

## Course development to strengthen co-learning in EI4WS networks and community of practice

### **Background to the socio-ecological challenge**

South Africa is a water-scarce country. Over the years, there has been a growing interest in supporting the development of sustainable management practices for the restoration and conservation of water factories (ecological infrastructure) as one of the critical strategies to water security unlocking the biodiversity economy.

The Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), in partnership with SANBI, the Department of Environmental Affairs, the WRC and other vital partners is currently implementing an extensive GEF6 Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security Project (EI4WS), titled: *Unlocking Biodiversity Benefits through Development Finance in Critical Catchments (SANBI, 2016)*. The EI4WS project aims to support integrating biodiversity and ecosystem services into the water value chain to contribute to improved water security.

WRC is leading a component of the EI4WS project that focuses on developing strategies to support social learning, knowledge mediation and management for deepening capacities in existing organisations and networks address issues in the water and biodiversity sectors. As part of this, WRC has commissioned Rhodes University through the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) to develop a *participatory course* as one of the mediating tools for strengthening co-learning in EI4WS networks and community of practice.

**Project title:** Participatory Course to Activate Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security Learning Networks

**Project duration:** January 2021- February 2023

### **Project objectives:**

- Develop a participatory course to activate EI4WS learning networks in the Berg-Breede and uMngeni River catchments
- Pilot the participatory course to activate EI4WS learning networks in the Berg-Breede and uMngeni River catchments
- Provide continued support for established EI4WS learning networks and scaling up of the participatory course in the Berg-Breede, uMngeni River and other catchments

### **Expected outcomes:**

- Develop learning networks and community of practice to catalyse the co-learning; knowledge production and sharing of existing and new knowledge assets and experience within and across the EI4WS project components and stakeholders in the Berg-Breede and uMngeni River catchments.
- Enhanced capacity for social learning facilitation and knowledge mediation through evidence-based case studies around financing, planning and development of ecological infrastructure for improved water security and biodiversity management;
- Knowledge mediation tools and materials that can be used as learning tools for co-inquiry processes to explore and expand EI4WS financing, planning and development within and across catchments networks and policy level spheres
- A 'Train the Trainers' short course based on the learning experiences in the Berg-Breede and uMngeni River catchments, which will be ready for scaling in other catchments.

## Methodology

This project is grounded in the transformative social learning methodology to facilitate co-inquiry processes throughout the project. The project will be carried out in three phases.

**Phase 1** will be focused on developing the catchments' contextual profiles, including stakeholder mapping of historical and present EI4WS related practices, networks, communities of practice or related platforms; desktop review of documentation and stakeholder networks on EI4WS related initiatives; and a review of existing knowledge assets and learning experiences concerning EI4WS-related initiatives to identify gaps in knowledge and stakeholder representation. It will further include a training needs assessment conducted through focus-group discussions and key informant interviews to identify potential course participants and their capacity gaps concerning EI4WS, in order to identify course priorities collectively. This process will inform the design mechanisms to develop curriculum and course materials (i.e. accreditation, level of training, quality).

**Phase 2** focuses on piloting the participatory course in the Berg/Breede and uMngeni catchment areas, facilitated through a series of training workshops and case studies to support course participants in implementing change-oriented EI4WS projects in their catchment contexts.

**Phase 3** involves reflexive evaluation of the course development process (i.e. curriculum design, learning materials course pilot, case studies, etc.) in order to develop final learning materials for the future scaling-up of the course as a 'Train the Trainers' course in other catchments.