



case study

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The importance, challenges, and benefits of SKEPPIES



Background on SKEPPIES

SKEPPIES is the Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Programme's (SKEP's) community conservation and development small grants fund operating in the Northern Cape implemented as a pilot programme in the 2006/2007 financial year. It was jointly funded by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and Conservation International (CI), to promote economic development of poor rural communities living within the Succulent Karoo, while also promoting conservation of the unique resources of the Succulent Karoo.

The SKEPPIES's fund provides accessible small scale funding and support to projects in the Succulent Karoo Biodiversity Hotspot with combined socio-economic development and conservation outcomes. SKEPPIES projects are specifically small conservation based businesses for the community conservation projects with funding that supports business skills development, marketing, and building resilience to climate change.

The SKEPPIES fund was started in 2006 to implement the conservation and development objectives of its partners. The various partners were the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF); Conservation International South African Hotspots (CI); Citigroup Foundation; Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA); Ford Foundation; and the South African National Biodiversity Institute's Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Program (SKEP of SANBI), and is now currently hosted by Conservation South Africa (CSA).

Since its inception, SKEPPIES continuously exceeded the expectations of its partners by benefitting conservation and communities, creating positive unintended consequences and synergies; and leveraging additional funding at grassroots level. As such, SKEPPIES made significant progress in demonstrating the success of the new paradigm it was pioneering, projects were funded and they created jobs, increased the skill set of the local people, and raised environmental awareness of people. The projects contributed to conserving 6,959 hectares of the Succulent Karoo landscape, ensuring

better environmental management of 42,228 hectares and protecting 242 red data plant species.

During its pilot phase in 2007, SKEPPIES supported 13 projects representing 22 new businesses and providing direct benefits to 109 local people. Since then, SKEPPIES projects have continued to generate significant numbers of new jobs, raise environmental awareness, and achieve remarkable conservation delivery including the conservation of 5230 hectares of land, the better management of a further 41 461 hectare, and the protection of 236 red-listed plant species. Projects currently supported by the fund include traditional catering businesses, hiking trails, land rehabilitation efforts, environmental education, species protection, and sustainable livestock management.



Pieter van Nieker at work in his studio. Kharkams Memory Stick project.

Importance of SKEPPIES

Through nature conservation, SKEPPIES projects assist in the socio-economic development of local people, adding value to existing businesses, creating new businesses, creating employment opportunities, capacitating people and raising their environmental awareness. SKEPPIES promotes the idea of the “emerging conservationist”, working with land reform beneficiaries towards sustainable land management and assisting them to unlock the development value of their natural resources.

SKEPPIES works to ensure that project beneficiaries have access to project development support and are working within the systems being tested and developed via SKEPPIES' innovative strategic methodologies and techniques. SKEPPIES funds projects which jointly contribute to nature conservation and development, need start-up funding, support entrepreneurship, support business development and form part of other projects in the SKEP priority regions.

SKEPPIES team work closely with the communities and that make it easy to understand the obstacles facing a lot of small projects as a result communities feel supported and empowered through the application and implementation process. SKEPPIES staff and partners help develop the best possible solutions to ensure the application process runs smoothly for everyone involved. The staff members are always available to the community projects involved.

Challenges of SKEPPIES

a. Lack of long term funding

SKEPPIES sought to test the application of a number of small grants for rural communities in developing their own economic and income-generating projects in order to improve their standards of living. It has been, and remains, a challenge to attract new and longer-term funding for the development of SMMEs and local conservation projects.

Lack of adequate business skills in the peer supporters

SKEPPIES needs to increase the ability of staff to effectively mentor projects, both in terms of the need to cover large distances to reach each project and in terms of capacity to provide effective mentoring. There is a great need for lessons sharing between SKEPPIES-funded projects. Training is needed in project development, proposal writing, financial management and project reporting. Other agencies could also support applicants in developing proposals. Staff training to provide this support is critical.

b. Optimal use of media and communication unit

SKEPPIES objectives and how to apply for funding needs to be made more widely available. This should be done in local community newspapers, on radio stations and in local forums, using plain language and explain concepts such as sustainable development. The process and requirements after funds are granted should be explained at an early stage. SKEPPIES should assist the grant recipients by introducing a project to a community, once it is funded.

c. Poor cooperation by the government officials

Government officials are the keys to the long-term success of most projects. Therefore, without their cooperation, delays on the potential projects are experienced. It is therefore very important to engage regularly with the government officials, even though difficulties are experienced.

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Conclusion

SKEPPIES offers small grants to green business to the poor rural communities throughout the entire Succulent Karoo and mostly the sensitive areas. This plays a big role within the Succulent Karoo as it generates education and awareness, as well as much benefit to the environment, encouraging the sustainable utilization of natural resources that will benefit not only the current generation but also future generations. It is therefore very important to secure the funding to support this good work. More funding will lead to a greater footprint in the future.