

SNAPSHOT - CAPE TOWN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION TRUST



KEY POINTS

- This initiative enhances biodiversity while providing economic opportunity and social inclusion in urban nature reserves
- Successful urban biodiversity conservation addresses both social and ecological factors
- An inclusive approach to urban conservation offers opportunities to low income and racialized communities
- Partnerships between non-profit organisations and local authorities can enable innovation

ABOUT THE PROJECT

NATure-based URban innoVATION is a 4-year project involving 14 institutions across Europe in the fields of urban development, geography, innovation studies and economics. We are creating a step-change in how we understand and use nature-based solutions for sustainable urbanisation.





Sustainability challenges and opportunities

Cape Town is located in a global biodiversity hotspot and has both stark inequity and high levels of unemployment, all of which make equity, job creation and nature conservation key challenges for the city.

Cape Town forms part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site called the Cape Floral Region Protected Area, which includes nearly 20% of Africa's flora in 0.5% of Africa's area.¹ There are 16 nature reserves within Cape Town that protect many endangered species and ecosystems, but threats to the staggering biodiversity of the area and the pressing needs of Cape Town's citizens are difficult to reconcile. In addition, structural inequality due to the history of apartheid has prevented many disadvantaged and racialized communities from accessing recreation, economic, cultural and other opportunities within protected nature reserves. Youth unemployment is over 50% in Cape Town.² ***“Particularly in an urban environment, you can't address the environmental challenges without basing it on the social challenges. There's massive disparity between income groups and there's massive segregation in a sense along old historic segregation lines that exist today very strongly. A lot of our conservation areas are in close proximity to low income community groups.”***³ New approaches are seeking to address the interconnections between these challenges to try to conserve biodiversity while strengthening economic opportunity and social inclusion in urban nature reserves.

Solution story and key actors

A non-profit organization called the Cape Town Environmental Education Trust has partnered with the City of Cape Town to create what they term a 'crèche to career' model of environmental education that supports on the ground nature conservation.

To tackle the challenges of both biodiversity protection and high unemployment levels, the Cape Town Environmental Education Trust (CTEET) takes a sustained engagement approach by offering youth environmental education in nature reserves, job skills training in the conservation sector, and employment in roles like conservation monitors. CTEET works in close partnership with the City of Cape Town to both deliver environmental education in nature reserves and to protect biodiversity by employing conservation monitors in protected green land fragments all over the city. ***“We're trying to create an awareness that green open space is a place of opportunity and it might be something something esoteric like spiritual connection,...an opportunity for training and development...[and] a place I can go to get a job as well. And once you have that shift in mindset, nature reserves start looking something different to that community.”***⁴ In this way, nature conservation in Cape Town takes a more inclusive approach that offers opportunities to low income and racialized communities.



Governance strategies

The Cape Town Environmental Education Trust works in partnership with the City of Cape Town to combine the resources of the local authority with the flexibility of a non-profit organization.

*“Key to it all is our linkage with the City of Cape Town, the municipality, because almost all of our programs – our education programs, our training programs, and a lot of our conservation activities – are done on the city’s nature reserves...There are so many things that that relationship enables and facilitates that, if it weren’t for that, we wouldn’t be able to do a fraction of what we do...It’s not really a cost per se to the city, but the benefits are massive because they, in many instances, gain employees and we address some of the items that they’re mandated to address – environmental education, awareness, conservation, upliftment.”*⁵ CTEET has a memorandum of understanding with the City of Cape Town allowing it to use city facilities. This arrangement provides CTEET with the stability to operate extensive programming, while maintaining the flexibility of a non-profit. Furthermore, CTEET offers a point of contact for both low income communities and developers that are hesitant to deal directly with the local government. In certain cases, a non-profit organization is more approachable and better positioned to partner with communities. In addition, a fully audited NGO also has a high chance of attracting developers’ funding for on-going maintenance of the green space that developers are required to set aside during development. The non-profit and local government partnership is advantageous because of its flexibility, approachability and stable resources.



Business models

Cape Town Environmental Education Trust focuses on low income communities and biodiversity conservation at the same time by repositioning urban nature reserves as opportunities for education and employment in the biodiversity sector.

*“We want nature reserves...viewed as places of opportunity.”*⁷ Marginalized communities have been excluded from nature reserves, but CTEET connects them with reserves to engender stewardship for nature while also addressing economic challenges. CTEET’s programming offers experiential nature education and skills training in a model that supports the development of environmental stewardship and technical expertise. CTEET strives to change mindsets and show children from low income communities the inherent, spiritual, and economic value of nature conservation, while offering skill training through a formal on-the-job learnership program. These efforts have connected early 6,000 children to nature, employed 151 people as conservation monitors and conserved 728 hectares of land.² CTEET’s approach focuses on low income communities and biodiversity at the same time to improve conservation outcomes while facilitating local economic development.



Citizen engagement

When urban nature conservation is paired with employment opportunities, it offers opportunities to improve inclusion for disadvantaged communities in urban green spaces.

“The problem with some of the reserves is [nearby low income communities] might not feel part of it because they’re locked out of that particular site. So [CTEET’s approach is] to try and create that passion for that particular site and the value for that vegetation type, which they might not necessarily know about. Also bringing in their knowledge as well...”⁸ With the CTEET approach, biodiversity protection is also about inclusion for low income communities in nature reserves. An inclusive approach to green space in Cape Town is needed to address the city’s challenges with inequity. Structural inequality and segregation as a consequence of apartheid have created barriers that prevent many of Cape Town’s low income and racialized residents from visiting nature reserves. CTEET engages with low income communities beyond the nature reserve’s fence to build new connections between residents and urban green space, particularly for the next generation. The goal is that ***“in the end – in 10, 20, 100 years time – that [nearby low income] community takes ownership of it: This is our nature reserve and something where we benefit.”***⁹ After all, urban nature conservation will only be successful if nearby people experience natural reserves and feel that they offer social and economic opportunities.



Innovation pathways

The partnership between local government and a non-profit organization allows for innovation and supports a new approach that simultaneously conserves biodiversity and provides economic opportunities for low income communities.

The partnership between CTEET and the City of Cape Town is a governance approach that draws on the resources of the municipality and the flexibility and approachability of a non-profit. As a non-profit, CTEET has access to novel funding sources that the city could not otherwise access and the non-profit is able to function with more flexibility – ***“it just allows innovation”***.⁶ In particular, the partnership supports an approach that recognizes the interconnection of social and environmental challenges. Conservation has traditionally focused on keeping people out of nature reserves in order to protect biodiversity, but CTEET shows how innovative urban conservation thinking can achieve multiple benefits for both people and nature.

¹ UNESCO. (2004). *Cape Floral Region protected areas*. Retrieved from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1007>; ² CTEET. (2017). *Annual Report*. ^{3,4,5,8,9} Representative of CTEET; ^{6,7} Representative of City of Cape Town, 2018; Photo credit: Laura Tozer, 2018.