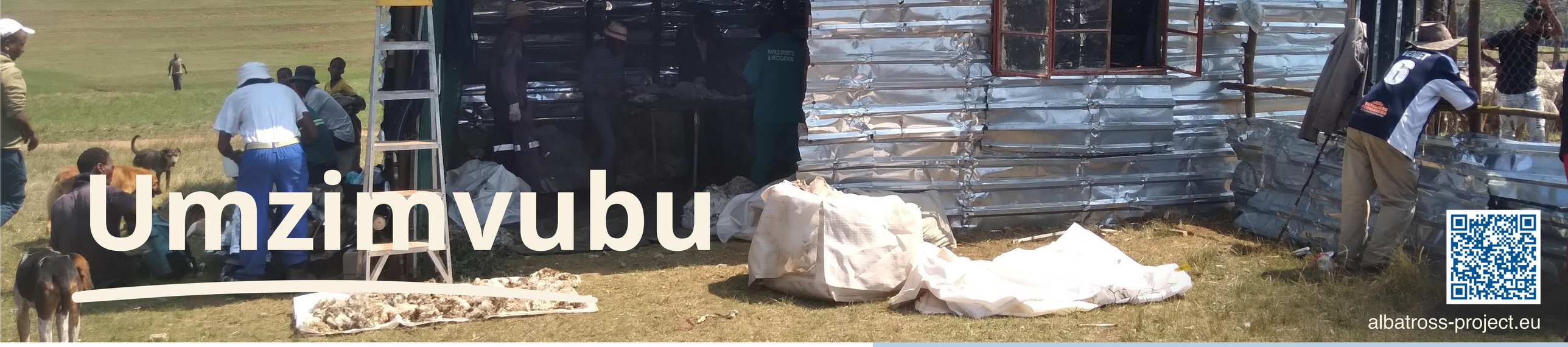


Umzimvubu

albatross-project.eu

The drainage basin for the Umzimvubu River is located along the northern boundary of the Eastern Cape and includes ten local municipalities. Northern uplands and central areas are mostly covered with grasslands (~70% of the area), and they represent a key biodiversity hotspot for their terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Livestock rearing and small-scale agricultural activities are key sectors in this area; however, drought and invasive species encroachment reduce water availability for crops and livestock, while intense rainfall causes flash floods, water contamination, and soil erosion. Overgrazing further increases vulnerability.

In this context, ALBATROSS carried out baseline assessments with 45 participants in the Matatiele area (2024), including planning with various climate information and service providers from the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership (UCP), to integrate climate services with specific needs. Community-based organizations, NGOs, public and private sectors, research institutions, as well as members of the local community, including traditional authorities and healers, were engaged. They explored sustainable rangeland management strategies through the responsible use of natural resources and the removal of invasive alien species and sustainable agricultural practices that incorporate indigenous plant species to support environmentally friendly and climate-adapted livelihoods.

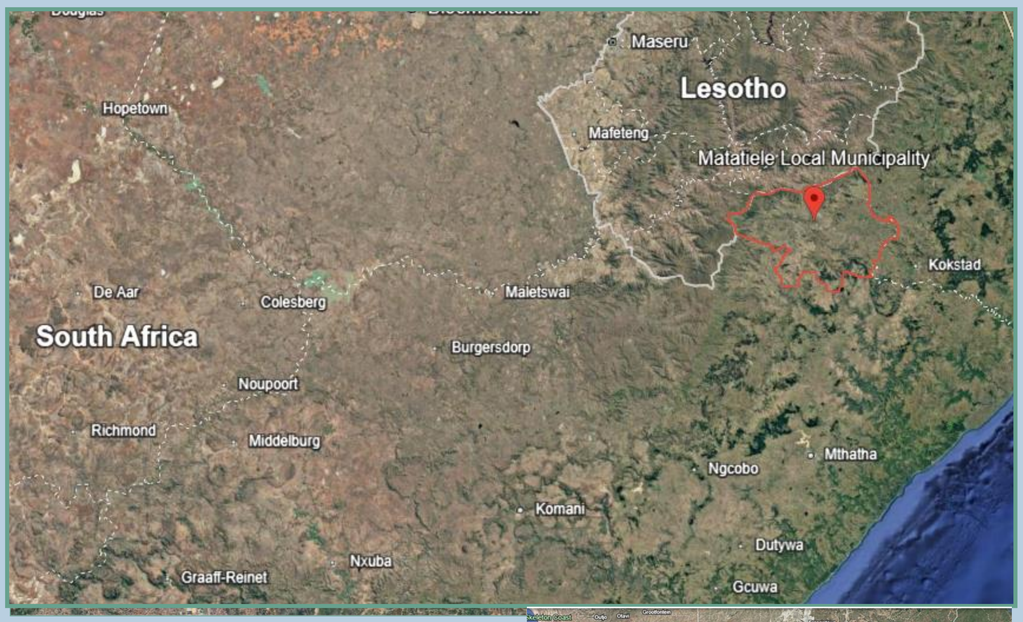
A key focus of the ALBATROSS project in the Umzimvubu Catchment is ensuring that climate information, particularly on rainfall extremes and fire risk, is effectively integrated into the planning and management of nature-based solutions (NbS). By aligning seasonal forecasts and long-term climate projections with community and land management decisions on rangeland use, crop planning, and erosion control, the project aims to reduce flood vulnerability and safeguard agricultural productivity. To support this integration, a climate service and climate risk assessment tool is currently being co-developed with local communities.

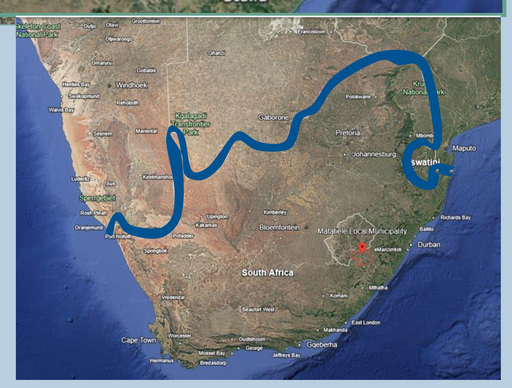
Stakeholder engagement in the Hub

In March 2025 University of Cape Town (UNICT) People in Nature & Climate (PiNC) Lab signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the core host organization in the Umzimvubu Hub, namely Environmental Rural Solutions (ERS) to further enhance stakeholder collaboration within the UCP, and streamflow knowledge exchange and feedback directly with the Umzimvubu Hub. This development was aimed at strengthening the relationship between the UNICT)Albatross team and ERS and the communities in the Umzimvubu Hub.

A training workshop was conducted with the ERS Eco-Champions focusing on secondary qualitative participatory data collection methods for youth participants. The session included training with five Eco-Champions, with experience ranging from four years on the job (one young male participant) to six months (four young female participants). The activity was facilitated and coordinated by Cherie Forbes, and the training was successfully completed in October 2025.

The ALBATROSS UNICT team are leading a study to document and share lived experiences related to people's mobility decisions and the role of nature-based solutions (NbS) projects, programmes, and sustainable natural resource–based livelihoods in shaping those decisions. Alongside the collection of empirical data, the initiative highlights compelling stories from resident community members. These narratives are intended to amplify local voices and can serve as valuable tools for communities to advocate for positive change. These experiences were gathered through 10 face-to-face semi-structured interviews that took place in the Hub in May 2026. The Eco-champion ERS team gathered real-life perspectives on NbS, sustainable natural resource-based livelihoods, and the links between mobility and NbS in the Umzimvubu Hub.





Geographic area:
Eastern South Africa, East Southern Africa

Regional climate:
Temperate to sub-tropical, with high rainfall and cold in winter

Main meteorological hazards:

Floods Droughts Wildfires

Work done towards the achievement of expected benefits

Engagement with communities in the catchment area included interaction with 87 stakeholders in Matatiele (approximately 4,350 km²), supporting the development of and training on climate service tools. These activities also focused on empowering local communities particularly young Eco-Champions and women in the Matatiele area through access to seasonal impact forecasting tools tailored to local environmental conditions and livelihood needs.

Policy Brief for South Africa

South Africa faces growing climate risks, including droughts, fires, floods, soil erosion, sea-level rise, and urban heatwaves. A review of 53 national and sub-national policies found that although climate hazards are widely recognized, the integration of NbS, climate services, gender considerations, and Indigenous and local knowledge remains fragmented.

While 75% of policies reference NbS, only a quarter integrate them comprehensively, with financing and monitoring gaps limiting large-scale implementation. Climate services are included in 40% of policies but remain insufficiently mainstreamed across development and sectoral planning. Strengthening resilience requires embedding NbS in policy frameworks, supported by dedicated financing, monitoring systems, and innovative approaches to carbon, water, and biodiversity management.

Outputs from the activity in the Hub

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ALBATROSSS UNICT team and Environmental Rural Solutions (ERS) in the Hub.
- Holden, P., Ngoma, G., Visser, M., Amekudzi, L.K., Amekugbe, M., Boahen, E., Boruru, E., Bostironnois, A., Dordaa, S., Ekai, D.E. and Forbes, C., 2025. Unlocking innovation in climate services through meaningful co-production for nature-based solutions. (Paper *submitted*).
- Establishment of the '*Pathways to impact*' that was developed as an outcome from stakeholder collaboration and continues to be a useful platform for facilitating stakeholder dialogue in the Umzimvubu Hub.

Hub coordinator and main implementer of interventions:
University of Cape Town

Funded by the European Union

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