

WWF SA's 2019 Living Planet Award winners announced

The winners of this year's WWF South Africa Living Planet Award were announced recently at the organisation's annual Living Planet Conference in Pretoria. Sissie Matela and Nicky McLeod of Environmental and Rural Solutions, based in Matatiele in the Eastern Cape, were recognised as this year's exceptional South Africans, inspiring people to live in harmony with nature.



Nicky McLeod, director and manager at ERS, and Lipalesa Sissie Matela, director at ERS

Introducing the award winners, CEO of WWF South Africa Dr Morné du Plessis said: “Today we honour two women who had a vision 10 years ago, for both people and nature; a vision to engage multiple partners and many local communities while addressing diverse yet inter-connected social and environmental needs.

“Over the last decade, the ERS has convened and led the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership Programme which brings together 35 organisations to govern the landscape and the water resources in the area. It is here that the vision and passion of these two remarkable women has created one of South Africa’s most innovative and collaborative approaches and catchment management models.”

The Umzimvubu River and its surrounds is home to some 20% of the Eastern Cape’s population (1.4 million people) and is one of South Africa’s few remaining near natural river systems. With 70% of the land under communal ownership, those who live along its course are highly dependent on the river system for water, grazing, household materials and local food security.

Upon hearing the news of the award, the duo responded: "This is such an honour for us and our little enterprise! We have been plodding along, hoping that we are changing lives and hopefully the grass is growing green and the water is getting clearer. Recognition like this is so motivating and we want to do more. Our progress has not been just due to our own work but also our entire team and the fantastic partners we work with. As the saying goes, a ship cannot sail without the crew!"

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