



CASE STUDY

RESILIENT CITIES PROGRAMME

Tongaat Hulett's commitment to ZERO HARM and sustainable development has been reinforced by its recent partnership with the eThekweni Municipality and Dube TradePort Corporation, through which Durban has joined the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities Programme. Focussed on building a city that will withstand the changes of time, climate and society, it aims to create a city that will survive and thrive in spite of environmental and societal changes.

As Debra Roberts, Durban's Chief Resilience Officer (eThekweni Municipality), explains: "The challenges that cities will face in the future require us to be innovative and to act differently in order to ensure more positive outcomes for the wellbeing of the city and its people. Being resilient is about making sure the foundations are in place to allow us to respond effectively to challenges and, where necessary, to fundamentally change how cities operate."

To this end, Tongaat Hulett, Dube TradePort Corporation and the eThekweni Municipality have entered into a partnership to develop a resilience framework for the northern area of Durban. The key corridor of land identified for this project stretches from the Ohlanga River in the south to the uThongathi River in the north and includes the uMdloti River. It extends inland to the outskirts of Verulam and beyond Tongaat into the Buffels Kloof area.

"The project arose out of an acknowledgement that economic development is key if we are to alleviate poverty, which is an imperative at national, provincial and local government level," explains Rory Wilkinson, Planning Director at Tongaat Hulett's development operation. "In order to achieve this, cities need to grow in a way that optimises land use, infrastructural provision and promotion of investment which will generate inclusive economic development, while managing the pressure urbanisation places on the natural environment through large-scale land transformation".

All parties acknowledge the need for balanced, sustainable development, based on enhancing the ecological footprint and incorporating a process towards obtaining both agreement on the extent of this footprint as well as an approach to development in the region. At the heart of the framework is the effect on degraded wetland habitat in the region.

All partners recognise the need for growth and development to overcome poverty and to provide economic upliftment for the community and that this should not come at a cost to the natural environmental assets which need to be preserved, protected and, where possible, enhanced.

"The concept of resilience means that business, government and society generally need to move beyond the concept of sustainable development to the ultimate goal of creating

environments that are adaptive to change," explains Hamish Erskine, CEO of Dube TradePort Corporation. "By building ecosystems that have the capacity to respond to development-induced changes, we will be ensuring that we are creating a lasting impact on the well-being of our people. Our partnership in driving this northern development area is one of the cornerstones of this principle. Our continued efforts need to be integrated and our strategies need to be aligned, in order for us to collectively accomplish this goal across our land holdings, which may prove to be a model for development throughout the region."

In the case of Durban's northern corridor, resilience means avoiding impacts on the natural environment wherever possible and seeking synergies that lead to enhancement of ecological performance wherever possible. If this is not possible, then impacts need to be mitigated appropriately. The development and preservation of greenbelts in the estuarine regions of the three river systems, referred to as "receiving areas" is key to this mitigation and enhanced resilience. These ecosystems play a critical role in water purification, flood attenuation and maintenance of the area's natural biodiversity, all of which are important in adapting to the likely negative impacts of climate change.

Consultants BiomimicrySA, Eco-Pulse Environmental Consulting Services and GroundTruth have undertaken studies which have led to the development of a wetland management framework that provides for wetland gains and losses within the existing "mitigation hierarchy" and ultimately, the environmental rehabilitation of these consolidated offset receiving areas to compensate for wetland losses in an area where environmental thresholds have already been exceeded. This, in turn, provides mitigation for where wetlands will be impacted upon by proposed development. The project is a pilot initiative between the three partners, and the learnings from this experience could help to inform how developments and environmental impacts are managed in future.

"We are looking to exceed the loss from the developments with proactive rehabilitation and enhancement to reach a position of net gain of environmental functioning in the region," adds Wilkinson. "This will ensure a solution that addresses the issue of an integrative approach to urban development. Through adopting a holistic rather than piecemeal approach we can achieve the best ecological functioning and social and economic gains. We envisage the partnership between the eThekweni Municipality, Tongaat Hulett and Dube TradePort as one which creates a joint future for the expansion of the city and its environs."

To find out more about the 100 Resilient Cities programme go to www.100resilientcities.org