

Restoring Sacred Sites

Clive Bruzas & Thami Kheswa based the following article on a recent funding proposal.

At the All Staff meeting on 19th and 20th February 2009, the topic of Sacred Sites created a lot of interest. The following article has been drawn from a recent funding proposal to fund a programme to restore sacred sites in four districts of KwaZulu Natal...

One of the beliefs on which the work of The Valley Trust is based is that good health and sustainable development require positive interactions between people and their environments. Our Social Plant Use Programme recognizes this, and emphasizes the importance of relationships between humans and their environments. For a variety of reasons, communities have often not conserved nature, but sacred natural sites represent a unique opportunity for doing so. Many of these sites have survived environmental degradation because they are deeply embedded in local cultural values and belief systems. In addition, they may provide sanctuary to rare or endangered species and can, therefore, play a significant role in biodiversity conservation.

In October 2008, The Valley Trust collaborated with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN), Imbabazane Municipality Traditional Health Practitioners Committee, and the KwaBhekuzulu Tribal Authority of the uThukela District to restore a sacred site dedicated to Nomkhubulwane. (According to the dictionary, Nomkhubulwane is "A Zulu female deity, believed to affect the planting of corn and harvest"). The restoration culminated in a Nomkhubulwane Ceremony, a three day event that was attended by 230 girls and approximately 400 adults.



Sacrificing traditional maize at Nomkhubulwane ceremony

The ceremony was of profound significance to those who participated, as evidenced by the following comments:

I have never seen such beauty in my life! I am extremely happy that we restored our culture. I observed and learnt a lot from Nomagugu who was leading the restoration process. The sky was so clear and all of a sudden drops of rain started coming down. There is a noticeable change in my work. There is a button that has been pressed. (Makhosi Ndlovu).

We were blessed by the drops of rain that came unexpectedly. I had a dream of Unomkhubulwane sacred site and the seed that I took there as an offering had been cleansed. The following morning I had many patients that came to seek for help (Makhosi Mazibuko).....

(P.T.O)



Traditional Health Practitioners with sacrifices of traditional chickens, seeds and foods

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I too am happy with the site visit. I remember when I was a young girl we used to go to the site when there was no rain (in another area); we would strip our clothes off and cover ourselves with leaves and branches and pass by the site of Nomkhubulwane where the older women were planting. Then within a few days it would rain. The site is important because it will help people to go back to their culture. While at the site I had a vision that was very interesting which I don't want to share now but just to mention it. I feel blessed to be part of the project (Mrs Victoria Mazibuko).

The Nkosi of the area, Nkosi Hadebe, stated that he would like an annual Nomkhubulwane Ceremony to be held now that the site has been restored. He expressed a deep appreciation for the assistance in restoring culture in his area. *"Whether these ceremonies will happen at a community level is too early to tell; traditionally there would be two ceremonies a year, one at planting and one at harvest time to give thanks to the earth and nature".*

It is hoped that this site in the uThukela District will serve as an inspiration to other communities to celebrate their culture and traditional values in a way that strengthens the links between people, the earth and the divine. Through the Council of Traditional Health Practitioners at the District level, requests have been made for assistance to restore sacred sites in other districts. The Valley Trust intends to work with Traditional Health Practitioners to identify several sacred sites that have been neglected for various reasons. In some cases, as in the sacred site dedicated to Nomkhubulwane, there may be a link between the site and issues of food security, but this is not necessarily the case at all sites. There is an urgent need for the sacred sites to be restored to become fully functional to fulfill the very purpose for which they were originally designated as sacred sites. The Valley Trust is currently seeking funding to facilitate the restoration of 12 sacred sites in four districts over a period of four years.

For more information about sacred sites, please contact Thami Kheswa in the Programmes Division.

Planning Process - Staff Views

I have learned that The Valley Trust is full of people who are very enthusiastic and dedicated on the ground, however this has to be communicated and converted into Funding.
Nina



I have learned and gained more knowledge, on how the whole organization work, especially the projects which are done at TVT. It will make my work easy and run smoothly as I am at reception and people come in or they call from outside, hoping to find out about what TVT does.

Sindi



I've learnt a great deal about the organization and it has helped me to understand what and how the organization works. I feel more confident now when people ask me what TVT does because I am able to give them answer with understanding.
Zama



It was interesting and it helped other Divisions to get a better understanding of work done by Programmes Division. It also makes it easy to collaborate as a division and to minimize the duplication of work and reach a common goal towards our work.

Clifford

Staff Views Continues...

Mathula

I have learnt the importance of reflecting on what you have implemented to your preceding work and obtaining knowledge of other projects work



During the two day workshop I was very impressed by the Self Help Groups in the Eastern Cape. The work that is being done there is amazing - hardly any transport but these people walk for miles to assist other communities. I believe that the above could be used in many rural areas, which would assist with poverty reduction. It was also very clear that the M E & R Division (being a small division) will have a great deal of work to do - and this must be done with passion.

Michelle



I've learnt more about The Valley Trust programmes; where they are being implemented and who does what. I also find the importance of consulting/ planning together as there were some of the things that seemed to be clashing. Was also great getting to know how maybe M,E & R can assist in programmes. It will influence my work by having to have more information like who funds what, what are the reporting times, the donor requirements in terms of reporting and work planning as this may be some of the information that M, E +R needs to have as to have easy understanding of programmes work and know where can be we be of help to programmes. Also to have the TVT work documented.

Nyameka



As a member of OS; I was only observing the planning process but it was very interesting to find out what the other divisions were planning and to get insight into their various work activities.

Helen

I believe it's an eye opener to those who's got no idea what other projects do within the Division. It creates room for understanding other people's work and lays foundation to establish ways in which we can collaborate our interventions to accelerate impact which will verify "quality" rather than "quantity" in our work.

On how it will influence the work, that will be better seen after one reflects on situation after this process comparing it to the time before the process was done. It supposes to make one learn from the other and improves on what is already happening.

Zigi

Planning together as a Division always plays a significant role in building a working and sharing environment that can assist us to share our work experiences that we face in our daily work such as challenges, learnings and how the situation can be changed.

Planning together helps us to work collectively as a team and also understand each individual weakness & strengthen opportunities that are available in our work. It also helps us to integrate our work and know how much support your colleagues want and also complement our work when necessary.

Frank

Water Harvesting

By : Clive Bruzas - Senior Manager (M, E & R)

Another topic that came up during the discussions at our All Staff meeting in February 2009 was water harvesting. There are many ways to harvest water, and one method which saves water by channeling it and soaking it into the soil is clearly demonstrated in what is sometimes known as the "Admin Garden" at The Valley Trust. This is the area between the original clinic and the main administration building. Many years ago The Valley Trust's vehicles were parked in this area, but after the property was redesigned and the vehicle park changed to its current location, it was decided to develop an indigenous garden on the old site. The ground was hard and dry, so the first task was to ensure that water was used to good advantage. Swales were dug to catch rain water and run-off from the roofs:



Bill Mollison, in his book "Permaculture" (available in our Library), describes swales as "long, level excavations, which can vary greatly in width and treatment from small ridges in gardens, rock piles across slope, or deliberately excavated hollows in flatlands and low-slope landscapes". The next step in developing our garden was to introduce indigenous shrubs, trees, and groundcovers to provide protection for the soil, organic matter, and shade. Over the years the area has transformed into the garden we know today, a shady area rich in plant life which provides a restful space at The Valley Trust, and offers a home to a wide variety of birds, lizards and insects.



Quote

"Life is like a tree. We all start as a seed and tend to follow the same path, yet in the end you never know what branch you will end on."

Joshua Burgess --- Ohio

Welcome to.....

Ms Fanekile Mchiza, Fundraiser - ED's Office