

Technical Report
Formal launching of the CEPF-funded SKEP programme
in the Knersvlakte

Requested Amount - \$2,000
Requested by Tessa Mildenhall
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With the support of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), Conservation International's Southern African Hotspots Program facilitated a highly participatory and scientifically rigorous process that led to a 20-year plan for conservation and sustainable development of the Succulent Karoo hotspot. The CEPF approved a grant of \$8 million toward the conservation of the Succulent Karoo and the objective of this event was to formally announce this investment.

The launch was held in the Knersvlakte, a town situated 300km from Cape Town, one of the geographic priority areas identified in the CEPF Ecosystem Profile. The decision to hold the launch within the Knersvlakte and not in Cape Town, where Conservation International's branch office is based, was made to show local support to the region that houses one of the SKEP field nodes and to create awareness by encouraging local stakeholders and press to visit this relatively unknown region. The local businesses and unemployed communities benefited immensely by the income brought in during this event. At the same time due to the influx of visitors, media presence and monies expended during this period, the event highlighted the Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Programme within the region to stakeholders who had never previously shown an interest in biodiversity conservation.

The monies expended for the launch were primarily spent in the region and all tokens and gifts were bought from community arts and crafts initiatives. A fun initiative spearheaded by the SKEP co-ordination field node was created by the launch of a youth awareness competition where local schools, were invited to submit visuals of their interpretation of what was special about the Succulent Karoo region. Selected images from this campaign were displayed at the function and schools that participated in the competition spent a period of time focusing on the Succulent Karoo's biodiversity so that they could accurately capture the essence of the region's uniqueness. All these local initiatives played a key role in emphasizing CEPF's commitment and vision of building civil society through awareness building and the support of local communities.

The event was held 7 April, 2003 and was attended by 150 people. The launch was very widely publicized by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, a national television station and the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, a national television station in Namibia. These clips were featured on the prime time news spots over a two-day period. After the launch radio interviews with CEPF Executive Director Jorgen Thomsen aired on the SABC radio, Namaqualand radio and the Namibian radio.

Newspaper articles appeared in Die Burger, The Business Day, The Farmers Weekly, Ons Kontrei, Namaqualand News, Namibian Economist, New Era, Southern Sun and the Bucht's Newsletter.

Monthly magazine articles were featured in The Veld & Flora, Africa Geographic, Garden & Home and the Sawabona South African Airways in flight magazine.

SKEP information was circulated to all guest houses that accommodated invited guests and with the help of the CEPF Communications Director, press packs were produced and circulated to all who attended the function. These packs were placed in specially produced SKEP Folders, which contained the 20-year SKEP Strategy document, the official press release, Succulent Karoo and CEPF fact sheets, a SKEP brochure and a SKEP quarterly newsletter. The strategy and folders were produced on recycled paper and were printed, for the first time in Cape Town, using bio-inks.

Invited guests represented local and national government from both South Africa and Namibia, Mayors from various municipalities, Municipal Managers, Heads of National Departments, other local conservation agencies, internationally renowned scientists, non-governmental organizations, tertiary institutions as well as private & corporate business leaders from the mining, agricultural and tourism sectors. Also in attendance were World Bank representatives, CEPF staff, Conservation International staff, the SKEP co-ordination unit and stakeholders from within all five SKEP sub-regions. A remarkable feature was the commitment shown by all in attendance who undertook to travel the vast distance to show their support of this initiative. For many of these individuals, this was the first event of this nature, creating a platform for interaction across a broad sectoral base. As a result of the interaction, various partnerships were strengthened and new ones developed.

The event was formally opened by Irene Kotze, the Matzikamma Municipal Mayor whereafter the formal investment was announced by Jorgen Thomsen, CEPF Executive Director and Conservation International Senior Vice President.

Following this announcement, national representatives in the person of Pam Yako, Deputy Director General for Biodiversity & Conservation for the South African Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism and Namibian Ministry of Environmental and Tourism representative Nicholas Kisting formally acknowledged and welcomed CEPF's large investment in conservation action within the Succulent Karoo. Both government representatives openly acknowledged how this initiative had supported across boundary partnerships and were extremely complimentary about the manner in which SKEP has already contributed to highlighting the importance of conservation in the Succulent Karoo.

Final speeches were made by local Scientist, Richard Cowling who acknowledged the hard work of all involved in the process to date and Owen Henderson, SKEP Programme Co-ordinator, who closed the event by introducing the SKEP co-ordination unit and thanked everyone for attending.

Dinner, made from local produce, was then served accompanied by wine, which was donated by an award-winning organic wine producer from the Namaqualand region.

The event was very well received and the exposure that CEPF and SKEP received as a result of this event has resulted in a stronger committed stakeholder base, actively supporting SKEP and its priorities within all 5 regions.