

WETLANDS RESTORATION TO STRENGTHEN POLIHALI WATER SECURITY



In September, the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) Environment Branch, in collaboration with GreenGAB; a manufacturing firm contracted to supply dongalocks, initiated hands-on training in wetland restoration at the Masenkeng wetland within the Sehonghong catchment. This activity marked the first step in implementing restoration initiatives on six priority wetlands that supply water to the Polihali Dam, scheduled to commence in October 2025.

Community mobilisation preceded the restoration work to ensure local support.

“We had to make sure that communities are on board as LHDA begins this important initiative. We sensitised them about the drying and decomposition of peats, the human practices contributing to wetland degradation, and the restoration interventions LHDA is introducing. With the support of Principal Chiefs, district leadership, and District Grazing Association we are hopeful that long-term improvements will be achieved,” said Mrs. ‘Mats’episo Tlebere, Senior Officer – ICM, Polihali Catchment.

The interventions—installation of donga locks, soil stabilisation and other engineering measures—are informed by a comprehensive wetlands baseline survey and conservation action plan conducted by Wetland Consulting Services between 2022 and 2023. The study identified 55 wetlands covering approximately 1,139 hectares. These were prioritised based on their contribution to water delivery to Polihali Dam, with the Sehonghong sub-catchment emerging as the largest cluster, followed by Upper Senqu and Upper Mokhotlong.

The wetlands restoration plan incorporates quality control measures and environmental safeguards, including prevention of watercourse contamination, and reduction of soil erosion. . It complements other Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) initiatives implemented in over 13 sub-catchments, such as construction of gully control structures, trash and stone lines, infiltration pits, and removal of invasive species.

Beyond technical interventions, LHDA is working with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry , Re-Noka, and other partners to establish Grazing Associations for local catchment management and advance the Ministry of Environment's discussions with lawmakers on declaring Lesotho's river headwaters that feed the Polihali and Katse dams—as protected areas, an initiative first proposed by the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project.

Through these partnerships, LHDA is strengthening collective responsibility for wetlands restoration and ensuring long-term sustainability of Lesotho's most vital resource—water.

These efforts reflect LHDA's Strategic Plan Goal 2, which commits the Authority to conserving and restoring ecosystems as part of its mandate to protect Lesotho's water resources. The work also supports national legislation on water resource protection and contributes to wider advocacy for environmental preservation.

