



**WESSA**

PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH

# CEO REPORT

FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR  
ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

*WESSA 97th AGM  
30 September 2023*

By Helena Atkinson

I am pleased to present the annual CEO report for the period of April 2022 to March 2023, which underscores our accomplishments, challenges, and strategic trajectory. This year has marked a significant phase of growth and transformation for WESSA. I take immense pride in the collective endeavours that have propelled us to our current standing.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past year has been pivotal for WESSA, as we have continued to reach unprecedented milestones, reaffirming our role as a frontrunner in the environmental sector, both domestically and internationally. Despite encountering various challenges, we have successfully executed our strategic vision, augmented our product and service offerings, and fortified our sectoral footprint.

Our overarching mission remains rooted in advocating, educating, and catalysing action for environmental and social justice, climate action, biodiversity conservation, and pollution reduction. Our vision is to spearhead citizen-driven initiatives across southern Africa. With an unwavering commitment to conservation, education, and advocacy, we have made remarkable strides in safeguarding South Africa's diverse biodiversity. WESSA's influential voice and role as a transformative agent for positive change persist through strategic partnerships, stakeholder engagement, and empowering individuals. Our legacy of environmental excellence spans nearly a century. In this Annual Review, we shall spotlight our strategic implementation, partnership synergies, and initiatives addressing today's pressing environmental concerns.

## FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Our financial performance has not reached the desired threshold set for this year. FY2022/23 witnessed a decline in revenue compared to the previous year, attributed to unrealised project proposals, reduced donations, and bequests. Nonetheless, there is compelling evidence that our strategy will yield improved financial outcomes in the forthcoming fiscal year.

## IMPACT

The period from April 2022 to March 2023 saw the approval and integration of our WESSA 2026 strategy into our operational targets. Our focus on environmental and social justice acknowledges the intrinsic link between humanity and the environment, promoting sustainable development.

WESSA's drive to encourage and support citizen action for a healthier planet remains steadfast. Our endeavours concentrate on education and training, advocacy, and action projects aligned with climate action, biodiversity, habitat integrity, and pollution reduction.

## NEW DEVELOPMENTS

A significant stride is the launch of WESSA's pangolin-focused programme. This initiative centers on the 3-year Pangolin-Friendly Farm Fences Project, already in progress. Additionally, we are aiding the pangolin rehabilitation community in securing reserves for long-term releases and facilitating the rehabilitation process. Notably, our CEO co-chairs the IUCN Pangolin Specialist Group's Southern Africa Working Group, which is instrumental

in formulating a Regional Conservation Action Plan for pangolins. WESSA's pivotal role as a partner in this effort is well-recognised. Moreover, we are actively driving the development of a Biodiversity Management Plan for pangolins in South Africa, in collaboration with The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) and other pangolin conservation entities. This presents a clear opportunity for WESSA to lead pangolin conservation efforts, focusing on Stakeholder Engagement, Wildlife-Human Conflict Mitigation, Rehabilitation Support, Education, Awareness-raising, Research, Monitoring, Law Enforcement, Policy Advocacy, Capacity Building, and Regional Conservation Planning.

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

As we approach WESSA's centenary in 2026, we anticipate celebrating a century of history, transformation, and cherished memories. This milestone offers a valuable occasion to reflect on insights gained from the past and the evolving global landscape.

We have also initiated Project Umgeni Valley, which centers on establishing a support fund and team for the Umgeni Valley home.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF 2022

A standout achievement this past year is WESSA's role in the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) network. Since 2001, our pioneering efforts have successfully implemented the FEE Blue Flag Programme, followed by the Eco-Schools Programme in 2003. Our Eco-Schools Programme has garnered both national and international recognition, nurturing environmentally responsible ambassadors and future leaders.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the WESSA Board, our dedicated staff, and our valued Membership for their consistent commitment to WESSA's mission. I am equally appreciative of our devoted team, steadfast shareholders, loyal customers, and diligent partners who have all played pivotal roles in our successes. Together, we have achieved remarkable milestones, and I am enthusiastic about WESSA's future prospects.

Our donors and partners continue to be the cornerstone of our existence. Thank you for your unyielding support which has been pivotal in propelling our environmental initiatives forward. Your generosity has created a lasting impact on our work, allowing us to drive positive change and advocate for a sustainable future. With heartfelt gratitude, we thank you for being champions of our cause and partners in making a difference that matters.

## ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

WESSA's strategic blueprint underscores the primacy of education, advocacy, and action in confronting critical environmental challenges in South Africa. These challenges encompass climate change, biodiversity decline, and pollution. As vocal proponents and agents of positive change, we shall continue to forge alliances, engage stakeholders, and empower individuals to champion a healthier planet.

Looking ahead, our strategic emphasis will revolve around:

**Innovation:** We remain committed to innovative approaches, exploring novel project approaches to be trailblazers in the sector.

**Staff Engagement:** Our focus on creating an environment conducive to staff growth and impactful contributions remains steadfast.

**Regional Expansion:** We aim to extend our footprint across Africa, leveraging growth and funding opportunities through our Schools Programme and facilitating new countries' participation in the FEE.

**Sustainability:** Our commitment to financial sustainability will intensify, with the goal of achieving a surplus by the close of the upcoming financial year.

*H. Atkinson*

**Helena Atkinson**  
WESSA CEO