



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

95th AGM

4th December 2021



You cannot protect the environment unless you empower people, you inform them, and you help them understand that these resources are their own, that they must protect them."

— Wangari Maathai

"A healthy ecology is the basis for a healthy economy." – Claudine Schneider

Reflecting on 2021 from both a personal and WESSA perspective, it became clear to me that during the past year, WESSA returned to the basics. This was very liberating and fulfilling to see because if the basics are wrong, the outcomes are more than likely to be wrong or not achieved.

I start my back-to-basics report by reflecting on a few quotes which are very simple, but very rich. Firstly, to reflect on the core of what we do as WESSA, and secondly, the times we currently live in, which is apt from the perspective of the COVID pandemic

At a macro-economic and in the lives of individuals, 2021 continued to be a challenging year on many fronts. Most noticeable are the long-lasting ravaging impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic. Many of us bear the scars of this pandemic. WESSA was not spared. Among the many devastating blows that WESSA people experienced in 2021 was the untimely death of a gentle giant, Mr Ossie Carstens, the immediate past chairperson of WESSA and a long-time serving member of the WESSA Board of Directors. Ossie led WESSA at a very difficult time for the organization, but he studiously carried out the mandate. His legacy will continue to live on at WESSA. Our thoughts still go to his family and may his soul rest in peace.

The annual financial performance of WESSA NPO (project income generation and/or corporate or donor funding) continues to be subdued, however I am happy to note that to date, we are weathering the storm better than 2020. In 2021, there were no further retrenchments. This was attributed to difficult decisions that were taken in previous years to have "a fit for purpose staff structure". Had those retrenchments not been carried out when they were the situation would have been quite dire today. I must place it on record that I empathize with our people who lost their jobs in the process. WESSA itself was a causality of this process as it lost both committed people and significant intellectual capital. I am happy that most of them have found their balance and continue to volunteer their time.

Besides being the nimble organisation that we are today, the everyday work of WESSA continues. Without the remaining WESSA staff, we would have no functioning WESSA. Throughout these difficult and turbulent times, WESSA staff remained focused on the task and faithful to their mandates. My gratitude goes to all staff, especially the Executive Committee which provided leadership to the organisation in a very disciplined way.

I continue to be impressed by the excellent and diverse work our members are doing on the ground. The Board of Directors has been receiving regular feedback on the programmes the regions are pursuing and the successes. The membership initiatives range from clean-up campaigns to principled objections to ecologically undesirable projects and our present-day existential challenge, climate change and other environmental degrading activities. These are very important programmes, and the impact could be even greater if the regions collaborate further with each other.

When we met around this time, 12 months ago, we experienced many board director resignations, including the CEO and CFO. Relations within the remaining Board members were quite low. I am very pleased to advise that these are things of the past. We now have a stable and full complement of the WESSA Board. To establish this Board, we appealed to the captains of the industry and public sector who genuinely care for the earth, and we received the most positive responses. We are indebted to

everyone who has taken their time from families and demanding careers to lend their support to this worthy cause. If any of you ever doubted why they joined this Board which is so demanding on their time – I would leave you with this question ***“What is the good of having a nice house without a decent planet to put it on?”*** – author unknown

The Board embarked on a conscientious process to recruit and select our new Chief Executive Officer. The recruitment attracted a wide range of individuals which is the testimony of WESSA's standing in society. The recruitment and selection process itself was very thorough, novel, inclusive and participatory. This process resulted in the selection of Dr Andrew Baxter who officially started in his position on 1 September 2021. Andrew is well known for his strategic and innovative approach to leadership. He joins us from an illustrious career both in the private and non-profit sectors. Welcome to WESSA Andrew - we look forward to your contributions.

WESSA's current strategy and direction was developed many years ago, and from time to time has been reviewed mainly as part of the annual budgeting process and to ensure our relevance with our stakeholders. Sometime in 2020, the Board approved a proposal which arose from the members of WESSA requesting a comprehensive review our strategic direction. In this regard, the Board resolved to undertake a “root and branch” review of the WESSA strategy. To implement this work, the Board selected an ad hoc committee of the Board to coordinate our efforts. The ad hoc committee is representative of all WESSA stakeholders. Despite the dedication of Board members, Exco members and WESSA members, the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust generously provided funding to make this work possible. We were extremely grateful for this funding, which enabled us to procure the services of professional consultants in the environmental and biodiversity sector led by Prof Christo Fabricius, Dr Randall Jonas and Dr Bianca Currie. The team have also given us many pro bono hours for which we are extremely grateful.

At a substantive level, the strategic review is looking at the value and sustainability of our current programmes and assessing opportunities for adding new programmes to address the ongoing environmental degradation and/or unsustainable use of our natural resources. To remind us all, our current programmes are (i) Sustainable Tourism; (ii) WESSA Training; (iii) Schools and Youth Unit and (iv) Education Centres. These programmes were borne out of the realisation that human capacity development is a major catalyst to social change. If any of our current programmes will be discontinued, it will have to be ensured that due care is applied because each of the programme stems from a rich and colourful history of strategic choices. As part of the strategic review exercise, I would caution us against being too broad as that may result in us becoming less impactful. Once we have determined our strategic direction, and the structure that will follow, as approved by the Board, we must ensure that there is a clearly defined funding model. Our strategy, as guided by Prof Fabricius and his team is ongoing.

With a stable Board of Directors, full complement of the EXCO cohort and the ongoing strategic review, the basics have been corrected and we now have a platform to be outwardly focused.

Wandisile Mandlana
WESSA Chairman