

My children will gladly continue with the legacy because they have also witnessed how effective this farming business is, especially now that our cows are calving. I will have more animals and the business will grow.

MANGENA GOODFRIDAY MAQASHALALA

SELF-EMPLOYED FARMER, AND FORMER CHAIRPERSON OF THE MABHELENI GRAZING ASSOCIATION, ALFRED NZO DISTRICT, EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

OUR GREATEST TREASURE

In South Africa's rangelands, degradation caused by invasive alien species and unplanned grazing can erode land and water resources.¹ Conservation South Africa uses a two-pronged restoration strategy: government's job creation programmes for alien clearing and erosion control, and voluntary rangeland improvement through conservation agreements.

CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS

For the period July 2018 to December 2019, Conservation South Africa designed, negotiated and implemented conservation agreements and a range of stewardship actions (including managing bush encroachment) with 832 farmers in 23 grazing associations across 250,943 hectares of community-owned land. Agreements with individuals, grazing associations and farming cooperatives bolster the uptake of essential practices for rangeland restoration in exchange for certain benefits.

Conservation agreement conditions

- Strict use of a planned grazing system and rotational resting of previously overgrazed areas.
- Erosion control to reduce localised flooding and high runoff.
- Bush clearing to decrease encroachment by woody or alien plant species.
- Exclusion of livestock from key wetlands and river bank areas to improve infiltration.

Benefits of conservation agreements

- Livestock (cow, sheep and goat) farmers' access to the red meat market through mobile auctions.
- Livestock improvement and assistance, such as providing access to vaccinations.
- Training in the design and application of a planned grazing system.
- Employment of eco-rangers (community monitors) to oversee planned grazing systems and the removal of invasive plants.
- Tracing services for commodity-based trade in the red meat sector to negate restrictions relating to foot-and-mouth disease.
- Development and provision of sustainable fodder for the dry season.

The impact of conservation agreements

This work has resulted in increases in forage, improved livestock conditions and associated livelihoods benefits for Conservation South Africa's target communities, who rely on the land to a significant degree for their livelihoods.

The increased ground cover and overall improvement in ecosystem function within these high biodiversity rangelands also impacted on biodiversity, water availability and carbon sequestration.

To support the expansion of this work, 40 NGOs and government departments were trained in the use of conservation agreements, which are now formally recognised as a Tier 2 Stewardship mechanism by the National Biodiversity Stewardship Guidelines.

¹ South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). 2019. *National Biodiversity Assessment 2018: The status of South Africa's ecosystems and biodiversity. Synthesis Report*. South African National Biodiversity Institute, an entity of the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Pretoria.



RESTORATION HIGHLIGHTS

Restoration through job creation

In 2019, the Department of Environment, Fisheries and Forestry provided support through the National Resource Management programme for management of alien plant species on 1,249 hectares of land across eight villages in the heavily infested middle reaches of the uMzimvubu Catchment. By December 2019, 159 restoration workers had been trained and deployed to play a valuable role in enhancing land and water security in the area.

Deployment of newly qualified eco-rangers

The first ten Conservation South Africa eco-rangers graduated from the Herding Academy in Graaf-Reinet in the Eastern Cape in November 2018. The Academy offers a course in Land Management (Captive Animal Care-Giving) which is accredited by the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Services Sector of the Education and Training Authority. A second cadre of 12 graduated in November 2019. Graduates are deployed back to their communities as eco-trainers, to provide support for Conservation South Africa and for other stakeholder-led rangeland restoration interventions in the uMzimvubu Catchment and the Kruger-to-Canyons Biosphere Region.

Conservation South Africa came and things changed. As much as we grew up herding livestock, we were not aware of many things. Livestock disease training, animal handling and nutrition opened my eyes. My thinking has changed. Now, the greatest treasure is land.

USISIKELELE NOTA, 20

YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE NDAKENI GRAZING ASSOCIATION (EASTERN CAPE)

Like most young men in the village, Usisikelele looked after his father's livestock during school holidays and was the proud owner of two cows when he found out about Conservation South Africa.



A FARMER'S TESTIMONY

Mangena Goodfriday Maqashalala was born in 1948 in Mabheleni, a small village in the Mvenyane region of Alfred Nzo District in Eastern Cape Province. He is a self-employed livestock and crop farmer, and a former chairperson of the Mabheleni Grazing Association.

Describing how living on the land has changed over time, Mr Maqashalala said there had once been more than enough grass in the valleys to feed livestock. There were indigenous forests and the river, which was home to a variety of fish, was full. There were also wetlands.

He said they all started disappearing when alien plants invaded the land.

The community struggled to feed their livestock and the river and the wetlands dried up. People struggled, and so did their livestock. Lack of feed led to loss of livestock and cows were no longer calving as before. "Our cows used to calve every year," said Mr Maqashalala.

He said the grass had come back to the areas where livestock were kraaled and that the number of predators had declined. "Conservation South Africa has brought a lot of change by clearing the wattle trees and helping with rangeland management. They came to our rescue. The livestock are healthier and calves are expected in the calving season. We sell our cattle during livestock auction as well and make a huge amount of money."

Mr Maqashalala said some of the practices such as rotational grazing, were used by his forefathers, but were lost as people became modernised.

He said animal nutrition, better grazing practices, livestock disease training and low-stress herding was mostly new information. "I now call myself a livestock nurse because I walk around my livestock every now and then to check for signs of sickness and treat sick livestock ... Knowledge is power!"

