



CEO REPORT

FOR THE 96TH WESSA AGM

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CEO REPORT

A few years ago, I was lucky enough to see the award-winning play Hamilton on Broadway. The musical tells the story of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. Written and composed by Lin-Manual Miranda, it is a story that speaks about leaving a legacy and what we want it to be for our future generations and what we are willing to do to make that possible. There is a particularly poignant lyric in the musical that resonated with me:

But remember from here on in, history has its eyes on you.

It is a reminder of the responsibilities we have towards future generations and how we will be viewed by them. This is of relevance to WESSA right now as we move towards our centenary celebration in 4 years' time. That puts us in a unique position, we have the history to show that we are resilient and have played a significant role in the conservation world for the last 96 years and we have more resolve than ever to continue being a leader in solving the environmental issues we face. But to do that we needed to restructure and review our work focus.

The strategic plan also brings together the various aspects of WESSA's operations and aims to make a significant impact on the environment. We now have a new strategy that we have adopted and started implementing. At the heart of this strategy is the overarching theme of citizen action and advocacy as the way we want to get to the planet we want and need. We are doing this by Educating, Advocating and Acting. We get members of the public, both adults, youth, and children to have the platform and the tools to take part in solving environmental issues that they care about and that has an impact on them. WESSA is in a unique position to be a leader in creating environmental advocacy awareness and will, both of which are the precursors to action for the environment. We must significantly reduce and ultimately reverse the impact of the climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution crises we are facing.

GROUP PERFORMANCE

We knew 2022 would be challenging, but we know that by working together with all stakeholders, we would continue to do good work for the environment. During the last year we have recovered from the impact of COVID to some extent and we have seen the return of schools to our education centers

that were re-opened We have performed better than last year with our project book growing which was to be expected after the end of the Covid pandemic. During 2022 financial year our performance has improved. We have increased our project book. We had a strong focus on streamlining financial procedures, cleaning up historical accounts and mitigating risks going forward. We are becoming less reactive and more proactive and will continue to focus on this in the next financial year.

We also must be mindful and aware of the external factors that influence our sector and the environment that we operate in. The roles and responsibilities of various non-profit organizations need to change radically in order to meet the increasing demand for their services. As the climate crisis and the loss of biodiversity continue to intensify, the work of these organizations is becoming more urgent. Various external factors are affecting the work and mission of conservation organizations. These include the increasing role of the private sector, the increase of urbanisation, lack of basic services available to people and the rise of transnational crime linked to wildlife and other natural products. Internal factors such as differences between generations and competition for funding are also contributing to the challenges faced by the sector. To ensure that their work is still relevant and effective, conservation organizations need to find new ways to carry out their missions. In the case of WESSA we have done this through the strategic review process we have just completed.

FUNDING AND INVESTMENTS

We work in a sector where we compete for funding with other organisations. We do well in getting project funding for some of our existing programmes and will continue to do so. Going forward though we want to raise funds through awareness campaigns and getting supporters to come on a journey with us and become part of our active citizen campaigns and garner more support for us along the way. This is support in both volunteer hours and financial.

We are going to be investing into formalized fundraising and to leverage the recognition and value that we know still comes with the WESSA brand. We want to build a strong cash reserve through an endowment fund. To do this, we are working on a strategy for fundraising. We are busy developing an investment policy that will guide our investment decisions.

We are thankful to our funders, donors and supporters who helped us facilitate our progress and achievements. We know there are still challenges ahead but thanks to all the work put into our

strategy and engagement with stakeholders we know that WESSA is on the right track. We are also very proud of the WESSA staff that have shown great resilience and commitment over during the last few years. They are also excellent project implementers, and this will remain a focus for us at WESSA. I would also like to acknowledge and recognise the volunteer arm of the organisation for the work they do on the ground across the country. The number of hectares cleared from alien vegetation, plastic removed from our beaches, species protected, youth and members of the public mobilised and input into advocacy work, is significant and impactful. Lastly, I would like to recognise the support of the WESSA Board. The Board provided stability during a difficult time and continue to give their time, expertise and advise and have played a crucial role in our new Strategy being developed and now implemented. Lastly, I would like to recognise the WESSA Executive Committee for their excellent work and leadership and then also Dr Andrew Baxter, especially for the work done on the development of the new WESSA Strategy and the fundraising framework we will now be following. We are also very grateful that he has agreed to be a member of the WESSA Board as a non-executive Director.

STRATEGIC PROGRESS

After the completion and adoption of the Strategy and acceptance of it by the Board, a Membership Working Group was also established to guide the operational structure and format of the volunteer part of WESSA. The composition of the Working Group includes all representative of all regions and include volunteers and staff. We will look at the volunteer structures, organizational support for volunteers, fundraising and governance and more importantly for opportunities for membership and full-time staff to work together more. To facilitate this process the ad hoc Board Strategic Working Group Committee work will continue with the focus area of WESSA volunteers under this Working Group. The objective is to evaluate and define specific aspects of the WESSA volunteer base. This includes the role of volunteers in citizen action, defining the future forms of being a WESSA volunteer, the communication between all stakeholders in the organisation and the opportunities to attract a younger audience and supporter base. Specific focus will also include a review of the governance and financial sustainability of the volunteer work.

LOOKING AHEAD

We will develop an effective communication and marketing strategy to amplify the work and the success of WESSA so that, in turn, we can begin to develop a coherent fundraising and resource mobilisation plan. Ultimately, we seek to diversify the revenue streams of WESSA. Our efforts as an

organisation will continue to be put into environmental capacity building of regular citizens, both adults, young people and the school kids we work with. We also know that we want to work closer and more with the private sector and we know we can support and guide them on a sustainability journey.

We want to grow WESSA's status as a leading, trusted voice on environmental issues. WESSA will be a thought leader, champion, expert, and a leading voice for the kind of environment we want to see and live in. We want to be involved in critical areas where we can deliver measurable outcomes and solving environmental problems backed up with a fundraising strategy and people actively taking part in implementing the solutions. Our advocacy efforts will allow our organisation to have impact through both re-active and pro-active advocacy efforts carried out by staff and volunteers alike. In other words – we will do advocacy and teach advocacy. Regular citizens in this regard refer to the general public (active citizens) as well as those involved in our programmes and projects (generally the youth). Advocacy as a practice, will be imbedded into all the work that WESSA does. Our advocacy work will however be firm but restrained and properly aligned to information rather than emotional opinion. We also want to work with government where it makes sense and campaign to influence policy where appropriate. Education and awareness raising, development of decision support tools, coordinated collective action, and demonstrating and implementing place-based solutions will achieve this. WESSA offers ways of resolving complex problems, not just critique.

APPRECIATION AND CONCLUSION

In a world where so many things have limited popularity and instant gratification has become the norm whilst we are facing bigger challenges than ever, there is a real need for an organisation like WESSA to remain focussed on long-term sustained efforts to protect our environment. We have done so for nearly 100 years and more recently we have been able to say we will be able to do it for another 100 years. We took stock, we adapted but we also refocused on what we are good at – working with civil society and creating a wave of action that has significant impact on the challenges we face. This strategic plan will act as the roadmap to guide us, and to lead us to continued success by using our strong suits, the power of education, advocacy and action. This strategic plan brings together our history but also our current strengths. We will make a significant impact on the climate realities we face, protecting biodiversity and associated habitats and by reducing pollution. We are WESSA – people caring for the Earth.

Despite the increasing number of factors that have negatively affected the work of conservation organizations, there is a bigger need than ever for us to remain focused on our core mission. It is very important that organizations like WESSA continue to carry out their work in a long-term manner. We will educate, advocate and act with the support of active citizens because we are people caring for the earth.