%20Review/20%20Year%20Review%20Documents/20YR%20Women's%20empowerment%20and%20Gender%20equality.pdf>

²² <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/digest/>

²³ <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/women-leading-the-charge-transforming-sas-environment-sector/>

²⁴ Gender Series Volume IX: Women Empowerment, 2017–2022. Published by Statistics South Africa, Private Bag X44, Pretoria 0001

socio-economic development. These initiatives create opportunities for women while also contributing to the overall growth and sustainability of the sector. In the 2023/2024 financial year, 80 918 work opportunities were created across these multi-sectoral programmes of which 60% (48 377) were awarded to women.

These commitments promote the scaling up of nature-positive food production, strengthen women's land rights to advance land restoration, and foster youth engagement by creating decent land-based jobs for women and young people.

South Africa has legislation in place to deal with SEAH matters, including the Domestic Violence Act, 116 of 1998 and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007), however, Gender Based Violence (GBV) remains a significant barrier to women's empowerment as it negatively affects their ability to choose and make decisions, especially if they constantly live in fear of violence either at home or at the workplace.

According to the South African Police Service (SAPS) crime statistics for 2023 however, over 42,000 cases of rape were reported, highlighting a dire situation²⁵. Furthermore, femicide rates in South Africa are among the highest globally, with a woman being murdered every three hours. These twin scourges are deeply rooted in the country's post-apartheid socio-economic fabric. GBV is not merely a social ill but a profound reflection of enduring gender inequalities and systemic failures.

The Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities Strategic Plan (2020 – 2025) emphasises economic empowerment as central to addressing gender inequalities²⁶. The Department advocates for all government departments, public entities and civil society organisations to focus on economic development and rural development as key sectors in empowering women and other marginalised groups. Interventions must demonstrate benefits for women and other marginalised groups. Economic development must extend to village and township economies where women and youth predominantly run enterprises in the informal sector.

The Commission on Gender Equality suggests that initiatives to promote gender equality focus on providing training, access to finance, market linkages, and skills development to enhance women's participation in higher-value segments and entrepreneurship²⁷. Closely linked to training in relevant sectors are leadership training and mentorship programmes that aim to increase the representation of women in decision-making roles.

The Environment Sector Gender Strategy²⁸ sets out several strategies for promoting gender mainstreaming in the Environment Sector. Strategy 7: Economic Transformation, Strategy 8: Partnerships and Networking and Strategy 11: Capacity Building are particularly relevant to the work of the GEF 8 project. Furthermore, the White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of SA's Biodiversity, through Goal 4: Transformation, promotes meaningful access and equitable benefit-sharing for designated groups, including women and marginalised peoples.

²⁵ <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/2024-elections-and-the-future-of-gender-transformation-in-sa/>

²⁶ Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities Strategic Plan (2020 – 2025). Pretoria

²⁷ Commission for Gender Equality (2024) Women in the South African economy. CGE, Pretoria

²⁸ Department of Environmental Affairs. Strategy toward gender mainstreaming in the environment sector 2016 – 2021 (extended to 2025).

Drawing on the above, the GAP accompanying this ESMF provides a set of actions to be undertaken to ensure its efforts to conserve biodiversity and promote socio-economic development in the three MLLs in ways that drive gender equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion:

- Engage more deeply with key stakeholders during the implementation phase of the project in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender issues and dynamics in the three MLLs and ensure that gender mainstreaming initiatives adequately address the specific needs of women in these areas.
- Ensure that the Project Results Framework and accompanying budget make provision for gender equality and women empowerment indicators. The framework should go beyond gender-disaggregated figures to capture key activities to ensure qualitative outcomes of gender mainstreaming.
- Ensure that during implementation that the GAP is considered along with the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework and the Stakeholder Engagement Plan.
- Undertake regular and ongoing gender mainstreaming training with project staff and partners to enable project stakeholders to systematically mainstream gender and develop a common approach to tackling gender inequality and women empowerment issues. The training should equip project staff and partners with the skills to identify and appropriately respond to gender issues in their day-to-day work and thus ensure equal opportunity to participate and benefit from the project.
- Confirm and prioritise the main gender and social inclusion issues (strategic and practical) and practices that the project should focus on at MLL level, to progressively facilitate positive change and minimise barriers to marginalised groups', including women's, participation and benefits from project outcomes. Developing Social Inclusion Plans as set out in the Social Inclusion Planning Framework (contained in the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework) would assist with this prioritisation.
- Allocate sufficient project capacity and resources at MLL level to effectively implement the GAP.
- Identify measures to avoid, mitigate or manage possible adverse gender impacts related to project interventions. Consider and mitigate potential safety and other effects that could affect female project staff engaged in stakeholder engagement and extension support activities with communities.
- Utilise traditional, religious and community leaders, and any existing women's groups or other social structures as entry points for gender mainstreaming. Community members take leaders as role models and take a cue from them. Role models amongst traditional and community leaders should be identified and capacitated as gender champions who speak out against harmful traditional and cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality.
- Facilitate women's and other marginalised groups' full participation and decision-making capacity in project activities that affect them within each MLL and empower them to be agents of change. Monitor such efforts for their effects on their rights, status and welfare. If marginalised groups are left out of the planning and implementation of local initiatives, valuable input is lost. Given cultural obstacles and gender stereotypes, women often find it difficult to enter into relevant professional fields and gain specific expertise. Inclusion of girls in project activities within each MLL is vital for fostering future generations of women leaders in conservation management. Programmes that encourage girls to participate in conservation education and community decision-making can help cultivate a sense of responsibility and agency in caring for their natural surroundings.

- Develop a suite of project-appropriate socio-economic and livelihood activities that positively impact women and the issues that matter to them. Training and development opportunities for women in the nature-based economy, including in tourism and the wild-life economy, should be prioritised.
- Define the structure and capacities to be developed to respond to gender inequalities to be addressed by the project, allocate specific resources for gender items in the project budget and work plan, and monitor their implementation and flow of funds throughout the project lifespan.
- Define responsibilities, necessary information, and resources for monitoring and reporting on gender mainstreaming. Include gender-specific activities and training sessions in the project timeline to develop capacity for gender-related M&E. Ensure regular M&E of the GAP.
- Ensure that project Grievance Mechanisms appropriately address matters of gender equality and social inclusion.
- Create opportunities for thematic exposure visits between MLLs to broaden perspectives, knowledge sharing, and building for both female and male leaders.
- In implementing the GAP, consider a broader definition of gender (beyond a binary definition).

3. Environment and Social Policy, Regulations and Guidelines

This section first outlines the laws and regulations of South Africa and the WWF’s ESSF and SIPP that apply to the project and then discusses gaps between South Africa’s laws and regulations and the SIPP.

For the GEF 8 *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project* implementation, the principles and procedures of the ESSF and SIPP shall prevail in all cases of discrepancies.

3.1. South Africa’s Policies, Laws, Regulations, Guidelines

The South African legal, regulatory and policy environment influencing the project has its foundations in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996).

Constitution Act 108 of 1996: The Bill of Rights included in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (“the Constitution”) indicates that, in terms of Section 24, the citizens of South Africa have the right to have the environment protected and to live in an environment that is not harmful to human health or well-being.

The Constitution further elaborates that everyone has the right (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing and (b) to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations through reasonable legislative and other measures that— (i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (ii) promote conservation; and (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.

National Development Plan 2030: The National Development Plan aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. South Africa can realise these goals by drawing on the energies of its people, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the state’s capacity, and promoting

leadership and partnerships throughout society. The plan focuses on the critical capabilities needed to transform the economy and society. The plan sets out six interlinking priorities:

- Uniting all South Africans around a common programme to achieve prosperity and equity.
- Promoting active citizenry to strengthen development, democracy and accountability.
- Bring about faster economic growth, higher investment, and greater labour absorption.
- Focusing on key capabilities of people and the state.
- Building a capable and developmental state.
- Encouraging strong leadership throughout society to work together to solve problems.

Of particular importance to this project are the following NDP objectives: i) Environmental Sustainability and Resilience through increased landscapes under protection for biodiversity conservation and investment in rural livelihoods; ii) Economy and Employment through reduced unemployment, broadened ownership of assets and increased GDP; iii) Social Protection through training and skills development for income support and improved participatory governance for more transparent benefit-sharing with marginal communities; and iv) Inclusive Rural Economy through sustainable rural economic development; promotion of inclusive businesses and value chains; and multi-stakeholder engagement among strategic partners (Government of South Africa, NGOs, and private sector), beneficiaries and PAs authorities.

Laws on Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation

National Environmental Management Act No. 107 of 1998 NEMA: The National Environmental Management Act provides for “co-operative, environmental governance by establishing principles for decision-making on matters affecting the environment, institutions that will promote co-operative governance and procedures for coordinating environmental functions exercised by organs of state; and to provide for matters connected therewith”. The Act promotes the application of appropriate environmental management tools to ensure integrated environmental management of development activities. Furthermore, the Act as part of the integrated environmental management process, the public needs to be informed and its participation enabled, in all phases of the investigation and assessment of impact.

National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 – NEMPAA: The National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act declares its objectives as “to promote sustainable utilisation of protected areas for the benefit of people, in a manner that would preserve the ecological character of such areas; and to promote participation of local communities in the management of protected areas, where appropriate.” According to this legislation, the purposes of the declaration of areas as protected areas include assisting in ensuring the sustained supply of environmental goods and services; providing for the sustainable use of natural and biological resources; creating or augmenting destinations for nature-based tourism; managing the interrelationship between biodiversity, human settlement and economic development.

Among the purposes of the declaration of protected areas, the Act mentions the protection of ecologically viable areas representative of South Africa’s biological diversity and its natural landscapes and seascapes in a system of protected areas, preservation of the ecological integrity of those areas and conservation of biodiversity in those areas. In addition, the Act allows for ensuring the sustained supply of environmental goods and services, providing for the sustainable use of natural and biological

resources, and creating or augmenting destinations for nature-based tourism. The Act also mentions the purpose of managing the interrelationship between biodiversity, human settlement and economic development and contributing to human, social, cultural and spiritual development.

National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 10 of 2004 – NEMBA: The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) provides for the management and conservation of South Africa's biodiversity within the framework of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998; the protection of species and ecosystems that warrant protection; the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from bioprospecting involving indigenous biological resources; the establishment and functions of a South African National Biodiversity Institute; and for matters connected therewith. The Act recognises, among other things, that biodiversity conservation involves working beyond the boundaries of formal protected areas across production and communal landscapes. South Africa published its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in 2005. National targets, aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, have already been developed. Along with the National Biodiversity Assessment (2018), these documents serve as the basis for the National Biodiversity Framework (NBF), updated every five years as required by the Biodiversity Act.

White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity: The White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity (2022) was published by the Minister and Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) in accordance with section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) which includes the "right to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations through reasonable legislative and other measures that, inter alia, promote conservation and secure ecologically sustainable development and the use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development." It represents a paradigm shift for conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity and emphasises a uniquely South African approach to conservation founded on the principles of Ubuntu. It forms the foundation for developing and implementing the GEF 8 *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project*.

The White Paper highlights the findings of the most recent National Biodiversity Assessment (2018), which show that almost half of South Africa's ecosystem types are threatened, with estuaries, rivers and wetlands having the highest proportion of threatened ecosystem types. 31% of ecosystem types are not represented in the current protected area system, with wetlands and river ecosystem types having the lowest levels of protection overall.

In examining the benefits derived from biodiversity, the White Paper notes that biodiversity-related jobs number approximately 418,000 and the biodiversity-based tourism industry is worth over R30 billion per year. It also notes that intact ecosystems and high species diversity are essential for agricultural production and highlights that healthy rangeland supports livestock and wildlife (the latter being worth R14 billion per year). It states that South Africa's biodiversity provides substantial employment comparable to the mining sector and that at least five other jobs depend indirectly on biodiversity use, for every job dedicated to conserving biodiversity. It concludes that biodiversity contributes to the goals of the National Development Plan by reducing poverty and inequality, through stimulating and building an inclusive rural economy. The policy objectives and expected outcomes of the White Paper include a set of goals, many of which are relevant to an integrated conservation and development approach. These include:

- Biodiversity conservation and sustainable use is transformative. This builds on concepts of environmental rights and ubuntu and is intended to advance the meaningful participation and active involvement of Previously Disadvantaged Individuals (PDIs) through the value chain of the biodiversity sector. The intention is to capitalise on the mega-diverse nature of biodiversity and wild landscapes to drive rural socio-economic development.
- Integrated, mainstreamed and effective biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. This considers integration across all spheres of government and society to ensure biodiversity contributes meaningfully to justifiable sustainable development. However, that development does not compromise the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for present and future generations.
- Equitable access and benefits sharing. This goal aims for benefits derived and shared from using and developing South Africa's genetic and biological resources to serve national interests.
- The biodiversity economy transformed. Promote and develop economic opportunities compatible with and complement the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and create and enable incentives that support the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

A range of policy objectives have been identified related to the goals set out in the White Paper. Amongst these is a policy objective to create large, contiguous terrestrial conservation landscapes that enhance naturalness and wildness. A further policy objective is to ensure that protected areas are effective drivers of inclusive socio-economic development. This requires changes in institutional arrangements for state-protected areas, partnerships with privately owned land, co-management arrangements with communities and arrangements for incorporation of community-owned land. A policy objective that is particularly relevant to the integrated conservation and development model being adopted for MLLs is enhanced cooperative governance across spheres of government. This requires the development of tools for relevant sectors to incorporate biodiversity conservation and promote sustainable use.

National Biodiversity Economy Strategy: Approximately 12 per cent of South Africa's land surface is arable, and only 2.2 per cent of the country's land surface is high potential arable land, which means that in many instances, agriculture is marginal land use. In this context, the wildlife ranching industry has grown from approximately 3,500 farms in the early 1990s to over 10,000, covering an area of about 20.5 million hectares. Given the challenges of rural poverty in South Africa and the demands driven by the rural development and land reform process, developments within the biodiversity economy can lead to meaningful socio-economic development in some of the most under-resourced parts of the country.

Wildlife ranching can involve multiple activities, including tourism, hunting and the commercial production of game meat. The government has acknowledged the role of this industry in the land reform and rural development process through the adoption of the Biodiversity Economy Strategy (2018) and the recent publication of a revised draft of the Biodiversity Economy Strategy (2024). The following key initiatives were identified:

- The identification and prioritisation of 10 million hectares for the transformation of the wildlife economy.
- The establishment, development and support to new wildlife ranching entrants through infrastructure support and game donation programmes.

- Operationalisation of eleven Biodiversity Economy Nodes (BENs) in the nine provinces of South Africa. These have been superseded by Mega Living Conservation Landscapes in the latest draft of the Biodiversity Economy Strategy.
- Formalising the South African game meat market and creating a network of 110 game meat processing facilities, which are black owned.
- Unlocking the potential of protected areas.
- Capacitating organised community structures such as CPAs and Trusts.

The government intends to invest heavily in this sector, which will be integral to the land reform and rural development process in the coming years. Adopting an integrated conservation and development approach, as envisaged by the MLL Project, complements and is aligned with the goals and objectives of the Biodiversity Economy.

Biodiversity Stewardship: South Africa has a strong enabling environment for protected area expansion, provided through the provisions of NEMPAA. To support protected area expansion efforts, South Africa has developed a National Protected Area Expansion Strategy (NPAES) that sets out the country’s approach and identifies spatial priorities for expansion. Each province has developed provincial protected area expansion strategies that contribute to the national strategy. SANParks currently gives effect to the NPAES through its Corporate Strategic Plan sub outcome “Protected Area expansion aligned with the NPAES and SANParks Land Inclusion Plan”.

NEMPAA provides SANParks and provincial biodiversity conservation authorities with several mechanisms to expand the system of protected areas. These include declaration of land purchased by SANParks, or land owned by the state, land held in trust by the state on behalf of communities, and privately owned land. In addition, a suite of tools has been developed under the auspices of national and provincial Biodiversity Stewardship Programmes to formally recognise conservation efforts that supplement the system of protected areas (Figure 5). In some instances, these areas are recognised as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) as described in Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal GBF.

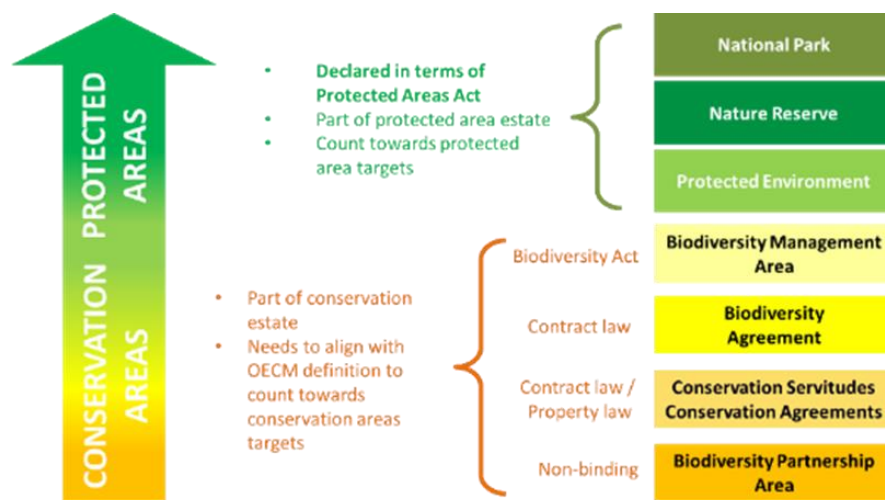


Figure 1: Categories applied in South Africa’s Biodiversity Stewardship Programme

A primary means of protected area expansion is through the declaration of private land and state-owned communal land as protected areas. This includes the declaration of new national parks or additions to existing national parks as contemplated in Section 20 of NEMPAA. The NPAES acknowledges that because the cost to purchase the land required to meet the country's protected area expansion targets would be unrealistically prohibitive, expansion through contractual arrangements with landowners and land rights holders provides the primary option for effective protected area expansion. In South Africa, biodiversity stewardship is the approach that is used to secure land in biodiversity priority areas through entering into voluntary agreements with private landowners, Community Trusts and Communal Property Associations (CPAs), sometimes linked to traditional authorities administering state-owned communal land (SANBI 2018).

The Business Case for Biodiversity Stewardship (SANBI 2015) demonstrated that the costs to establish a protected area through contractual arrangements with landowners were between 70 and 400 times less costly to the state than land acquisition. Furthermore, the cost to the state to support ongoing management of a contract protected area was found to be between four and 17 times less than the cost to manage a state-owned protected area.

Protected area expansion progress between 2008 and 2016 shows that biodiversity stewardship (including purchase or donation of land by NGO partners, in particular WWF-SA and the National Parks Trust) constituted 81% of protected area expansion whilst 19% of protected area expansion was undertaken through the declaration of state land.

Specific Policies Related to Sustainable Land Management

Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (Act No, 43 of 1983): An Act to provide for control over the utilisation of the natural agricultural resources of the Republic to promote the conservation of the soil, the water sources and the vegetation and the combating of weeds and invader plants; and for matters connected therewith.

National Forest Act, 1998 (Act No, 84 of 1998): Natural forests and woodlands form an important part of the environment and need to be conserved and developed according to the principles of sustainable management. In terms of section 7(1) of the National Forests Act, 1998, no person may cut, disturb, damage or destroy any Indigenous tree in, or remove or receive any such tree from, a natural forest except in terms of: (a) license issued under subsection (4) or section 23; or (b) an exemption from the provisions of subsection (4) published by the Minister in the Gazette. Regulations associated with the National Forests Act were published as Government Notice R466 (29 April 2009).

World Heritage Convention Act, 1999 (Act No, 49 of 1999): This Act incorporates the World Heritage Convention into South African law, providing for enforcement and implementation of the World Heritage Convention in South Africa, the recognition and establishment of World Heritage Sites and the establishment of Authorities and the granting of additional powers to existing organs of state; the powers and duties of such Authorities, especially those safeguarding the integrity of World Heritage Sites. This legislation also defines the procedures for the establishment of Boards and Executive Staff Components of the Authorities, integrated management plans and land matters in relation to World Heritage Sites.

National Heritage Resources Act (Act No. 25 of 1999): The NHRA is the overarching legislation that protects and regulates the management of heritage resources in South Africa, with specific reference to the following Sections:

- Section 5. General principles for HRM
- Section 6. Principles for the management of heritage resources
- Section 7. Heritage assessment criteria and grading
- Section 35. Protection of paleontological, archaeological and meteorite resources
- Section 38. Heritage resources management

The Act requires that Heritage Resources Authorities (HRAs), in this case South African Heritage Resources Agency, be notified as early as possible of any developments that may exceed certain minimum thresholds in terms of Section 38(1), or when assessments of impacts on heritage resources are required by other legislation in terms of Section 38(8) of the Act.

Meat Safety Act (Act 40 of 2000): The Meat Safety Act 40 of 2000 intends to provide for measures to promote meat safety and the safety of animal products, to establish and maintain essential national standards in respect of abattoirs, to regulate the importation and exportation of meat, to establish meat safety schemes; and to provide for matters connected therewith. The Act makes provision for measures for meat derived from both domestic and wild animal sources.

Laws on Labor and Working Conditions

Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993: The objective of this Act is to provide for the health and safety of persons at work and for the health and safety of persons in connection with the use of plant and machinery; the protection of persons other than persons at work against hazards to health and safety arising out of or in connection with the activities of persons at work; to establish an advisory council for occupational health and safety.

Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997: The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 gives effect to the right to fair labour practices referred to in section 23(1) of the Constitution by establishing and making provision for the regulation of basic conditions of employment, and thereby to comply with the obligations of the Republic as a member state of the International Labour Organisation. According to the Act, employing a child younger than 15 is criminal. The Basic Conditions of Employment Amendment Act, No. 20 of 2013, was published and became effective on 1 September 2014.

Labour Relations Act, 1995: The Labour Relations Act aims to promote economic development, social justice, labour peace and democracy in the workplace. It sets out to achieve this by fulfilling the primary objectives of the Act, which are to give effect to and regulate the fundamental rights conferred by section 27 of the Constitution, including the right to fair labour practices, to form and join trade unions and employer's organisations, to organise and bargain collectively, and to strike and lockout; to provide a framework for regulating the relationship between employees and their unions on the one hand, and employers and their organisations on the other hand. At the same time, it also encourages employers and employees to regulate relations between themselves; and to promote orderly collective bargaining, collective bargaining at sectoral level, employee participation in decision-making in the workplace and the effective resolution of labour disputes.

Employment Equity Act, 1998: The Employment Equity Act promotes equity in the workplace, ensures that all employees receive equal opportunities and that employees are treated fairly by their employers. The law protects you from unfair treatment and any form of discrimination. The law states that your employer can't discriminate against you directly or indirectly through employment policy or practice on the grounds of race, gender, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion,

culture, language, and birth. The law aims to redress injustices of the past by implementing affirmative action measures.

Children’s Act, 2005: Section 141 of the Children’s Act prohibits that child be used, procured or employed for ‘slavery or practices similar to slavery, including but not limited to debt bondage, servitude and serfdom, or forced or compulsory labour or provision of services’ or for ‘purposes of commercial sexual exploitation’ or for the commission of a crime. The Act further requires social service professionals to report any instances of contravention of the act that they are aware of.

Land Acquisition

Restitution of Land Rights Act, 2003: In 1994, the first law passed by the first democratically elected parliament was the Restitution of Land Rights Act (Act 22 of 1994). This was done with the conscious acknowledgement that land justice is important to deal with the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

The Act makes provision for the restitution of rights in land to persons or communities dispossessed of such rights after 19 June 1913 because of past racially discriminatory laws or practices. To administer this task, the Act established a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and a Land Claims Court. The Minister is authorised to purchase, acquire in any other manner or expropriate land or rights in land for restitution awards.

Communal Property Association Act 1996: The Communal Property Association Act makes provision for communities to form juristic persons, to be known as communal property associations, to acquire, hold and manage property on a basis agreed to by members of a community. This must be done in terms of a written constitution.

Indigenous Peoples

Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act, 2019: In 2021, the country passed into law the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act 3 of 2019, which *inter alia* sought to provide for the recognition of traditional and Khoi-San communities, leadership positions and for the withdrawal of such recognition. The Act has, however, been invalidated on the basis that full public participation was not undertaken, in line with South African legislative prescripts. The South African Government has 24 months in which to improve or replace the Act.

Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Act, 2019: The Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Act, 2019 aims to protect the indigenous knowledge of indigenous communities from unauthorised use, misappropriation and misuse. It promotes public awareness and understanding of indigenous knowledge for wider application and development. The Act seeks to develop and enhance indigenous communities' potential to protect indigenous knowledge, regulate the equitable distribution of benefits, and promote the commercial use of indigenous knowledge in the development of new products, services and processes.

Gender, Gender-Based Violence, and Sexual Harassment

Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000: In terms of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 4 of 2000 (PEPUDA), which gives expression to the right to equality, section 8 stipulates that no person may be unfairly discriminated against on the grounds of gender, expressly including gender-based violence. Section 8 of PEPUDA prohibits limiting

women's access to social services, such as health or education, and denies or denies systemic inequality in access to opportunities.

Domestic Violence Act, 1998: The Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 ("the DVA") is the law that deals with domestic violence in South Africa. This law exists to give people who are experiencing domestic violence the best possible protection that the law can, and it commits the government to stopping domestic violence.

Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1991: The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007, also referred to as the Sexual Offences Act) is an act of the Parliament of South Africa that reformed and codified the law relating to sex offences. It repealed various common law crimes (including rape and indecent assault) and replaced them with statutory crimes defined on a gender-neutral basis. It expanded the definition of rape, previously limited to vaginal sex, to include all non-consensual penetration, and it equalised the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual sex at 16. The act provides various services to the victims of sexual offences, including free post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV and the ability to obtain a court order to compel HIV testing of the alleged offender. It also created the National Register for Sex Offenders, which records the details of those convicted of sexual offences against children or people who are mentally disabled.

Community Engagement

The South African Constitution asserts the need for the realisation of a participatory democracy, which calls for the active involvement and participation of the citizenry as well as more defined interest groups.

Public Participation Framework for the South African Legislative Sector: This framework defines public participation as 'the process by which Parliament and provincial legislatures consult with the people, i.e. interested or affected individuals, organisations and government entities before making a decision. Public participation is two-way communication and a collaborative problem-solving mechanism to achieve better and more acceptable decisions. Other terms sometimes used are 'public involvement', 'community involvement' or 'stakeholder involvement'.' The Framework acknowledges that in a diverse society such as South Africa, there is also a need to recognise that the term public is inclusive and diverse by its very nature and that there should be a focus on those who are confronted with poverty and lack access to resources, including children, women, people with disabilities and the youth.

The National **People and Parks Forum** (DFPE facilitated) aims to address issues at the interface between conservation and communities, particularly the realisation of tangible benefits by previously displaced communities to pave the way for establishing protected areas (PAs). The Forum facilitates rural communities' active participation by supporting the resolution of land claims in PAs, strengthening governance, participation, access to, and benefit sharing from PAs, and developing and implementing a capacity-building and awareness-raising strategy.

3.2.WWF Safeguards Standards and Procedures Applicable to the Project

WWF US has developed environmental and social safeguards standards per the GEF Policy on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards²⁹ as a GEF Implementing Agency. These standards require that any potentially adverse environmental and social impacts are identified and avoided or mitigated. Safeguard policies relevant to this project are as follows:

Standard on Environment and Social Risk Management

This standard is applicable because GEF 8 *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project* intends to support activities that result in various environmental and social impacts. The Project is expected to deliver significant positive impacts for both nature and people in South Africa, with its strong focus on securing priority biodiversity through protected and conservation areas. Closely linked to this is the development and implementation of a suite of benefits for communities, including investment in improved livelihoods, job creation, skills and small business development in the ecotourism and wildlife economy sectors. Potential negative impacts include that livelihoods, ecotourism and wildlife economy activities have a negative impact on nature, and that the project's activities adversely impact Project Affected People.

The precise location and impact of site-specific activities cannot be determined at this stage and will only be known during project implementation. Thus, an ESMF is prepared to set out guidelines and procedures to identify, assess and monitor environmental and social impacts and avoid or mitigate adverse impacts. Site-specific ESMPs will be prepared as required based on the principles and guidelines of this ESMF.

Standard on Protection of Natural Habitats

WWF's mission is to protect natural habitats, and it does not undertake any projects that would result in the conversion or degradation of critical natural habitats, especially those that are legally protected, officially proposed for protection, or identified as having high conservation value.

The Standard on Protection of Natural Habitats is triggered as the proposed project directly targets protecting, improving the management of, and restoring significant biodiversity in the three project MLLs. It will also strengthen landowners and local communities to conserve the natural resources they depend on. Management and investment plans developed for these habitats will promote removing invasive species and using non-invasive indigenous species for restoration.

Pro-nature and heritage tourism portfolios and feasibility assessments will be developed. Project funds will not be utilised for construction-related activities; however, project activities are likely to promote the development of tourism infrastructure. South African legislation contains substantial requirements for environmental authorisation. Pro-nature and heritage tourism portfolios and assessments will advocate for compliance with environmental management legislation to mitigate this risk.

Through developing a portfolio of wildlife products and the development of value chains for these products, the project will promote the consumption and use of wildlife products per South African legislation. This could impact on the populations of the targeted species. There is also the potential risk of consumption of contaminated bush meat in situations where enforcement of regulations is weak. To

²⁹ <https://www.thegef.org/documents/environmental-and-social-safeguard-standards>

mitigate this risk, the project will implement the HARVEST protocol, a robust self-regulation protocol to prevent any public health risks.

Overall, the GEF 8 *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project* activities will bring 2 million hectares of land under conservation –1,372,100 hectares being added to the Protected Area (PA) estate or being under improved management within PAs, and 630,000 hectares of landscapes outside declared PAs will be under enhanced land management in production systems.

Standard on Restriction of Access and Resettlement

The WWF's Standard seeks to ensure that adverse social or economic impacts on resource-dependent local communities are avoided or minimised because of restrictions on resource access and/or use. The project does not involve the resettlement of communities. The establishment of protected areas and conservation areas may result in communities experiencing restrictions in terms of access and livelihoods. However, this is not anticipated considering the options provided through NEM: PAA and the Biodiversity Stewardship approach proposed. The Process Framework sets out steps to follow where access and/or livelihoods may be restricted within a project site because of the Biodiversity Stewardship option selected.

Standard on Indigenous Peoples

The WWF's standard requires ensuring that indigenous rights are respected, that IPs do not suffer adverse impacts from projects, and that IPs receive culturally appropriate benefits from conservation. The policy mandates that projects respect IPs' rights, including their rights to FPIC processes and tenure over traditional territories; that culturally appropriate and equitable benefits (including from traditional ecological knowledge) are negotiated and agreed upon with the IPs' communities in question; and that potential adverse impacts are avoided or adequately addressed through a participatory and consultative approach.

As indicated above, there are no Indigenous Peoples in the project areas. Therefore, the Standard on Indigenous Peoples has not been triggered, and an IP Planning Framework has not been developed. Instead, a Social Inclusion Planning Framework has been prepared to ensure that the project takes a socially inclusive approach, including vulnerable and marginalised groups in project planning, implementation and beneficiation.

Standard on Community Health, Safety and Security

This Standard ensures that communities' health, safety and security are respected and appropriately protected. The Guidance on Labor and Working Conditions requires employers and supervisors to implement all reasonable precautions to protect workers' health and safety by introducing preventive and protective measures. It also requires that the labour rights of project-employed workers are observed, as indicated in Annex 1: Screening Tool. Project activities should also prevent adverse impacts involving quality and supply of water to affected communities; SEAH-related risks to both affected communities as well as project staff; safety of project infrastructure, life and properties; protective mechanisms for the use of hazardous materials; disease prevention procedures; and emergency preparedness and response. Project-appointed staff should undergo training on conflict management and human rights.

The Standard on Community Health, Safety and Security is triggered despite project resources not being utilised for the above activities. The project will, however, develop and leverage investment in wildlife product value chains within the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) and Greater Addo MLLs

landscapes, per the Meat Safety Act (2000) and the draft National Game Meat Strategy (Government Gazette, 18 July 2022). The national game meat strategy states that for growth and transformation in the game meat industry, a clear strategy is needed to overcome current and future challenges and achieve goals towards expanding the game meat footprint. The strategic objectives of the national game meat strategy intend to ensure an increase in economic, practical, and safe game meat that enters the formal retail market through enabling infrastructure and technological improvements. Through the wildlife economy aspects of the project that will be undertaken.

One of the goals stated in the Game Meat Strategy is to increase the number of thriving previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs), women and youth ranchers and other game meat value chain actors from the current <4% to >25% by 2030. The game industry in South Africa has a deep history that is linked to colonial power, apartheid, and land ownership, with only about 4% of all value chain actors being PDIs.

Wildlife economy strategic and investment plans will be developed for the conservation and protected areas in the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) and Greater Addo MLLs that include a spatial analysis of sources of wildlife products, key available infrastructure such as registered abattoirs and tanneries, and the identification of potential wildlife economy hubs within the MLL.

The project will utilise the HARVEST protocol and brand, which assures buyers that meat under the brand comes from animals culled in conservation or protected areas where the culling and processing is performed to recognised environmental, animal, people, and food standards and where the selling of such meat and products supports demonstrable sustainable livelihoods for communities associated with these areas. The HARVEST protocol has been approved by the South African Meat Industry Company (SAMIC). SAMIC is a quality assurance company created by the Red Meat Industry of South Africa. It has been appointed by the Department of Agriculture to approve and audit Quality Indication Marks (brands).

Wildlife economy activities will comply with the environmental and social safeguards provisions included in this ESMF, and proposed activities will be screened annually via an ESS Screening process to ensure all safeguards, including consultation and consent processes, are followed. Promoting wildlife economy activities will be based on the White Paper for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity and subject to other laws related to biodiversity management and animal welfare (such as the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act and Animal Protection Act). It will further promote biodiversity-positive impacts, follow ecological principles, and enable the development and implementation of sustainable management plans that include social, economic, and environmental sustainability criteria as embodied in and promoted by the Harvest Protocol. Therefore, the Standard on Community Health, Safety and Security is triggered as project resources will be utilised to provide game meat and products for training purposes. SMMEs will be supported in accessing and using game meat and products for income generation.

Furthermore, the wildlife economy strategic and investment plans indicated above are likely to promote 'mixed farming' of wildlife and livestock with private landowners in the Greater Addo MLL as well as grazing of communally owned livestock in protected and conservation areas in the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL. This poses the potential risk of the transfer of zoonotic diseases. Project plans will mitigate this risk by ensuring guidelines are developed for 'mixed farming' in Greater Addo, covering separate camps and enclosures for livestock and wildlife. The One Health approach should be adopted concerning the grazing of communally owned livestock in protected areas.

Standard on Pest Management

WWF-funded projects are not allowed to procure or use formulated products that are in World Health Organization (WHO) Classes IA and IB or formulations of products in Class II unless there are restrictions that are likely to deny use or access by lay personnel and others without training or proper equipment. The project will follow the recommendations and minimum standards as described in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides and its associated technical guidelines and procure only pesticides, along with suitable protective and application equipment, that will permit pest management actions to be carried out with well-defined and minimal risk to health, environment, and livelihoods.

Project activities will focus on facilitating sustainable agricultural practices (including sustainable rangeland management and agroecological practices) and restoring areas ecologically degraded by anthropogenic soil erosion and invasive indigenous and alien plant species infestations. Project resources will be used to develop and implement conservation agreements with landowners and land rights holders, as well as spatial and investment plans for ecological restoration. Investment plans will leverage public and private sector investment in the restoration economy in each MLL.

The project, therefore, does not include activities that will directly result in the procurement or usage of pesticides. Thus, it is not anticipated that this standard will be triggered.

Standard on Cultural Resources

This Standard ensures that cultural resources are appropriately preserved, and their destruction, damage, or loss are avoided. Physical and cultural resources (PCR) include archaeological, paleontological, historical, architectural, sacred sites, graveyards, and burial sites of unique natural value. Intangible cultural resources include traditional ecological knowledge, performing arts, oral traditions and expressions, traditional craftsmanship and social practices, rituals and events. The impacts on cultural resources resulting from project activities, including mitigating measures, may not contravene the recipient country's national legislation or obligations under relevant international environmental treaties and agreements.

Project activities will include the declaration of protected areas on communal land, which, as indicated previously, will be undertaken using the biodiversity stewardship approach, where the declaration is voluntary and is therefore not likely to restrict access to physical and cultural resources.

Furthermore, the project will develop pro-nature and heritage tourism portfolios for the three MLLs, which will be utilised to leverage private and public sector investment in these landscapes.

The pro-nature and heritage tourism portfolios will need to be developed per the Standard on Cultural Resources, including ensuring that:

- Local people and other relevant stakeholders are consulted in documenting the presence and significance of cultural heritage resources, determining whether disclosure of information regarding the resources is appropriate given any threats to the safety and integrity of the resources, assessing the nature and extent of potential impacts on these resources, and designing and implementing mitigation plans; and
- PAPs are informed of their rights under national law, where the commercial use of cultural heritage resources is anticipated, and arrangements are made for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from such use.

Therefore, the Standard on Cultural Resources is cautiously triggered as pro-nature and heritage tourism portfolios may identify, map, and promote cultural heritage resources of significance. Mitigation plans will, hence, need to be developed where required.

Standard on Grievance Mechanisms

Project-affected communities and other interested stakeholders may raise grievances with the PMU and WWF at any time. The PMU will inform project-affected parties about the Accountability and Grievance Mechanism. The PMU and WWF's contact information will be publicly available. Relevant details are also provided in the Grievance Redress section of this ESMF.

The WWF Standard on Grievance Mechanisms is not intended to replace project- and country-level dispute resolution and redress mechanisms. This mechanism is designed to: address potential breaches of WWF's policies and procedures in a gender-responsive manner; be independent, transparent, and adequate; be survivor-centred and offer protections to those reporting SEAH-related grievances; be accessible to project-affected people; keep complainants abreast of progress of cases brought forward; and maintain records on all cases and issues brought forward for review.

Standard on Public Consultation and Disclosure

This standard requires meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders as early as possible throughout the project cycle. It requires the Project Team to provide relevant information promptly and, in a form, and language that is understandable and accessible to diverse stakeholders. This standard also requires that information concerning environmental and social issues pertinent to the project be disclosed for at least 30 days before implementation and 45 days if the Indigenous Peoples Standard has been triggered. WWF will disclose safeguards documentation on its Safeguards Resources web page. The final safeguards documents should be published on the national websites of the Implementing Agencies and made available locally in specific locations. The project must also release all final key safeguard documents locally via hardcopy, translated into the local language and in a culturally appropriate manner, to facilitate relevant stakeholders' awareness that the information is in the public domain for review.

Standard on Stakeholder Engagement

This standard ensures that WWF is committed to meaningful, effective, informed stakeholder engagement in designing and implementing all GEF and GCF projects. WWF's commitment to stakeholder engagement arises from internal standards such as WWF's Project and Program Standards (PPMS) and WWF's commitment to international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Stakeholder engagement is an overarching term that encompasses a range of activities and interactions with stakeholders throughout the project cycle and is an essential aspect of good project management. The project has prepared a Stakeholder Engagement Plan and a Social Inclusion Planning Framework that sets out how stakeholder engagement and social inclusion will be implemented during the project.

Guidance Note on Gender-based Violence and Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

All over the world, it is estimated that one in three women and girls experience GBV during her lifetime. A recent study conducted by IUCN, in collaboration with USAID as part of Advancing Gender in the Environment (AGENT), states that forms of GBV (ranging from sexual, physical and psychological violence to trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual coercion and in some cases rape) can be linked to environmental issues.

Many projects implemented by WWF relate to effective management of protected areas and the landscapes in which they are located through support to law enforcement, patrolling and better management and restoration of landscapes by restricting access to natural resources. These activities can potentially give rise to GBV/SEAH risks where government-employed law enforcement officials/rangers/guards supported by the project may misuse the power of their positions by sexually exploiting women in local communities. This is a risk if women collect water or natural resources in a protected area. As another example, projects that promote alternative livelihoods, particularly ones that improve women's empowerment and decision-making, can often lead to changes in power dynamics within communities and increase the risks of GBV/SEAH toward those empowered women.

GBV and SEAH's implementation of WWF activities in projects and programs is unacceptable and requires timely, proportional, and appropriate action. WWF recognises that to achieve biodiversity conservation, it is vital to promote gender equality and make every effort to ensure that project activities implemented by WWF respect integrity and human rights and mitigate any risk that gives rise to discriminatory and exploitative gender inequalities. WWF does support projects in areas where there is civil war, ethnic conflict, and insurgencies where there are existing GBV/SEAH risks. WWF, therefore, needs to understand these risks to avoid exacerbating local conditions that contribute to GBV/SEAH, which would undermine any conservation outcomes the project seeks to achieve.

For WWF projects, including GEF and GCF projects, under the Standard on Community Health and Security, the project team should identify any potential GBV/SEAH risks by screening proposed project activities using the following questions:

- Is there a risk that the project could pose a more significant burden on women by restricting the use, development, and protection of natural resources by women compared with that of men?
- Is there a risk that persons employed by or engaged directly in the project might engage in gender-based violence (including sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment)?
- Does the project increase the risk of GBV and/or SEAH for women and girls, for example by changing resource use practices?
- Does any mandated training for any individuals associated with the project (including project staff, government park rangers and guards, other park staff, consultants, partner organisations and contractors) cover GBV/SEAH (along with human rights, etc.)?

Identifying GBV/SEAH risks in a project is normally undertaken as part of project preparation. It could be conducted during community/stakeholder consultations, identifying potential risks and screening impacts on vulnerable groups, community health, safety and security, labour and working conditions, gender equality issues, and any other social or environmental risks. Any potential GBV/SEAH risk identified during this stage would be factored into the project's overall social risk, which, in turn, is factored into the overall environmental and social risk associated with a project.

Guidance Note on Labor and Working Conditions

As a conservation organisation, WWF does not typically fund large infrastructure activities in conservation projects implemented by its GEF and GCF Agencies. Therefore, it does not directly adversely impact labour and working conditions. However, WWF GCF Agency projects do implement projects in the forestry, agriculture, and fisheries sectors, which may have potential unintended adverse impacts. This is mostly seen in financing activities necessary for strengthening protected area management systems, including the construction of protected area administrative buildings, watch towers, or accommodations for park guards.

In such cases, these activities are usually executed by third-party contractors who employ construction workers, including sub-contractors. In such cases, WWF will ensure that any funding for such activities complies with WWF's Environment and Social Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) and more specifically, international labour and working condition standards such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and any relevant local labour standards of the project-specific countries.

This Guidance Note provides detailed guidance of reasonable precautions to implement in managing principal occupational health and safety risks. The following is based on the IFC's Environmental, Health, and Safety Guidelines (April 30, 2007), and covers the following general thematic areas:

General Facility Design and Operation

- Integrity of Workplace Structures
- Severe Weather and Facility Shutdown
- Workspace and Exit
- Fire Precautions
- Lavatories and Showers
- Potable Water Supply
- Clean Eating Area
- Lighting
- Safe Access
- First Aid
- Air Supply
- Work Environment Temperature
- Training

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Training

- Physical Hazards
- Rotating and Moving Equipment
- Rotating and Moving Equipment
- Vibration
- Electrical
- Eye Hazards
- Welding / Hot Work
- Industrial Vehicle Driving and Site Traffic
- Working Environment Temperature
- Ergonomics, Repetitive Motion, Manual Handling
- Working at Heights
- Illumination

Standards for Workers' Living Conditions

- General living facilities
- Drainage
- Heating, air conditioning, ventilation and light
- Water
- Wastewater and solid waste
- Rooms/dormitories facilities

- Bed arrangements and storage facilities
- Sanitary and toilet facilities
- Toilet facilities
- Showers/bathrooms and other sanitary facilities
- Canteen, cooking and laundry facilities
- Medical facilities
- Leisure, social and telecommunications facilities³⁰

Guidance Note on Projects Relating to Dams

In many river basins, WWF's freshwater conservation work is affected by the development of new dams or by the operations of existing dams. WWF opposes unsustainable dams that do not adhere to internationally recognised principles and criteria for good practice. WWF advocates that (1) no dams be built in or affect areas of high conservation value; (2) alternatives be fully considered before decisions are made to build new dams; and (3) principles, tools, and inclusive, transparent processes be applied that make the best possible choices regarding the management of existing dams and development of new dams.

Project interventions do not include the management of existing dams or the development of new dams. Were further site-based project development result in dam-related interventions, the GEF's Safety of Dams Safeguards on dams and the positions of the WWF Network and SANParks will need to be considered.

Guidance Note on Ranger Principles

Rangers protect wildlife, manage protected areas, and resolve human-wildlife conflicts. Rangers must act within the law and under high ethical standards to achieve positive outcomes for both people and nature. WWF only supports legitimate law enforcement activities that are carried out in a way that respects and protects the human rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples. Specific measures are in place to uphold WWF's high ethical standards, including a risk assessment, mitigation actions, and continuous monitoring throughout implementation.³¹ Rangers are expected to adhere to the following principles:

- Act within the law.
- Ensure accountability.
- Build ranger capacity
- Support the welfare of rangers and their families.
- Partner with local communities.
- Identify, monitor and plan for challenges.
- Maintain impartiality.
- Communicate regularly.
- Sanctions for malfeasance.

³⁰ Specific guidance and standards can be found in the Guidance Note on Labor and Working Conditions.

³¹ See [Ranger Principles document](#) for more details.

3.3. Gaps between South Africa's laws and policies and the WWF's SIPP

South Africa has not formally adopted the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), which is central to self-determination; however, the spirit of the principle is promoted under local policies and some pieces of legislation (especially mining and environmental law)³².

Land management legislation recognises the need for public consultation and participation in developments affecting rural communities. For example, the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act of 2013 provides for 'inclusive, developmental, equitable and efficient spatial planning. This must be achieved through the process of spatial justice, which advocates that the plan must include everyone affected'³³.

For the GEF 8 *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project*, the WWF's ESSF and SIPP provisions shall prevail over South Africa's legislation in all cases of discrepancy.

4. Anticipated Environmental and Social Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section outlines potential adverse environmental and social impacts resulting from project activities.

Not all potential impacts of this project are known at this stage because the scope and nature of the project activities will unfold through detailed planning and implementation. However, given what is presently known, this ESMF contains a Process Framework and Social Inclusion Planning Framework, which indicates the process that should be followed to develop site- and activity-specific social inclusion plans and lays out the process for establishing future ESMPs, LRPs and SIPs as needed.

As will be detailed later in this document, the MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender focal points, under the guidance of the M&E, Safeguards and Gender Officer, should fill in detailed information regarding the nature of relevant project activity and its specific location in the *Safeguards Eligibility and Impacts Screening form* (Annex I). In this regard, please note the following:

- All implementation plans developed for site-based activities should comply with the procedures and the standards set out in this ESMF.
- Any sub-executing entity or service provider who receives funding for site-based project activities must follow the guidance contained in this ESMF. Language reflecting this understanding must be included in any agreements with any provider/third party.

³² Mukwevho 150-152; See also The Constitution of the Republic of south Africa, 1996 Section 195(1) e.

³³ Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013.

4.1. Adverse Environmental Impacts

The negative environmental impacts of implementing the *GEF 8 Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project* are minimal. The risks are articulated by the project component below:

Project Component 2: Fostering and enhancing sustainable economic opportunities & socio-economic empowerment

Potential livelihood support interventions can have adverse environmental impacts. Livestock management, agroecological practices, and water use management are all issues that need to be carefully considered in the context of the habitat and natural resources in an area.

Fire management is essential to grassland and savanna ecosystem health and management. However, annual fire regimes need to be carefully planned for and managed, including for potential safety and health risks.

The project's socio-economic activities with communities surrounding National Parks and other protected areas do not reduce pressures and impacts on protected areas. The development of wildlife product value chains is based on principles of sustainable resource utilisation and community-based natural resource management, but these may not be effective. However, people may see this as an opportunity to undertake unsustainable and illegal poaching that puts pressure on wild populations and result in human health and safety impacts.

The wildlife economy strategic and investment plans are likely to promote 'mixed farming' of wildlife and livestock with private landowners and communally owned livestock grazing in protected and conservation areas. This poses potential occupational health and safety risks, as well as the risk of the transfer of zoonotic diseases.

Pro-nature and cultural heritage tourism portfolios may leverage investment in tourism products with adverse environmental impacts. Where investment is secured, developments must undergo environmental impact assessments to mitigate potential environmental impacts.

Project Component 3: Building capable conservation management institutions, community of practices & improving conservation capacity and skills

The project will develop site-specific conservation agreements and management plans for protected and conservation areas. These agreements and plans will include provisions for community livelihood interventions within or near the protected and conservation areas, many of which are recognised as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA). If those field-based interventions are not properly designed and managed, critical habitats could be adversely affected.

4.2 Environmental Mitigation Measures

Table 4. Anticipated Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Project Activity	Potential impact	Proposed mitigation measures	Responsible party
Project Component 2			
<p>2.1. Increased biodiversity-positive sustainable socio-economic empowerment and development, owned by local stakeholders and benefiting local communities in the 3 MLLs.</p>	<p>Pro-nature and cultural heritage tourism portfolios may result in investment in tourism products that have adverse environmental impacts – increased traffic, direct and indirect impacts of tourism developments and activities, increased demand for resources (land and water), generation of wastes</p> <p>Potential livelihoods interventions can have adverse environmental impacts including over-grazing, soil compaction, cropping practices, use of herbicides and pesticides, increased water-demand, run-off and siltation/eutrophication of water bodies.</p> <p>Fire management is an important part of grassland and savanna ecosystem health and management. However, inappropriate fire regimes and management practices can lead to increased land degradation, encroachment by woody vegetation or weedy species, biodiversity loss and declining land productivity.</p> <p>Fire management holds occupational health and safety risks for workers and community safety risks (e.g. in the event of management fires going out of control).</p> <p>There is a risk that promotion of game meat value chains through the project could indirectly stimulate unregulated or even illegal bushmeat hunting or culling of wildlife</p>	<p>Where leveraged investment is secured, developments need to undergo environmental impact assessments, in line with national regulatory requirements under NEMA and any other applicable legislation, to ensure that potential environmental impacts are mitigated. See section on cultural heritage mitigation measures for further details.</p> <p>Anticipated cost: none to the project as this is for leveraged investments and developments. The Tourism and Business Development Managers to ensure that portfolios include requirements regarding Environmental Impact Assessments.</p> <p>The training and employment of extension support officers to support the implementation of conservation agreements and agro-ecological projects.</p> <p>Business/investment plans for livelihoods activities and management plans under conservation agreements to include appropriate livestock management, agro-ecological practices, and water use management guidelines and monitoring frameworks.</p> <p>Landscape-based fire management practices to be integrated into effective ecological management and livestock production</p>	<p>MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point with support from M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist</p>
			<p>MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point with support from M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist</p>

	<p>and selling of wildlife meat and products that do not meet safety standards.</p> <p>Mixed wildlife-cattle grazing systems in the Barberton-Makhonjwa MLL may pose risks of zoonotic disease transfer and the spread of wildlife-borne diseases (e.g. brucellosis) to domestic livestock, thus presenting health and safety risks to people and compromising economic viability of livelihoods based on these mixed-use systems.</p>	<p>systems under the conservation agreements/management plans. Provision of training on safe fire management practices.</p> <p>Training and employment of extension support officers is included in budget. Strict meat safety protocols and verification systems that meet industry standards must be applied. The HARVEST protocol (see Standard on Community Health and Safety) stipulates strict ecological criteria and ethical and humane methods in undertaking culling operations to feed game meat value chains. The training and employment of extension support officers to support implementation across the value chain will limit illegal selling. Project plans will mitigate this risk through provision of veterinary services and training to communal livestock owners to mitigate the transmission of diseases.</p> <p>Training and employment of extension support officers is included in the budget. Project plans to include specifications to mitigate transfer of zoonotic diseases within allocated budget</p>	
Project Component 3			
<p>3.1 Increased area of PAs newly created, and area of existing PAs with improved effective management, delivered through a new inclusive and collaborative conservation model in the 3 MLLs.</p>	<p>i) Impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems: Conservation Agreements and management plans will include community livelihood interventions within or near protected and conservation areas, many of which are recognized as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA). These livelihood activities may have adverse impacts on critical habitats if field-based interventions are not properly designed (i.e. based on sound ecological data regarding</p>	<p>Site-based, participatory socio-economic/livelihoods assessments to be carried out in line with the project’s Process Framework to determine likely economic displacement impacts</p> <p>Management plans for protected areas must be developed in full compliance with provisions of NEM: PAA</p> <p>Conservation agreements (and their supporting management plans) will promote ecological restoration, improved rangeland</p>	<p>MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point with support from M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist.</p>

	<p>sustainable use and limits of acceptable change) and managed.</p> <p>(ii) Access restrictions: declaration of protected areas, and new management plans, may restrict access to certain parcels of land or may preclude certain land use types or practices previously applied by stakeholders, leading to economic displacement (even if temporary)</p>	<p>management and appropriate use of fire and responsible burning practices, as these are interrelated.</p> <p>Budget for these mitigations is allocated in the safeguards and gender allocation</p>	
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4.3. Adverse Social Impacts

The adverse social impacts associated with implementing the *GEF 8 Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project* as well relevant mitigation measures are articulated by below:

Implementing the MLL initiative, while aiming to foster inclusivity and meaningful community participation, has the potential to encounter several adverse social impacts that must be intentionally addressed. The historical context of racial segregation and land dispossession in South Africa has left a legacy of mistrust and limited involvement of local communities, including women and youth, in mainstream conservation efforts. These communities may face challenges in accessing the benefits and opportunities promised by the MLL initiative, leading to potential social disparities and exclusion. Additionally, traditional landowners and communal lands might experience pressure and conflict over land use changes, potentially disrupting their socio-economic stability and cultural heritage. The risk of marginalising vulnerable groups, including women, if not properly managed, could exacerbate existing inequalities. Furthermore, the shift from isolated conservation strategies to integrated landscape approaches requires significant capacity-building and resource mobilisation, which, if inadequately addressed, could hinder local communities' effective participation and empowerment.

To mitigate these risks, the MLL initiative must prioritise transparent stakeholder engagement, equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, and continuous capacity-building to ensure that all community members, particularly women, are actively included and empowered in the conservation and sustainable land use processes.

The outcomes and outputs across the three core project components have therefore been planned to create a robust framework intended to promote inclusion, which means meaningful participation by local communities and in particular women and youth across MLL activities. Empowering the critical stakeholders through sustained economic opportunities and socio-economic inclusion, is also an imperative.

The GEF 8 project's planned outputs offer several mitigation measures to address the potential adverse social impacts identified. For Project Component 1, establishing interim governance structures and creating governance charters by 2026 (Output 1.1) will help ensure transparent and inclusive decision-making processes. By including at least 60% of local community members, with 50% representation of women, in governance structures by 2026 (Output 1.2), the project mitigates the risk of exclusion and social disparities. Annual stakeholder engagement forums promote participatory decision-making and transparency, fostering community trust. Additionally, capacity-building workshops and a knowledge-sharing platform (Output 1.3) will empower governance members, particularly women, with the skills and knowledge needed to participate in and benefit from conservation activities effectively.

Under Project Component 2, establishing SMMEs and cooperatives focusing on women- and youth-led initiatives by 2030 (Output 2.1) will provide economic opportunities and promote socio-economic empowerment. Creating 11,000 jobs, with 50% allocated for women and youth by 2030 (Output 2.2), will further address employment disparities. Training and capacity-building initiatives, with at least 1,700 individuals accredited or certified in relevant sustainable economic practices by 2030 (Output 2.3), will enhance the skills and employability of local communities. Access to finance and markets for local enterprises through microfinance schemes and innovative funds by 2027 (Output 2.4) will support the growth of women- and youth-owned businesses. These measures collectively ensure that the project fosters inclusive economic opportunities and mitigates the potential adverse social impacts on marginalised groups.

Project Component 3's outputs offer critical mitigation measures to address potential adverse social impacts. Collaborative partnerships established by 2030 and the training of at least 150 conservation professionals, including women, by 2029 ensure inclusive conservation strategies and active community involvement (Output 3.1). Establishing Conservation Management Communities of Practice (CoP) and an online knowledge-sharing platform by 2026 (Output 3.2) fosters continuous learning and collaboration, while capacity-building programs by 2029 (Output 3.3) enhance women's skills in conservation management, biodiversity monitoring, and ecosystem restoration.

These measures promote inclusive participation, address historical inequalities, and empower local communities and women to participate in conservation initiatives meaningfully.

The PMU, MLL Hub Safeguards, and Gender Focal Point, with support from M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards, and the Gender Specialist, will be responsible for reinforcing the planned intervention across all three project components to avoid any adverse social impacts during and beyond the project implementation phase.

4.4. Process Framework

Developing site-specific management plans as part of the project may result in restrictions of access to livelihoods and natural resources for local communities.

The project is not anticipated to adversely impact communities' livelihoods, but it aims to improve their livelihoods. To this end, a Socioeconomic Impact Assessment will be undertaken in the three MLLs at the start of project implementation. Based on this assessment, a Socioeconomic Impact Model will be developed and utilised for annual reporting of project socioeconomic impacts. The socio-economic impact model will cover the following aspects:

- The economic contribution to local economies (through direct, indirect and induced impacts);
- Job creation and livelihoods improvements (direct and indirect);
- Capacity building, including technical skills transfer and educational opportunities.
- Infrastructure investments and improvements in services furthering community developments.
- Opportunities created for entrepreneurship.
- Increased awareness and education of environmental issues.
- Cultural preservation, and
- Other community social initiatives.

More specifically, community livelihoods will be supported through Conservation Agreements, sometimes called rangeland stewardship agreements, negotiated with community livestock owners through livestock owners' associations. These agreements stipulate minimum ecological requirements for livestock management and then enable market access through the provision of mobile auctions and in some cases, the provision of mobile abattoir services. This model has been successfully implemented in various parts of South Africa without restricting communities' access to livelihoods, and it is envisaged that it will be applied to communities in the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) and Eastern Grasslands MLLs.

The agreements envisage the livestock owners in a particular region combining their cattle into a single managed herd. However, individual ownership of the cattle will still be known and recognised through identification markers such as ear tags. Once the cattle are combined into a single herd, herders are employed from within the community and trained as eco-rangers. They are then employed by the livestock owners' association and play the primary role of herding cattle while also providing basic extension support, which includes observing and reporting on particular issues linked to animal health, snaring, other environmental issues and providing support such as removing invasive alien plants. Through this approach, effective rangeland management can be implemented, including ensuring specific areas of rangeland are adequately rested by keeping cattle out of these areas and by integrating cattle management with fire management and annual burning regimes. Such interventions lead to marked improvements in habitat conditions through limiting over-utilisation of areas, minimising selective grazing and ensuring key ecological issues such as fire management are integrated with livestock management. They, in turn, lead to far better animal production outcomes as animals tend to feed more efficiently and animal health is more effectively addressed, leading to healthier animals, higher reproduction rates and better returns in the sale of animals, meat and hides. Veterinary services will be provided to livestock owners who have signed agreements, including vaccinations, herd reproduction management issues and parasite control.

They will also be assisted with herd health management plans and training on relevant veterinary matters.

Further support will also be provided to livestock owners in the Grasslands MLL to enable them to adopt the Responsible Wool Standard. This certification, supported by the South African Wool Growers Association, would improve market access for the community livestock owners.

Developing site-specific management plans or conservation agreements may restrict local communities' access to livelihoods and natural resources. Land use changes should be based on free, informed consultations with the affected communities and relevant authorities, which should be carried out before finalising any usage changes.

If such a change negatively impacts sources of economic income or other livelihoods of affected communities, affected communities and households around the project-supported areas will be provided opportunities to restore their livelihoods to at least pre-project levels.

This process will be organised in the following manner:

Screening: The MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Points, under the guidance of the M&E, Safeguards and Gender Officer, will undertake screening of all planned activities for likely restrictions of livelihoods and access for local communities in the MLLs.

Social assessment: If the screening confirms and identifies households affected due to access restrictions to natural resources, a social assessment process will be conducted based on participatory consultations with affected people. The social assessment will generate the necessary baseline information on affected communities' demographics, social, cultural, and economic characteristics, the land they have customarily used or occupied and the natural resources they depend on. The assessment will assess potential impacts and the extent of access restriction to resources along with suitable mitigation and enhancement measures, including options for alternative access to similar resources.

Livelihood Restoration Plans: Based on the findings of the screening and social assessment, Livelihood Restoration Plans (LRP) will be prepared in consultation with affected peoples and stakeholders, which will provide tailored livelihood support and benefit sharing for affected persons, groups and communities.

The LRPs will be site-specific and include the following issues: (i) identifying and ranking of site specific impacts; (ii) setting out criteria and eligibility for livelihood assistance; (iii) outlining the rights of persons who have been customarily using water or land resources for subsistence to be respected; (iv) identifying and describing available mitigation measures, taking into account the provisions of applicable legislation, the available measures for mitigation promoted via project activities and any additional sound alternatives proposed by the affected persons; (v) outlining specific procedures on how compensation if required, can be obtained.

Mitigation measures as part of the LRPs: To allocate an alternative livelihood, affected communities, individuals, and stakeholders should be consulted in a participatory and inclusive manner. Eligibility criteria should be established according to guidelines provided by WWF's SIPP. Alternative livelihood schemes should be discussed, agreed upon, and provided for affected persons/ groups.

The livelihood options must consider the affected persons' traditional skills, knowledge, practices and culture. Affected persons should be provided project-related livelihood support and other

opportunities as part of the planned project activities. These may include activities implemented as part of Outcome 2.1 Pro-nature economic development catalysed and owned by the relevant stakeholders in each landscape that supports local communities in developing sustainable livelihoods and green businesses aligned to MLL objectives.

An accessible and efficient grievance redress mechanism should be established and made functional (see section 5.8 of this ESMF).

Special attention should be paid to tailoring these mitigation measures to the needs of PAPs, per the guidelines provided in section 4.6 of this ESMF. While some may be interested in the mitigation measures outlined above, others may necessitate an alternative approach.

Compensation: The project activities as per the Project Strategy will not impact local communities' income-generating activities and livelihoods and should, therefore, not require compensation. Instead, project activities are aimed at improving the livelihoods of local communities.

In cases where compensation is required by allocating alternative resources (e.g., alternative agricultural areas), measures will include identifying these resources with the active involvement of the affected persons/communities and providing assistance to access them. This should also be determined as part of an FPIC process. Based on local conditions, detailed procedures on how compensation should be calculated and awarded should be provided in each site-specific LRP.

4.6 Social Inclusion Planning Framework

As indicated above, the Khoi-San people were in colonial times, found in the north-western half of the Eastern Cape, including parts of the area proposed for the Greater Addo MLL. They do not have access to their ancestral lands in the MLL and have largely been assimilated into society. Furthermore, South Africa's land restitution process does not allow them to claim ancestral lands.

Therefore, an Indigenous People's Planning Framework is replaced with a Social Inclusion Planning Framework aimed at promoting opportunities for Project Affected People (PAPs), including marginalised groups, in all aspects and stages of project implementation.

WWF's SIPP indicates that PAPs include those likely to be affected by the project because of the actual impacts or potential risks to their physical environment, health, security, well-being or livelihoods. These stakeholders may include individuals or groups, including local communities.

Marginalised groups are defined here as a part of the South African population that experiences a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population (expanding on the StatsSA definition³⁴) and include:

- Children – those aged 17 years and below.
- The youth – persons aged between 15-34 years.
- Women – the female population.
- Older persons – persons aged 60 years and above; and
- Persons with disabilities – those experiencing various levels of difficulties in functional domains such as seeing, hearing, walking, remembering and concentrating, self-care, communicating and social interaction

³⁴ <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-19-05/03-19-052020.pdf>

- People who self-identify as Khoi-San in the Greater Addo MLL

General data, where available, on these marginalised groups is included under the demographic information for each MLL above. As part of developing MLL-level stakeholder engagement plans as social inclusion plans, it is proposed that the demographic information be expanded as appropriate to the landscape.

Project Impacts on PAPs

As indicated above, project impacts on PAPs include potential exclusion from full participation and beneficitation from project activities. This could be because of logistical, technological and/or cultural barriers.

PAPs might also be unable to claim their rights effectively, raise their concerns or file grievances due to limiting factors and barriers. Such barriers include, but are not limited to, awareness, logistics, language, culture, literacy, and technology. Furthermore, the grievances that are filed by PAPs may not be addressed in a timely and appropriate manner.

The project might not fully incorporate the views of women and girls and, therefore, not provide equitable opportunities.

Mitigation Planning

Mitigation planning steps to address the potential adverse impacts on PAPs from project activities should include:

Conduct screening to determine whether PAPs are present in or have collective attachment to the project site, which groups are present and where they are located (and map their location). The following are important considerations:

- **When to screen**: as early as possible during implementation and before any potentially impact-causing activities are started.
- **What information to collect**: demographic data regarding the PAPs who are present, and where they live. Information on types of livelihoods, decision-making procedures/mechanisms (or any decision-making institutions, governance systems or representatives).
- **How to collect data**: through desktop review of census and municipal data; consultation with community and village leaders/chiefs, and CSOs who work in the landscapes.
- **Who should screen** consultants hired to deliver the social assessment and/or relevant MLL hub staff under the guidance of PMU staff (MLL Hub Focal Points and PMU M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Specialist).

Information should be recorded, and where appropriate, the location of any PAPs should be mapped, regarding the targeted intervention sites.

Undertake a culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive and appropriately scoped social impact assessment to scope potential project impacts, both positive and adverse, on the identified PAPs. The impact assessment should identify and evaluate measures necessary to avoid adverse effects (based on free, prior, and informed consultation with the PAPs), or if such measures are not feasible, the identification of measures to minimise, mitigate, or compensate for such effects, and to ensure that the PAPs receive appropriate benefits under the project.

Furthermore, it should include a rapid conflict analysis that incorporates a description of any groups involved in existing land-use or other conflicts, the reasons for the conflicts and their impacts on PAPs, power relations among groups or individuals involved in the conflicts, community perceptions regarding the conflicts, and conflict avoidance or resolution mechanisms that could be deployed.

Undertake meaningful consultations with PAPs and their representative organisations, to solicit their participation: (i) in designing, implementing, and monitoring measures to avoid adverse impacts or, when avoidance is not possible, to minimise, mitigate, or compensate for such effects; and (ii) in tailoring project benefits for PAPs in a culturally appropriate manner.

Ascertain the consent of PAPs, applying an approach of full and effective participation, primarily based upon transparent, good faith interactions, so that everyone in the community is empowered to join fully in the decision-making process.

Prepare, disclose, resource and implement the Social Inclusion Plan, the proposed format of which is set out below. The SIP should include a framework or Roadmap for continued consultation with the PAPs during project implementation; specify measures to ensure that PAPs receive culturally appropriate benefits; identify measures to avoid, minimise, mitigate, or compensate for any adverse project impacts; and include culturally appropriate grievance procedures, monitoring and evaluation arrangements, and a budget and time-bound actions for implementing the planned measures.

Drawing on the GRM included in this ESMF, **establish a culturally appropriate GRM** and ensure it is well communicated to stakeholders and readily accessible to them.

Monitor and Report on the Social Inclusion Plan through six-monthly Project Progress Reports and annual Project Implementation Reports. Apply adaptive management measures as and when necessary.

Development of SIPs

The contents of the SIP will depend on the specific project activities identified and the impacts (informed by the impact assessment indicated above) these activities may have on PAPs within the MLL and at the project site. As a minimum, the SIP should include the following information:

- ✓ Description of the PAPs affected by the proposed activity.
- ✓ Summary of the proposed activity.
- ✓ Detailed description of PAPs' participation and consultation process during implementation.
- ✓ Description of how the project will ensure benefits appropriate to PAPs and avoid or mitigate adverse impacts.
- ✓ Budget.
- ✓ Mechanism for complaints and conflict resolution; and
- ✓ A monitoring and evaluation system includes monitoring of issues and measures concerning PAPs and adaptive management measures.

For project activities that may result in changes in PAP's access to land and/or livelihoods, the provisions of the Process Framework (Section 4.5) should also be followed.

The project will follow the approach of full and effective participation, primarily based on transparent, good-faith interactions so that everyone in the community is empowered to join fully in the decision-making process. It includes providing information in a language and manner the community understands and, in a timeframe, compatible with the community's cultural norms.

The affected PAPs will be actively engaged in all stages of the project cycle, and feedback from consultations with the PAPs will be reflected in the project design, which will be disclosed. Their participation in project preparation and planning has informed project design and PAPs will continue to participate in the project execution actively. Once SIPs or LRPs are prepared, these will be translated into local languages (as applicable) and made available to PAPs before implementation, including in formats other than written documents when requested by PAPs

SANParks shall ensure adequate flow of funds for consultation and facilitation of planned activities within the SIPF including for Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) activities as indicated below. Project brochures and pamphlets with infographics containing basic information such as sub-project location, impact estimates, mitigation measures proposed, and implementation schedule will be prepared, translated into a language understandable to the PAPs, and distributed among them. Where literacy is low in the communities, other means of communication must also be agreed upon with them, especially targeting community members with lower literacy levels. A range of consultative methods will be adopted to carry out consultation, including, but not limited to, focus group discussions (FGDs), public meetings, community discussions, and in-depth and key informant interviews, in addition to the censuses and socioeconomic surveys.

The key stakeholders to be consulted during screening, impact assessment, design and implementation of the LRPs and SIPs include:

- All PAPs/marginalised groups.
- Appropriate government departments.
- Provincial and municipal government representatives.
- Relevant community and leadership and management structures, etc;
- Academia representatives.

The project will ensure adequate representation of stakeholder groups by conducting consultations using various tools and approaches.

The views of PAPs will be considered during the execution of project activities while respecting their practices, beliefs, and cultural preferences. The outcome of the consultations will be documented in the six-monthly project progress reports. The Senior Project Manager, with the support of the M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards, and Gender Specialist, as well as the MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point, will also ensure that affected persons are involved in the decision-making process.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent Framework

Suppose any Khoi-San people (either communities or individuals who self-identify as such) are to be identified in developing a site-level Social Inclusion Plan; in that case, the FPIC approach needs to be implemented immediately at the site.

FPIC ensures that IPs' rights are guaranteed in decisions that may negatively affect their lands, territories, or livelihoods. It ensures that they have the right to give or withhold their consent to these activities without fear of reprisal or coercion, in a timeframe suited to their culture, and with the resources to make informed decisions.

FPIC is composed of four separate components:

- Free—without coercion, intimidation, manipulation, threat or bribery.

- Prior—indicates that consent has been sought sufficiently before any project activities have been authorised or commenced and that the time requirements of the Indigenous community’s consultation/consensus processes have been respected.
- Informed—Information is provided in a language and form easily understood by the community. It covers the nature, scope, purpose, duration, and locality of the project or activity, as well as the areas that will be affected, including the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts, all involved actors, and any procedures that the project or activity may entail.
- Consent—The right of IPs to give or withhold their consent to any decision that will impact their lands, territories, resources, and livelihoods.

The processes of consultation and obtaining FPIC will be applied to all the aspects of the site-level activities that may negatively affect the rights of IPs, i.e. Khoi -San. FPIC will be required on any matters that may negatively affect the rights and interests, water areas, lands, resources, territories (whether titled or untitled to the people in question) and traditional livelihoods.

The following process will be applied when initiating FPIC as part of SIP development at site -level:

Conduct sociocultural and land tenure assessment that builds on the social impact assessment undertaken in the SIP development. Identify the following with regards to IPs:

- Customary laws, informal rules and organising practices on land ownership.
- Institutions and governance systems.
- Types of livelihoods.
- Community stakeholders land users and assess who has the right to give or withhold consent.
- Substantive rights and national legal framework related to FPIC; and
- Assess the consequences of the proposed project that may result in the changing status of the lands, territories and resources.

Identify local representatives

- Conduct preliminary consultations with the community or individuals and explain the nature of the proposed project.
- Allow time for decision-making on their representatives for the consultation process leading to FPIC.
- Clarify the responsibilities of representatives.
- Agree on the process leading to FPIC; and
- Identify signatory parties for the consent agreement

Conduct consultation leading to FPIC

- Share objectives and scope of the project with the representatives and identify site-level activities requiring FPIC.
- Inform them of how the project is financed and implemented and its grievance redress mechanisms.
- Provide clear and transparent information on the benefits and risks of the project.
- Share the findings of the sociocultural, land tenure and environmental assessment and
- Formalise consent agreement.

Formalise the consent agreement and include:

- Respective expectations.
- Proposed site level activity duration and expected results.
- Grievances Redress Mechanisms.
- Terms of withdrawal of consent.
- Record of the process through means and languages accessible to all parties involved; and
- Participatory monitoring and verification plan and procedures.

Assess the implementation of the FPIC consent agreement against the monitoring and verification plan and procedures indicated above to inform corrective/adaptive measures and learn lessons for subsequent dissemination and uptake in other sites.

All consultations with IPs should be carried out in good faith to seek agreement or consent. Consultation and consent concern IPs' right to meaningfully and effectively participate in decision-making on matters that may affect them. Consultations and information disclosure are integral parts of the FPIC process and any development support planning for IPs to ensure that the priorities, preferences, and needs of marginalised groups, including Indigenous groups, are adequately considered.

Disclosure

The final SIPP and PF and any site-specific SIPs and LRPs will be disclosed on the websites of the executing agency, SANParks, and WWF and made available to affected PAPs. Information dissemination and consultation will continue throughout project execution. Summaries of SIPs and mitigation measures proposed in SIPs will be translated into the dominant languages spoken in the MLL where the SIP is undertaken, and paper copies will be made available to the affected persons in the offices of relevant local authorities.

Institutional and monitoring arrangements

The M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist will be responsible for developing and implementing the SIPP, with support from the PMU Senior Project Manager, on logistical matters (e.g., conducting field visits, reaching out to PAP communities, convening meetings, etc.). MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender focal points will be responsible for developing any site-level SIPs, with approval of SIPs and oversight of their implementation provided by the M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist.

The M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist will periodically report to the Senior Project Manager, SANParks, and WWF US on implementing the SIPP/SIPs. Monitoring and Reporting are undertaken in conjunction with reporting on the other ESMF commitments (as per Section 5.4).

4.7. Cultural Heritage Mitigation Measure

This standard ensures that cultural heritage resources are appropriately preserved, and their destruction, damage, or loss are avoided. Physical cultural resources include archaeological, paleontological, historical, architectural, and sacred sites, including graveyards and burial sites of unique natural values. Intangible cultural resources include traditional ecological knowledge, performing arts, oral traditions and expressions, traditional craftsmanship and social practices, rituals and events. The impacts on cultural resources resulting from project activities, including

mitigating measures, may not contravene the recipient country's national legislation or its obligations under relevant international environmental treaties and agreements.

Project activities will include the development of pro-nature and heritage tourism portfolios for the three MLLs, which will be utilised to leverage private and public sector investment in these landscapes. The Standard on Cultural Resources is therefore not triggered. Terms of reference for the development of pro-nature and heritage tourism portfolios should, however, apply WWF's Standard on Cultural Resources to ensure that where heritage tourism activities and locations become better defined, these are developed in line with the standard to ensure there are no negative impacts on physical and cultural resources at the time of implementation.

4.8 Pest Management Plan

WWF-funded projects are not allowed to procure or use formulated products that are in World Health Organisation (WHO) Classes IA and IB, or formulations of products in Class II, unless there are restrictions that are likely to deny use or access by lay personnel and others without training or proper equipment. The project will follow the recommendations and minimum standards as described in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides and its associated technical guidelines and procure only pesticides, along with suitable protective and application equipment, that will permit pest management actions to be carried out with well-defined and minimal risk to health, environment, and livelihoods.

Project activities will focus on facilitating sustainable agricultural practices (including sustainable rangeland management and agroecological practices) and restoring areas ecologically degraded by anthropogenic soil erosion and invasive indigenous and alien plant species infestations. Project resources will be used to develop and implement conservation agreements with landowners and land rights holders and spatial and investment plans for ecological restoration. Investment plans will leverage public and private sector investment in the restoration economy in each MLL.

Therefore, the project does not include activities that will directly result in the procurement or usage of pesticides. Thus, it is not anticipated that this standard will be triggered.

If emerging project activities require pest management during implementation, an integrated pest management approach (which considers cultural, mechanical, physical, and chemical methods) is proposed. If the use of pesticides cannot be avoided, WWF's Standard on Pest Management will be triggered, and the project will need to apply the procedures relevant to implementing the Standard as set out in WWF's SIPP.

5. Implementation Arrangements

5.1. Procedures for the Identification and Management of Environmental and Social Impacts

The following is an exclusion list of activities which will not be financed by the *GEF 8 Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project*. This includes activities that:

- Leads to land management practices that degrade soil and water (biological or physical). Examples include but are not limited to, the felling of trees in core zones and critical watersheds, quarrying and mining activities, and commercial logging.

- Negatively affect areas of critical natural habitats or breeding grounds of known rare/ endangered species.
- Significantly increase GHG emissions.
- Use genetically modified organisms or modern biotechnologies or their products.
- Involve the procurement and/or use of pesticides and other chemicals specified as persistent organic pollutants under the Stockholm Convention or within categories IA, IB, or II by the World Health Organization.
- Develop forest plantations.
- These result in biodiversity loss, ecosystem functioning alteration, and new invasive alien species are introduced.
- Involve the procurement or use of weapons and munitions or fund military activities.
- Lead to private land acquisition and/or physical displacement and voluntary or involuntary relocation of people, including non-titled and migrant people.
- Contribute to exacerbating any inequality or gender gap that may exist.
- Involve illegal child labour, forced labour, sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation.
- Adversely affect indigenous peoples' rights, lands, natural resources, territories, livelihoods, knowledge, social fabric, traditions, governance systems, and culture or heritage (physical and non-physical or intangible) within the project area.
- Negatively impact areas with cultural, historical or transcendent values for individuals and communities.

In advance of the initiation of any project activity, the MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point, under the oversight of the M&E, Environment and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist, should fill in detailed information regarding the nature of the activity and its specific location in the *Safeguards Eligibility and Impacts Screening* form (Annex 1). Part 1 of this form comprises basic information regarding the activity; Part 2 contains basic “pre-screening” questions. If the response to any of the questions in these two parts is “Yes”, the activity will be deemed ineligible for funding under the Project. The executing partners will thus be required to change the nature or location of the proposed activity so that it complies with all the safeguards requirements and all responses at the *Safeguards Eligibility and Impacts Screening* form are negative.

Suppose the activity is deemed eligible according to Part 2. In that case, an environmental and social screening procedure will be carried out per Part 3 of the *Safeguard Eligibility and Impacts Screening* format, based on the WWF’s SIPP and applicable South African laws and regulations. The sub-executing partners shall respond to the specific questions in Part 3 of the form, provide general conclusions regarding the main environmental and social impacts of each proposed activity, outline the required permits or clearances, and specify whether any additional assessments or safeguard documents (e.g., ESMP) should be prepared.

Issues that are considered as part of this environmental and social screening include the following:

- a) Need for government-land acquisition.
- b) Environmental impacts (e.g., dust, noise, smoke, ground vibration, pollution, flooding, etc.) and loss or damage to natural habitat.
- c) Social impacts: identification of vulnerable groups or Indigenous peoples, impacts on community resources, impacts on livelihoods and socio-economic opportunities, restrictions of access to natural resources, land usage conflicts, impacts on tangible or intangible cultural heritage, etc.; and
- d) Health and safety issues (both for workers and for local communities).

The screening of each activity should be undertaken by the MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point under the guidance of the M&E, Safeguards and Gender Officer. If the screening process

indicates that additional assessments or safeguards documents shall be prepared, these should be carried out by the sub-executing partners before the start of activities.

If the screening reveals adverse environmental or social impacts that may arise from the planned activity, an ESMP should be prepared. The ESMP should be prepared by the MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point in collaboration with the Project Manager(s) in the sub-executing entities and under the oversight of the M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Senior Specialist.

5.2. Guidelines for ESMP Development

Suppose the Environmental and Social screening process identifies any adverse environmental or social impacts from specific project activities; in that case, the MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Point, in collaboration with the relevant Project Manager in the executing entity and under the guidance of the M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Senior Specialist, should develop a site—and activity-specific ESMP. The ESMP should be prepared before initiating the project activity and closely follow the guidance provided in this ESMF.

The ESMP should describe adverse environmental and social impacts that are expected to occur as a result of the specific project activity, outline concrete measures that should be undertaken to avoid or mitigate these impacts and specify the implementation arrangements for administering these measures (including institutional structures, roles, communication, consultations, and reporting procedures).

The structure of the ESMP should be as follows:

- i. **A concise introduction:** explaining the context and objectives of the ESMP, the connection of the proposed activity to the project, and the findings of the screening process.
- ii. **Project description:** Objective and description of activities, nature and scope of the project (location with map, restoration/construction and/or operation processes, equipment to be used, site facilities and workers and their camps; bill of quantities if civil works are involved, activity schedule).
- iii. **Baseline environmental and social data:** Key environmental information or measurements such as topography, land use and water uses, soil types, and water quality/pollution; and data on socioeconomic conditions of the local population. Photos showing the existing conditions of the project sites should also be included.
- iv. **Expected impacts and mitigation measures:** Description of *the activity's* specific environmental and social impacts and corresponding mitigation measures.
- v. **ESMP implementation arrangements:** Responsibilities for design, bidding, and contracts where relevant, as well as monitoring, reporting, recording, and auditing.
- vi. **Capacity Need and Budget:** This section provides the capacity needed to implement the ESMP and cost estimates for its implementation.
- vii. **Consultation and Disclosure Mechanisms:** Timeline and format of disclosure.
- viii. **Monitoring:** Environmental and social compliance monitoring with responsibilities.
- ix. **Grievance Mechanism:** Provide information about the grievance mechanism, how PAPs can access it, and the grievance redress process.
- x. **A site-specific community and stakeholder engagement plan:** To ensure that local communities and other relevant stakeholders are fully involved in the implementation of the ESMP, a stakeholder engagement plan it. Section 5.8 provides specific guidelines on community engagement. implementing

5.3. Stakeholders' Role & Responsibilities in the ESMF Implementation

General

The institutional arrangement (Figure 2) for project implementation includes WWF US as the GEF Implementing Agency, SANParks as the Lead Executing Agency and a Project Steering Committee. It further outlines how GEF 8 and GBFF funds will flow and the reporting lines:

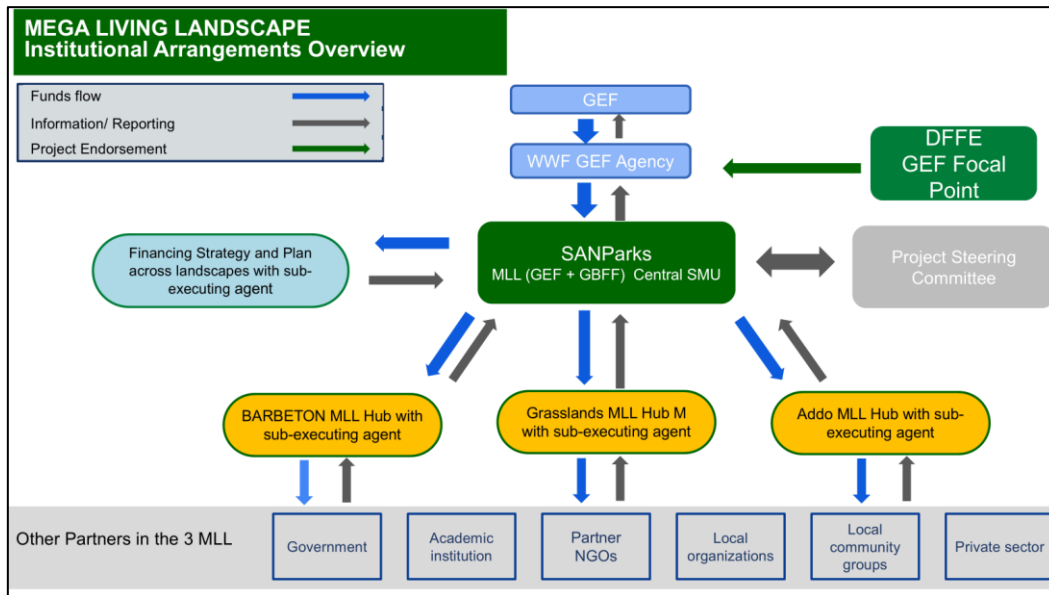


Figure 2. Project Institutional Arrangement

SANParks is the project's lead Executing Agency, which will oversee the implementation of all project activities. SANParks will host a Project Management Unit (PMU) as part of its responsibilities. The role includes overseeing the execution of the GEF- and GBFF-funded projects per approved plans, ensuring that all activities align with specified objectives and outcomes. The PMU manages the performance of sub-executing agents and is responsible for guaranteeing compliance with GEF, WWF, and national policies, particularly regarding environmental, social, and financial safeguards. Financial management is critical to its duties, requiring the PMU to administer and manage project funds with transparency, accountability, and effective resource utilisation.

Additionally, the PMU will regularly monitor project progress and provide comprehensive reports to the GEF Implementing Agency and other stakeholders, ensuring adherence to timelines and goals. Finally, the PMU engages and coordinates with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and international partners, to facilitate the smooth execution and overall success of the projects. The PMU will, at a minimum, consist of the following: Strategic Lead, Senior Project Manager, Finance Manager, M&E, Safeguards and gender Officer, and Junior Administrator.

Project Steering Committee (PSC): The PSC serves as an oversight body for strategic partners involved in the GEF 8 and GBFF projects and will be responsible for supervising and monitoring the technical and financial execution of the projects, including the fulfilment of the Results Frameworks, and approving annual work plans and budgets, among others. Its key functions include:

- **Strategic Direction and Guidance:** Provide overall strategic direction for the project and offer guidance on the work plan, ensuring alignment with project objectives.

- **Progress Assessment:** Review project activities to assess progress and performance, including the annual review and approval of the project work plan and budget per GEF and WWF-US guidelines.
- **Implementation Facilitation:** Facilitate project implementation by leveraging members' institutional support, networks, and channels of influence.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Relationship Development:** Support the development of relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders, including the private sector, public sector, civil society, and academia, to mobilise interest and support for the project.
- **Problem Resolution and Funding Acquisition:** Address and resolve issues raised by committee members and seek additional funding to enhance project outputs and activities as needed.

WWF US, the GEF Implementing Agency: WWF-US, through its WWF GEF Implementing Agency function will: (i) provide consistent and regular project oversight to ensure the achievement of project objectives; (ii) liaise between the project and the GEF Secretariat; (iii) report on project progress to GEF Secretariat (annual Project Implementation Report); (iv) ensure that both GEF and WWF policy requirements and standards are applied and met (i.e. reporting obligations, technical, fiduciary, M&E); (v) approve annual workplan and budget; (vi) approve budget revisions, certify fund availability and transfer funds; (vii) organize the terminal evaluation and review project audits; (viii) certify project operational and financial completion, and (ix) provide no-objection to key terms of reference for project management unit.

Safeguards Implementation

Specific arrangements and responsibilities related to the implementation of environmental and social safeguards requirements, as stated in this ESMF are as follows:

SANParks as an Executing Agency:

SANParks, as an Executing Agency, has the overall responsibility for ensuring environmental and social safeguards are implemented and ensures coordination with relevant Government authorities.

These responsibilities include:

- Monitoring implementation of this ESMF and compliance with national and international regulations, and WWF ESSF standards, including keeping track of all ESS requirements
- are effectively and timely met by project sub-executing agencies, including oversight for safeguards and implementing this ESMF.
- Collect grievances from the project-wide GRM and report back to the WWF US, GEF Implementing Agency
- Provide strategic guidance to project implementation, including oversight for safeguards and the implementation of this ESMF.

Project Steering Committee:

The responsibilities of the PSC include:

- Overall oversight and monitoring of compliance with safeguards commitments; and
- Support and provide recommendations regarding safeguard issues where needed.

WWF GEF Implementing Agency:

- Overall oversight and monitoring of compliance with safeguards commitments.
- Support and specific recommendations on specific safeguard issues if needed.

PMU:

- Ensure that bidding documents and contracts include clauses or conditions relevant to ESS as set out in this ESMF. It is crucial to include requirements related to occupational health and safety in bidding documents.
- Implement and supervise ESMF and other safeguard plans.
- Provide safeguard reports to the Executing Agency.
- Implement the GRM.
- Disclose safeguards documents and
- Report on safeguards implementation and compliance to the PSC and WWF GEF Agency

The M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Senior Specialist within PMU will have the following ESS responsibilities:

- Provide input to the Senior Project Manager to ensure safeguards compliance with ESMF/PF during project planning and implementation.
- Monitor implementation of the ESMF/PF including inputs and recommendations from related consultants.
- Conduct ESS Screening on newly planned/revised project activities, as outlined in ESMF.
- Ensure the project team understands environmental and social safeguards and how to support the implementation of the ESMF/PF.
- Provide training on safeguards requirements to sub-executing agency staff and relevant partners as required.
- Regularly review the above-mentioned frameworks and make amendments as necessary.
- Set up and ensure the implementation of the GRM, including being the point of contact for grievances. With assistance from the senior project manager, oversee the addressing of grievances.
- Ensure full disclosure of existing and newly developed Plans with concerned stakeholders.
- Carry out regular monitoring and capacity building visits to the MLL project sites.
- Provide inputs to project reports on the status of safeguards compliance and GRM implementation with the ESMF/PF during implementation and any issues arising.
- Ensure alignment in implementation of the ESMF/PF and the Gender Action Plan and Stakeholder Engagement Plan; and
- Engage regularly with the ESS Specialist in the WWF US, GEF Implementing Agency.

5.4. Monitoring

Various entities will thoroughly monitor the compliance of Project activities with the ESMF at different stages of preparation and implementation. The goal of monitoring is to measure the project's success rate, determine whether interventions have resulted in dealing with negative

impacts, whether further interventions are needed, or whether monitoring is to be extended in some areas. Monitoring indicators will be very much dependent on specific project contexts.

Monitoring at the project level

The PMU, located in SANParks, will oversee and monitor the implementation of this ESMF and comply with national and international regulations and WWF ESSF standards, including keeping track of all ESS requirements being effectively and promptly. The PMU will be responsible for (i) collecting grievances from the project-wide GRM and reporting back to the WWF US GEF Agency and (ii) providing strategic guidance for the project implementation, including oversight for safeguards and implementing this ESMF.

Monitoring at the field activity level

The project sub-executing agencies in the MLLs will be responsible for monitoring and reporting on compliance with the ESMF. They will ensure that project activity-related investments are screened and their safeguard instruments prepared, cleared, and disclosed before project activity approval. Further, the Sub-Executing Agencies will ensure that private sector investors and contractors implement the specific sub-project ESMP and submit reports on ESMP implementation as required.

Within the sub-executing agencies, the relevant project staff allocated to environmental and social safeguards responsibilities will monitor and supervise all project activity-related investments.

Disbursement of project funds will be contingent upon their full compliance with safeguards requirements.

Monitoring at the agency level

WWF US, as the project's Implementing Agency, and SANParks, the Executing Agency, oversee compliance with the ESMF.

To facilitate compliance monitoring, SANParks will include information on the status of ESMF implementation in the six-monthly Project Progress Reports (PPRs) and the annual Project Implementation Review (PIR) reports.

5.5. Community Engagement

Community consultation has been an integral part of these assessments and the project design and will continue throughout the project cycle. This section describes community engagement during project preparation and implementation. It provides an overview, while the full details are covered in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

Community Engagement during Project and ESMF/PF Preparation

Stakeholder engagement started with a national technical design workshop on 19 March 2024 in Pretoria, South Africa. The workshop was attended by 25 representatives from national and provincial governments, conservation agencies, and civil society organisations.

The technical design workshop was followed by extensive stakeholder engagement as set out in the stakeholder engagement plan prepared for the PPG phase. The project was designed through a co-design process, meaning that the key stakeholders jointly designed and decided upon objectives,

outcomes, strategies, and approaches. Stakeholder engagement took place between April and October 2024. A summary of the stakeholder engagements, drawing from the stakeholder engagement register included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (Annex 5 of the CEO ER Doc), indicates that:

- ~ 100 discrete consultation sessions were undertaken.
- ~ 75 different groupings/entities were engaged with – national, provincial, local government, traditional authorities, traditional leaders, local communities, NGOs, conservancies, Protected Environments, and the private sector.
- ~ 325 individuals were engaged of which 198 were women.
- Stakeholder engagement took place at the national level, focusing on capabilities, durable financing and due diligence aspects of project design.
- Engagement at the MLL level focused on designing MLL-level activities, including livelihoods, socio-economic, and protected area expansion outcomes. Design workshops were conducted in each MLL to develop the work programme for each landscape.
- To inform the gender analysis and action plan, engagements were undertaken with women and youth. These included women living in rural villages and working in the conservation sector in South Africa and the MLLs.

Representatives from the WWF-US, the GEF Implementing Entity, participated in the Greater Kruger (Barborton-Makhonjwa) MLL design process from 12 to 16 August 2024. This engagement with the WWF-US team was useful in working through complex design aspects and reaching agreement on possible pathways for project implementation. Engagement during this week included a briefing meeting with Nkosi (Chief) Tikhontele Dhlamini, traditional leader of the Lomshiyo community. The Lomshiyo community owns land within the Barborton Nature Reserve which forms the core of the Barborton-Makhonjwa MLL. The Lomshiyo community are proposed as direct beneficiaries of project activities in the Barborton-Makhonjwa MLL. The INKosi supported the project's implementation on Lomshiyo community land.

The outcomes and expressed concerns and aspirations of local communities, land rights holders, and users engaged through extensive long-term engagement within the Eastern Grasslands and Greater Kruger (Barborton-Makhonjwa) MLLs have informed the design of projects within these landscapes.

In the case of the Eastern Grasslands MLL, extensive stakeholder engagement has been undertaken with a range of stakeholders, including traditional authorities and local communities, district and local municipalities and civil society organisations (CSOs), as part of the process of developing a vision for the proposed Grasslands National Park. Also, in the Grasslands MLL, the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership has engaged a wide cross-section of stakeholders, including provincial and local government, traditional authorities, local NGOs and CSOs, and local communities for over 10 years. In the case of the Maloti Thaba Tsa Metse Traditional Authority and Local Community, extensive engagement has culminated in the community agreeing to declare parts of their land as a Protected Environment under NEM: PAA.

Within the Greater Kruger (Barborton- Makhonjwa) MLL, Traditional Authorities have been engaged in developing a landscape vision with the Barborton-Makhonjwa World Heritage Site and Barborton Nature Reserve at the core. Care for Wild, as the designated management authority for Barborton Nature Reserve, has facilitated this process, intending to promote nature-positive rural socio-economic development within the landscape.

Stakeholder engagement concluded with a Final Design Workshop convened on 2 October 2024 in Johannesburg. The objectives of this workshop were to present what the Mega Living Landscapes Program, which currently comprises of the GEF 8 and GBFF projects, will do and how the objectives will be achieved. The workshop was attended by 40 representatives from national and provincial

governments, conservation agencies, and civil society organisations. The meeting outcomes were largely positive, with delegates supporting the proposed project plan and providing useful input for refinement.

Community engagement during project implementation

Community consultation will be an ongoing and continuous process throughout the project cycle. This section describes community engagement during project implementation.

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) sets out how the project will engage with stakeholders, and particularly local communities. The SEP will be implemented in alignment with the Gender Action Plan and the Social Inclusion Planning Framework, which forms part of this Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework. The Social Inclusion Planning Framework sets out activities that require Free, Prior and Informed Consent from marginalised and vulnerable groups (including Indigenous Peoples, where they are to be found while preparing community level Social Inclusion Plans) and provides for local communities' right to self-determination.

Particular attention is required to further assess environmental and social impacts and develop appropriate management measures during project activities with the local affected communities/groups and persons. Based on the social and other assessments and management plans conducted in accordance with this ESMF, the SEP and SIPF will need to be periodically updated during project implementation.

The project will utilise (and strengthen where necessary) existing stakeholder engagement processes in planning and implementing project activities. This includes leveraging processes and structures relevant to establishing the Grasslands National Park and the functioning of the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership in the Eastern Grasslands MLL. In the Greater Kruger (Barberton-Makhonjwa) MLL, the project will leverage processes and structures facilitated through the co-management of the Barberton Nature Reserve and the management of the Barberton-Makhonjwa World Heritage Site.

Drawing on these existing processes, the project will establish landscape collaborative platforms in each project MLLs to build landscape-level collaborative decision-making and implementation. Each MLL Hub will develop a detailed MLL-level SEP and SIP to inform the establishment of the landscape collaborative platform. This will be undertaken in the first year of implementation so that the MLL-level SEP and SIP can appropriately inform the establishment of the platform. The MLL level SEP and SIP should identify all relevant stakeholders in the landscape, including traditional leadership, indigenous knowledge communities, People and Parks Forums, and marginalised and vulnerable groups and individuals. The MLL level SEP and SIP will be reviewed and updated periodically and progress reported on as part of project implementation reporting.

Consideration will be given to ensuring the representation of diverse stakeholders, including traditional authorities, local communities, marginalised groups, landowners, and representative bodies. Efforts will be made to address potential power imbalances within these platforms, including capacity development of community and marginalised group representatives to enable them to participate meaningfully, ensuring that workshop materials are accessible, i.e. not using technical language and translating key messages into the most spoken local languages.

During the first year of implementation, local communities will be engaged to ensure the co-creation of community-level project interventions. The community engagement process will commence with securing agreement from local communities on their preferred community engagement approach. The SIPF sets out steps for conducting social analysis when entering a community and undertaking a community-level SIP to ensure that diverse community stakeholders, including marginalised groups, are engaged.

The SIPF further guides undertaking a Free, Prior, and Informed Consent process (FPIC). FPIC ensures that the rights of local communities and marginalised groups are guaranteed in any decision that may negatively affect their lands, territories, or livelihoods. It ensures they have the right to give or withhold their consent to project activities without fear of reprisal or coercion, in a timeframe suited to their culture, and with the resources to make informed decisions.

A combination of methods will be used to consult and engage local communities and marginalised groups while respecting all participants' views and knowledge. These methods include focus group discussions and key informant discussions on topics relevant to these groupings and the project. The consultation will also include women-only groups and be cognisant of other community social and political dynamics.

As part of the community engagement process, WWF's ESSs require that project stakeholders, including locally affected communities/ groups and persons directly impacted by project activities, have access to relevant information. Specifically, the ESSF standards on (1) Consultation and Disclosure, (2) Stakeholder Engagement, and (3) Grievance Mechanisms provide details and will be adhered to during the implementation of this ESMF and the subsequent implementation of the resulting management plans.

Because project interventions need community support and participation to succeed, a participatory process and community consultation approach involving landowners, land rights holders, government authorities, and other stakeholders at different levels will provide substantial information on the patterns of resource use of local affected communities/groups and persons. This will accurately identify which groups/individuals will be most affected by project activities. The SEP documents measures and approaches for continued community engagement during the project implementation phase.

5.6. Guidance for SEAH Risk Mitigation

According to the results of the screening provided in Appendix 1 of this ESMF, a detailed plan to address SEAH risks will be developed within the first six months of project start-up, using information already included in the GAP, updated procedures for SEAH-specific grievances outlined below and in line with the national law. This will include:

- Any identified SEAH-related risk mitigation measures in the project's annual work plan, budget, and annual reporting requirements. This will require the participation of the entire PMU in reviewing any identified risks and mitigation measures to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities and the responsibilities of EEs, project partners, contractors, and any other entities who will receive GEF funding for this project.
- Develop a communication mechanism between the local project partners and the PMU's M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards, and Gender Integration Specialist to promptly address any SEAH situation that may arise at the landscape level. This early warning system will be included in the project's security protocol, and will require:
- Reporting any such grievances or challenges within five business days. This shall hold even if grievances are informally submitted (i.e. not through an official GRM)
- The confidentiality of anyone who has received a complaint or become aware of a SEAH-related situation, including protecting the personal identifiable information of all parties—both the potential victim(s) and potential perpetrator (s).

- Strengthen the capacities of the project's sub-executing and implementing partners on the prevention of GBV and SEAH, as well as WWF policies and codes of conduct to address SEAH risk. These trainings will be undertaken by the project's PMU's M&E, Safeguards and Gender Officer and should include:
- Training within the first 3 months of project implementation that has been prepared with oversight and final approval from the WWF GCF AE Safeguards and Gender Leads.
- Be mandatory for all implementing partner staff involved in the GEF-financed activities.
- Strengthen the capacities of the entities participating in the MLL platforms so that specific prevention and rapid response measures are included to address GBV—and SEAH-specific threats, including those to social and environmental leaders they may work with.
- Provide the same GBV and SEAH training to the MLL platforms the implementing partners will receive.

5.7. Communications and Disclosure

All affected communities and relevant stakeholders shall be informed about the ESMF requirements and commitments. The executive summary of the ESMF will be translated into the applicable local languages spoken in the three MLLs and made available along with the ESMF and SEP on the websites of SANParks and sub-executing entities, as well as the website of the WWF GEF Agency. Hard copies of the ESMF will be placed in appropriate public locations, at SANParks, and at sub-executing entities' offices in the three MLLs. Project Managers, the MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Points and the M&E, Safeguards and Gender Officer at SANParks will be responsible for raising community awareness regarding the requirements of the ESMF. They will also ensure all external contractors and service providers know and comply with the ESMF and other safeguards documents.

During the project's implementation, activity-specific ESMPs shall be prepared in consultation with affected communities and disclosed to all stakeholders before the finalisation of the project concept. In consultation with the PSC and WWF, the GEF Implementing Agency, SANParks shall review and approve all draft ESMPs before they are publicly disclosed. The PMU must also disclose any action plans prepared during project implementation to all affected parties, including gender mainstreaming.

Disclosure should be carried out meaningfully and clearly to the affected people. For this purpose, the executive summary of ESMPs or the terms and conditions in environment clearances should be disclosed on SANParks and, where relevant, on the sub-executing entities and WWF websites.

The disclosure requirements are summarised in **Table 5** below.

Table 5: Disclosure framework for ESMF-related documents

Documents to be disclosed	Frequency	Where
Environment and Social Management Framework	Once in the entire project cycle. Must remain on the website and other public locations throughout the project period.	On the website of SANParks, sub-executing entities and WWF. Copies should be available at PMU office, MLL Hub offices, and in local municipal offices in project areas
Environmental and Social Management Plan/s	Once in the entire project cycle for every activity that requires ESMP. Must remain on the website and	On the website of SANParks and the relevant sub-executing entity and WWF. Copies should be available in

	other disclosure locations throughout the project period.	local municipal offices in project areas
Safeguards Monthly Progress Report	Monthly	Copies should be available at the PMU office as well as MLL Hub offices in project areas
Minutes of Formal Public Consultation Meetings	Within two weeks of meeting	On the website of SANParks and WWF. Copies should be available at PMU office as well as MLL Hub offices in project areas
Grievance redress process	Quarterly, throughout the project cycle	On the website of SANParks. Copies should be available at the PMU office

5.8. Capacity building and technical assistance

WWF US will provide SANParks with capacity-building activities to help it meet ESMF implementation requirements and best practices. These activities will focus on issues related to preparing ESMPs and LRPs, operationalising the GRM, and monitoring ESMF. The budget for capacity building will be included in Component 4: the project monitoring and evaluation budget.

5.9. Grievance Mechanisms

The project will directly and physically affect local communities and individuals residing within the three project MLLs in South Africa. Thus, an efficient and effective Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) must collect and respond to stakeholders' inquiries, suggestions, concerns, and complaints.

Overall, under the GEF 8 *Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project*, there will be three Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM) available to those impacted by the project, which should be accessed in the following order depending on the type of grievance being raised: firstly project-wide (SANParks PMU-level), secondly WWF US, and thirdly the GEF Secretariat mechanism. This section will describe the details of the GRM, including further information on the process to submit a grievance, how long the PMU will have to respond, and who on the PMU will be responsible for its implementation and reporting.

As part of the PMU, SANParks will appoint a Monitoring and Evaluation, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Integration Specialist, who will serve as the Grievance Focal Point for the project and oversee the project-wide GRM. Grievances against activities undertaken in the project, including in the MLLs, can be lodged through the following channels:

Reimagining National Parks for People and Nature – Mega Living Landscapes Project Grievance Focal Point, SANParks, 643 Leyds Street, Muckleneuk, Pretoria

Postal Address: PO Box 787, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa

Tel: 012 426 5000

Email: TBC

Website: www.sanparks.org/contact

The GRM will operate based on the following principles:

- **Fairness:** Grievances are assessed impartially and handled transparently.
- **Objectiveness and independence:** The GRM operates independently of all interested parties to guarantee fair, objective, and impartial treatment to each case.
- **Simplicity and accessibility:** Procedures for filing grievances and seeking action are simple enough that project beneficiaries can easily understand them. They are also written in a language that is accessible to everyone within a given community, especially the most vulnerable.
- **Responsiveness and efficiency:** The GRM is designed to respond to the needs of all complainants. Accordingly, officials handling grievances must be trained to effectively respond to grievances and suggestions and respond quickly to them.
- **Speed and proportionality:** All grievances, simple or complex, are addressed and resolved promptly. The action taken on the grievance or suggestion is swift, decisive, and constructive.
- **Participation and inclusiveness:** The project implementers are encouraged to address grievances and comments from a wide range of affected people, including communities and vulnerable groups. Special attention is given to ensuring that marginalized groups, including those with special needs, can access the GRM.
- **Accountability and closing the feedback loop:** All grievances are recorded and monitored, and no grievance remains unresolved. Complainants are always notified and receive explanations regarding the results of their complaints. An appeal option is always available.

Complaints may include, but not be limited to, the following issues:

1. Allegations of fraud, malpractices or corruption by staff or other stakeholders as part of any project or activity financed or implemented by the project, including allegations of gender-based violence or sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment.
2. Environmental and/or social damages/harms caused by projects financed or implemented (including those in progress) by the project.
3. Complaints and grievances by permanent or temporary workers engaged in project activities.

Complaints could relate to pollution prevention and resource efficiency; negative impacts on public health, environment or culture; destruction of natural habitats; disproportionate impact on marginalised and vulnerable groups; discrimination or physical or sexual harassment; violation of applicable laws and regulations; destruction of physical and cultural heritage; or any other issues which adversely impact communities or individuals in project areas. The grievance redress mechanism will be implemented in a culturally sensitive manner and facilitate access to vulnerable populations. Project staff should receive special training within the first 12 months of project implementation. This will help to ensure they can address SEAH-related grievances in a culturally sensitive and victim-centred way.

The Grievance Redress Mechanism includes the following components:

1. **Disseminating information about the GRM:** It is essential that project stakeholders, including community members and landowners, understand and have confidence in the grievance mechanism, which is why materials describing the GRM will be made publicly available early on, both digitally on the websites of SANParks and sub-executing entities, and in physical form as part of the project stakeholder engagement activities. Through this, the

process of lodging and handling grievances will be made clear to all project participants, especially what constitutes a grievance, right to raise grievances, methods for raising grievances, how complaints are handled and responded to and timeframes. The information about the GRM can also be presented as a chart to make it easy for people to view. The materials should as a minimum be produced in the following languages: English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and siSwati.

2. **Submitting complaints:** Project-affected People, workers, or interested stakeholders can submit grievances, complaints, questions, or suggestions verbally or in writing via email, mail, phone call, or in person. Once the PMU has been established (within the first six months of its operation), the appropriate addresses and phone numbers will be identified.
3. **Processing complaints:** All grievances submitted to the Grievance Focal Point shall be registered and considered, and a tracking registration number should be provided for each complaint. The Grievance Focal Point shall determine the best way to categorise or otherwise sort complaints received based on their nature, the specific matter to which they refer, etc.
4. **Acknowledging the receipt of complaints:** Once a grievance is submitted, the Grievance Focal Point shall acknowledge its receipt, brief the complainant on the grievance resolution process, provide the contact details of the person handling the grievance, and provide a registration number that enables the complainant to track the status of the complaint.
5. **Investigating complaints:** The Grievance Focal Point will gather all relevant information, conduct field visits as necessary and communicate with all relevant stakeholders as part of the complaint investigation process. The CTF should ensure that the investigators are neutral and do not have any stake in the outcome of the investigation.
6. **Responding to complainants:** A summary of the complaint raised, actions taken, conclusions reached, follow-up plan and timeframe for completion will be written and communicated to the complainant within 15 working days. If further investigation is required, the complainant will be informed accordingly, and a final response will be provided after an additional period of 15 working days. Grievances that the Grievance Focal Point cannot resolve at their level should be referred to a higher level for verification and further investigation.
7. **Appeal:** If parties are unsatisfied with the GRM's response, they can appeal to SANParks within 10 days of the decision Date. If they are still unsatisfied with the appeal committee's decision, they can submit their grievances directly to the GEF Agency or the Court of Law for further adjudication.
8. **Monitoring and evaluation:** The Grievance Focal Point will compile a quarterly report with full information on the grievances they received. The report will describe the grievances and their status in the investigation. Summarised GRM reports will constitute part of the regular project progress reporting and will be submitted to the PMU, PSC, and WWF GEF Agency.

The GRM seeks to complement, rather than substitute, the judicial system and other dispute-resolution mechanisms. *In accordance with South African legislation, all complainants may, therefore, file their grievances in local courts or approach mediators or arbitrators.*

In addition to the project-specific GRM, a complainant can submit a grievance to the WWF GEF Agency. A grievance can also be filed with the Project Complaints Officer (PCO), a WWF staff member fully independent from the Project Team, who is responsible for the WWF Accountability and Grievance Mechanism and who can be reached at:

Email: SafeguardsComplaint@wwfus.org

Mailing address: Project Complaints Officer
Safeguards Complaints,
World Wildlife Fund
1250 24th Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

A stakeholder may also submit a complaint online through an independent third-party platform at <https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/59041/index.html>

In addition to the project-wide and WWF GEF Agency GRMs, a person concerned about a GEF financed project or operation may submit a complaint to the GEF Resolution Commissioner, who plays a facilitation role and reports directly to the GEF CEO. The Commissioner can be reached at:

E-mail: plallas@thegef.org

Mailing Address:

Mr. Peter Lallas

Global Environment Facility

The World Bank Group, MSN N8-800

1818 H Street, NW

Washington, DC 20433-002

5.10. Budget

The project budget will fully cover the ESMF implementation costs. The M&E, Safeguards, and Gender Officer (jointly funded by the GEF8 and GBFF projects), with support from the Senior Project Manager, will ensure that a sufficient budget is available for all activity-specific mitigation measures that may be required in compliance with the ESMF.

A full-time M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Specialist will be employed and 40% of their time will be dedicated to ensuring the ESMF implementation. The Senior Project Manager at PMU will oversee the implementation of the ESMF.

At the MLL level, MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Focal Points will be contracted part-time to fulfill the site-level requirements of ESMF implementation (jointly funded by the GEF8 and GBFF projects).

The budget for capacity building on ESMF implementation, travel costs and workshops and meetings for safeguards monitoring (including travel, workshops and discussions) are included in the overall monitoring and evaluation budget shared between the GEF 8 and GBFF projects.

The proposed combined Safeguards and Gender budget for the GEF 8 and GBFF projects is as follows:

	GEF 8	GBFF	Total
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M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Senior Specialist (PMU) (5yrs)	R 2,817,947.00 (output 4.1.2)	R 580,191.00 (output 4.1.1)	R 3,398,138.00
MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Officer x 3 (5 yrs)	R 4,351,434.00 (output 1.1.1)	R 1,740,573.00 (output 2.2.2)	R 6,092,007.00
MLL Hub Safeguards and Gender Officer x 3 (5 yrs)	R 1,160,383.00 (output 4.1.2)		R 1,160,383.00
Total budget	R 8,329,764.00	R 2,320,764.00	R 10,650,528.00
Notes:	<p>1. MLL Hub safeguards and gender budget (per MLL): R 1,837,272.00 (GEF 8) + R483,493.00 (GBFF) = R 2,320,765.00</p> <p>2. Per MLL Hub (5yrs): Safeguards and Gender Focal point (part-time): R1,300,00.00 Assessments not included in activity budgets/undertaken by Safeguards and Gender Focal point/to be determined based on activities not specified: R 1,020,765.00</p>		

Annex 1. Safeguard Eligibility and Impacts Screening

This screening tool must be completed for each activity or category of activities included in the annual work plan and budget. It must also be completed whenever management measures, or plans are developed and/or project intervention areas are determined.

The tool will be filled out by the M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Specialist and reviewed by the Senior Project Manager. The decision on whether a Site-Specific Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) or Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP) are required shall be made by the M&E, Environmental and Social Safeguards and Gender Specialist in consultation with the WWF GEF Agency Safeguards Specialists and the Senior Project Manager, based on the information provided in this screening form, as well as interviews with the MLL Hub Project Manager and Safeguards and Gender Focal point, local communities, and any other relevant stakeholders.

Part 1: Basic Information

1	Activity Name	
	Description of Activity ("sub-activities")	
2	Type of Activity:	New activity <input type="checkbox"/> Continuation of activity <input type="checkbox"/>
3	Activity location:	
4	Total size of site area	
5	Activity implementation dates	
6	Total cost	

(Move to Part 2 after filling in all information in the table above)

Part 2: Eligibility Screening

No.	Screening Questions: <i>Would the project activity</i>	Yes	No	Comments/Explanation
1	Lead to land management practices that cause degradation (biological or physical) of the soil and water? Examples include but are not limited to: the felling of trees in core zones and critical watersheds; activities involving quarrying and mining; or commercial forestry.			
2	Negatively affect areas of critical natural habitats or breeding ground of known rare/endangered species?			
3	Significantly increase GHG emissions?			
4	Use genetically modified organisms or modern biotechnologies or their products?			
5	Involve the procurement and/or use of pesticides and other chemicals specified as persistent organic pollutants under the Stockholm Convention or within categories IA, IB, or II by the World Health Organization?			

No.	Screening Questions: <i>Would the project activity</i>	Yes	No	Comments/ Explanation
6	Result in the loss of biodiversity, alteration of the functioning of ecosystems, and introduction of new invasive alien species?			
7	Involve the procurement or use of weapons and munitions?			
8	Lead to private land acquisition and/or the to physical displacement and voluntary or involuntary relocation of people, including non-titled and migrant people?			
9	Contribute to exacerbating any inequality or gender gap that may exist?			
10	Involve illegal child labor, forced labor, sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation?			
11	Adversely affect marginalised groups, including indigenous peoples' rights, lands, natural resources, territories, livelihoods, knowledge, social fabric, traditions, governance systems, and culture or heritage (physical and non-physical or intangible) inside and/or outside the project area?			
12	Negatively impact areas with cultural, historical or transcendent values for individuals and communities?			
Please provide any further information that can be relevant:				

If all answers are “No”, project activity is eligible and move to Part 3

If at least one question is answered as “yes”, the project activity is ineligible, and the proponent can reselect the project activity site and do screening again.

Part 3: Impacts on screening

Please answer the questions below and follow the guidance to provide basic information regarding the suggested activity and describe its potential impacts.

No.	Would the project activity:	Yes/No	Provide explanation and supporting documents if needed
<i>Environmental Impacts</i>			
1	Result in permanent or temporary change in land use, land cover or topography.		
2	Involve clearance of existing land vegetation		If yes, number of trees to be cut down: Species of trees: Are the trees protected: Total land area of vegetation cover removed:

			Estimated economic value of the trees, crops and vegetation to be cut down / removed and any replacement costs (e.g., fees, registration, taxes): <i>Provide additional details:</i>
3	Does the activity involve reforestation or modification of natural habitat? If yes, will it involve use or introduction of non-native species into the project area?		
4	Will pesticides be used? If so, are they on the list of those excluded by the Stockholm Convention?		
5	Result in environmental pollution? This may include air pollution, liquid waste, solid waste, or waste as the result of earth moving or excavation for example		
6	Trigger land disturbance, erosion, subsidence, or instability?		
7	Result in significant use of water, such as for construction?		
8	Produce dust during construction and operation?		
9	Generate significant ambient noise?		
10	Increase the sediment load in the local water bodies?		
11	Change on-site or downstream water flows?		
12	Negatively affect water dynamics, river connectivity or the hydrological cycle in ways other than direct changes of water flows (e.g. water filtration and aquifer recharge, sedimentation)?		
13	Result in negative impacts to any endemic, rare or threatened species; species that have been identified as significant through global, regional, national, or local laws?		
14	Could the activity potentially increase the vulnerability of local communities to climate variability and changes (e.g., through risks and events such as landslides, erosion, flooding, or droughts)?		
Socio-Economic Impacts			
15	Negatively impact existing tenure rights (formal and informal) of individuals, communities or others to land, fishery and forest resources?		
16	Operate where there are marginalised groups, including indigenous peoples, and their lands/territories/waters are located? OR Operate where any marginalised groups, including indigenous communities have close cultural/spiritual or land use relationships? If yes to either, answer questions below:		
	a. Has an FPIC process been started? b. Will any restrictions on their use of land/ territories/water/natural resources be restricted?		
17	Restrict access to natural resources (e.g., watersheds or rivers, grazing areas, forestry, non-timber forest products) or		

	restrict the way natural resources are used, in ways that will impact livelihoods?		
18	Restrict access to sacred sites of local communities (including ethnic minorities) and/or places relevant for women's or men's religious or cultural practices?		
19	Operate where there is any cultural heritage or religious or sacred sites that may be impacted by the project?		
20	Undermine the customary rights of local communities to participate in consultations in a free, prior, and informed manner to address interventions directly affecting their lands, territories or resources?		
Labor and Working Conditions			
21	Involve hiring of workers or contracting with labor agencies to provide labor? If yes, answer questions a-b below.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Are labour management issues prevalent in the landscape? b. Are illegal child labour issues prevalent in the landscape? 		
22	Involve working in hazardous environments such as steep, rocky slopes, areas infested with poisonous animals and/or disease vectors?		
Minorities and Vulnerable Groups			
23	Negatively affect vulnerable groups (such as women, poorer households, migrants, and assistant herders) in terms of impact on their economic or social life conditions or contribute to their discrimination or marginalization?		
24	Stir or exacerbate conflicts among communities, groups or individuals? Also considering dynamics of recent or expected migration including displaced people, as well as those who are most vulnerable to threats of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment.		
Occupational and Community Health and Safety			
25	Involve any risks related to the usage of construction materials, working high above the ground or in canals where slopes are unstable?		
26	Expose local community to risks related to construction works or use of machinery (e.g., loading and unloading of construction materials, excavated areas, fuel storage and usage, electrical use, machinery operations)		
27	Generate societal conflicts, increased risk of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment or pressure on local resources between temporary workers and local communities?		
28	Work in areas where forest fires are a threat? If yes, how recently was the last one?		
29	Work in areas where there is the presence or history of vector-borne diseases (some examples include malaria, yellow fever, encephalitis)		
GBV/SEAH Risks			
30	Is there a risk that the project could pose a greater burden on women by restricting the use, development, and protection of natural resources by women compared with that of men?		

31	Is there a risk that persons employed by or engaged directly in the project might engage in/be impacted by GBV (including sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment)? The response must consider risks not only at the beneficiary level, but also to workers within all the organizations receiving GEF funding.		
32	Does the project increase the risk of GBV and/or SEAH for women and girls, for example by changing resource use practices or singling out women and girls for training without complimentary training/education for men? The response must consider all workers within the organizations receiving GEF funding.		
33	Does any mandated training for any individuals associated with the project (including project staff, government officials, park rangers and guards, other park staff, consultants, partner organizations and contractors) cover GBV/SEAH (along with human rights, etc.)?		
Conflict Sensitivity and Risks			
34	Are there any major underlying tensions or open conflicts in the landscape or in the country where the landscape is situated? If yes, answer a-d below		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is there a risk that the activities interact with or exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts in the landscape/seascape? b. Do stakeholders (e.g. implementing partners, rights holders, other stakeholder groups) take a specific position in relation to the conflicts or tensions in the landscape/seascape or are they perceived as taking a position? c. How do stakeholders perceive WWF-South Africa/IA, and SANParks and its partners in relation to existing conflicts or tensions? d. Could the conflicts or tensions in the landscape/seascape have a negative impact on the activities? 		
35	Could the activities create conflicts among communities, groups or individuals?		
36	Are some groups (stakeholders, rights holders) benefiting more than others from the activities? And if so, how is that affecting power dynamics and mutual dependencies?		
37	Do the activities provide opportunities to bring different groups with diverging interests positively together?		
Biodiversity Economy Risks and Impacts			
38	Do the activities include collection, harvesting, R&D and commercial development of genetic resources (especially those that might be rare and threatened)?		
39	Do the activities include the creation of markets for ABS products?		
40	Do the activities include the handling, use and transportation of living modified organisms?		

List of documents to be attached with Screening form:

1	Layout plan of the activity and photos
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d. Any other requirements/ need/ issue etc:

Screening Tool Reviewed by:

Signed:

Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

Exclusion list

The following practices and activities will not be supported by the project:

1. Land or water management practices that cause degradation (biological or physical) of the soil and water.
2. Activities that negatively affect areas of critical natural habitats or breeding ground of known rare/ endangered species.
3. Actions that represent a significant increase in GHG emissions.
4. Use of genetically modified organisms, or the supply or use of modern biotechnologies or their products in crops.
5. Introduction of crops and varieties that previously did not grow in the implementation areas, including seed import/transfer.
6. Actions resulting in loss of biodiversity, alteration of the functioning of ecosystems that fall outside the limits of acceptable change, and introduction of new invasive alien species.
7. Procurement of pesticides or activities that result in an increase in the use of pesticides or chemicals under international phase-out agreements.
8. Activities that would lead to physical displacement and voluntary or involuntary relocation.
9. Activities that do not consider gender aspects or contribute to exacerbating any inequality or gender gap that may exist.
10. Child Labour.
11. Activities that would adversely affect IPs' rights, lands, natural resources, territories, livelihoods, knowledge, social fabric, traditions, governance systems, and culture or heritage (physical and non-physical or intangible) inside and/or outside the project area.
12. Activities that would negatively impact areas with cultural, historical or transcendent values for individuals and communities.