

Evaluation of the uMngeni Resilience Project: Enhancing Climate Adaptation through Integrated Approaches in South Africa

The "Building Resilience in the Greater uMngeni Catchment" project, known as the uMngeni Resilience Project (URP), aims to reduce the vulnerability of communities and small-scale farmers in the uMgungundlovu District Municipality (uMDM) to climate change. This region faces critical challenges, including severe droughts, flash floods, intense storms, and wildfires, exacerbated by factors like informal housing in flood-prone areas and poor land use management.

Approved by the Adaptation Fund Board in October 2014, the URP was implemented through a partnership involving the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), the uMgungundlovu District Municipality (uMDM), and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Initially planned for five years (October 2015 - September 2020), the project received a no-cost extension until September 2023, extending its impact without additional funding. With a budget of USD 7,495,055, the project focused on three high-risk areas: Nhlazuka, Swayimane, and Vulindlela.

The URP's key interventions included establishing early warning and disaster response systems, creating climate-resilient infrastructure, promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices, and disseminating lessons learned and policy recommendations. These efforts aimed to protect vulnerable communities, especially women, and promote sustainable agricultural practices among small-scale farmers.

As the project concludes, this evaluation critically assesses its effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and long-term impact. Conducted from December 2023 to June 2024, the evaluation involved site visits to Swayimane and Vulindlela and engaged stakeholders including SANBI, executing entities, community beneficiaries, and service providers. The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative approaches, ensuring a comprehensive assessment. Key focus areas included project results, sustainability, design, relevance to government priorities, and M&E systems.

Despite some limitations, such as timing constraints and logistical challenges, the evaluation provides valuable evidence for decision-making. The URP significantly exceeded its target of involving 25,640 community members, ultimately benefiting 102,855 individuals, including 53,572 females and 48,283 males. The project established three early warning systems, covering the entire uMDM for flood and storm monitoring and creating partnerships for fire warning systems. In terms of infrastructure and agricultural resilience, the project restored 206 hectares of grassland and implemented solar irrigation systems for communal farmers in Swayimane.

However, some targets, such as retrofitting houses for climate resilience, were not fully met due to delays and logistical challenges. The URP's effectiveness is further evidenced by its impact on policy and knowledge integration, with two significant policy recommendations developed and its interventions incorporated into the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Disaster Management Plan and Climate Change Adaptation Strategy.

This comprehensive evaluation underscores the URP's successes and challenges, providing critical insights into the implementation of integrated climate adaptation strategies. It highlights the importance of continuous improvement in reporting and adaptation practices to ensure sustainable development and resilience against climate change.