



POLICY BRIEF //

**Achieving South Africa's 30x30 target
through strengthened local governance
and traditional leadership**

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01/ CALL TO ACTION

This policy brief emphasises the importance of local governance structures and traditional leadership in achieving South Africa's 30x30 targets. It highlights how vulnerable people and places can be addressed together through biodiversity stewardship agreements in terrestrial ecosystems and a seascape approach in marine ecosystems. Furthermore, it proposes recommendations for aligning South Africa's updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) with the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). **The key messages are:**

1 Align national biodiversity and climate change policies: Develop, update and enforce policies that halt and reverse biodiversity loss and address climate change, such as the updated NBSAP in alignment with the GBF targets.

2 Prioritise ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation (EbA and EbM): Recognise the role of ecosystems in climate adaptation and mitigation by investing in and promoting ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation approaches that align with national biodiversity and climate targets. EbM also provides access to climate finance which can fund EbA.



3 Formally recognise biodiversity stewardship agreements in OECM criteria: Ensure that OECM criteria are well-defined and recognise biodiversity stewardship agreements including conservation agreements that are more binding, and develop comprehensive guidelines for assessing and monitoring them.

4 Invest in community-led marine ecosystem protection: Protect the economic and ecological significance of marine ecosystems by adopting a seascape approach, creating a network of protected marine areas that benefit both nature and coastal communities.



5 Empower local governance structures and traditional leadership to achieve the 30x30 target: In the criteria for Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM), acknowledge the contribution of local governance structures such as Local Municipalities, Traditional Authorities, cooperatives and grazing associations to the governance and management of biodiversity under biodiversity stewardship agreements.

02/ INTRODUCTION

Nature is part of the climate change response // The Paris Agreement, agreed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), recognises that we must achieve **net zero** greenhouse gas emissions globally by **2050** to limit temperature increase to **1.5°C**.



By 2030, **37%** of the necessary mitigation action could come from nature which depends on well-functioning ecosystems [1].

Our ability to adapt to climate change also depends on nature. Using nature to adapt to and mitigate climate change while benefiting people and nature is known as **ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation**, which are also referred to under a broader category known as nature-based solutions.

Ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation in rangeland biomes // Rangelands make up **80%** of South Africa's land area [2] and consist of six biomes - Grasslands, Savanna, Succulent Karoo, Nama-Karoo, Albany Thicket and Indian Ocean Coastal Belt. It is estimated that **92%** of South Africa's rangelands overlap with two global biodiversity hotspots: the Succulent Karoo and Maputaland-Pondoland Albany Hotspots, making South Africa home to the highest biodiversity rangelands in Africa. These hotspots contain more than **12,000** plant species and more than **3,500** faunal species [3].

Rangelands that are rested and managed well support grass growth. As a result, they are better able to provide fodder to livestock during droughts and improve infiltration of water which buffers against floods and holds fertile topsoil. From endemic plants to migratory herbivores, predators and birds, these landscapes also serve as critical habitats for the country's diverse wildlife.

Nature is vulnerable // Many areas around the world are seeing a decline in the variety of naturally occurring species and ecosystems, known as **biodiversity loss**. It is happening for many reasons including climate change as well as inappropriate land and marine management. Biodiversity loss is disrupting ecosystems and their vital role in supporting human well-being and survival. Globally, **one million** animal and plant species are threatened with extinction by **2030** [4]. Five¹ of the six biomes making up South Africa's rangelands are the least protected ecosystem types [2], and Grasslands and Savanna are among the most threatened. About **60%** of coastal ecosystems such as salt marshes, mangroves, and seagrasses are threatened.

People are intimately interconnected with nature // Rangelands are home to some of South Africa's communal farmers² who rely on them for their livelihoods and survival. They have a long history of natural resource management and have a deep understanding of ecosystems and species that depend on them. People in coastal communities rely on oceans as a source of food and employment.

Vulnerable communities often live in places that are already degraded making them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of biodiversity loss such as food and water insecurity. Securing the health of our climate, ecosystems and biodiversity is essential to the survival of all people. Addressing challenges faced by vulnerable communities and their ecosystems can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for people and nature.

¹ Indian Ocean Coastal Belt, Nama Karoo, Grassland, Albany Thicket and Savanna

² Communal land is made available to local communities for farming but is managed by the municipality or other structures such as Traditional Authorities and Communal Property Associations. Title deeds are held in the name of Traditional Authorities, Communal Property Associations or the municipality.

03/ VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND VULNERABLE PLACES CAN BE ADDRESSED TOGETHER

3.1 GLOBAL COMMITMENTS // Urgent and transformative action is required to protect and conserve biodiversity [4], while enhancing the resilience of people. Countries around the world, including South Africa, are working towards living in harmony with nature by 2050. They adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), held in December 2022.

The GBF sets the global direction of action and funding, to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and live in harmony with nature by 2050. It has action-oriented targets that cover three main categories – (1) reducing threats to nature, (2) meeting people's needs while using nature sustainably and sharing its benefits, and (3) developing tools and solutions for doing so.

Target 3, better known as “30x30”, is often referred to as the lifeline of the GBF [5]. It aims to ensure that by 2030, a minimum of **30%** of terrestrial, inland water areas, and marine and coastal areas are effectively conserved and managed.

As party to the conventions of UNFCCC and CBD, South Africa has made its commitment to protecting our biodiversity and shielding us against climate change and biodiversity loss. The South African government has committed to support the achievement of Target 3 and is developing an implementation plan which escalates ambition, collaboration and inclusivity in South Africa's efforts towards achieving the target [6].

3.2 FULFILLING COUNTRY OBLIGATIONS // National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) serve as the primary tool for countries to fulfil their obligations under the CBD. This is similar to how Nationally Determined Contributions under the UNFCCC capture a country's efforts toward achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.

BOX 1: Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least **30%** of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognising indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognising and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

South Africa's current NBSAP (2015 – 2025)

provides a roadmap for how the country can best manage and utilise its natural resources and conserve its unique biodiversity, while supporting the country's development goals. It also identifies the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, such as government, private sector, civil society organisations, and local communities, in implementing these strategies and actions [7].

From now through to 2024, countries will update their NBSAPs to align with the GBF. The updated NBSAPs will be submitted for consideration at the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, scheduled for the second half of 2024. As countries undergo their updates and set new national targets aligned with the GBF, there are many opportunities to implement and scale up ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation that contribute to the achievement of the GBF, and other international commitments such as those made under the UNFCCC.

04/ ACHIEVING SOUTH AFRICA'S 30x30 TARGET THROUGH BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP

4.1 PROTECTED AND CONSERVATION AREAS //

One of the current NBSAP's objectives is to ensure that the network of protected areas and conservation areas includes a representative sample of ecosystems and species, and is coherent and effectively managed. It includes targets for protected areas and conservation areas and contributes to achieving the 30x30 Target (See Box 2).

BOX 2: Targets for protected areas and conservation areas as per the current NBSAP

Areas protected under the Protected Areas Act: By 2028, in protected areas: 10.8 million land-based hectares, 353km inshore, 210 000km² marine offshore in South Africa's exclusive economic zone plus 93 300km² marine offshore in Prince Edward Islands exclusive economic zone. **Number of hectares in the conservation estate:** By 2019, 13.2 % (16 121 794 ha).

In South Africa, protected areas and conservation areas have specific meanings, rooted in the legislation used to safeguard the land or sea. The difference is not about who owns the land, but about the legal mechanisms in place to protect and conserve these areas.

Protected areas are formally recognised in terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003) and their primary management objective is to conserve biodiversity. They are binding on the property and landowner.

Conservation areas are not formally recognised by legislation, but are governed under the authority of a specific entity or individual. They are managed for their biodiversity values, either directly or as part of a broader landscape management system. There is a lower level of security for long-term management associated with conservation areas, therefore, they are considered to have a reduced form of protection.

Conservation areas play a crucial role for ecosystems and people by serving as essential connectors that facilitate the movement of wildlife, plant species, and ecological processes across a wider area. They contribute to the overall health and resilience of ecosystems, prevent habitat fragmentation and provide valuable natural resources and socio-economic benefits for communities who depend on them.

4.2 OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES (OECM): BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP //

An approach recognised by the CBD that is being used to define areas such as conservation areas is **Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures** (OECM). An OECM is an area outside of protected areas that is governed and managed in ways that conserve biodiversity and the benefits it provides, including ecosystem functions and services, as well as cultural, spiritual, and socio-economic benefits (CBD Decision 14/8). A set of criteria are available to determine the effectiveness of OECMs in achieving conservation targets. These criteria include aspects related to [8]:

- 1 Biodiversity:** Importance for supporting and preserving biodiversity, including different species and ecosystems.
- 2 Governance:** The governance and management methods (including whether they are under binding agreements) should ensure successful conservation efforts. Monitoring and evaluation, through satellite and ground data, plays a critical role in assessing the impact of conservation measures and adjusting them as necessary for better outcomes.
- 3 Sustainability:** The ability of the conservation measures applied in the OECM to be maintained over the long-term, ensuring continuous positive outcomes for biodiversity (See Box 3).

BOX 3: The Greater Kruger Landscape Financing Strategy: An example of long-term, sustainable financing for continuous positive biodiversity outcomes

The Greater Kruger Landscape Financing Strategy is a model of long-term and sustainable financing, designed to ensure continuous positive outcomes for biodiversity and socio-economic well-being for communities in the Greater Kruger Landscape. There are many funders actively seeking investment opportunities and ongoing projects in need of financial support. The Strategy seeks contributions from various sources, including donor funding, government allocations, corporate sponsorships, financial institutions and impact-driven investors. It mobilises resources, unlocks fundable opportunities, and directs appropriate investments into the landscape. Examples of identified financing mechanisms include carbon financing, tourism, and Green Economy Job Creation Programmes.

Biodiversity stewardship is recognised by the NBSAP and makes substantial contributions to meeting national protected area and conservation area targets. It can align current conservation mechanisms with OECM reporting requirements. Biodiversity stewardship recognises that landowners and land users in biodiversity priority areas are custodians of biodiversity on their land, by voluntarily entering into contractual agreements with conservation authorities.



There are a variety of agreements under different categories of biodiversity stewardship.

Some are formally declared as protected areas in terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003), known as **category 1: protected areas**.³

Others are not formally declared as protected areas but contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, known as **category 2: conservation areas**.⁴

A third category exists, known as **category 3: partnership areas** which is informal and non-binding [9].

Categories 2 and 3 are potentially eligible for assessment as OECMs, and further clarity will be provided upon the approval of South Africa's 30x30 Implementation Plan and alignment to OECM criteria as to what can or cannot be included. Every effort should be made to ensure that a specific area is assigned the highest level of protection possible and is managed effectively over the long term.

³ Category 1 agreements include nature reserves or national parks; and protected environments.

⁴ Category 2 agreements include 1) biodiversity management agreements; 2) biodiversity agreements; 3) conservation servitudes; 4) business, industry and biodiversity initiatives; and 5) conservation agreements.



4.3 MEETING OEMC CRITERIA ON COMMUNALLY OWNED LAND //

Category 2 stewardship agreements, including conservation agreements and biodiversity agreements,⁵ are powerful tools for conservation and sustainable use in landscapes where communities are the owners and local stewards of their land, such as communal livestock farmers. It is important for biodiversity stewardship on communal land to take place through a long-term commitment that suits community needs [9].

Conservation agreements are developed through a **voluntary** and **participatory** process and can be used to support communal livestock farmers to protect nature in return for **incentives**. They are usually signed for a period of **3 years**. Conservation actions, informed by science and traditional knowledge, and incentives are identified with farmers based on what they can do to improve their farming, and what they need to support them. Farmers commonly need livestock medicines for vaccination and dosing against parasites, climate resilient breeds, better access to markets, and training to become more resilient to climate change.

Conservation agreements have had a **significant impact** on communal livestock farmers across South Africa, including in the Namakwa District (Northern Cape), Kruger to Canyons Biosphere (Limpopo and Mpumalanga) and the Alfred Nzo District (Eastern Cape) – all located in biodiversity hotspots.

They aim to balance grazing practices with conservation efforts, promote sustainable land use and preserve natural resources. Farmers have seen an observable improvement in the condition of their grazing lands. Conservation agreements have fostered trust within communities and have paved the way for participation in formal agreements.

⁵ Biodiversity agreements are legally binding through contract law; typically signed between landowners and conservation authorities with final signing by a delegated representative of the provincial conservation authority; are signed for a period of five to 15 years; and require a management plan.

For example, the Maloti Thaba Tsa Metsi Protected Environment in the Eastern Cape has six Traditional Authorities, acting as the Management Authority and operating under the governance of a Community Property Association and a Joint Venture partnership. The communities live in the protected area and collaboratively manage it.

DESIRED OUTCOMES



Preserved
natural
resources



Access to
economic
opportunities



Trust

4.4 LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP //

Conservation agreements are usually signed with entities that represent communal livestock farmers, some of which are governed by legislation, such as Traditional Authorities,⁶ Communal Property Associations,⁷ Local Municipalities, cooperatives⁸ and Grazing Associations.⁹

⁶ **TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES:** Some communities who occupy communal land are recognised traditional communities in terms of the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act 41 of 2003. Chapter 12 of the Constitution recognises the relevance and importance of traditional leadership. It awards power to the national legislature to pass legislation to provide for the role of Traditional Authorities as institutions at the local level on matters affecting local communities.

⁷ **COMMUNAL PROPERTY ASSOCIATIONS:** Communal Property Associations are registered in terms of the Communal Property Associations Act (Act 28 of 1996) to manage communally owned land.

⁸ **COOPERATIVES:** Cooperatives, governed by the Cooperatives Act 14 of 2005, promote economically viable businesses, especially for historically disadvantaged groups like women, youth, and individuals with disabilities. They play a vital role in addressing poverty and reducing unemployment, driving economic development.

⁹ **GRAZING ASSOCIATIONS:** Grazing associations are recognised as formal entities under the Communal Land Rights Act 11 of 2004, through which communal livestock farmers can establish regulations to collectively manage communal grazing areas.

Partnering with local leaders is critical to conservation and can provide unique insights into ways to make conservation more effective. As stewards of the land, local governance structures and traditional leadership:



Use their **knowledge**, practices, and values to help manage natural resources in sustainable and culturally appropriate ways.



Help enforce **laws and regulations** related to conservation and natural resource management, using their knowledge of the land and community relationships to detect and deter illegal activities.



Collaborate with conservation authorities and government agencies to create protected areas and conservation areas that recognise and respect people's rights and cultural practices while conserving biodiversity.



Engage in education and outreach efforts to raise **awareness**, working to empower and engage local communities in conservation efforts.



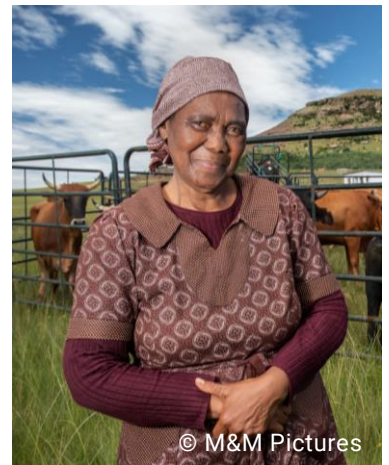
Play a part in ensuring that municipalities can deliver **services** effectively.



Assist us to meet our local, national and international **obligations**.



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05/ ENHANCING THE PROTECTED AREA NETWORK IN MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

The ocean and estuaries support coastal communities and enhance climate resilience. South Africa's oceans are home to a rich diversity of marine life, including over **9,000** species of plants and animals. They also play a crucial role in carbon absorption, with seagrasses storing **18%** of oceanic carbon and mangrove forests storing **6.4 billion** tonnes globally, and their destruction emits significant CO₂ [10]. The sustainable use of South Africa's oceans and coasts could potentially increase GDP by **R177 billion** and generate **one million** jobs by 2033 [11].

In South Africa, about **60%** of coastal ecosystems such as salt marshes, mangroves, and seagrasses are threatened; **30%** of salt marshes have been lost; mangroves are found in less than **10** of **26** subtropical estuaries [2]; and several seagrass species are listed as vulnerable in the Red Data List of Species. In South Africa's southern Benguela region, kelp forests and temperate reefs, covering around **1000km** of coastline, offer ecological, social, and economic benefits. Unfortunately, many valuable species in these areas were overexploited and reached a state of crisis in the 1990s [12] [13].

South Africa has made immense strides for marine protection through the marine and coastal targets, as outlined in the NBSAP and National Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Spatial plan [14]. Achieving these targets requires significant and coordinated efforts from various stakeholders, including government, civil society, and local communities [15].



One way to protect and manage the ocean and coast on a large scale is through the **seascope approach** - a network of marine protected areas where governments, private organisations and other key stakeholders work together to conserve the diversity and abundance of marine life and promote human wellbeing.

Seascapes achieve socio-economic and conservation goals while protecting blue natural capital and social equity. They connect protected areas and conservation areas in a broad network that helps to achieve ocean conservation at scale [16].

Traditional and local knowledge is vital for ocean conservation and marine planning but is often understated. Local communities play a critical role in managing marine resources. Madagascar's Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA) is a good example of this (Box 4).

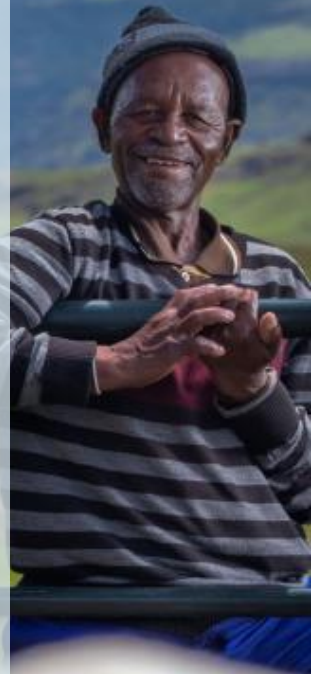
BOX 4: Locally Managed Areas (LMMAs) from Madagascar

LMMAs are areas of nearshore waters or coastal areas that are collaboratively managed by local communities and local government to achieve conservation and sustainable development objectives [17]. Madagascar, with over **5000km** of coastline and more than **500 000** people reliant on coastal and marine resources, established its first LMMA. This empowered local communities to take and implement decisions about the use of their resources. This approach has been expanding within communities, governmental authorities and organisations working in marine and coastal conservation. Today Madagascar has more than **200** LMMAs [18].

LMMAs can serve as a locally driven model for OECMs that contribute to achieving global marine protection targets. South Africa has the potential to establish LMMAs [19]. Organisations like Conservation South Africa aim to demonstrate the value of locally managed OECMs within a seascope.

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ACRONYMS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework	OECM	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Areas	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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