

# Save the Dusi and our youth

P7



# Save our rivers AND our youth

Building a green economy would provide jobs for youth

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**J**UNE is the month in which we celebrate both the role of youth and the environment in our city. How can we engage youth to become agents of change to help solve the environmental challenges that our city faces?

What challenges are youth facing and how do we connect youth development with finding solutions to environmental problems?

A major environmental challenge for Pietermaritzburg is the sharp decline in the health of the Msunduzi River, due to high levels of sewage, solid waste (plastic) and industrial pollution caused by city residents, businesses and poor municipal service delivery. This decline poses a huge threat to this strategic water resource with significant consequences for water security, community health and the local and regional economy.

The graph on this page shows the increase of water testing sites that recorded, over the period 1990–2017, a regular E. coli count of more than 10 000 per 100 ml, indicating extremely high levels of sewage contamination. An E. coli count of less than 130 is acceptable for swimming, with increased risk of illness at 1 000.

The sewage-contaminated water is causing the spread of a toxic algal bloom in Inanda Dam, one of Durban's key water supplies. This will inevitably lead to the premature ageing and death of this body of water, a process known as eutrophication. This poses a major threat to Durban's future water security in the longer term and will drive up the costs of water treatment and delivery, damaging the competitiveness of KZN business and the regional economy.

Strongly flowing sewer surcharging leaks near outlying informal homesteads

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in Edendale and Eastwood often go unrepaired for long periods of time, posing a serious health risk to affected homesteads and people who come into contact with the contaminated tributaries

and the river downstream.

Further decline in water quality may also place at risk the future of the Dusi Canoe Marathon, which brings R35 million annually into the regional economy. Canoeing is a unique part of the city's identity, and its demise would be a serious setback for Pietermaritzburg.

In less than three months, Pietermaritzburg will be hosting the International Canoe Federation Flat Water Marathon World Championships at the Natal Canoe Club, Camps Drift, from September 5 to September 10.

There will be participants and visitors from 37 countries descending on the city. This is a first for the African continent, and should the success of this prestigious international event be compromised by poor water quality, it would not only affect the reputation of the host city, but also affect the plan for the regular staging of national and international canoe events in the city, with all the economic benefits they bring.

Burst and surcharging municipal sewerage pipes are largely to blame for the water contamination. The problem is getting worse because of ageing infrastructure, lack of maintenance and poor response times by the Msunduzi Municipality to reported leaks in outlying areas. The budget allocated for sewer maintenance and rehabilitation is woefully inadequate; there is debris and solid waste dumped in the system by households and pipes and manholes are stolen or vandalised.

Given the high levels of youth unemployment in Pietermaritzburg townships (almost 50% for youth under the age of 25), there are significant opportunities to involve the youth in large-scale environmental and vocational skills development programmes as part of the current Extended Public Works Pro-



## Raise awareness and join the Green Corridor River Fun Run

Runners take part in the Green Corridor River Fun Run 2016. Join the Msunduzi Green Corridor River Fun Run on Sunday to raise awareness of the declining health of the Msunduzi River and the actions required to restore the river as a natural 'green corridor' for the city. Register at [www.kzntrallrunning.co.za](http://www.kzntrallrunning.co.za) Free for pupils, adults R20 for three kilometres and R40 for six kilometres. PHOTO: DARREN GODDARD

% of PMB River Sites with Results >10000 E. coli per 100 mL

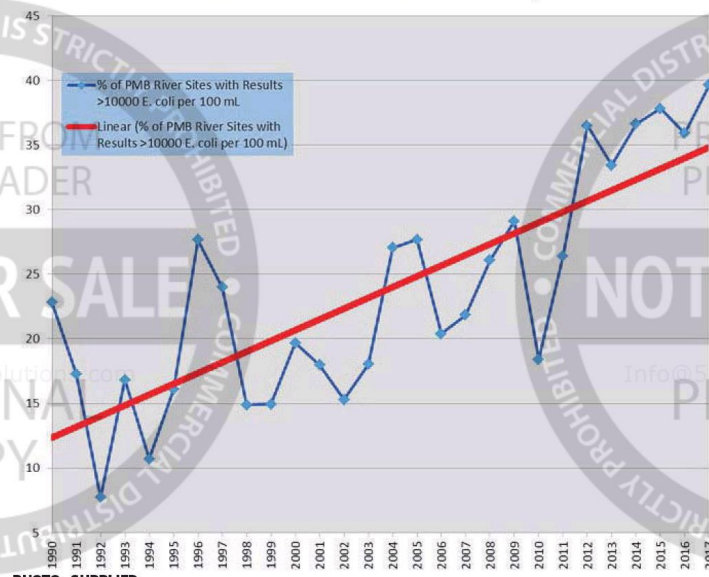


PHOTO: SUPPLIED

gramme (EPWP), as well as in social and business enterprises to address these problems. This would include youth being trained and supported to undertake environmental awareness and educa-

tion, vocational skills development, eco-systems services, environmental monitoring, recycling, upcycling, eco-agriculture, township public space beautification and other activities linked

to improving the health of the Msunduzi River, as part of the development of a "green" economy.

For the past two years, the Dusi Umnjeni Conservation Trust (Duct), under

the auspices of the Msunduzi Green Corridor project, and in partnership with the Msunduzi Municipality and community-based organisations in Edendale, has been piloting projects to connect youth development with innovative solutions to the river health problems of the Msunduzi River.

The youth have been contracted to open access along overgrown sewer lines, or as community-based sewer monitors, equipped with bicycles and smartphones to monitor sections of the sewer system where river tests reflect high E. coli counts. In partnership with two township NGOs — Liberty NPO in Imbali and Sakshizwe Community Education Project (SCEP) in Ashdown — 12 unemployed post-matriculants were selected as "enviro champs" to undertake a one-year practical service and environmental vocational training programme to restore wetlands and tributaries of the Msunduzi River in the river health hot spots of Ashdown and Imbali.

For a number of years, Duct has been supporting a programme of learning and practical activities for Eco Clubs drawn from 39 schools in the Msunduzi Municipality.

Duct, through various EPWPs funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Independent Development Trust and local municipalities, now employs 362 formerly unemployed people in 26 trained teams to undertake alien clearance (terrestrial and aquatic), sewer monitoring and the clearing up of illegal solid waste dumps in the city and within the broader Umnjeni River system between Pietermaritzburg and Durban, as well as in Mphohmeni, Howick. Richard Clacey is the acting CEO at Dusi Umnjeni Conservation Trust (Duct).