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WCEEf Regional Conference Report 2023

Educate, Empower, Preserve: Greening the Future with Environmental Education

Date: 15 & 16 August 2023

Venue: Avenue Conference Centre, 20A, V&A Waterfront

Enabler: Cape Leopard Trust (CLT)

Host: CLT for WCEEf



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Introduction & Background

The Western Cape Environmental Education Forum (WCEEF), also known as WC EE Friends hosted the first Environmental Education/ Education for Sustainable Development Regional Conference on the 15&16 August 2023 at Avenue Conference Centre, Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, V&A Waterfront. Through the power of strengthened partnerships, the Conference was fully sponsored, hosted by one of the WCEEF stakeholders, Cape Leopard Trust (CLT), and accommodated about 75 delegates under the theme: **Educate, Empower, Preserve:** Greening the Future with Environmental Education.

About the Western Cape EE Friends (WCEEF)

The WCEEF, is a shared platform coordinated by the Department of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning (DEA&DP) through the Directorate: Sustainability and the City of Cape Town's Capacity Building Unit.

Members of the WCEEF are designated by their respective National and Provincial departments, Local and District municipalities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Higher Institutions of Learning (HIL), private organizations and others. The Provincial Forum is voluntarily attended by all regional environmental education/ Education for Sustainable Development partners/stakeholders that are active in the Western Cape.

The Environmental Education Forum is driven by SDG: Goal 4 (Quality Education) of the SDG's – a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly. The SDGs are part of Resolution 70/1 of the United Nations General Assembly: "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."; ESD Roadmap 2030 and The Africa We Want Agenda 2063.



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Purpose of WCEEF

The purpose of the Forum is to encourage co-operative governance by improving the quality and quantity of environmental education and ESD activities delivered to communities, schools and other public entities in the Western Cape. The platform membership has exponentially grown, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic season, to include more new stakeholders and connections for a common purpose have been strengthened. This is an all-inclusive bottom-up platform, which seek to strengthen partnerships and collaboration of efforts amongst stakeholders and bringing all Western Cape active EE/ESD practitioners in this field to a common goal, to “transform lives through quality education for all.”

Key deliberations of the 2023 Conference

Stakeholders included National, Provincial and Local Governments, various NGOs in Environmental Management under various environment and education mandates, including Curriculum Advisors in Education(WCED), Higher Institutions of Learning (HIL) Stellenbosch University: (Science& Innovation Education), National Education System of Engagement (Fundisa for Change), River Health & Water Management, Coastal Management, Biodiversity Management, EPWP & Circular Economy, Waste & Pollution Management, Bioreserves, Catchment to Coast, Communication of EE/ESD through Art & Theatre, STEM Clubs partnerships, and many more.

The conference programme started off with an opening speech of the Inaugural conference done by the sponsor partner, (CLT) Mr. Chris Eksteen, the Education and Outreach Manager. Deep insights as encoded in the extracts from his speech as follows:



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“We have gathered here this week to foster a greener future. This conference aims to create a platform for collaboration, and a clear overarching goal is set – to promote partnership and cultivate the skills necessary to propel EE in our province. Furthermore, this gathering empowers us to be a unified voice not only in our echo chambers but also on the larger stage, allowing us to engage with the government, help shape policies, and influence decisions. Together, we possess a collective strength that can amplify our impact and ensure our message is heard where it matters most.

As we navigate the currents of this conference, let us remember we are not alone. This assembly represents a diverse array of individuals, organizations, and institutions, all navigating the same boat in the same industry. The friendships forged here will weather the storms and celebrate the victories that lie ahead in our industry.”

The programme was directed by the vibrant and energetic Yanga Gceya (Soapbox South Africa), part of the WCEEF family, who kept all delegates engaged, focused, and participatory throughout the conference. DEA&DP's HOD: Mr. G. Gerber shared a virtual message of support about the importance of hosting regional conferences of this nature and relations to the ESD in achieving the 17 UN SDG's and Mr. Ron Mukanya (DEA&DP-Directorate Sustainability) echoed the same sentiments and offered a message of support to the WCEEF platform, on how we can together offer change through partnerships in the region. The Western Cape Education Department was represented by officials in the Environment, Sciences & Curriculum fields, and Mr H. Mahomed: DDG WCED offered a message of support virtually on the importance of EE in the School Curriculum and the messages of support were embraced by all.

WCEEF's history, mission and vision bear a great story of strengthened partnerships showcased by this platform. DEA&DP's Sustainable Awareness & Education Khuthala Swanepoel (WCEEF Chair) shared about the enabled platform through DEA&DP and the City of Cape Town's shared vision to advance learning, knowledge(s), and working together to transform lives through environmental education. Highlights were shared with all, including opportunities presented to WCEEF to share the case of strengthened regional partnerships to the International platform in the SADC region via the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) platform. The City of Cape Town recently engaged all partners to share about their activity areas, where school programmes are delivered.



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This data was used to generate Geographical Information System (GIS) information about the impact and effectiveness of our EE programmes and where are we collectively active with our school programmes and projects.

Key findings, as presented in detail by Lindie Buirski (Head of Capacity Building Programmes), WCEEf Co-Chair, showed that we need to work more with rural schools in the Province, as often resources do not reach under-resourced schools. The GIS report became a reflection point and a foundation for our next focus of project and programme implementation at the school level.

Poster presentation and Showcasing at EEASA 41st Conference, Gauteng 2023

There was an opportunity for all stakeholders to present their programmes and projects through Posters under the theme of strengthening the WCEEf “partnerships” to share lessons learned, best practices, etc., and about 11 organizations shared learning experiences, and case studies about their work forged through WCEEf partnerships. WCEEf has been afforded an opportunity to showcase the posters at the upcoming 41st (EEASA) Conference in Gauteng, September 2023, which will be hosted by WESSA. Alongside this great initiative, earlier this year (2023), WCEEf stakeholders participated at the development of the WCEEf e-Resource Handbook, sponsored by Cape Nature. An Abstract was submitted by WCEEf Chair alongside other co-authors and was approved by EEASA organizing committee under the title “ ***The power of documenting regional learning environments and fieldwork experiences in Environmental Education for accelerated youth participation: The Western Cape EE Friends case study, showcasing strengthened partnerships in advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).***”



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Distinguished Guest Speakers at the WCEEf conference 2023 included:

- Professor Eureka Rosenberg: Dean Faculty of Education, Rhodes University (Monitoring & Evaluation of EE/ESD Activities- Theory of Change & Practice)
- Dr. Glenda Raven: Director Learning for Change (Monitoring & Evaluation of EE/ESD Workshop)
- Ms. Shanu Misser: National EE Programmes (Fundisa For Change (FFC), the value of establishing the Western Cape FFC Node through WCEEf.
- Ms. Mona Mkumatela: Breteau Foundation (Opportunity for partnerships Plastic Changemaker SA Curriculum linked Education Programme)+ Miraculous Ladybug Action episode soon to be launched in SA.
- Dr. Judy Mann: Executive for Strategic Projects, Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation (Keynote: Free Choice Learning/Ocean Literacy)
- Ms Andrea Schnetler-Niddrie: SnareFREE (Biodiversity Snare AWARE Workshop)

Delegates were exposed to enhancing EE Awareness by using **Storytelling**, through a vibrant, full participatory workshop, the Eco-Theatre Interactive showcase by Jungle Theatre, presented by Vincent Myburgh (Co-finder Jungle Theatre) and an actress and educator, Noxolo. The showcase was a learning experience and a “show-stopper” to all.

Videos showcasing what stakeholders engage with various audiences in EE/ESD were played throughout the conference and brought deeper awareness and appreciation of regional EE work. **Reflexivity** brings a powerful dynamism at gatherings of this nature, where stakeholders are brought for a common purpose. The power of 4IR was at play, as the energetic Programme Director enabled all stakeholders to reflect on the conference deliverables by using interactive games through Smart Phones, through Quizizz.com. It was phenomenal!



The conference was honored to host one Grade 9 learner from Phillipi, by the name of Yamkela, who got permission from his School Principal to attend and be a representative for many voices from school environments. Yamkela participates in environmental education programmes offered by one of our stakeholders, the South African Education Project (SAEP), and tagged along with this organization to the conference. He exposed WCEEf stakeholders to the plight of being a learner in Township Schools, where education is faced with the competing realities that are real challenges to the learners' journey in pursuit of quality education.

Consequent to Yamkela's speech, WCEEf endeavors to start a **WCEEf Youth Wing**, where our learners will be given a platform to be heard through school debates, dialogues, etc., by incorporating the existing DFFE: Working on Fire School's Debate Model.

The Market Place was vibrant, with networking opportunities, sharing of resources, and case studies by all stakeholders. In addition to learning through exhibitions, Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation offered our stakeholders an opportunity to learn about their Education and Outreach Programmes, from the stunning Aquarium Fish Tanks to the Lab Classrooms/Marine Science Education Lessons and the 20A Outreach Mobile vans for Smart Living and Marine & Coastal Education (Ocean Motion).

In conclusion

The conference objectives were met with great success. WCEEf is thankful to Cape Leopard Trust (CLT), who made the hosting of this conference possible in our beautiful Province, and for affording an opportunity for our WCEEf stakeholders to write history. In order to strengthen Teacher Support in the region, the conference delegates embraced and affirmed WCEEf to be the **Fundisa for Change (FFC) Western Cape Node**, to be the interface for the National Education System of Engagement to support Teacher Education regionally. **STEM+ Clubs** by WCED and Cape Town Science Centre have also been flagged as an opportunity for collective WCEEf collaboration to support learners in school environments.



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An opportunity to reflect on an idea of a **“co-engaged partnership change project”** undertaken by WCEEF, to respond to sustainability challenges in our region received great positive responses, and reinforcements to bring ideas to life are underway.

We would like to thank all Heads of Institutions & Organizations for their messages of support. Thanking all our stakeholders for their support, sharing gifts and participation in general, and for making the platform relevant for current and future generations.

Thanking all our distinguished guests and guest speakers for adding such great value to our collective learning journey.

During the conference, WCEEF received messages of support from other National EE Learning Forums, as read during the conference from, KZN, Mpumalanga and Gauteng. WCEEF is part of a bigger ESD/EE family and the messages of support affirmed that we belong to something bigger than us. Last but not least, the ongoing support by DFFE: Sector Education & Training, as represented by Dr Nomboniso Hlela, who travelled all the way from Pretoria to engage with WCEEF, was greatly appreciated and we look forward to what the future holds, as we nurture and further strengthen WCEEF.

Thank you! Enkosi kakhulu! Baie Dankie!

Report by: Task Team : WCEEF Conference 2023

Chris Eksteen (CLT); Lindie Buirski (City of Cape Town) & Khuthala Swanepoel (DEA&DP; WCEEF)



Ends.