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# A Study on Reporting and Learning in Three Natural Resource Management Programmes in South Africa

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## **Abstract**

This is a case study that focuses on three Natural Resource Management programmes, namely: the Department of Environmental Affairs Working for Water Programme, the Kruger to Canyon SANParks Biodiversity Social Projects as well as AWARD's programme for Resilience in the Limpopo-Olifants Basin. All three programmes are being implemented in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces of South Africa. As a monitoring and evaluation officer at AWARD, I was part of the team that developed a strategy to enable learning through monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and this sparked my interest in understanding how other programmes might be approaching this. The focus of the study is on the role of reporting, as part of programme monitoring and evaluation, as a means to support learning of both programme implementers and organisations.

An in-depth description of each case has been provided to enable an understanding of the overall reporting system, how reporting may play a role in supporting individual and organisational learning, and what factors enable or constrain learning in association with reporting. The research was descriptive and interpretive as the first phase of a possible extended study engaging organisations in exploring how to strengthen reporting for learning.

The participants and organisations were sampled using both purposive and convenience sampling. Data was collected through 17 key informant interviews; observations during two learning events; and, the collection and review of numerous documents (guides, reports, templates etc.). The data was analysed through qualitative content analysis using two frameworks: Argyris' three loops of learning (1974;1978) and the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) lens (Engeström, 1987). The former was useful for bounding the types of learning to identify, and the latter for surfacing contradictions that can be explored in organisational development processes.

Through the analysis of the data and literature, the following insights were gained:

- All three programmes have been 'thinking' about learning, but only in the case of AWARD was reporting associated with learning; in all three programmes, additional spaces have been designed to facilitate learning.
- Although programmes might not necessarily focus on reporting for learning, their reports do indicate a potential for facilitating reflection and thus learning. The

organisational culture in government-based reporting systems is, however, strongly geared to performance management, accounting for resources spent, meeting targets and eliminating mistakes. Reports are used to guide planning, to account to the funder and to release further funding.. In this context only single and double loop learning is in evidence.

- Programme participants did raise ‘triple loop’ questions about whether the programme or system overall was working, but there did not seem to be space for such questions, in the reporting or the learning events, and there was no evidence that they were addressed.
- In the case of AWARD, spaces were created through reporting to encourage learning. This worked sometimes to enable learning but not always due to, for example, time constraints and competing responsibilities.
- There are certain aspects to consider when designing reporting that seem to support learning (see below). The process of using reporting for learning takes time and organisations might not get this right the first time around.
- Reflection opportunities are only experienced as enabling if participants have the space and power to act on the reflections, or see others acting on them to address issues, otherwise they get frustrated.

Steps that could assist programmes in improving reporting to enable learning are:

- Adding to reporting templates a space for reflections to ensure that while the programme reports on the quantitative data needed for accountability purposes, it also creates additional space (without unduly increasing reporting responsibilities) for implementers’ learning.
- Encouraging discussion about ‘mistakes’ such as failures to meet targets, why they occur, and what we can learn from them.
- Allowing programme implementers to give feedback on their reporting challenges and take measures to support them, e.g. make adjustments to templates.
- Understanding the programme’s definition of learning, and the diverse learning needs that may be involved, which can contribute to a working strategy that the organisation can build on when initiating learning spaces.
- When learning events are organised, taking the inputs of participants seriously and developing ways in which these could be taken further into actions from which further

learning can stem; reflecting on and raising issues without an opportunity for action is frustrating.

- The process of enabling reporting for learning takes time and organisations might not get it right the first time around (trial and error) and a strategy that worked for one organisation might not necessarily work for the next. When designing a learning strategy as part of a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework, it is therefore important to consider the needs of the organisation and to work with implementers to develop and refine this over time.

The thesis concludes with comments on the limitations of the study, the methodology and the analytical frameworks used, and finally, provides recommendations for further research.

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AWARD	Association for Water and Rural Development
BSP	Biodiversity Social Projects
CPA	Communal Property Association
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
DEA	Department of Environmental Affairs
DEFF	Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries
DPME	Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation
DPW	Department of Public Works
DWAF	Department of Water Affairs & Forestry
EPWP	Extended Public Works Programme
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GPS	Global Positioning System
GWME	Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
K2C	Kruger to Canyons Biosphere
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MAREP	Management Research and Planning Forum
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MERL	Monitoring Evaluation Reporting and Learning
MTPA	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency
NEMBA	National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NRMP	Natural Resource Management Programme
PC	Project Coordinator
PDMS	Performance Development Management System
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
RESILIM-O	Resilience in the Limpopo Basin - Olifants Catchment
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RPL	Regional Programme Leader
SANParks	South African National Parks
SAM	Strategic Adaptive Management
SANBI	South African National Biodiversity Institute
SAMTRAC	Safety Management Training Course
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SMMEs	Small Medium & Micro Enterprise Businesses
SPRA	Special Poverty Relief Allocation
TB	Tuberculosis
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSTEEP	Values, Social, Technological, Environment, Economy, Political
WfW	Working for Water
WIMS	Water Information Management System
WoF-HAT	Working on Fire - High Altitude Team

# **Chapter 1: Introduction and context of study**

## **1.1 Background to the Study**

This study seeks to understand how the reporting component of monitoring and evaluation is supporting or failing to support learning within three natural resource programmes in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga region of South Africa. Two of the organisations involved in these programmes are based in Limpopo, one in Mpumalanga and all three programmes have field sites in both provinces.

This study was motivated by observations I made as a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer while working at the Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD). The organisation was exploring forms of reporting for the purposes not only for accountability to the donor, but also for learning within the organisation, and wider sharing. I became interested in building my skills as an M&E officer by understanding better what is involved in reporting, and how it could potentially support organizational learning and AWARD was a good case study for such an exploration.

As in many other organisations, much time and effort were directed towards reporting, which staff often viewed as extra work. As a member of the monitoring and evaluation team, I worked with the organisation to develop a strategy that ensured that staff did their reporting but also had an opportunity to learn, without increasing strain on by increasing their responsibilities. This strategy was tried and tested for several years, and in this study, I reflect on the process and what we can learn from AWARD's monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning (MERL) framework and its implementation. AWARD's is not the only strategy that could be adopted when introducing learning through monitoring, evaluation and reporting; I chose to explore two other case studies in addition to AWARD.

These cases are programmes within organisations that work in the same geographical and natural resource management (NRM) context as AWARD, but have different organisational set-ups. During my engagements with the Working for Water programme in the Blyde River catchment, and with the SANParks Biodiversity Social Projects programme, I discovered that these programmes were facing challenges with regard to monitoring and evaluation, suggesting reporting that focuses on accountability and lacks opportunities for reflection, reporting tools

that do not optimally collect relevant data and limited communication with the wider community. I wondered about the extent to which monitoring, evaluation and reporting supported, or failed to support, learning in the NRM sector and this sparked my interest to investigate how these organisations might be pursuing this, and how their reporting formats and processes support or hinder learning.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Objectives**

As explained above, the study seeks to understand how reporting, as part of monitoring and evaluation, is supporting or failing to support learning within three NRM programmes. The research questions were crafted to explore the learning phenomena, taking into consideration the different organisational dynamics.

### **Research Questions**

#### **a) What are the current reporting practices?**

This question focused on unearthing dynamics surrounding current reporting which included: the purpose and utilisation of information, the data collection and collation process, the data flow process as well as the associated strengths and weaknesses of this system. Data for this question was generated through interviews with programme implementers and managers, and analysis of programme documents, and informal conversations.

#### **b) To what extent do the current reporting practices support learning?**

This question focused on exploring the extent to which learning was being supported or not supported by the reporting system. It involved looking at the current report use, the types of learning mentioned, and evidence of learning, as well as other learning opportunities that are not necessarily associated with reporting. The data for this question was generated through the same interviews as well as document analysis.

#### **c) What are the underlying factors that promote or constrain reporting for learning?**

This question was designed to open space for systemic and historic analysis of learning and how reporting has promoted or constrained this learning from taking place through CHAT workshops. Due to unforeseen circumstances, this did not happen, as I will explain further in

Chapter Three. I then adopted the cultural historic activity system framing to identify constraints and enablers by looking at certain factors within the reporting. Data for this question was also generated through the interviews, document analysis as well as observations during learning events.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Funded NRM programmes need to adhere to funders' reporting requirements which are generally centred around quantifiable indicators. This type of reporting is favoured by funders as it produces simple indicator-based data that can be aggregated to give a simple global picture that is quick and easy to communicate. However, it runs the risk of emphasising a culture of accountability that could potentially limit an organisation's ability to learn and improve its efforts, and could also limit how funders learn to improve future programmes. It would seem that many organisations struggle with implementing a comprehensive and effective monitoring and evaluation system with a strong reporting system for documenting and sharing lessons with the wider community, as well as facilitating learning within the organisation. Van Wilgen and Wannenburg (2016) explained that if a programme's monitoring and evaluation practice is neglected, it is difficult to judge how much progress a programme has made and to learn from it. Yet learning is important in an NRM programme; as Keen, Brown and Dyball (2005) noted, learning is needed to guide the adaptation of practices and they argued for the creation of platforms within the NRM sector that allow for participatory learning and collaboration.

There are many processes involved in organisational learning, but monitoring and evaluation could play a very important, if not one of the most important, roles in facilitating this. There is not much research in South Africa on how this can be done, nor on the role of reporting in this regard.

### **1.4 Research Approach**

This is case study research within a descriptive and interpretive paradigm as outlined in Chapter Three. It is based on three embedded cases of three different NRM programmes selected from three different organisations. Purposive and convenience sampling were both used to select the organisations and data was generated through three methods: key-informant interviews, document analysis as well as observations in certain meetings and workshops. The analysis was guided by the theoretical lenses of the three loops of learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978) as well as Cultural Historic Activity Theory as developed by Engeström (1987), both of which are suitable for studying learning in an organisational context. The analysis was done in three

phases (guided by the research questions). Phase I included mapping out the current reporting system, phase II involved exploring the extent to which the reporting system supports learning while phase III focused on identifying the factors that either promote or constrain learning.

## **1.5 Context of the Three Case Studies**

### **1.5.1 The Department of Environmental Affairs' Working for Water Programme in the Upper Blyde River Catchment**

As part of the ongoing transformation process, the South African government has, since 1994, initiated several strategies aimed at addressing social and economic issues (Holmes, Euston-Brown & Richardson, 2003). These included the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the macro-economic policy on Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). The RDP was the foundation in which the Working for Water programme was initiated and first implemented. The RDP has since been absorbed into various implementing government departments and funding is channelled through the National Treasury to poverty relief projects and programmes throughout the country as a Special Poverty Relief Allocation (SPRA).

The government through the then Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAF) launched the Working for Water (WfW) programme in 1995. At the time of this study, the programme was being administered by DEA (now Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries) (<https://www.environment.gov.za/projectsprogrammes/wfw>). This is a Natural Resource Management Programme (NRMP) that is operated in all nine provinces and all major terrestrial biomes. One aim of the programme is “to improve the integrity of natural resources by preventing the introduction of new species, ensure early detection of and rapid response dealing with emerging invasive alien species as well as the management of the impact of established invasive alien species” (Skyles & Jooste, 2014, p. 15).

According to Sykes and Jooste (2014), the programme was globally renowned as one of the most outstanding environmental conservation initiatives on the continent and is backed by politicians for its job creation efforts as well as fighting against poverty.

Although WfW might be deemed successful in terms of its job creation and poverty alleviation function, the programme still experiences challenges, some of which are associated with monitoring, evaluation and reporting. For example, according to Van Wilgen and Wannenburg (2016), the programmes do not have robust indicators to assess the *effects* of

alien plant control; the current set of indicators more focus on inputs rather than outcomes, the strict requirement to maximize employment severely limits the programme's ability to effectively monitor and evaluate outcomes, and this makes it impossible to assess the impact of these programmes.

Within the broader national WfW Programme, I selected the Upper Blyde Programme in the Upper Blyde River catchment. I had access to the staff on this programme through its association with AWARD. This was an interesting case because it is a very large programme with ambitious goals and there is need for ongoing learning at multiple levels. It is furthermore a context with high biodiversity values. The Blyde catchment is characterised by unique and highly diverse biodiversity across many different ecosystems, and the Mariepskop complex within the upper catchment consists of more than 1400 floral species (Thifhulufhelwi & Graf, 2015). It is considered critical for the provision of ecosystems services such as climate regulation, water flows, and the maintenance of natural resources. It is furthermore regarded as a significant biodiversity hotspot and a major water source area. The catchment has high rainfall and the water that emanates from the Blyde River makes an important contribution to the base flows in the lower reaches of the Olifants River passing through the Kruger National Park (WAMTechnology, n.d). The Blyde is located within the lower Olifants River basin and has been recognised as a benchmark basin in South Africa by the International Water Management Institute.

There are currently three main institutions operating within the Upper Blyde catchment and all have different NRM programmes involved in alien plant clearing for ecosystem restoration. These are the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) as well as the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). The programmes operating within Blyde are Working for Water, which is the biggest, Working on Fire - High Altitude Team (WoF-HAT) as well as the South African National Parks - Biodiversity Social projects (SANParks-BSP). The researcher worked with DEA, mainly focused on WfW (as case study 1) as well as the Biodiversity Social Projects (as case study 2).

### **1.5.2 The Kruger to Canyons SANParks – Biodiversity Social Projects**

The Biodiversity Social Projects (BSPs) are programmes run by the South African National Parks (SANParks), implemented by the Kruger to Canyons (K2C) Biosphere Reserve and



funded through DEA. The Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserve was registered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on 20 September 2011, as the 411<sup>th</sup> Biosphere reserve site registered in 94 countries worldwide, thus acknowledging the global significance of the Greater Kruger region, the Eastern Savannahs as well as the escarpment of South Africa ([http://www.kruger2canyons.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.kruger2canyons.org/about_us.html)).

This K2C SANParks BSP programme traverses Limpopo as well as Mpumalanga provinces. The entire reserve area is 2.5 million hectares which is mostly dedicated to long term conservation of formally protected areas as well as privately owned conservation land. Conservation, agriculture, tourism, forestry as well as rural and urban development are some of the land uses within the Biosphere range. The K2C organisation is an NGO responsible for many projects within the region, one of which is SANParks-BSP. Their responsibilities range from biodiversity conservation, research, education, conservation corridors, stewardship, sustainable development as well as land use and restitution (<http://www.kruger2canyons.org/programmes.html>).

The three main objectives of SANParks- BSP are poverty relief, community upliftment as well as nature conservation within the Kruger protected areas, their buffer zones as well as other controlled areas. Within K2C, the two programmes under BSP are Working for Ecosystems (another of the ‘Working for’ programmes) as well as Environmental Monitors (<http://www.kruger2canyons.org/bsp.html>). The main aim of the K2C-SANParks BSP is to oversee the implementation of invasive alien plant clearing within the Park’s portion of the Olifants Catchment which includes its rivers and tributaries.

### **1.5.3 AWARD’s Resilience in the Limpopo - Olifants River Basin (RESILIM-O) Programme**

The Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has worked on issues relating to integrated water research management for over 18 years in southern Africa. The organisation has dealt with a wide range of projects, from local scale community-based to policy at an international scale, and water sharing arrangements between countries. Its emergence and development coincided with South Africa’s transition to democracy. AWARD’s work began as a response to the need for a multidisciplinary rural research centre that could respond to the problems of rural development

within the context of a rapidly changing South Africa (<http://award.org.za/index.php/projects/usaaid-resilm-o/>).

AWARD's current focus and context was shaped after it worked on a series of village water projects, following the severe drought of 1992. By 1996 a programme that integrated the village projects with the Water Information Project at the University of Witwatersrand's Rural Facility was launched, and in 1998 AWARD was established as an independent Section 21 Company ([www.award.org.za](http://www.award.org.za)). The organisation's vision focuses on contributing to a more sustainable world and a democratic South Africa where the principles of equity and sustainability are upheld and strengthened through building active civil society participation in wise water and biodiversity stewardship, management and governance.

AWARD's RESILIM-O programme is funded through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and focuses on the health of the Olifants River Basin's ecosystems as well as the resilience of its residents, their adaptation to climate change as well as other change factors (<http://award.org.za/index.php/projects/usaaid-resilm-o/>). The programme is governed by four principles: working with people, understanding context, building a resilience learning network as well as specialist studies. Working with people entails understanding the complex network of stakeholders in the Olifants catchment and their practices. Building context includes being able to collaboratively build a shared picture of the catchment through working with diverse networks while building a resilience network involves capacity development of individuals and organisations to be able to respond to climate change challenges through building a strong resilience learning network (*ibid.*).

The overarching goal of the programme is to reduce vulnerability to climate change through building improved transboundary water and biodiversity governance and management of the Limpopo-Olifants Basin through the adoption of science-based strategies that enhance the resilience of its people and ecosystems through systemic and social learning approaches (AWARD, 2017).

It is within these three cases that I will explore how organisations are using reporting as part of monitoring and evaluation to support learning, or not.

## **1.6 Thesis outline**

This thesis consists of five chapters. This first introductory chapter is followed by a literature review, in which I will review the literature pertinent to this study, that is, literature on monitoring and evaluation, particularly in relation to the NRM sector, as well as organisational learning.

Chapter Three details the research methodology adopted for the study, which includes more details on the selection of the research sites, data collection methods and tools, data analysis methods as well as ethical implications. Chapter Four presents the findings and my interpretations of the findings and engages in some discussion of these findings. The last chapter makes conclusions and considers recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Literature review and conceptual framework

### 2.1 Introduction

The following concepts were carefully chosen in relation to the focus of the study. **Monitoring and evaluation** is the scholarly, professional and practical field in which I explore **reporting and learning** as the key focus of the study, and in particular, theories associated with **organisational learning**. Within these, I highlight the theory of single, double and triple loop learning, which I use to analyse forms of learning associated with reporting in Chapter Four.

Since the study focuses on reporting for learning within Natural Resource Management programmes, I looked at concepts that are common within the sector and here I focus on Strategic Adaptive Management, which is a key methodology that has been proposed and even implemented in some Natural Resource Management programmes as a way of dealing with complex environmental systems. These concepts guided my understanding of how learning takes place or might potentially take place through reporting within organisations in the NRM sector.

### 2.2 Organisational Learning

There are many different types of learning theories and definitions of learning used in different fields. Schunk (2012) explained that theories are merely a set of acceptable principles used to explain a phenomenon as well as provide a framework for interpretation. Learning theories range from socialization, enculturation, experiential to constructivism, reflection, expansive, social, action learning and more. All these theories have a specific definition of learning as well as how it happens (processes) and the conditions that allow for it to happen. For the purposes of this study I focus on organisational learning and associated theories.

Learning has become a buzz word within organisations, including NRM programmes, as it is seen to be crucial to the success of organisations (Saadat & Saadat, 2016). Organisational learning is an unceasing process of organisational improvement that is integrated with the organisation's activities, as well as the values, attitudes and perceptions of members. It is often not an easy task and uses information and feedback about process and outcomes to implement changes (Bhikoo, n.d). It is for this reason that organisational learning has been linked to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as it can potentially play a significant role in learning by providing feedback on organisational activities as well as the outcomes of those activities.

There are many theorists who write about organisational learning and those that are dominant in the field include Argyris and Schon (1978), Senge (1995; 1990), Daft and Weick (1984), Lave and Wenger (1991) as well as Engeström and Kerosuo (2007). All these theorists have a distinct way of defining organisational learning and how it takes place.

The concept of organisational learning can be dated to 1978 when it was used by Argyris and Schon and was later popularised during the 1990s by Peter Senge. Senge (1990) argued that organisations must learn if they want to succeed. He further argued that organisations learn through individuals who learn; however individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning, although without it, no organisational learning occurs. Senge (1990) went on to define learning organisations as places where people constantly expand on their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured; where collective aspiration is set free and where people continue learning how to learn together. Fiol and Lyles (1985) also explained organisational learning as a process where individuals continually work on improving their activities and actions through better knowledge and understanding.

Over the years, scholars have used the concepts of organisational learning and learning organisations interchangeably but Denton (1998) noted a difference between the two: organisational learning is a process and includes a set of activities and actions that the organisation practices, while the concept of a learning organisation refers to the nature of the organisation. In the context of this study, we will focus more on organisational learning as a process that facilitates learning within an organisation, that is, the organisation as a whole but also the individuals, if their learning contributes to organisational learning. Denton (1998) explained that generating new ideas, proposing new and untried solutions to problems as well as creativity are some of the features that contribute to organisational learning.

Organisational learning entails acting on ideas, then evaluating the ideas, accepting those that are good enough and rejecting those that are not. Generating ideas alone is not enough to facilitate organisational learning; actions like evaluation, coupled with selection and implementation of ideas, can enable organisational learning. Careful assessment of an organisation's structure, policies, procedures and members is needed to support the learning and reflexive action as well as for surfacing the hidden assumptions and beliefs embedded within the organisation that might prevent desired outcomes from being achieved. Developing

the ability to engage in **double loop learning** (Argyris & Schon, 1974) is also important and is explained below.

Organisational learning is also defined by Torres and Preskill (2001) as a continuous learning process that involves growth and improvement through the utilisation of information about both processes and outcomes to make changes that are integrated with work activities and the organisation's culture, systems and structures, leadership and communication mechanisms. Organisational learning has a strong focus on "establishing the balance between accountability and learning the role of evaluation, integrating the relationship between evaluation function and evaluator role within the organisation, sustaining an essence of ongoing inquiry which calls for learning incrementally as well as providing time for reflection, examination of underlying assumptions and dialogue among program staff" (Torres & Preskill, 2001, p.388).

Many believe that a slight change in the way in which an organisation does things contributes to organisational learning, but Fiol and Lyles (1985) argued that change does not necessarily imply learning. There are different levels of learning with each one having a different impact on the organisation. They claimed that four contextual factors affect or indicate the likelihood of organisational learning: the organisation's culture, a flexible strategy, organisational structure as well as the environment.

Each organisation has a set of norms and rules they adhere to, which are linked to its history and these play a huge role in determining the likely future or direction of an organisation. Argyris and Schon (1978) noted that these organisational norms are likely to influence an organisation's behaviour and any change that might have to be enforced within the organisation should also involve restructuring those norms and belief systems.

The second factor that is likely to influence learning is a strategy that allows for flexibility.. Fiol and Lyles (1985) argued that learning is influenced by the strategy chosen by providing a room for new perceptions, interpretation as well as decision making. This strategy will determine the success or failure of an organisation to implement learning.

Organisational structure also plays a big role in determining learning processes, although it is also greatly influenced by the degree of flexibility allowed. Duncan (1974) pointed out that there are two organisational structures, one which is centralised and mechanised, which will

be likely to reinforce past behaviours and ways of doing things, as well as a more decentralised and organic structure that allows shifts in methodology, ideas and beliefs. My study includes cases involving different organisational structures. Organisations like the Department of Environmental Affairs use a more centralised system, which can also be referred to as a top-down approach wherein most significant decisions are made from the top.

Once can expect non-governmental organisations like the Association for Water and Rural Development to have a looser and less top-down structure with more flexible strategies. However, AWARD's RESILIM-O programme (one of the case studies here) was implemented in partnership with the international funder USAID, which can also be quite rigid in its structure and strategies. Similarly, the K2C-SANParks BSP case consisted of a mix of more or less rigid organisational structures and strategies. The size of the organisation could be another factor to consider when implementing organisational learning, as it may relate to flexibility of strategy and structure.

The last factor mentioned by Fiol and Lyles (1983) is the environment. Lawrence and Dyer (1983) argued that an environment that is too complex may hamper learning from taking place as it is likely to overload those that need to learn and implement learning.

Besides the four factors mentioned above that play a role in organisational learning, there are also two levels at which this type of learning takes place: low-level and high-level learning. According to Cyert and March (1963), low level learning occurs within a set of rules in an organisational structure. This type of learning is usually short term, leads to some behavioural developments and only impacts part of what the organisation does. This type of learning is a result of repetition and routine guided by management goals, decisions and rules and because of this, low level learning is prevalent in organisations that are well understood and where management thinks it can control situations (Duncan, 1974).

This type of learning's focuses more on outcomes, levels of performance as well as an immediate effect on an activity and is usually based on what has worked in the past. It is referred to by Argyris and Schon (1978) as single loop learning. This type of learning focuses on detecting and correcting error by sticking within the organisational rules. Higher level learning has a different focus on norms rather than activities. Its effects and impacts on the organisation are broader and more long term and occur inter alia through skills development

and insights (Miller & Friesen, 1980). Usually, this type of learning can be seen in the form of a new strategy. It is also referred to as double loop learning which focuses on detecting and correcting errors in ways that modify the norms, policies and organisational objectives (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Now that we have considered what organisational learning is, we can move on to explore how it might happen. There are also many organisational learning theories in the field which differ on how learning occurs, on who experiences the learning as well as on the conditions that promote a learning organisation.

For the purposes of this study, I will look at four organisational theories: Experiential learning, Adaptive and Generative learning (which includes loops of learning introduced above), Assimilation theory as well as the Cultural Historic Activity Theory.

### **2.2.1. Experiential Learning**

The theory of experiential learning as developed by Kolb (1984) has influenced leadership and organisation development and contributed to widely used principles of a learning organisation. It expresses that learning happens through the combination of grasping and transforming experience. The theory explains how learning happens through a four-stage learning cycle which consist of concrete experience, abstract conceptualisation, reflective observation as well as active experimentation to transform the experience component.

In this theory, an organisation learns when members go through an order of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting in a repeating progression. The experiences of an organisation might trigger observation and reflection that are likely to spark new behavioural patterns. Kolb (1984) described three models of the experiential learning process: the **Lewinian model of action research and laboratory**, **Dewey's model of learning** as well as **Piaget's model of learning and cognitive development**. These models provide a holistic perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour (ibid.).

These three experiential learning models have similar characteristics. The first characteristic is that they describe learning as a process and not necessarily in terms of outcomes. In other models, learning is predominantly measured by the number of outcomes a person or organisation can produce, through accumulation of facts or habits that are triggered by specific



behavioural conditions. Kolb (1984) argued that the use of outcomes to measure learning can be defined as non-learning because it is almost impossible to measure how much someone has learned through their ability to relate knowledge accumulated or rather their outcomes. Bruner (1966), also emphasised that the purpose of education is to stimulate inquiry and skills development rather than memorising a body of knowledge.

The second characteristic of the models reviewed here is learning as a continuous process grounded in experience. This characteristic suggests that learning is created from the experiences of the learners and is tested out in their experiences. This is supported by the human consciousness theory (Bruner, 1990) that argues that consciousness is continuous, and experiences evolve as one engages with the environment. This means that for every experience, there is something that a learner loses and takes which then explains how what has been learned in a situation becomes an instrument for dealing with and understanding situations that are yet to follow.

The third characteristic argues that learning happens or takes place from conflict resolution. This is for the idea that new learning, skills, knowledge and attitudes are achieved through confrontation with experiences that do not match up to existing knowledge or understanding. The learning or new knowledge is created from the way in which conflicts get resolved (by the individual or organisation). In the Lewinian model (explained below) learning happens from conflict between the concrete experiences and the abstract concept. Paulo Freire (1970) also referred this in his concept of praxis that includes reflection and action to transform the world.

Kolb (1984) argued that learning requires a range of abilities, and the learners must always select the abilities they will utilise in a learning situation. Kolb (1984) argued that learners need four different kinds of abilities: concrete abilities, reflective observation abilities, abstract conceptualisation as well as active experimentation. He explained that these four abilities enable learners to involve themselves in new experiences without being biased, observe and reflect on their experiences, create new concepts that integrate their experiences into logical theories which they can use to make decisions and solve problems. Another characteristic of the Experiential learning theory is that learning is viewed as a **holistic process of adapting to the world**. This type of learning happens when humans adapt to their social and physical environment.

For illustrative purposes, I am singling out the Lewinian model (Kolb, 2014) of experiential learning, in which learning is facilitated through an integrated process that often starts with the 'here-and-now' experience coupled by data collection and observations. The data collected is analysed and the results are presented back to the actors for them to use in modifying their behaviour as well as their choices. This learning theory makes use of a four-stage cycle that includes **concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalisations** as well as **testing implications of new concepts in situations** (Kolb, 1984). Concrete evidence serves as the basis for observations and reflections which are then assimilated into a theory from which new inferences can be deduced. Knowledge is then created from these inferences that serve as a guide (ibid.).

What makes this learning theory noteworthy is the emphasis on concrete experience to validate and test new knowledge while action research is based on feedback processes. The feedback allows for goal directed actions as well as the evaluation of things that went wrong during the action implementation. Kolb (2014) argued that organisational ineffectiveness can be solved or minimised through feedback processes and called for a balance between observation and action.

### **2.2.2 Adaptive and Generative Learning**

Senge (1990) also invented a four-step process referred to as the wheel of learning which is similar to the experiential theory and comprises doing, reflecting, connecting and deciding. Adaptive and generative learning (Senge, 1990) evolved from the experiential learning theory. This theory makes use of mental models which consists of assumptions, generalisations, or pictures that might potentially influence how we see or understand the world and act. Senge defined adaptive learning as learning that only focuses on the foundation of prior and current knowledge, which is then amended to new ways of thinking to accomplish an objective. This kind of learning is quite significant in organisations that seek to improve certain practices. Organisations that seek to achieve this kind of learning should be able to identify gaps in their current practices, which would enable new ways of thinking or the generation of additional ideas to close the gaps.

By contrast, generative learning is a different kind of learning that thrives on producing radically new ideas as well as continuous change. This is usually the production of new strategies, action plans or resources which are urgently needed to make the change required.

Senge (1990) uses five disciplines to explain the learning phenomena: personal mastery, mental models, building shared visions, team learning as well as systems thinking. Personal mastery refers to conditions that allow for personal learning within organisations and is more concerned with staff development, while shared visions are vital for an organisation that seeks to learn and are more concerned with the need for consensus within an organisation.

According to Senge (1990), team learning is where organisational learning takes place because if the team doesn't learn then the organisation cannot learn. This element requires strong communication amongst staff as well as an openness to creative thinking. Systemic thinking is crucial for examining relationships between different parts of an organisation to understand how learning might happen as well as outlining factors that might prevent learning from taking place (ibid.).

According to Chiva, Grandio and Alegre (2010), generative learning is developed both individually and socially "at the edge of chaos" through intuition, attention, dialogue and inquiry (p. 116) while adaptive learning involves improvement or development through a process of self-organisation. March (1991) expanded the generative theory into two modes of organisational learning which he called exploration and exploitation. Exploration is about seeking new options, experimenting or thinking in previously unused ways, while exploitation is more about using existing knowledge and resources to gain value from what is already known. This is evident for example in the use of existing documents or action plans for a different purpose.

Many scholars associate adaptive and generative learning with single and double loop learning (which will be explained below). This can be seen within the two modes of organisational learning, exploration and exploitation by March (1991) explained above. Although scholars differentiate between adaptive and generative learning, it would seem important for organisations that want to learn to combine the two, to enhance their capacity and build their organisations into learning institutions, as both modes of learning seem to be necessary.

### **2.2.3 Loops of Learning**

The concept of learning loops emanates from the theory of action by Argyris and Schon (1974) which views humans as agents and designers of action. These authors suggested that humans

are responsible for designing actions that enable them to achieve certain objectives as well as for monitoring these actions and their consequences (Greenwood, 1998). The theory of action has two different dimensions: espoused theory as well as the theory-in-use. Argyris and Schon (1974) described theories-in-use as more related to the assumptions about oneself, one's relations to others and to the environment that shapes people and what organisations actually do, while espoused theories are linked to the words that we use to communicate what we do or what we would like others to assume we do (even if we are not necessarily doing it or believing in it).

Argyris and Schon (1974) explained the three elements for modelling the theory-in-use: governing variables, action strategies, as well as consequences. Governing variables are those dimensions that people or organisations try to keep within acceptable limits, action strategies are those that are used to control governing values and keep at an acceptable range, while consequences are what happens because of actions taken.

Smith (2001) suggested that the person or organisation's theory in use is confirmed in cases where the consequences of the strategy are what was wanted, although there may be a mismatch between intention and outcomes in the sense that consequences might be unintended and might work against governing variables; this is where the notion of single and double loop learning comes in, as responses to the mismatch. These two types of learning are the work of Argyris and Schon (1978) and are usually described in the context of organisational learning.

Single loop learning is referred to as learning that occurs when the set rules, values and plans are followed rather than questioned. This is usually when a strategy to solve an issue is sought within the rules of the organisation. Hargrove (2002) argued that single loop learning is concerned with refining actions for the purposes of improving performance without altering guidelines in place.

However, when one questions the rules, goals and plans and subjects them to scrutiny, double loop learning is involved. This type of learning often leads to a shift in strategies that might be used to address the challenges (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Double loop learning comes about through reflection on assumptions and goals (how they can be achieved).

Both these two types of learning are usually explained with a thermostat, where single loop is concerned more with achieving a certain degree for a temperature while double loop involves changing settings, which would be the objective. Single loop learning focuses mostly on making current techniques more effective and all efforts of reflection are directed towards the same goal. It is considered less risky for individuals as well as organisations because it involves following routine (ibid.).

Double loop learning is more creative and reflective as it involves confronting assumptions and ideas behind goals and strategies as well as testing hypotheses. Argyris and Schon (1974) argued that double loop learning is more necessary in cases where practitioners and organisations need to make informed decisions in uncertain contexts. This type of learning is not necessarily concerned with changing objectives, but the goal is to discover new ways or invent alternative ways of solving problems at hand (Cartwright, 2002).

There is a considerable amount of literature on single and double loop learning related to organisational learning by Argyris and Schon, but they have not done much work on what we call triple loop learning although this was expanded from their work. Georges and Van Witteloostuijn (1999) defined triple loop learning as more concerned with developing new competencies and skills as a way of increasing the fullness and depth of learning about the issues at hand. This type of learning is also referred to as 'learning about learning' and usually occurs when participants reflect on the rules and learn new skills as well as beliefs or values that might potentially impact their thinking as well as the way in which they do things. Hargrove (2002) defined triple loop learning as societal learning that is concerned with enforcing changes into the whole structure (i.e. frameworks, policies, regulatory structures etc.).

It is important to note that programmes might be chaotic if their core values and beliefs are to be altered or revisited all the time, but no learning would take place if structures were rigid and did not allow for any alterations (this is visible in double and triple loop learning). Armitage et al. (2008) talked about the need for multiple loop learning (single, double and triple), a concept which considers the different levels providing guidance and stability in a social system.

The work of Argyris and Schon has played a huge role within the literature about relationships of people, organisational learning as well as action learning. They suggested that the inquiry

into organisational learning must concern itself with active processes of learning. They viewed organisations as initiators and lead actors of organisational learning and for organisational learning to occur, the learning experienced by individuals needs to be embedded into the organisation's beliefs and norms. The three loops of learning have proven to be very powerful tools for organisational learning (Yeo, 2002) and will also be applied in this study.

#### **2.2.4 Assimilation Theory of Learning**

The assimilation theory of learning is different to the preceding theories but has also been used to describe what enables organisational learning. Focussing on how individuals learn from within the constructivist learning theory tradition, Piaget (1983) explained that assimilation occurs when new information arises that fits into the individual's existing knowledge (or constructs) and extends the individual's mind. Ausubel (1998) claimed that learning through assimilation can only be possible if the targeted concept is logically connected to the learner's structure of knowledge and if the structure of knowledge is organised clearly.

Here it is useful to distinguish between learning that is meaningful and learning which is rote. Meaningful learning is more concerned with the learners using a new experience or new information being presented to compare new knowledge to prior knowledge. Such 'meaningful' knowledge is retained much longer and for the learning to occur, there should be prior knowledge, a facilitator who constructs meaningful material and processes, as well as the learner who actively chooses to utilise this new material. Contrary to meaningful learning, rote learning of given facts involves information that is not easily relatable to existing concepts and as such can be easily forgotten. This type of learning is unrelated to experiences (Schunk, 2012).

With the exception of rote learning within the assimilation theory, the common themes of organisational learning amongst these theories include establishing a learning climate and culture that provides opportunities for all to be engaged, individuals that learn from experience and provide appropriate feedback, people who take responsibility for their personal mastery and development as part of wider organisational learning, and learning at multiple levels.

All three theories are concerned with knowledge accumulation and sharing; however, they present different ways in which organisations learn. Most scholars have argued that organisational learning is much more than individuals acquiring knowledge but rather a

systemic process in which learning is embedded within the culture, norms and history of the organisation although individuals are still needed to drive this change.

### **2.2.5 Cultural Historic Activity Theory**

Cultural Historic Activity was developed out of Vygotsky's concept of mediated action and was further developed by Engeström (1987) through activity systems analysis. This theory has been associated with studying human learning and development (Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition, 2010). Foot (2014, p. 2) described CHAT as "one of several practice-based approaches that provide a robust framework for analysing professional work practices". This approach enables researchers to analyse evolving professional practices (such as reporting) and practitioners (such as M&E officers) to engage in reflective research.

This is facilitated through a systemic approach that includes tools, and the current dynamics of money, power, culture as well as history (Foot, 2014). The most critical concerns within the CHAT approach are concerned with the connection between learning and development. The essential task of CHAT is to ensure that the system is analysed as a whole activity and not simply as isolated components.

CHAT is known to provide an understanding for human development or cognition through the examination of relations amongst different elements (people, tools and their goals) within the activity system (Cole & Engeström, 1993). The activity is a combination of cultural elements within the complex structures shaping actions of individuals who seek to achieve a certain goal (ibid.).

The activity system is the primary unit of analysis and contains different elements which are; object, outcome, subject, rules, tools, division of labour and community. The **subject** refers to key players engaged in an activity system and can either be an individual or groups of individuals (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Subjects pursue the object in an attempt to shape their identities and transform their knowledge. Nardi (1996) defined an object as a product of the activity system which is transformed into outcomes (desired results) through interactions with the subject.

**Tools** can either be external or internal and are used to mediate human action and experience and are deeply embedded in the elements of an activity system. This is often enhanced and

shaped to be more effective or useful through interactions with the subject i.e. if staff interact more with the reporting, they are likely to enhance it to become a learning tool.

The **community** is a group of individuals with a shared interest or culture who are part of or interact within an activity system, and possess a set of negotiated rules that guide how they interact with other participants in the activity. The **division of labour** indicates what is being done by whom towards the object.

The activity systems are central to CHAT as they are multi-voiced and model collective activities that are being undertaken by actors with different roles, positions as well as perspectives (Foot, 2014). The three generations of CHAT (1st, 2nd and 3rd) have been developed based on the evolution of how human development can be understood. In the context of this study, the second generation of CHAT (**Error! Reference source not found.**) was adopted to explore reporting and learning practices within the three different cases, and the factors that enable or constrain the extent to which such reporting practices support learning.

The concept of an activity system was regarded as a useful form of framing in this study because it speaks to a number of elements that are being engaged with by the subjects in order to transform the object, namely reporting within the three cases. In this case, it was to understand how the different components influence the reporting system in terms of its potential in becoming a learning tool (outcome).

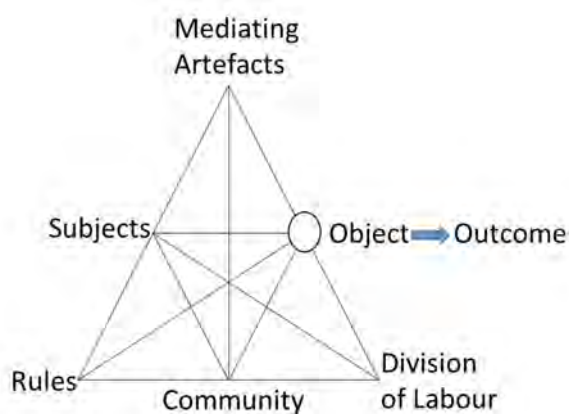


Figure 2.1: A second generation activity system (Engeström, 1987)

The CHAT theory of organisational learning, focuses on learning within multi-organisational networks or what is referred to as networks of learning and this can be seen in the third-



generation activity system that expands units of analysis from a single activity system to two more interconnected activity systems. Activity theory focuses on the idea of organisational learning to expand on its unit of analysis (or learning) beyond the individual. The two are not only concerned with individual learning but also collective learning.

The selected theories of learning were preferred for this study because they are complementary and reflect similar underlying assumptions about learning, provide lenses on the different types of learning, as well as explanations for how learning takes place.

### **2.3 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation as a practice has gained prominence over the years in the environmental sector in South Africa and has been widely used for measuring programme impact as well as assessing if the programme is moving closer towards achieving the set goals. There are many definitions for these two terms, but for this study I use the AWARD (2017) definition of monitoring: a process that regularly and systematically collects information on all aspects of the programme that enables timely data-driven decisions, accountability and providing the basis for evaluation and learning to take place. It is vital that monitoring data is collected throughout the programme cycle.

Evaluation is defined by Sida's Evaluation Group (2018) as "a systematic and objective approach of determining the merit, worth or value of something" (p. 9). This plays a central role in understanding how and why certain results were or were not achieved, but also in facilitating organisational learning. Like monitoring, evaluations can apply to many aspects of a programme and these range from activities, projects, to strategies, policies as well as the entire organisation; unlike monitoring, the methodology and procedures used when conducting evaluations are relatively demanding and might involve in-depth analysis. However, the purpose of both monitoring and evaluation is to provide programmes with information that can help in assessing whether they are on the right track, assist management in making informed decisions, improve performance as well as achieve planned results.

Cracknell (2000), in his book *Evaluating Development Aid*, wrote about the need for evaluation and the difference between evaluation for accountability versus for learning, which plays a role in how evaluation plans are developed and executed. He explained that evaluation conducted

for accountability has a huge emphasis on the degree to which the programme has failed or succeeded and is usually done as an investigation into the past (end of project life). This type of evaluation is usually based on random samples and the use of findings or feedback is relatively unimportant; thus, it often becomes a ‘tick-box exercise’.

In evaluations with a learning objective, the emphasis is more on improving future performances as well as exploring reasons for programme successes or failures. The projects under evaluation are usually selected for the potential lessons, and the findings generated are usually valued for the improvement of the project, as well as for the planning and appraising of new projects. Feedback to programme implementers is seen as vitally important as it is likely to surface new challenges as well as lessons that need to be taken into consideration (Cracknell, 2000).

Monitoring and evaluation is vitally important for this study as it is usually the home of and the basis for reporting and potentially for learning. Although there are many other channels to facilitate learning in organisations, the process of monitoring and evaluation has its own ways and methods in which learning is recognised and facilitated. Within both the Blyde WfW programme and the K2C SANParks BSP programme, the monitoring and evaluation unit is where all aspects that deal with reporting are housed, from templates to reporting periods. According to the DEA Strategic Plan (2009-2014), learning is deemed to be the core of monitoring and evaluation as a drive from practice to more effective results.

With regard to AWARD, a monitoring and evaluation unit was established to monitor, evaluate and report on the USAID funded RESILIM-O programme. AWARD added ‘learning’ to monitoring, evaluation and reporting, to make monitoring and evaluation explicitly more conducive to learning, *in addition to* being accountable to USAID. This process was referred to as MERL.

Monitoring and evaluation is a good opportunity for organisational learning as it plays a significant role of providing feedback and useful insight that should inform strategic decisions, programme improvement and accounting for any change that has occurred within a programme cycle. Although monitoring and evaluation champions understand the planning, budgeting and reporting cycles of the organisation, everyone in the organisation has a role to play to ensure that the culture of learning thrives (Bhikoo, n.d).

Reporting is defined by the Department of Public Works (2009) as a process that best communicates the required information collected during monitoring/evaluation for optimum use by the programme and different stakeholders. Reports are used to keep track of information, which gives the organisation the ability to utilise the data for proactive decision making as well as organisational excellence. The criteria for reporting include the type, format, content as well as timing.

Reporting plays a significant role within monitoring and evaluation, as a potential platform for learning for individuals as well as the wider organisation. Reporting provides detailed information on programme activities being monitored as well as results of a programme/project that has been evaluated. According to Mitra (2010), reporting is central to monitoring and evaluation because a good reporting system will ensure there is adequate high quality data available to enable monitoring and evaluation, but also to ensure easy information flow and communication of its findings.

Different organisations use reporting for many purposes including providing an update on progress (especially for funded projects) and identifying challenges as well as the programme impact. Reporting provides a vital link between monitoring and evaluation through documentation of monitoring processes and assessments through provision of baseline data to measure future change. Most programmes also rely on inputs tracked over time to determine impact. Reporting assists organisations with conducting further evaluations/ assessment to determine corrections/adjustments through the transformation of data collected into information.

Reports help in communicating the purposes of programme monitoring and evaluation, sharing programme improvements and challenges with the wider community as well as the lessons that have been learnt. Reporting is used for identifying gaps or changes that might be needed within the programme, assessing productivity as well as results, monitoring resource utilisation and documenting programme impacts. It has the potential to increase organisational communication, thus playing a role in organisational learning and if led effectively, reports can give people involved in the project confidence due to regular communication that is clear, timely and enables the programme to progress (ibid.).

Reporting is an interesting and simple way to facilitate learning as all organisations have a reporting responsibility. If done correctly, reporting takes considerable staff time, and it should therefore also have considerable value for both the staff and the organisation (and even the wider sector).

It is important to note that in many organisations, as was the case with AWARD, the reporting function lies with the communications department and is not necessarily the responsibility of the monitoring and evaluation unit; this could be one reason why the potential for reporting to be a learning tool is not always realised. This setting can play a role in how staff view reporting, which is often perceived as a separate activity done outside of the day to day responsibilities. This can be very problematic for an organisation that wants to learn through reporting as it may require a shift in structures which may lead to resistance.

In the next section I look at monitoring and evaluation in the public sector, or government, as a way of understanding the context of the NRM programmes that feature in case studies one and two.

### **2.3.1 Monitoring and Evaluation in the Public Sector**

South Africa is one of several countries with a ministry responsible for monitoring and evaluation, a relatively new term introduced about 20 years ago. Currently, almost all government departments (including DEA, now DEFF) have established their own monitoring and evaluation units, with the support from statutory bodies such as the Public Service Commission and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). Before these structures were in place, the development of monitoring and evaluation in the public sector was very limited.

Goldman et al. (2015) stated that the government started major investments into monitoring and evaluation in the early 2000s, and this was followed by the policy framework on Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWME) issued by the Presidency in 2007. This policy links performance information, official statistics as well as evaluations and coordination of role players to the administrative centre of government, and champions monitoring and evaluation practices in the public sector. Although no formal evaluations were

being conducted nor was there a formal evaluation system, there were emerging evaluation practices in the Public Service Commission as well as the Department of Social Development.

After the 2009 elections, monitoring and evaluation was viewed as a tool for improving government performance and addressing issues that had to do with service delivery (Phillips, Goldman, Gasa, Akhalwaya, & Leon, 2014). The Public Service's monitoring and evaluation mandate is deeply enshrined in the Constitution. According to the Public Service Commission (2012) monitoring and evaluation work has entrenched democracy and increased transparency and accountability of the government and ensured the country was kept informed regarding the government's performance.

In 2010, the DPME was established for the purposes of planning and implementing and promoting monitoring and evaluation in government, monitoring the performance of individuals in all spheres of government as well as service delivery (Phillips et al., 2014; Public Service Commission, 2012, p. 13).

The roles that were created for the DPME included assessing the management performance of government departments, developing evaluation policies, hands-on monitoring of front-line service delivery as well as to strengthen oversight and identify strategies for poorly performing local government institutions.

In 1996, 96 national and provincial government departments were part of an electronic based survey designed to look at the state and the use of monitoring and evaluation systems. This study looked at several aspects ranging from enabling institutional environments, roles and responsibilities, organisational culture as well as the barriers to the effective use of monitoring and evaluation for decision making and accountability. One particular aspect relevant to my research is the integration of reporting into monitoring and evaluation as well as the use of monitoring and evaluation results for learning purposes.

The survey reported 72% full integration of monitoring and evaluation with reporting. However, there was a contradictory discovery that indicated that senior managers do not often discuss reports with juniors, which is a major barrier to the learning mentioned above and might potentially indicate that reports are being compiled for compliance purposes as opposed to being used for assessing and improving practices as well as learning (Umlaw & Chitepo, 2015).

It was also found that information is collected and submitted to transversal departments without being discussed by those that need to act on the information.

These findings may point to barriers or constraints to learning that may also affect the two Natural Resource Management Programmes (Working for Water as well as SANParks-BSP) included in this study. In the next section I discuss NRM programmes as a sub-set of public sectors programmes.

### **2.3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation in Natural Resource Management Programmes**

According to the DEA (2009-2014) strategic plan, at the core of the department's monitoring and evaluation is the drive for learning from current practices for more effective results. This intends to bring about changes and improvements in programmes and is shaped by the Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation strategy.

The Working for Water's monitoring and evaluation system's purpose is to ensure that the information captured guides the further development and adjustments of the programme's interventions and that the outcomes are achieved (DEA, 2008).

WfW's M&E Framework (ibid) features two types of indicators: environmental/ecological as well as socio-economic indicators. These indicators are related to spending, person days (referring to employment of workers), persons trained as well as hectares cleared (of invasive alien vegetation). This indicator framework has been criticised as it does not measure capacity developed, or the impacts of the training as related to employees' day to day work. Alien clearing efficiency is measured by hectares cleared, rather than the degree of indigenous vegetation recovery. Without measuring the impacts of the clearing, managers have no idea whether they are using the optimal approach, or whether they are degrading or improving ecological integrity (Holmes et al., 2003). The indicators are important as they usually determine what is reported by organisations.

The Working for Water programme has had challenges in relation to monitoring and evaluation. There are, however, a few systems in place for supporting M&E including the monitoring and evaluation framework, the framework of generic standards as well as a management information system known as Water Information Management System (WIMS) which is a primary source of information for the M&E programme. This is a project-based

planning system which is based on Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and allows for the tracking of clearing activities and expenditure within projects as well as comparison of activities against targets (ibid.). It can be used for ensuring planning as well as establishing checks and management of the programme.

NRMPs need to adhere to the mandates of the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) of the Department of Public Work (DPW) in terms of monitoring and evaluation. DPW (2009) outlines the role of monitoring and evaluation within the environmental and cultural sector as: to efficiently gather information about performance of the EPWP programmes/projects, to monitor and report implementation progress and evaluate the impact of the programme on the unemployed and their communities. Performance towards the achievement is measured through key performance quantitative indicators. The levels of indicators are input, output, outcome as well as impact.

Although the WfW programme aligns to the Department of Public Works through the EPWP objective, it has its own monitoring and evaluation unit that sits within the Department of Environmental Affairs. Levendal, Le Maitre, Van Wilgen and Ntshotso (2008) noted that the most critical weakness in the Working for Water's M&E approach is the lack of specific, achievable, relevant, time-based objectives which can be used to evaluate progress towards the goals set in the Strategic Plan. The systems for monitoring organisational and individual performance are weak and the focus appears to be on indicators related to spending, clearing and person-days without linking this to impact indicators. This is having significant negative unintended consequences (Holmes et al., 2003).

The contradiction noted is that EPWP also has a monitoring and evaluation function towards the NRM programmes, and that is to align reporting and monitoring processes of all NRMPs to ensure that there is co-ordination, and the framework is implemented in all spheres of government (DPW, 2004-2008). The EPWP M&E framework also stipulates that cross-sectional surveys of contractors and beneficiaries should be conducted at the end of the project cycle (in years one, three and five) to determine the impact of the project on biodiversity, impact of income transfers on beneficiaries and their households, impact of assets created, and relevance and quality of training. Furthermore, a longitudinal survey should also be conducted six months after beneficiaries exit the EPWP and a further six months thereafter to assess whether employment or self-employment occurred after exiting the EPWP, and to determine

longer-term impact of income transfers and training. However, with the current available information, it is not clear whether such surveys are being conducted or have been conducted previously.

### **2.3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation in Non-Governmental Organisations**

Non-governmental organisations vary in specialised roles from conflict resolution, human rights, health, to environmental activism, research as well as education. They are best known for providing or aiding relief for poverty-stricken communities, water and rural development, providing basic services and to a certain extent, supporting government departments.

According to Lewis and Kanji (2009), an NGO is an independent organisation which is neither run by the government nor driven by profit mechanisms and many of these are funded by international donors. Other NGOs (also) have government partners. While NGOs may not have as many guidelines as public sector organisations on how they monitor, evaluate and report on their programmes, they often have partners that may influence their M&E and reporting processes and they are frequently trying to meet multiple needs, as required by their multiple partners.

The NGO sector is where programmatic evaluations first emerged in South Africa and programme activities and outcomes were often evaluated for the purposes of acquiring further funding from donors (Potter & Kruger, 2001). Many NGOs however also put much emphasis on learning, both within the organisation and in their sectors more broadly. AWARD is an example of an organisation that tries to address multiple objectives including learning, accountability to funders and communicating its impacts to assist with further fundraising.

For the RESILIM-O programme, funded by an international donor, AWARD adopted a hybrid approach that not only enables monitoring and evaluation but also allows for reporting and learning (AWARD, 2015). This framework took into consideration the key focal areas of monitoring and evaluation which are inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. **Inputs** are resources and methods employed to conduct an activity; **outputs** are information, results or products produced by undertaking certain activities. **Outcomes** are eventual results after a few activities have been implemented and **impacts** are the overall or long-term effects of interventions (Welgemoed, 2015).



Like many NGO's, AWARD prioritises conducting reflections after meetings, workshops or conducting research in the field. This practice is aimed at helping the organisation reflect on their experiences and actions to engage in a process of continuous learning. One of the key principles shaping AWARD's work is complex systems thinking, in the context of which the organisation has been developing and adopting an approach to implementation, evaluation and learning referred to as Strategic Adaptive Management (SAM). AWARD has developed and adopted this approach with partners like SANParks and others in the NRM sector, and SAM is discussed next as a particular approach to M&E, in which reporting potentially also has a role.

## **2.4 Strategic Adaptive Management**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

Strategic Adaptive Management (SAM) is a concept used within the Natural Resource Management literature as a framework for ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation in complex systems, supported by practical and scientific approaches. This concept was chosen because of its prominence in the NRM literature in South Africa, and its relationship to evaluation and learning. Strategic Adaptive Management has been advocated as a solution to many different issues ranging from conservation, river basin or catchment management and impact assessment. It also provides to some extent an alternative to the monitoring and reporting approach outlined earlier in relation to the public sector.

Strategic Adaptive Management (SAM) is defined by Kingsford and Biggs (2012) as a process that acknowledges fundamental uncertainties of dynamic and unpredictable ecosystems but tests these uncertainties, progressively, while improving management. Roux and Foxcroft (2011) defined SAM as simply a process that allows practitioners to learn by doing, adapting certain behavioural traits and altering programme direction as new information becomes available. This process often begins with the acknowledgement that the context of any programme or initiative that pursues systemic change is difficult to understand initially, and changes frequently (Goeldner, Sparkman & Fowler, 2016). This then allows for trial and error or scientific experiments that in turn produce new learning that is both relevant and valid for that site, and as such the programme staff tend to appreciate new information within their efforts to become more effective in managing natural resources in complex and uncertain conditions.

This process is concerned with knowledge accumulation through feedback loops between ecosystem change and decision makers, in a structured cycle of conceptualisation, through monitoring, reflecting, learning and adapting (Allen & Gunderson, 2011) and it has been proposed as a preferred process for supporting participatory planning and collaboration.

Strategic adaptive management can potentially improve conservation within and around protected areas through highlighting gaps in management as well as guiding actions and strategies to achieve goals, despite the daunting nature of the system's uncertainty. SAM brings together the disciplines of management and decision science so that management interventions are designed to elicit scientifically measurable results that are analysed to inform future management decisions. It acknowledges different factors that influence the condition of an ecosystem that may be outside the manager's jurisdiction and requires a broad holistic and strategic approach (ibid.).

According to Kingsford, Biggs & Pollard (2011), SAM is usually in the form of a recorded design of four steps that form part of the plans for an area or system in question. It starts off by (a) setting the desired future condition, followed by (b) identifying management options, (c) operationalising these and then ending off with (d) evaluation and learning, which lead into the next cycle. The key processes that influence the four generic steps of the SAM framework, and throughout the implementation phase, are feedbacks, iterative planning and evaluation.

Strategic adaptive management offers mental models that not only allow for co-learning, but also offer ongoing opportunities for productive interaction (Kingsford et al., 2011). Due to the learning aspect within SAM, it has in theory been a preferred approach compared to traditional NRM methods, although it remains challenging for some environmental agencies to implement.

In its early days, SAM was pioneered on South African rivers (Kingsford & Biggs, 2012) and although it started off in aquatic systems, it has subsequently been successfully implemented in terrestrial ecosystems as well as species management, exemplified in the Kruger National Park. The successful implementation of Strategic Adaptive Management requires adhering to the set generic steps mentioned above, however it is equally important to note that adaptive management is founded based on complexity, resilience as well as incorporating values ranging from social to technological, economical, ecological as well as political (Keeney, 1992 as cited

by Kingsford et al., 2011). It is very important to ensure that at the beginning of the planning phase, the context is set, and the degree of management intervention is defined. This allows the value setting to proceed with all available information for the system and progresses through a process of outlining the values of the different groups of stakeholders involved, also taking into consideration their shared resources.

The context for SAM as explained (Kingsford et al., 2011; Kingsford & Biggs, 2012) can be set by identifying the following values: social, technological, environmental, and ecological, economic, socio-economic as well as political, in a process therefore referred to as V-STEEP. Social values are those that recognise and are underlined by cultural beliefs that should be acknowledged and considered. This might further require taking into consideration other values necessary to implement SAM like managing for complexity, custodianship as well as sustainability. Technological values may include the availability of complex analytical tools, survey capacity and capabilities for analysis. There may also be some other technological drivers that may be available to ensure effective management.

Environmental and ecological values are those that include a list of habitat locations as well as their size, including rare or threatened species that are of significance in the area. These might also include identification of relative ecological importance of ecosystems and species at local, regional, national and international scales. Environmental and ecological values might also be linked with relevant legislation and international focus on rare and endangered species (ibid.).

Economic values are those values of natural resources from which people can benefit economically. Examples are fishing, tourism or increased livestock production. Political and legal issues include a list of relevant legislative, policies, frameworks and mandates which are relevant to a conservation area. This also includes a range of stakeholders relevant to a particular area (ibid.).

The implementation of strategic adaptive management has been summarised by Roux and Foxcroft (2011) into three stages: adaptive planning, adaptive implementation and adaptive evaluation. This is necessary for vision creation, setting objectives as well as scoping out options for achieving these different objectives, although the other two steps do feed into the planning process from time to time. The planning stage is important for establishing common purpose amongst relevant stakeholders to ensure the development of a collective roadmap for

getting from ‘current’ to the desired state (Roux & Foxcroft, 2011). This is the stage where stakeholders agree on contextual issues e.g. in the V-STEPP process described earlier.

Strategic adaptive implementation entails incorporating options that were selected into the organisation’s operating procedures and routines. This step includes further development of action plans as well as detailed activity lists for the implementation to take place. This is also the stage where monitoring protocols are established and frequency for these is then decided.

Strategic adaptive evaluation and learning is the last and the most important step, mostly because one of the purposes of strategic adaptive management is to learn and adapt over time. It is also very important to ensure that this ‘learning’ takes place throughout the whole process and not only at the end. Roux and Foxcroft (2011, p. 3) outlined that “the learning and evaluation is facilitated by reflecting on whether the monitoring was adequate, effective and feasible; if the intended plan of operations materialised; reflecting on whether the options selected were appropriate and if the consequences predicted were correct and acceptable. The last step in this is reflecting on whether the objectives and visions were met to ensure effective adaptive management to solve complex NRM problems but also to ensure that learning takes place throughout the whole process.

#### **2.4.2 Examples of SAM applied within the Natural Resource Management Sector in South Africa**

As indicated, Strategic Adaptive Management was chosen as one of the concepts to support the study because of its role within the NRM sector in dealing with programme complexities and facilitating co-learning. Of importance for this study is that SAM has been used within SANParks (Kruger National Park), AWARD as well as in the Working for Water Programme.

Strategic Adaptive Management has been an integral part of the Kruger National Park’s plans and decision making. According to Roux and Foxcroft (2011), this framework was adopted in 1995 mainly due to two challenges faced by the Park: socio-ecological complexity as well as the existence of multiple stakeholders with different values, perceptions and expectations due to sharing common natural resources, considering that Kruger National Park is highly influenced by external social issues.

Due to the nature of this stakeholder relationship, management decided to do away with traditional strategies that targeted single problems and adopt one that encourages ongoing learning and negotiation processes in which mutual sense making and adaptation are often priorities (Pahlwostl & Hare, 2004). Roux and Foxcroft (2011) argued that a certain level of uncertainty and diverse stakeholders with frequent conflicting interests often calls for two necessary actions for the effective management of natural resources: to learn and adapt, and to do so *with* relevant stakeholders; Strategic Adaptive Management offers both.

SAM was used in the Kruger National Park to assess its effectiveness for ensuring sustainable use of natural resources as well as providing resource users with socio-economic benefits (Scheepers, Swemmer & Vermeulen, 2011). Although there are many examples of how this framework was applied within the Park, I will use one that looked at the harvesting approach of the Pepper-Bark (*Warburgia salutaris*) tree (ibid). This is a tree with medicinal significance and is widely known for treating conditions ranging from colds, influenza, abdominal pain, stomach ulcers to cancer; this has created a high demand which led to overharvesting. Due to this, the tree cannot be easily found within surrounding communities, and its largest remaining population is in Kruger National Park.

This information put a high risk on the Park's mandate regarding biodiversity protection. Illegal harvesting is not allowed but denying communities to access this useful resource might contribute to negative relations which might ultimately negatively impact on the Park's objectives. To solve this problem, an active management and monitoring strategy was created to ensure long-term survival of the species. This strategy combined biophysical and social research, outreach and awareness as well as conservation and protection. An awareness education programme focused on rare and invasive species was also offered to the wider community.

This ultimately proved to be very successful: communities have different perceptions regarding the Pepper-Bark tree and they are now more open to using the leaves, as opposed to cutting down the whole tree. This change in harvesting method fostered better bark recovery (Scheepers et al., 2011).

With reference to AWARD's RESILIM-O programme (Case Study 3), Strategic Adaptive Management and associated methods have been widely used in different projects within the

programme. This was because the programme was designed with a systems orientation that “assumes that environment and development challenges such as social and ecological resilience in the face of climate change are issues of a systemic nature” (AWARD, 2017, p. 4). The Strategic Adaptive Management process, referred to as V-STEPP, was used in the first phase of the RESILIM-O programme to set the context for the different projects that were implemented under it .

Most of these activities aimed to understand how the state of natural resources was changing within the Olifants catchment, and as required by the generic steps, this was done collectively with stakeholders. Frame, Clifford-Holmes, Winter and Davies (2018) conducted research on how Strategic Adaptive Management was being applied within the water services sector and the Municipal Support Initiative (MSI) which is one of the projects in the RESILIM-O programme. In this latter project, SAM was applied as a professional learning process to support municipal practitioners to improve their preparedness and responsivity to deal with national resource degradation and climate change vulnerability (ibid.).

In conclusion, SAM is designed to facilitate action with purpose and learning while engaging and empowering communities. It is a concept central to NRM initiatives in complex systems, and will be used, along with the other organisational learning concepts discussed earlier in this chapter, to guide the analysis of the data on reporting and learning gathered in this study. How data was generated is explained in the next chapter on research methodology.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### 3.1 Overview of the Study Design and Programme Selection

This chapter details the research design, the research processes as well as the steps taken to collect data. I also deal with some of the most important ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, and transparency. The Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) framework for analysis and analytic processes are also described. Other issues I deal with are sampling or programme and participant selection, the need for flexibility and design changes made, as well as validity. Research questions are included to remind the reader of what the study investigated.

One of the first things I learnt in this study, is that the intended research participants spend most of their time either busy in the office or out in the field, often having to deal with unforeseen issues, and as a result seem to have very little time to contribute to research. This had several implications for the study, including changes to the original study design. I was required to be flexible in terms of how interviews were set up and where, as well as the data collection process. Appointments often had to be cancelled or rescheduled. I also had to abandon my initial plans to engage members of NRM organisations in a CHAT informed expansive learning process to strengthen the way in which reporting can support learning in these contexts. This also led to me changing the initial case studies.

The initial focus of the study was to be only on the government funded DEA NRM programmes. The intention was to engage them in an expansive learning process around reporting and learning, following the surfacing of possible contradictions in their reporting system, through a CHAT analysis of the system. Due to the unavailability of any programme with staff who had the time to engage in an extended co-engaged research process, I then broadened the cases to three different organisations (see Table 3.1) and cut the expansive learning phase of the intended study. As introduced in Chapter 1, my final sample of three cases consisted of DEA's **Working for Water Programme** with a focus on the Upper Blyde catchment, **SANParks Biodiversity Social Programmes implemented by K2C**, the Kruger to Canyons organization (**K2C SANParks BSP**) as well as AWARD's **Resilience in the Limpopo Basin – Olifants Catchment Programme (RESILIM-O)**. The three different programmes were selected due to their scope of work, which is within the NRM sector, the

ability of the implementing organisations to give some time to provide information for the study, and their proximity to Hoedspruit, where I was based.

Table 3.1: Selected case studies

<b>Chosen Programme</b>	<b>Implementing Organisation</b>	<b>Funder</b>
Working for Water with a focus on the Upper Blyde	Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA)	DEA
Resilience in the Limpopo Basin-Olifants Catchment (RESILIM-O)	The Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD)	The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
K2C SANParks Biodiversity Social Projects (BSP)	Kruger to Canyons (K2C) and SANParks	DEA

### **3.2 Orientation and Methodology**

The study is a descriptive and interpretive case study that focuses on understanding how reporting has enabled or constrained learning within each programme. Investigating such a topic requires an in-depth description and analysis of reporting processes and thus calls for a research design that will allow such in-depth analysis. It is for this reason that I adopted a case study approach using descriptive and interpretive methodologies.

#### **3.2.1 Research questions**

- a) What are the current reporting practices?
- b) To what extent do the current reporting practices support learning?
  - Sub-question: What other learning opportunities are there and in what ways do they support learning?
- c) What are the underlying factors that promote or constrain reporting for learning?



### **3.3 Methodological Approach**

The purpose of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon as well as its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). This type of approach is focused on the ‘what’ as opposed to the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ something has happened. It should provide accurate and valid representation of factors that are relevant to the study’s research questions and will be used in this research to give a comprehensive detailed description of the current reporting practice within the organisation mostly derived from interview data as well as a review of programme documents.

The interpretive approach is shaped by human experiences and social contexts. This type of approach considers the researchers as part of phenomenon under study and as such their roles should be clearly outlined. Interpretive research is very useful in exploring reasons behind certain complex social processes as well as uncovering relevant research questions or issues for follow-up research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002,). This approach required me to consider the relation between me as the researcher and the organisations under study. It allowed me to use interpretation to make sense of the data collected and presented to me for the purposes of answering my research questions.

Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 3) explained that a case study is “an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context, using a variety of data sources”. They further explained that this is to ensure that the issue is explored using a variety of lenses to allow for its multiple facets to be revealed and understood. “Case studies are set in temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 253). They have been widely used as a way of conducting research to impact upon practice, and to refine the ways in which the practice is theorised.

The aim of this study (based on three case studies) was to put together an inquiry in which the researcher collected and interpreted information which can at a later stage be used by the NRM practitioners to reflect upon certain aspects of their reporting related practices, in their organisational contexts. In this regard, the case study had exploratory, interpretive and explanatory intentions. The explanatory part was addressed through two analytical lenses, that of the learning loops as well as the CHAT framework described in Chapter Two.

### **3.4 Research Sites and Participant Selection**

This research was conducted within NRM organisations based in Hoedspruit and Nelspruit in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces respectively of South Africa. The sampling (choice of case studies) was both purposive and convenience. It was purposive because the three organisations have a natural resource management focus. It was convenience sampling, based on proximity to the researcher, which kept research expenses down. Furthermore, my employer at the time (AWARD) and I had a working relationship with the organisations who were implementing the other programmes. This was important as it meant I could approach them for interviews about a potentially sensitive topic (their reporting practices).

Working for Water was also selected because it is one of the biggest NRMPs. Purposive sampling was used to select individual interviewees. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) defined purposive sampling as that which allows the researcher to select participants to be included in the study based on their judgment or possession of a certain character, thus I selected participants for interviews, based on their involvement in reporting within the different institutions.

As explained above, I selected the three different organisations due to their NRM setting or context as well as proximity to where I was. Then I needed to select programmes for the research, since some organisations had more than one NRM programme, as well as identify the most relevant participants to interview. In the case of AWARD and DEA-NRM, it was quite simple because both these organisations have one large programme whereas with SANParks, one programme of many had to be selected.

### **3.5 Data Generation Techniques and Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.5.1 Introduction**

This research made use of both primary and secondary data sources. Hox and Boeije (2005) defined primary data as that which is collected for a specific purpose, using the right procedures that fit the purpose of the research at hand, while secondary data is that which has been produced by others, and can be used for describing contemporary and historical attributes, re-analysis, teaching and learning as well as methodological advancement. Primary data was acquired through key-informant interviews and participant observations in workshops and meetings. Secondary data involved the use of organisational reports and other documents that had been compiled by other people but were related to the research.

### 3.5.2 Key-informant interviews

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) described interviews as a ‘flexible tools’ for data collection. According to Yamagata-Lynch (2010), interviews enable the researcher to identify information about the object of the study and participants’ perspectives about the object. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argued that interviews allow participants to express their understandings “of the world in which they live in, to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (p. 349), as well as assisting the researcher to get direct responses about issues at hand. Interviews were conducted with the programme officials, managers and other relevant parties within the three programmes. The participants were carefully selected considering their involvement at different levels in the organisations’ reporting systems.

Data for the three organisations was collected in different settings. With Working for Water, interviews were conducted at the DEA regional offices in Nelspruit and these took place with the GIS technician, the project coordinator, the area manager as well as the regional programme leader. Data for the SANParks BSP was collected at the Kruger to Canyons offices in Hoedspruit with project beneficiaries, the contractor, the project managers as well as the cluster managers, and lastly, data for AWARD was collected in their Hoedspruit offices on three different occasions. These interviews involved one of the two programme directors, the M&E manager, one project manager and one project implementer. In total I interviewed 17 individuals. The dates and times of the interviews depended on the availability of research participants. For a copy of the interview schedule, please refer to Appendix 0.

### 3.5.3 Participant observations

Participant observation is another technique that was used to collect data within this study. De Vos (2005) defined this as a procedure that studies the natural experiences of the participants within a community or situation. This method was carefully selected considering the learning events within the programmes and because it allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants’ feelings, impressions and experience in relation to the work environment. I conducted observations in learning spaces and was able to do this with two of the programmes in the study.

My first set of observation was done with the AWARD on 25 April 2018. This was a **Shared Learning event** for which the purpose was to pause and reflect on programme lessons learnt as well as to reflect on the role that monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning plays in the

process of learning in the organisation, also in the preparation of reports, knowledge sharing as well as guiding future processes.

The second observation was done with the Working for Water team on 8-10 May. The gathering was a Management, Research and Planning (MAREP) workshop which was facilitated by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) for the purposes of enabling information sharing and learning amongst researchers, planners and managers. The purpose of this observation activity for me was to introduce myself to the wider NRM community (prior to setting up interviews), as well as to gain an understanding into the MAREP workshop which is a learning-oriented space within the DEA- NRM community (discussed in Chapter Four).

Notes were taken during the two observation activities and these helped me in contextually understanding the NRM community, particularly as I had never interacted with them before. I was able to contextualise how the MAREP workshops were facilitated and how everyone participated. Being part of this space allowed me to interact with different participants in informal spaces such as tea and lunch tables.

#### **3.5.4 Document analysis**

Document analysis was necessary to understand the type of reporting being done, how this had shifted from reporting done in the past (if it had), the reporting tools (such as templates) in place, how they were designed, and the extent to which they seemed to enable learning. Document analysis as defined by Bowen (2009, p.1) “is a systemic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents”. These documents can either be printed or electronic. This method requires documents to be examined, and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Documentary sources also assist the researcher with information or data that has been produced in the past about a programme, thus providing historical traces of information, perspectives and any other information that is not accessible in the present (Cohen & Manion, 2002).

For the purposes of this study, I collected several documents which assisted me in answering all the research questions, although not all documents received were useful. I applied the three loops of the learning framework to identify the type of learning that would potentially be supported through these reports, reporting tools and guidelines. I gave a guide to each participant to assist them in selecting the documents they thought were relevant. These included

field reports, monthly, quarterly and annual reports as well as the organisation's reporting guidelines. The analysis included consideration of reporting periods and timelines, the content (including structure, purpose, usability) as well as constraints and enablers to learning.

## **3.6 Data Analysis**

### **3.6.1 Qualitative content analysis**

This is a method that is commonly used for analysing qualitative data and is preferred for the analysis of verbal or written text (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This type of text data might be from different sources ranging from interviews, survey questions, observations, focus groups as well as print media (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundsen, 2002). Qualitative content analysis is associated with providing knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon under study, which is why it was preferred because it assisted the researcher to understand the current reporting practices as well as to identify themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

There are many approaches to qualitative content analysis which range from conventional to directed and summative; conventional analysis was adopted for this study. The purpose of conventional content analysis is to describe a phenomenon, especially in cases where literature is limited (Kondracki et al., 2002) and in this case, it is reporting for learning. This type of analysis often starts with reading all research data several times to achieve a deeper understanding (Tesch, 1990) and might include highlighting texts as a way of deriving codes then making notes and coming up with interpretations and thoughts on the initial analysis. This was applied to all three research questions and the analysis process is detailed below.

### **3.6.2 Analysis process**

The first analytical phase involved answering the research question aimed at understanding the current reporting practices in the three different programmes. This analysis involved mapping out the reporting system from the interview data and document analysis. This was attained by reading through all the interview transcripts for the purposes of identifying themes that were relevant for answering questions. I looked at the reporting period and timeline, people involved, the purpose of the reporting, templates, the content that would include the structure, as well as what is being reported. Mapping these aspects of the reporting process provided a good basis, according to my understanding and my experience as a monitoring and evaluation officer having managed a reporting process, to identify instances of learning, for understanding the

process as well as being able to identify constraints and enablers. The mapping process was presented in the form of a narrative and a table for the three case studies in Section 4.1.

The second analytical phase involved exploring and understanding the extent to which the current reporting system supports learning. The first step in this phase involved outlining any learning that might have been mentioned during the interviews as well as within the documents. The next step involved the use of theoretical lenses and in this case, the theory of single, double and triple loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Georges & Van Witteloostuijn, 1999) in identifying learning taking place, as well as the type of learning taking place.

The third phase of the analysis addressed the last research question, which sought to outline the underlying factors that either promoted or constrained reporting for learning. Some of these will be mentioned in the interview data, which will be easy to extract, but I also applied the learning theory lens mentioned above, as well as the CHAT lens (both of which have been outlined in some detail in Chapter Two). The ‘three loops’ of learning theory enabled me to outline factors that promote or constrain learning by looking at what is defined as single, double and triple loop learning, as well as understanding how it happens in the programmes being studied. CHAT refers to the cultural-historical activity system theory which was developed out of Vygotsky’s concept of mediated action, and further developed by Engeström (1987) by introducing the activity system analysis which was applied in this study.

The CHAT framework (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) assisted me in identifying institutional factors in the programme systems that are in place by referring to the tools (for reporting), the rules (for reporting), the community (involved or potentially involved in reporting), the subjects (of reporting), the division of labour (who does what in the reporting system) as well as the object. The object of the activity system in this case is programme reporting, with a special focus on reporting for learning. This analysis helped me to identify underlying factors that may either promote or constrain reporting for learning. I applied it in all three case studies, and in relation to all three forms of learning considered.

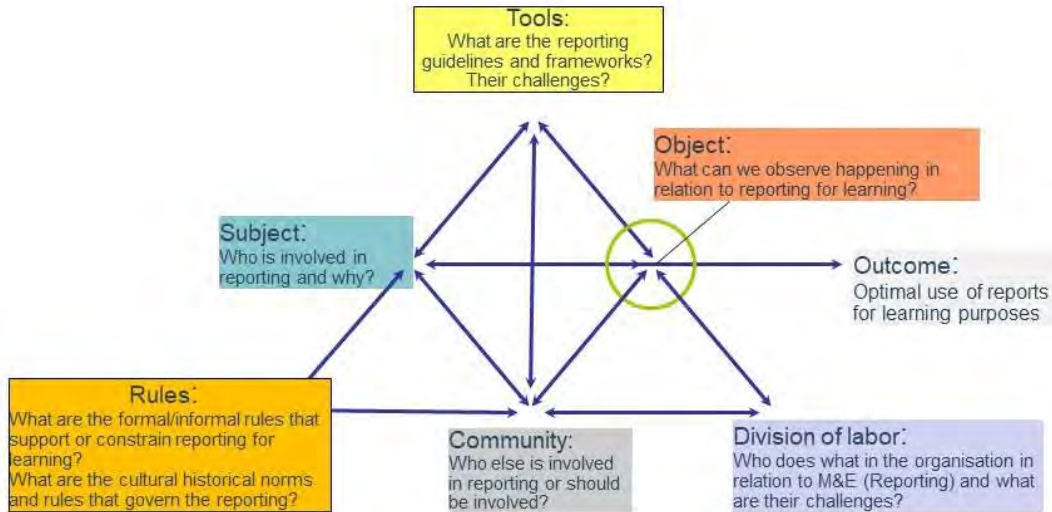


Figure 3.1: CHAT framework to identify system factors that promote or constrain reporting for learning (Source: Engstrom, 1987)

1. **Tools** - What are the reporting guidelines and frameworks? Their challenges?
2. **Object** - What can we observe that is happening in relation to reporting for learning?
3. **Subject** – Who is involved in reporting and why?
4. **Rules** - What are the formal/informal rules that support or constrain reporting for learning? What are the cultural historical norms that govern reporting?
5. **Community** - Who else is involved reporting or should be involved?
6. **Division of labour**- Who does what in the organisation in relation to M&E and what are their challenges?
7. **Outcome** – Optimal use of reports for learning purposes (Recommendations)

## 3.7 Ethics

### 3.7.1 Introduction and overview

I have ensured that the study has followed all the required ethical and legal procedures to conduct the research according to the Rhodes University’s ethical requirements. Firstly, I ensured that requests for participation were sent to the different organisations for their permission to be included within the study. This included a letter explaining what the study aimed to do, but also assuring participants that any information would be well taken care of and treated as confidential, should they require this.

The ethical considerations of this study centred around the contents in the organisational reports. Organisations may wish to keep this confidential, as well as the nature of the reporting process itself. The experiences of individuals within the organisations may compromise them,

if made public. See the table below for all ethical considerations for documents as well as research participants.

Table 3.2: Ethical considerations

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Ethical considerations</b>
DEA Working for Water Upper Blyde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One research participant asked to remain anonymous and the rest gave permission for me to use their full names and positions. However, because even the anonymous codes could be worked out by those who know the organisations, I refrained from giving detail such as names of colleagues</li> <li>- All research participants gave me permission to record interviews.</li> <li>- Most of the documents that I worked with from this team were already in the public domain (can be found on the internet), except for the key performance indicator report, the learning strategy as well as the MAREP reports which were only shared with the supervisor.</li> </ul>
K2C SANParks BSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All research participants gave permission for their interviews to be recorded.</li> <li>- Only one participant asked to remain anonymous.</li> <li>- Documents consulted were all confidential and were treated as such.</li> </ul>
AWARD RESILIM-O Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All research participants gave permission for the interview to be recorded as well as the use of their full names in the research.</li> <li>- Documents analysed were both public and private and having worked with the organisation I was fully aware of which documents were not for public consumption.</li> </ul>

### 3.7.2 Respect and dignity

The researcher ensured that this ethic was met by protecting the dignity of the participants, protecting their privacy and confidentially but also by letting them choose to participate or not



after being informed of the researcher's intentions. Informed consent requires competence on the part of the research participant to decide, voluntarism, full information and comprehension (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

- The participants were given accurate and truthful information regarding the study as well as the intentions of the researcher. All participants were selected with the assistance of senior management within the programme so as not to create problems in terms of participation.
- Participants were free to decide if they wanted to be part of the study or not, although senior management had granted me approval to interview these people.
- Junior staff were afforded the opportunity to engage with the researcher separately from the senior staff members and confidentiality was guaranteed for all the information they shared. This meant that transcripts were not shared with anyone other than my supervisor, who respected this confidentiality. Where interviewees are quoted, I use codes so that they could not be identified. I refer to their positions when the comment given is more general.

### **3.7.3 Transparency and honesty**

To gain access and ensure transparency, the researcher was introduced to all participants through a senior colleague who has been working with the participants for over three years. I also ensured that I:

- submitted my research proposal to all participants as well as the interview questions, before the interviews were conducted.
- informed participants how the information they provided would be utilised.
- did not falsify the data and shared interview transcripts with the interviewees for member checking. Unfortunately, none of the research participants came back to me regarding their transcripts.

### **3.7.4 Accountability and responsibility**

I was granted permission by the Director of AWARD to conduct the research as part of my day to day work. To ensure accountability and responsibility, I:

- ensured that the research was conducted rigorously, by making use of appropriate methods.
- explained all procedures to all participants.

- made sure to safeguard all in-house or confidential documents that were sent to me for review and did not share them with anyone other than my supervisor, who subscribed to the same need for confidentiality.
- will ensure that the findings of the research will only be used for the study and not to expose or embarrass participants or organisations in any way.

## **3.8 Validity Measures**

### **3.8.1 Introduction to validity**

According to Joppe (2000), as cited in Golafshani (2003, p.1), “Reliability is the extent to which results are consistent every time, while validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to do or how truthful the results of the research are”. Reliability in this study will refer to how the accuracy of participants’ descriptions of reporting processes. Validity was addressed through attention to credibility of data sources (such as documents selected), neutrality (of myself as researcher), applicability and transferability of the insights gained in these institutional contexts, to other NRMP contexts (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). For the purposes of this research, the researcher will address credibility of the study through triangulation, prolonged engagement and member checking, as discussed below

### **3.8.2 Triangulation**

Triangulation is defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) as “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (p. 141). This involved comparing multiple sources of data for the identification of patterns and trends. I did this through using semi-structured key-informant interviews, document analysis and observations.

### **3.8.3 Prolonged engagement**

Prolonged engagement is the act of spending more time with participants in their physical setting, for the purposes of gaining full understanding of the phenomena being investigated (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, as cited in Houghton, Casey, Shaw and Murphy, 2013). The researcher was to spend time within the respective institutions to understand the reporting practice, and this would have been possible with the CHAT workshops that unfortunately fell through. However, this was done with AWARD as I was working there at the time of the study.

### **3.8.3 Member checking**

This involved formally sharing interview transcripts with the relevant interviewees and seeking clarity about information found in the reports (documents) with the relevant participants. The purpose of presenting this data, was to offer participants an opportunity to correct factual errors, to add any further information and to check for adequacy of the analysis (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Affording participants an opportunity to review the final draft research thesis before submission to the University would have been very useful but for the purposes of confidentiality and to avoid unnecessary comparison amongst the three programmes, this did not take place.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has considered all issues relating to the research methodology as well as the research methods applied in this study. I explained how the data analysis was approached and in the next chapter I present the findings as well as my interpretations of the findings.

# CHAPTER 4: Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the three case studies and initiates some discussion. Findings are my interpretations of the data, the data being the interview transcripts, meeting notes and content of documents collected as listed in Chapter Three. This ‘raw data’ is not included in the study but was shared with my supervisor. To maintain the flow of the presentation of each ‘case’ of reporting, and because there was often more than one data source for a finding, I have not coded each finding back to its source. Only one interviewee asked to remain anonymous, but I used codes for all the sources of direct quotations.

The findings are presented in relation to each of the research questions in turn. For each question, the findings will be presented per case, in the following order:

Question 1: Case 1, Case 2, Case 3 findings

Question 2: Case 1, Case 2, Case 3 findings

Question 3: Case 1, Case 2, Case 3 findings.

## 4.2 Question 1: What are the current reporting processes?

Data for this question was generated through document analysis and semi-structured key-informant interviews, which were transcribed and then, through qualitative content analysis, analysed to identify the various aspects of reporting processes including how the data was collected, the responsible parties and their roles. I have summarised this data in table form, as well as presented a descriptive narrative to give a picture of reporting in each programme included in the study.

### 4.2.1 Case study 1 – DEA WfW Upper Blyde

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#### 4.2.1.1 Introduction

The WfW reporting process as followed in this case, starts at the project beneficiaries’ level and goes all the way up to the national treasury and the president’s office. There are many different parties involved in reporting, and the reporting process takes the form of a chain that involves: project beneficiaries, contractors, project coordinators, GIS technicians, data managers, area managers and regional programme leaders; in addition there are related roles in the Extended Public Works Programme, as well as the DEA (see Table 4.1). At the core of

the WfW reporting is the need to indicate the programme's achievements in terms of hectares cleared as well as land restored, and the number of people employed.

#### ***4.2.1.2 Levels of reporting in the WfW reporting chain***

**Project beneficiaries** are usually a group of between 10 to 12 males and females that are selected to work on an alien clearing project and therefore benefit from income and training. Their roles vary from health and safety representatives, to field workers as well as peer educators. The emphasis of the programme was on recruiting more women, youth as well as the disabled. The programme indicated that there must be 60% women employed, 20% youth between the ages of 18 to 35, 20% disabled and only one person per household must be employed (<https://www.environment.gov.za/projectsprogrammes/wfw>).

A demographic profile for each team needed to be recorded. Therefore, besides their day to day responsibilities in the project itself, all project beneficiaries were responsible for submitting their identity documents as well as declaration forms indicating their health and disability status to the contractor. These declaration forms had to be signed and attached to a doctor's letter in cases of disability or health conditions. That is, they must provide evidence of their health or disability status, and their identity.

Health and safety representatives are responsible for reporting on any health and safety issues that might have occurred at the project site during the project; this includes the types of incidents, as well as any potential risks identified that might pose as danger to the workers. This was all recorded on timesheets, to indicate how many days a person had worked within a week, as well as the hours worked. All these reports are submitted to the contractor who is the link person between the beneficiaries and the implementers, in this case WfW.

A **contractor** is a single person responsible for the execution of the project, for example clearing a certain portion of land/ hectares as stipulated by the clearing contract, through the work of the programme beneficiaries mentioned above. Contractors are only allowed to have one contracting entity within the programme. They have a contract of employment with the workers/beneficiaries. The contractor reports against indicators as per a business plan with DEA, and this includes the number of hectares cleared and land restored as well as employment figures and their first line of reporting is to the project coordinators. On a weekly basis, contractors must submit copies of identity documents of all the workers on their project,

together with time sheets and any declaration forms, to project coordinators. Time sheets should include person days, the name of the worker, gender, identity numbers as well as the disability status, with the declaration forms and accompanying doctor's note in cases of disability or health conditions.

Once a month, contractors are responsible for reporting on operational issues and this includes the number of hectares of land cleared, as well as of land restored. Although this data is recorded on weekly basis, it is reported to the office (WfW) monthly. This reporting includes the volumes and types of herbicides used. There are also other legislative compliance issues related to health and safety. What is reported here is the number of incidents that have occurred, the extent and nature of the incident, as well as measures put in place to prevent future incidents. Contractors are also responsible for financial reporting details on expenditure against the work that has been done, wages and other project expenditures. This information is submitted in the form of claims as well as invoices.

Once a month or once every second month, contractors must submit a contract progress summary report. This is not a DEA requirement but an additional report that was initiated by the WfW team in Nelspruit to enable the contractors as well as the project coordinators to better monitor the progress. This report contains information on hectares cleared, employment of beneficiaries, as well as finances, and it serves as evidence for work that has been done. All claims that are submitted to the team by the contractors should include a copy of the contract progress summary report. This report must be verified by the project coordinator or area manager before it is signed off. Contractors are also expected to keep a detailed register of complaints which needs to be brought to the attention of authorities.

Above the contractor level, there is a **project coordinator**. The project coordinator's responsibilities are to manage the number of contracts that have been awarded which includes reporting the work done, as well as conducting inspections. One project coordinator can have as many as eight contracts that he or she manages. Their first reporting responsibility is to collate and verify information that has been submitted by the contractors. These include the timesheets, invoices, as well as the contract progress summary report. They must conduct interim inspections of land cleared against each contract to measure the extent of completion of the contract and that is done through a hand-held GPS (Global Positioning System) and inspection template. When all contracts have been inspected, the information is collated, together with the information submitted through the contract progress summary report into a

Key Performance Indicator (KPI) report. Project coordinators are also responsible for conducting final inspections when a project or contract comes to an end.

The KPI report is a weekly and monthly requirement but due to time certain constraints as well as many other responsibilities, project coordinators are sometimes unable to do this on a weekly basis. This report is intended to be submitted to the area manager together with other reports from the GIS and data management section that gives details on hectares and person days. The contents of the KPI report are discussed at the performance review meetings which are held once every month. Issues dealt with are related to hectares cleared or not cleared, employment figures, health and safety incidents, corrective measures for non-compliance etc.

The KPI review meetings are attended by project coordinators and their area managers. There is also another quarterly KPI review meeting which is attended by the regional programme leader as well. This meeting goes beyond reporting the figures only, as issues emanating from stakeholder engagements and project advisory committees are also discussed, and this can include challenges that the project is facing as well as recommendations. The template for the KPI reporting covers both green and socio-economic issues. Besides operational issues, project coordinators are expected to track and report on their financial expenditure.

**Area managers** receive reports with information from the project coordinators which they compile into a KPI report for the whole area, which gets presented or submitted to the regional programme leader. At this level, the information gets a lot of attention in terms of checking finer details, verifications and corrections where necessary. These reports are sent back and forth between the area manager and the regional programme leader until it is ready to be submitted as a final report. Part of that information is submitted to the data management section that sits within the regional office, for specific indicators around hectares cleared, land restored, and the number of small, micro and medium enterprises supported. The final report is sent to the monitoring and evaluation division in DEA based on a template, with an attachment that includes evidence for the hectares cleared based on verifications or inspections that were done.

The **regional programme leader (RPL)** is the contact person between DEA and the team in the regional WfW office in Nelspruit. If there are any issues associated with the reports submitted, the RPL receives the report back from DEA for corrections and inputs or to provide additional evidence. Area managers are also responsible for submitting project progress reports, which were originally compiled by regional leaders. This was a decision taken together

with head office that area managers should be responsible for this since they are on the ground and the RPL will simply verify, sign off and submit to the M&E unit in DEA National. The RPL also ensures that employment information is sent to the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) which is another entity within the reporting chain.

Employment information is extracted from the WIMS and a labour analysis report is drawn from the system, which reports employment for each individual project. The labour analysis report includes the number of people, who they are, their job categories as well as how many days they have worked, and it is the responsibility of the **GIS and data management section** that sits within the Working for Water team in Nelspruit. This report is sent from the data management section to the RPL who forwards it to EPWP.

Evidence for the system generated labour analysis report is in the form of scans of identity documents, employment contracts, pay slips or pay sheets relating the wages the beneficiaries and contractors are supposed to earn. Based on the information submitted, the **EPWP** from time to time conducts a data quality audit. Certain participants are selected for the audit and evidence needs to be provided for the selected participants. The regional leader is responsible for this audit with assistance from the area managers as well as project coordinators. Bi-annually, the regional leader is responsible for reporting on how the region is doing in terms of achieving the targets sets. This includes the collation of the entire province’s performance at a cluster level and at a chief directorate level. There is also financial reporting that must be done at a cluster level using the basic government accounting system.

The above descriptive narrative on the reporting process is summarised in the table below (Table 4.1).

*Table 4.1: Summary of the WfW reporting process (Case 1)*

<b>Level of reporting</b>	<b>Type of reporting</b>	<b>Who else</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Content/ Purpose</b>
	ID copies	Contractor	Once when a contract is signed	Submitted as proof of employment and used for statistics on the number of men, women and youth employed.  Submitted together with the timesheet for person days.



Beneficiaries	Declaration forms	Contractor	Monthly	A declaration of any form of disability a beneficiary might have, and in cases of disability, doctor's note must be attached.
	Health and safety report	Contractor	Monthly	Includes the types of incidents, potential risk identified, number of people injured as well as corrective measures taken.
Contractors	ID Copies of all beneficiaries	Project coordinator (PC)	Weekly	Submitted with timesheets to indicate person days (employed), number of people employed as well as the gender breakdown.
	Declaration forms	PC	Monthly	As above
	Timesheets	PC	Weekly	Indicate person days, name of worker, gender, identity numbers and disability status.
	Contract progress summary reports	PC	Monthly or every second month	Contains information on hectares cleared and land restored, employment as well as finance. It serves as evidence for the work that has been done.
	Financial reports	PC	Monthly	Reports on expenditure against work that has been done, wages and other project expenditures. Submitted in the form of claims and invoices.
	Operational report	PC	Monthly	Reports on hectares cleared and land restored; types and volumes of herbicides used; health and safety matters like number of incidents, nature of the incident and measures put in place to prevent future incidents.
	Project coordinator	KPI reports	Area manager	Weekly and monthly
ID Copies		GIS and data management section	Weekly	Submitted with timesheets and contract progress report for the section to capture person days and hectares cleared.
KPI review meetings		Area manager	Monthly	Progress is discussed and reviewed, this includes challenges experienced in the field, hectares, health and safety, employment figures, challenges and suggestions emanating from stakeholder engagements as well as project advisory committees.

	Interim inspection reports	Area manager	As per work reported as complete.	Verifications by project coordinators against the work done by contractors and beneficiaries. For every work done reported, PCs must do interim inspections as well as a final inspection when the contract comes to end.
Area manager	Area KPI Report	RPL + PCs	Monthly	Area managers compile KPI reports as per information submitted by the project coordinators. Details contract progress, person days, employment figures, health and safety as well as corrective measures for non-compliance
	Monthly KPI meetings	Project coordinators and GIS section for labour analysis data	Monthly	Progress is discussed and reviewed, this includes challenges experienced in the field, hectares, health and safety, employment figures, stakeholder engagement as well as project advisory committees.
	Quarterly KPI meetings	RPL	Quarterly	As above, but dealt with in finer details with the RPL for verification and corrections then submitted to DEA National.
	Project progress reports	RPL and DEA M&E	Monthly	Details contract progress, person days, employment figures, health and safety as well as corrective measures for non-compliance for the whole area
GIS and data management section	Labour analysis report	Regional programme leader	Monthly	The labour analysis report is a requirement for EPWP as it indicates the number of people trained, their job categories, who they are as well as their daily rate.
	Person days and hectares cleared	Project coordinators and area managers	Monthly and quarterly	The hectares and person days are included in the KPI report to show progress or achievements against the set targets.
Regional programme leader	Cluster progress	DEA National	Bi-annual	Details how the region is doing in terms of achieving targets
EPWP	Data quality audits	RPL, AMs and PCs	From time to time	Verification of employment figures
Department of Environmental Affairs	Compliance inspections	RPL, AMs and PCs	From time to time	Verifications done against compliance issues
	Monitoring and Evaluation	RPL and the M&E unit in head office.	Monthly	The monitoring and evaluation of the programme is done in Pretoria and has a strong emphasis on indicators.

## 4.2.2 Case study 2 – K2C-SANParks Biodiversity Social Projects

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### 4.2.2.1 Introduction

The K2C SANParks BSP reporting, like the Blyde WfW reporting, starts at the project beneficiary level, and goes all the way to DEA, although there are certain additional dynamics. The BSP is a programme run by the South African National Parks, implemented by Kruger to Canyons (K2C), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) funded through DEA. So, the reporting system additionally covers those two entities, SANParks and K2C, which are absent within the Blyde WfW reporting system. BSP adopts a similar reporting and contracting approach, influenced by DEA, as the (government) funder. The reporting chain includes project beneficiaries, contractors, project managers, data capturers, cluster managers, the Kruger to Canyons organisation, SANParks, DEA, as well as external evaluation specialists from time to time.

At the core of the BSP reporting is again the need to indicate the programme's achievements in terms of the hectares cleared, the number of people employed as well as the number of SMMEs supported through the programme. This links to its main objectives which are poverty relief, nature conservation and community upliftment, as it aims to empower people through nature conservation by encouraging entrepreneurship (<http://www.kruger2canyons.org/bsp.html>).

### 4.2.2.2 Levels of reporting in the K2C-SANParks BSP

**Project beneficiaries**, like in the Blyde WfW project, are a team of between 10 to 12 males and females who are selected to be part of the project. Their roles vary from health and safety representatives, to field workers, supervisors, first aiders as well as peer educators. They each have different reporting requirements, according to their responsibilities.

The health and safety representatives are responsible for health and safety reports done daily when they enter the site. This includes checking any hazards on site before the whole team arrives, vehicle inspections, protective clothing and the first aid kit (if there is a shortage this needs to be reported to the contractor for replacement). Their reports also detail injuries on site as well as corrective measures to be taken. This is followed by a 'toolbox talk' (#S01, 2019) with the other beneficiaries to address the risk, causes of injuries, and corrective measures to prevent further injuries. The toolbox talks are referred to as 'topics of the day' and take place

daily with all the team members. First aiders are responsible for toolbox talks regarding the possible dangers on site and how they can assist as they are equipped with level one and two first aid training.

There are also peer educators' meetings that address diseases like HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, malaria, tuberculosis, issues like domestic violence and conflicts amongst family members or team members. Issues on water, hygiene and sanitation are also addressed during the toolbox talk.

Project beneficiaries are required to sign a register every day on site and for every toolbox talk they attend, that includes their names, identity numbers, date as well as the time.

All these site level reports are submitted to the **contractor** who must pass them onto the project managers. Contractors are responsible for a monthly health and safety report as well as communicating the challenges experienced in the field. There is also a bookkeeper who maintains a record of the workers' wages and other project expenses. All these reports are submitted to the contractors.

The contractor must submit their reports to the **project managers** based at the K2C office. According to the project manager I interviewed (#S03, 2019), the first reporting requirement for project managers is an annual plan of operations (APO) that guides the activities from the start to the end of a financial year. The APO reports on several aspects ranging from operational matters, to person days as well as training days for beneficiaries and contractors. Project managers are responsible for updating the finances on a weekly basis, and this is done on an Excel template. The report details all financial expenditures for the week, which is then captured on a spreadsheet on a monthly basis to indicate expenses against the targets set and the work done. Another monthly reporting requirement for the project manager is health and safety, which includes the person days worked as well as the type of incidents. This information is used to draw up a statistical report that include categories of incidents as well as the number of people injured.

A stakeholders' feedback report is done every quarter by the project managers and includes targets set, progress made against these targets, achievements, challenges as well as the highlights of the programme. This report is given to the communal property association (CPA),

the reserve manager at Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), as well as the tribal authority. Another way of sharing with stakeholders is through quarterly newsletters and articles (a form of additional reporting not visible in Case 1) which are submitted to the K2C office. Progress is also reported verbally during the monthly meetings.

Project managers are also responsible for reporting on operational aspects that include person days, and training conducted, hectares cleared, both initial and follow up clearing, as well as the total amount of money spent. This should include the number of SMMEs that have been employed, as well as the number of individual beneficiaries (i.e. paid workers). **Administrators** assist the project managers with reporting on finances while **project beneficiaries** submit a report every Friday or Monday to project managers detailing their plans for the following week. Project managers must report to their cluster manager and the K2C monthly, in which both the project managers and the rest of the team at K2C participate.

Project managers are also responsible for monitoring and evaluation in the form of conducting specific audits for their projects and assist each other in the different projects assigned to each project manager. This involves selecting an area for the assessment; examples mentioned were health and safety as well as hectares cleared. There is also an independent **evaluation officer** that conducts evaluations for BSP, as well as verifications depending on the type of assessment that has been selected at that point.

All these reports that are compiled by project managers have to be sent to the **cluster manager** (based at the K2C Office) who then compiles all project reports from project managers into cluster reports which detail finances, number of hectares cleared as well as indicators of community impact, and which are then forwarded to the **implementation manager** who in turn forwards it to the **senior manager**, through to the **SANParks executives** and then **DEA**. These reports are done monthly and yearly.

The above descriptive narrative on the reporting process is summarised in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Summary of the K2C-SANParks BSP reporting process (Case 2)

<b>Level of reporting</b>	<b>Type of reporting</b>	<b>Who else</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Content/ Purpose</b>
Project beneficiaries	Health and safety report and toolbox talk	Other team members and contractor	Daily, weekly, monthly	Number of incidents, causes, risks, and corrective measures.
	First aid report and toolbox talk	Other team members and contractor	Daily, weekly, monthly	What level 1 and 2 deals with, risks in the field, uses of the first aid kit
		Contractor – Project managers	Weekly	Report every Friday on plans for the following week
	Peer educator toolbox talks	Other team members and contractors	Daily, weekly, monthly	Conflict resolution, hygiene and sanitation, diseases.
Contractor	Health and safety report	Project manager	Monthly	Number of incidents, causes, risks, and corrective measures.
		Project manager	Weekly	Report every Friday on plans for the following week
	Bookkeeper	Project manager	For every payment done	Wages, transport, UIF (Unemployment Fund), record of training of all team members and cost
Project managers	Annual plan of operations	The whole team	Start of every project	Person days, hectares, and training planned as well as the budget required
	Weekly and monthly financial reports	Administrators & cluster managers	Weekly and monthly	Financial expenditures for the week, expenses against targets and achievements
	Health and safety	Cluster manager	Monthly	Person days, types of incidents, number of people injured
	Operational reports	Cluster manager	Monthly	Person days, training conducted, hectares cleared, and budget used as well as the number of SMMEs being supported
	Stakeholder feedback	Stakeholders/ K2C	Quarterly	Targets, progress, achievements, challenges and highlights

	Newsletters and articles	K2C office	Quarterly	Targets, progress, achievements, challenges and highlights
Cluster managers	Cluster reports	Implementation manager	Monthly and yearly	Hectares cleared, finances as well as community impact

### 4.2.3 Case study 3 – AWARD’s RESILIM-O Programme

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#### 4.2.3.1 Introduction

AWARD’s RESILIM-O programme reporting process is slightly different from the two reporting processes above. The programme is donor funded and implemented by a single NGO and sub-contracts to other NGOs. The RESILIM-O programme does not have a linear reporting system, unlike the two government programmes. Diverse field and monthly reports all feed into a central, in-house monitoring and evaluation unit set up for the programme (consisting of a monitoring and evaluation officer, a manager as well as a research associate) and from there to the NGO’s two executive directors, with some of the information reported to the donor (USAID) and shared with a range of stakeholders.

The RESILIM-O programme has different projects within it, tackling a range of related issues, using a range of approaches such as research, convening of water forums, building capacity of civil society and government officials, monitoring river quality and supporting small scale farmers, hence the greater diversity of the reporting, compared to the previous two cases. Everyone in the organisation, from the interns to the executive directors, are involved in the reporting process at different levels. To a certain extent, the reporting system is guided by selected USAID indicators (hectares improved, number of people and organisations capacitated), so information collected needs to address these indicators, but AWARD also has in-house reporting requirements that are much broader than these indicators.

#### 4.2.3.2 Levels of reporting in the AWARD RESILIM-O reporting chain

The reporting in the RESILIM-O programme starts at the field level, in which **project implementation teams** that host or attend an event, be it a workshop, a meeting or a field trip, are required to produce and submit a **back to office report (B2O)**. This is a field report that

tracks, amongst others, the significance of the events and changes observed that are related to the engagements with stakeholders or partners. It is accompanied by a register which was specifically designed to capture the relevant information about participants and organisations involved in capacity development events. The back to office report also includes a section that is aimed at facilitating reflections on the significance of observations, and teams are encouraged to complete the template collaboratively.

The register tracks the number of people that attended an event, their gender as well as their institutions; this information is relevant or needed to address the specific indicators that the programme must report against. All these field reports need to be sent to the monitoring and evaluation team as soon as they are ready, for the purposes of compiling quantitative data needed for TraiNet (see below); they also provide other, both qualitative and quantitative data, from which the monthly reports and eventually the quarterly and annual reports are generated.

Every month, **project managers and their teams** compile a monthly report (possibly by referring to their B2O field reports, among other data sources) which they submit to the in-house (programme) monitoring and evaluation unit. These reports provide a summary of activities that were covered within that month, highlight challenges or specific issues that emerged as well as a bit of reflection on the month's activities. These reports are a source of qualitative data that the director and M&E unit need to compile the quarterly and annual reports.

The **M&E Officer** (in this case it was me) collects and keeps an archive of all B2O reports and collects monthly reports, with the help of the M&E manager. The M&E Officer also enters the statistics about number of people involved in RESILIM-O capacity development activities into TraiNet, which is USAID's global training data management system that captures data related to training programmes that include participants' country of origin, the type of training received, number of participants as well as the associated finances. The monitoring data is drawn from by the registers submitted by project teams as well as AWARD's finance unit.

As per USAID requirements, the AWARD programme **directors** need to submit three quarterly reports and one annual report for every financial year. These reports are checked and finalized by the directors, but compiled by the **monitoring and evaluation team**, with inputs from project implementation teams. This is done to ensure that the teams check on what has



been captured and if it is a true reflection of what they did within that quarter. These reports are for accountability towards USAID, but also have been used for facilitating learning and sharing with stakeholders and partners.

All these reports that are compiled must be sent to the inhouse data management system which sits within the monitoring and evaluation team. This team is responsible for ensuring that the organisation adheres to the reporting system in place through interactions with staff members, but also through the refining of reporting tools to collect relevant and accurate data. Other duties of the M&E team are to store all data electronically, assist in documentation, feedback to and to some extent facilitating learning within the team, and this includes discussion on best practices.

Another form of reporting is through monthly meetings referred to a RESILIM-O day. These are spaces designed to facilitate learning for the programme implementation teams, and sometimes their partners. A theme is selected every month and the team comes together to share, learn and reflect. These spaces have also been used to assist struggling projects with new strategies/ ways of improving practices and solving challenges.

The above descriptive narrative on the reporting process is summarised in Table 4.4.3 below.

*Table 4.3: Summary of the AWARD RESILIM-O reporting process (Case 3)*

<b>Type of reporting</b>	<b>Level of reporting</b>	<b>Who else</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Content/ Purpose</b>
Back to office report + registers	Project teams	Monitoring and evaluation  Partners and stakeholders	As per every field meeting	To track stakeholder engagement, progress, identify challenges and provide first level of reflection among field teams. Used by monitoring and evaluation to track quantitative data; contribute to monthly reports.
Weekly meetings	Project teams	Monitoring and evaluation unit	Every Monday	Report back on activities conducted the previous week as well as activities planned for the following week. To share progress, challenges with other projects

Monthly reports	Project teams	Monitoring and evaluation unit	Every month	Details project activities for the month, highlights, challenges as well as reflections. Content of these reports are reported in quarterly and annual reports.
Quarterly reports	Monitoring and evaluation	Project teams	Every quarter	Details programme activities for the quarter, including the financial standing at that point.  Accountability factor to USAID but also for sharing with partners and stakeholders.
Annual reports	Monitoring and evaluation unit	Project teams	End of financial year	Details programme activities for the financial year.
RESILIM-O Meetings/days	Project teams	Project teams including Admin staff.	Every month	Monthly meetings which are aimed at internal learning. a particular project or topic is selected for the month
TraiNet	Monitoring and evaluation		By the end of every quarter	Captures training events including the financial resources used

### **4.3 Question 2: To what extent do the observed reporting practices support learning?**

This question will focus on the extent to which learning might be taking place in the three case examples in relation to their reporting practices, the type of learning as well as how it is being supported by the reporting systems in place. This has been surfaced by reading through the interview transcripts and relevant documents, as well as applying the analytical frame to the data. The analytical frame is the three loops of learning by Argyris and Schon (1978) as explained in Chapter Two. Identifying the absence of learning and / or missed opportunities for learning also forms part of this analysis.

#### **4.3.1 Case study 1 –DEA WfW Upper Blyde**

##### ***4.3.1.1 Report uses***

The reports generated by the programme are used differently by the individuals I interviewed at different levels of the reporting chain. The same report may be used differently at different levels.

**Contractors and beneficiaries** use their reports to communicate project progress, successes, challenges, and herbicides usage, as well as health and safety issues, amongst others. This information is important for informing future project planning by the project implementation team, as well as addressing challenges and identifying plans for interventions (usually through toolbox talks).

**Project coordinators** have several reporting tools and each one has a slightly different use. As mentioned in 4.2.1, weekly reports are used to advise on performance, in terms of extent of alien plant clearing and how much work still needs to be done. This same tool is used by area managers to monitor project coordinators' performance as well as any challenges they might be facing. The monthly reports are needed by the monitoring and evaluation directorate in Pretoria.

Using these reports, project coordinators can take some programmatic decisions. For example, one can tell how much money and how many teams are required to clear a certain number of hectares. A project coordinator I interviewed indicated that: "These reports inform me of my future planning, say for example I have seen that this financial year I couldn't manage to clear all the hectares, or I couldn't even manage to finish the budget, then that informs me, like if it is a trend" (#W04, 2018). This helps to improve planning for future projects, as well as with adjusting budgets and teams. Other reports are used as evidence to prove that work has been done.

Quarterly reports are used to measure the performance of the region. The same interviewee (#W04, 2018) mentioned that these reports are sometimes used to report progress during ministerial meetings. They refer to the targets set for the year, progress made in terms of hectares cleared and people employed as well as the amount of money used.

The **GIS technician** uses data submitted by the contractors and beneficiaries to draw a labour analysis report for the Extended Public Works Programme on the number of people employed, daily rates, number of days worked as well as gender. The GIS technician mentioned that she uses her reports both to track the progress of the programme and to inform planning and budgeting.

**Area managers** use their reports to track progress in hectares cleared and SMMEs as well as the financial spending. Results are also analysed to check if they correlate with the targets and

goals of the programme. These reports assist in detecting when contractors are not meeting their targets, which prompts the person responsible to make corrections. The reports also track if the SMMEs under the programme are doing well.

The tracking of contractor's progress is important, especially for follow-up work or new contracts that might be issued. Interviewee (#W03, 2018) mentioned that this is done to assess a contractor's quality of work, their work ethic as well as productivity which is useful for the programme in selecting the right people for a job but also to determine if there is a need for an additional team.

#### ***4.3..1.2 Learning mentioned***

As noted in Chapter Two, learning is a broad word which means different things to different people. All interview participants spoke about how and what they learn within the programme, but it was not always related to reporting. I first introduce references to reporting and learning that were made during the interviews before discussing the types of learning evident as well as other learning opportunities mentioned.

Project coordinators said that reports help them learn about past projects, how success was achieved and what they can do differently going forward. This learning is used to plan future projects, for instance one interviewee mentioned using old reports to estimate the budget and number of days required for the next project. Also, one can learn about methods used effectively to clear alien invasive plants.

Another instance of learning related to reporting frequently mentioned, is learning how to report. There has been training for all project teams related to reporting. This is usually around writing or compiling these reports as well as the challenges one might encounter in the process of report writing. A project coordinator explained: "For example if the manager sees that my people are committing a lot of mistakes in terms of reporting, then he will show us to say we can do it in this way. He teaches us to do it the right way" (#W04, 2018).

The introduction of contract progress summary reports in the WfW Blyde Project by the area manager was done also for the purposes of teaching contractors the 'ins and outs' of reporting and for them to learn how to keep track of their progress. According to the project coordinator,

if one feels one is lacking knowledge on reporting, then one can arrange training for reporting (#W04, 2018).

Another form of learning mentioned which is facilitated through reporting is through the programme accounting to stakeholders (neighbouring communities including traditional authorities). These are reports that the programme usually feeds back to the stakeholders who then get to learn and understand what the programme is all about. They are also given an opportunity to make input and to some extent, their inputs assist the programme implementers in solving programmatic challenges they might be facing. Besides information sharing, the stakeholder reports also serve the purpose of stimulating capacity and ensuring the stakeholders are more knowledgeable in terms of the actual work being done through the programme.

Reporting challenges can stifle learning. According to the (#W01, 2018), inaccurate reports are time consuming and hinder learning (for planning and progress purposes) because instead of getting value out of them, the focus is on correcting errors. The learning here is learning how to report according to given rules. However, in the process of correcting errors, one is often able to identify interventions to assist the team in terms of building competencies required for effective reporting.

#### ***4.2.1.3 Type of learning supported***

Argyris and Schon (1978) used single and double loop to explain how learning happens. In the context of this case, single loop learning would involve learning how to operate in given ways within the set rules, values, and plans. Double loop learning involves experimenting with how to operate better and seeking solutions for challenges within those rules and values. Triple loop learning is more concerned with learning about learning, reflecting on how learning happens and developing new rules and approaches altogether. In this section, I use the three loops to identify the type of learning supported by the reporting system. This was applied to the interview data as well as documents reviewed.

There seems to be a considerable amount of single loop learning that takes place as the programme teams learn how to adhere to the rules and the requirements of the programme, set by the DEA guidelines. This can be seen mostly in them learning how they do their reporting and conduct data collection; there seem to be little room to encourage a different type of learning.

Workshops aimed at assisting project teams with their reporting are usually done after the reports submitted are problematic in the sense that there might be missing information, evidence is not submitted, or the wrong data has been captured. These workshops focus mostly on correcting the errors, thus making sure that reports are done accurately and within the rules of the programme. Another example of this can be seen during quarterly key performance review meetings where an individual from DEA national is invited to assist the team with their reporting challenges. Most of the trainings conducted also encourages single loop learning. An example can be seen from #W03, 2018 who said, “When we go to do introduction to safety management training course, it is more of health and safety of the teams that we have on site, what is expected of us when we go on site”.

Examples of double loop learning were evident in managers introducing some changes to assist the teams in performing as required. One example was introducing smartphones for data collection and verification to replace the GPS devices that are unserviceable. The smartphone is a different tool that still does the work and collects that data that is required by the programme. The data collection and verification are still being done within the set rules and values, but a new variable (the smartphone) was introduced, tested and proved to be effective.

Another example for double loop learning can be seen within the GIS work in the Water Information Management System (WIMS). The system has been labelled as problematic and ineffective. One interviewee (#W02, 2018) mentioned that WIMS is not a good reporting tool as it only does half the job; it became necessary to introduce the ArcGIS/ArcMap to deal with certain functions that cannot be performed on WIMS and make work slightly easier. However, the two systems are not aligned as they take two data types and conversion is necessary when integrating information from one system to the other. There was no evidence of triple loop learning, which could have facilitated the introduction of a new system altogether to potentially solve the current challenges.

Another possible example of double loop learning was the introduction of contract progress summary reports which are not part of the DEA national requirements and so were a deviation from the reporting system in place, but were introduced to assist the programme with better capturing certain information that was not being reported. A change was thus introduced when the managers learnt that they needed to adapt (by introducing something new in for the form of more reporting) to better manage the contractors and the reporting.

Toolbox talks are further examples of both single and double loop learning. The health and safety staff teach workers how to stay safe by following the rules and when there are incidents, they must find ways to address them. Toolbox talks are based on informative topics of the day chosen depending on the issue at hand that might need to be addressed urgently, as informed by the health and safety inspections and reports. The reporting thus plays a role in learning in that it identifies what issues should be learnt about.

#### ***4.2.1.4 Other learning opportunities***

It was important to consider other instances of learning that might be taking place ‘outside’ but alongside the reporting system. This was challenging to uncover because of the different ways in which each interviewee interpreted ‘learning’. Nonetheless, within the data, there were a few instances that pointed to a variety of learning opportunities within the organisational context that could support individual and organisational learning, alongside reporting.

Interviewees additionally mentioned the following areas or activities in relation to learning. Sharing ideas and assisting each other when one encounters a challenge was mentioned as an instance of learning. One interviewee (#W04, 208), for example, mentioned that when working in the office, if one comes across a problem, one can ask other members who might have more experience or who might have solved a similar problem in the past. These seem to be instances of learning how to function or perform better within the given system. There are also specific platforms that have been created within the programme to enable learning.

#### **Training**

Project beneficiaries are frequently exposed to a range of training aimed at equipping them with the skills to enable them to carry out their responsibilities well. The training includes first aid, health and safety, as well as environmental education. Similarly, staff have access to training, for example: “If you feel it is communication [on which you need skills] then you can arrange training that deals with communication and then if you feel it is project management, all that, even financial management” (#W04, 2018).

#### **Regional interactions**

Project teams from different regions also get together from time to time to share ideas and learn from each other. This is a knowledge exchange setting where project teams ‘teach’ others or

share methods used within the programme which have proved to be effective. “We gather together as project coordinators and area managers and then we meet with Limpopo, for example, and share knowledge in terms of project management or I share my knowledge of the activities that I am implementing” (#W04, 2018).

### **Project advisory committees/ Working groups**

These are made up by community members of the area where certain projects are being implemented, as well as other stakeholders. Working groups are mandated by the project operational standards and in terms of these, social and economic dynamics of the settings are discussed. This is an opportunity for programme implementers to learn from the community members and get to know their views in relation to natural resource management. This is also a space for programme implementers to discuss possible interventions for challenges being faced, as well as how the community can assist in curbing those challenges. This would suggest that these are opportunities for double loop learning between programme teams and stakeholders.

### **Regional – Management, Research and Planning Forum (MAREP)**

This is one of the key learning platforms within DEA, specifically tailored for the NRM programmes, facilitated by a learning network reference group (contracted through the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)). These are one- or two-day events that provide a space for feedback and engagement among implementers around the natural resource management work. The idea of MAREP originated from the organisational learning networks strategy and was initiated in 2014 with the intention to enable sharing and learning amongst researchers and planners but also to enable organisational learning.

For the purposes of this study, I attended one regional MAREP workshop in Hoedspruit. The workshop had two objectives: “to develop an understanding of the absolute connectedness of natural resource management with community engagement and socio-economic development as well as establishing within participants, the invisibility of their engagement with people and the natural environment work that they do as natural resource managers out in the work, with their internal development work to develop their abilities and learn different methods” (DEA, 2017). The workshop was facilitated through the use learning processes that have been developed within the conservation sector (ibid.) which are discussed further in section 4.5 on factors that enable or constrain learning.



Besides the MAREP forum, other components proposed as part of the learning network are: a **social process learning programme** which is intended to develop faculties needed to engage in complex social ecological systems as well as **reflective monitoring and evaluation** to facilitate the development of new ways to identify the qualitative shifts that take place through the strategy, taking into consideration that much of the NRM's work is quantitatively driven (SANBI, 2018).

To ensure that the programme achieves its overall goals effectively, in 2005, a new strategy and action plan was proposed. One of the key components of the strategy was to ensure that research capacity in WfW collaborated closely with the monitoring and evaluation unit in the development of the WfW's M&E programme. This shows that monitoring and evaluation (and one assumes, associated reporting) was regarded as important in the programme nationally. However, the intended collaboration has not taken place. The regional programme does not have an M&E function internally but submits all its reports to the national office.

One of the priorities for this proposed strategy was the need to follow adaptive management to ensure that the programme develops a culture of learning by doing, which sought to open space for implementation teams to challenge the status quo (#W04, 2018) and "improve the performance of every one of their tasks through new approaches, testing such approaches through research as well as controlled rapid dissemination of such approaches" (WfW, 2005). This could have stimulated double and perhaps even triple loop learning. There is no evidence of this in this case study, however, as programmes still need to adhere to the given requirements.

#### ***4.2.1.5 Conclusion***

In relation to reporting, most of the learning mentioned referred to learning how to report better, how to be safe and effective at work (informed by reports on health and safety incidents and failures to meet targets), how to be more successful at meeting targets (also informed by reports), and how to deal with associated challenges (informed by report-back meetings with stakeholders). All of this seems to be single and double loop learning, that is, learning what the rules and procedures are and how to apply them, and coming up with new tools or processes for succeeding within the existing system.

There are both formal and informal opportunities for this learning. The WfW programme has introduced measures to ensure that learning does take place; these are for the whole programme however, not related to reporting. They will be discussed further in the section [4.3](#) regarding conditions that enable or constrain learning, below.

### **4.3.2 Case study 2 – K2C-SANParks Biodiversity Social Projects**

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#### ***4.3.2.1 Report uses***

The K2C-SANParks BSP reporting process or system is similar to the WfW reporting system as they are both funded through DEA, and the BSPs are also associated with the Extended Public Works Programme whose focus is also on poverty alleviation through job creation. There were several uses of reports that were mentioned during the interviews and these varied from one position to another.

Project beneficiaries used their different reports to address specific site related issues that range from health and safety, to work responsibilities, site rules and hygiene. Health and safety reporting generally focuses on recording injuries encountered in the field, as well as corrective measures that might be required. This information is then used to plan and conduct toolbox talks, to ensure the rest of the group are aware of the issues on site and take precautions when working.

There are also educational talks which seek to address challenges encountered by the contractor and beneficiaries, and this is done in conjunction with reporting as the reports inform the topics to be addressed.

Although interviewees did not explicitly mention instances of learning in health and safety reports and the meetings, there seemed to be evidence of single loop learning as the issues raised within the reports are being addressed in these particular meetings with project beneficiaries, i.e. they are trained how to do the job within the constraints of the site. Double loop learning was also evident as the health and safety staff and managers can develop ways to address the challenges.

Other reporting was significantly influenced by the given indicators that influence the type of data to be collected as well as the purpose of that data collection. At the project coordinator level, reports are used to capture person days, training conducted, the number of people that attended a training programme, the number of hectares that have been cleared, and financial tracking. This reporting assists with being held accountable but also staying informed on how much was spent on wages, training, transport, and administrative duties: “It is going to tell you if you are overspending, underspending or on point because remember that we are planning per month, so in April it will tell you that you must spend this much money and if you don’t then it means that you are underspending” (#S03, 2019). The system also helped with identifying any unapproved expenditure. This is thus a form of learning about what is going on leading to adjustment within the given system if required.

Reports also helped project managers to be aware of any risks and trends developing on site through the health and safety report covering all incidents or potential threats. This is usually done by project beneficiaries including their contractors and communicated through to the responsible project managers. This assisted managers in developing mitigation measures (which are sometimes presented during toolbox talks) for recurring trends and for finding alternative ways in which workers can continue with their jobs despite a problem on site (adapting to the context as informed by the reporting). The reports also assisted them to determine the extent to which external assistance or further training sessions may be required. Based on information that has been reported or communicated, project managers were able to implement action plans should a need arise to solve a particular issue, i.e. “that graph will show you that this is the problem and you focus on that, and you can make a vehicle safety campaign and then you can call the traffic officers to come and help” (#S03, 2019).

The reporting system also acted as a guide in terms of alerting project managers to priority tasks, identifying shortfalls against intended progress, challenges as well as how those challenges can actually be dealt with:

[Reporting] helps a lot because on a daily basis, already in the morning I know what is it that I have to do, what is it that I need to follow up, where are we lacking, where should we be advancing, what is it that is expected to be done and how best can we do it, where do I need help. So obviously, with all the reporting and the feedback that I am getting, it assists me with having my daily schedule, my weekly and my monthly, the focus as well, of where should I mostly focus at. (#S04, 2019)

Another use for the reporting system was providing evidence for work done in compliance with the monitoring team based in the DEA national office. There was however no mention that this might contribute to learning.

As in Case Study 1, in the K2C BSP programme reporting was also used to account to other stakeholders besides the funder DEA. This involved different stakeholders depending on each project:

We submit to our stakeholders. So, for instance I have two projects, I work with Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), I meet with the stakeholder once. I write my targets, where am I, what is it that I have achieved, my challenges, and my highlights and then I also do the same for the communal property association (CPAs) and the reserve manager at MTPA. Those are my stakeholders that side. (#S06, 2019)

No mention was made of this form of reporting resulting in learning, although that was the case in Case 1.

The reporting system was also used in developing a proposal for more funding or motivation for a different site to be added to the additional sites that are currently running. Project managers indicated that, should they feel there is a need for an additional budget, site or project in a different area, the progress communicated through the reports is often used as useful baseline data: “Say if I need to add another site, I use it to request money, to motivate for another project in another area. That one is basically for me, the baseline study, where I do the ground truthing” (#S06, 2019). This was not linked to learning.

Besides the programme implementation, correction, management and planning used by the project managers, beneficiaries, contractors and cluster manager, the system is designed to serve as a communication channel between different parties such as the implementation manager, the senior manager, the SANParks executives, the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Minister, as well as the Extended Public Works Programme. This allows the people at the national level to be aware of what is happening on the ground by communicating purpose, challenges, as well as programmatic impact. At the levels at which I interviewed programme staff, interviewees did not mention whether this was associated with learning.

Tracking impact is another important use of the system. The cluster manager indicated that this system assisted him particularly to track the impact of the programme on the surrounding

communities as well as the environment. This is especially around benefits like employment created. In terms of benefits for the biophysical environment, the system tracks the extent to which the programme is achieving its desired goals in terms of rehabilitating degraded land as well as clearing invasive alien plants. One interviewee did, however, also question the actual longer term impacts (see below).

#### ***4.3.2.2 Learning mentioned***

Although no direct reporting for learning was mentioned during the interviews nor was visible in the documents I reviewed, project beneficiaries did indicate that they had learnt by being part of the programme. It was mentioned that having been part of these environmental programmes, they now have a better understanding of conservation and why should be a priority. This has not only improved their knowledge but also influenced their practices outside the workspace and their engagements with other community members. “We have learnt a lot of things, we are now able to see the importance of the environment because before the programme, we would just cut down trees but now we know which ones are important and shouldn’t be cut because what we do is more about conservation” (#S01, 2019).

According to the SANParks BSP project manager, the reporting system is very comprehensive and allows one (in this case the manager, as other interviewees did not mention this) to acquire knowledge on different aspects within the programme. This means that one has the opportunity to learn from what others within the programme are responsible for: “also you get to learn a lot from the information that you are receiving ... at the end of the day you are able to learn things from the HR department, from the finance department, from conservation and administration” (#S04, 2019). This has potentially broadened the project manager’s ability in the sense that she now has a better understanding of other people’s responsibilities and can see the links to her own work.

The interview question about opportunities for learning was often interpreted as referring to formal learning (education). Almost all the project managers mentioned the availability of SANParks staff bursaries for furthering one’s studies. No link was made to reporting, but project managers indicated that these bursaries were beneficial because certificates received after completing a course might assist one in acquiring a better position. There were trainings mentioned as well that equip project managers with certain skills and knowledge that enable them to perform their day to day responsibilities i.e. “ there is an allocated budget specific for

every person to train and are position specific, and depend on the type of job that you are doing and then the career one is where do you want to see yourself, I would say they are really working depending on the person” (#S04, 2019).

#### ***4.3.2.3 Type of learning supported***

Much learning that takes place within toolbox talks is single loop learning which can also be referred to as ‘following the rules’ e.g. “we write down the incidents and underneath the report we also write down corrective measures of which should be taken and then the following day we have to do a toolbox talk about that corrective measure so that we can help the other workers to avoid or to limit the incidents so that they can be able to take responsibility” (#S01, 2019). These corrective measures are guided by the WfW standards which is a guide that indicates all the site rules and regulations for all NRM programmes, which might indicate that there is little room for a different type of learning to take place because employees need to adhere to a certain document that outlines how they should perform their day to day duties.

Another example of single loop of learning can be seen from the health and safety reports which are used to document incidents, as well as causes and mitigation. If similar incidents keep occurring, then project managers call for a health and safety awareness training session to refresh the contractor and beneficiaries’ memories. This is single loop learning because it is sticking within the DEA guidelines in terms of what steps need to be taken should a problem on site arise. However, there is some room for double loop learning if managers develop novel solutions to the on-site challenges; however no examples were given.

Assisting project managers in sticking to their respective approved budgets for the work planned is another way in which the reporting system supports learning. Project managers have indicated that the reporting system has a way of showing if they are over or underspending in accordance with the work done. This assists project managers in taking corrective measures to solve the budget discrepancies, and can range from increasing or decreasing team members to adding another site. Because this is done monthly, it gives project managers an opportunity to stay on top but also to avoid such issues at the end of a financial year, which might be costlier. It is another example of single loop learning.

More evidence of single loop learning can be seen in the case of herbicide applications. This is done on site but reported to indicate the volume of herbicides uses, their type as well as their effectiveness. Project managers have indicated that should herbicides not be mixed correctly

on site, the corrective measure is to take the beneficiaries for training which is also referred to as capacity building.

There is no evidence from the interviews or documents analysed to indicate that double loop learning is taking place in relation to reporting in this programme, but there are indications of team members starting to question the rules that govern the reporting system and the programme (that is, triple loop learning). One manager spoke about how the programme has created some problems for both the environment and the so-called beneficiaries since its inception. He made reference to the aim of the programme which is poverty alleviation, but in his observation, programme beneficiaries upon exiting the programme find themselves in more financial distress than before (possibly due to incurring debt in the short period they are employed); furthermore, the more the programme clears alien trees, the more trees there are to clear:

One other thing is, it's about what is it that the community needs, because I mean like, we have been working for about nine years and some people will just tell you that you guys have just been cutting trees, for them they don't see any difference and now it's like we have more aliens that when we started ...” (#S05, 2019)

He also spoke briefly about his passion for tracking the impact on communities through the different programmes, which is something not necessarily captured in programme reporting, as it deals only with hectares and employment figures. He felt “it would work well if we actually change the whole model, convince the ones on top to change the whole system” (#S05, 2019) but the reporting system is not currently assisting with engaging with relevant parties to do something about the observations which are causing him concern.

The BSP unit report (2019) communicates finances for specific projects that are under BSP including their challenges/failures and how these will be corrected or dealt with. Although no direct reference to learning was made in the report, there is evidence of single loop of learning in terms of following the rules to ensure that challenges are dealt with accordingly; however the report has potential to be used as a learning tool in terms of how one achieves set targets as well as how to address challenges. The same applies to the K2C parthenium monthly report (2019) that contains a section referred to as “reason for deflation on deliverables” which in my view could potentially facilitate learning through reflections on what went wrong and how this can be addressed in the future, which would be an example of double loop learning.

Single loop learning seems to be the dominant form of learning taking place this was evident in interview data. There are also instances of double loop learning but little evidence as to how reports are used for any triple loop learning – involving actions that might change the whole underlying or overarching approach to the programme taking place. This does not necessarily imply that individual managers are not asking such questions.

#### ***4.3.2.4 Other learning opportunities***

Several interviewees mentioned bursaries offered by the programme as learning opportunities for the staff and their children. Short courses on different programmatic aspects as well as diplomas in nature conservation were also mentioned as learning opportunities. Communities of practice were also considered learning spaces. This is a Department of Environmental Affairs initiative that consists of different teams from different areas coming together from time to time to showcase their work and interact with others who are working on similar programmes. They afford each participant a chance to observe what others are doing, give input/ comments and learn different types of strategies which they can apply in their own sites.

### **4.3.3 Case study 3 – AWARD’s RESILIM-O Programme**

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#### ***4.3.3.1 Report uses***

In the AWARD RESILIM-O system, all the reporting is designed for a purpose but also to feed into and inform other reports. The idea behind this system is that the connections will make it easier for information to flow from one report to another. One interviewee (#R03, 2019) explained that broadly, reports are used as an inventory of everything that happened, informing project teams of the process, the progress, and what needs to happen but they also help facilitate reflection on processes and outcomes of engagements.

The workplan is used to inform the funder of all activities the programme will undertake for that year within specific projects. It also assists the programme implementation team in planning their activities and in keeping track of the progress. It is therefore a form of reporting that supports other reporting.

The **Back to Office (B2O) report** is used to capture engagements with stakeholders in the field including the number of participants as well as reflections on these engagements. Back to office



reports (including reflections) feed into the monthly reports providing both quantitative and qualitative data.

The **register** that accompanies the back to office report is used to capture the number of people and institutions involved, to assist AWARD to report to the funder against indicators. This data is also fed into USAID's global TraiNet database, along with the costs associated with the training. No learning was mentioned by the interviewees in relation to this reporting component.

AWARD used **monthly reports** to capture and reflect on the project activities each month including challenges as well as identifying measures that could address these challenges. However, one interviewee (#R02, 2019) noted that this intended function is not always utilised especially because these reports are not always compiled collectively. When the monthly reporting requirement was introduced into the programme, the purpose was for the project teams to record their month's activities but also to sit together and reflect on those activities, and their challenges, collectively for learning. However, often project teams are busy and do not have time to sit together, which results in people assigning responsibilities for a task, each person compiling their own section and reports being sent from one person to another. For the monitoring and evaluation unit, as well as the programme directors, monthly reports are used to inform the quarterly and annual reports.

The **quarterly** and **annual** reports are used as a form of accountability to USAID but also for sharing with partners and stakeholders, although this has not been done consistently (#R01, 2018). Project teams also indicated that they have used these reports to get a sense of what is happening in other projects within the programme.

The reporting system informs project activities, and this is different for each project. Interviewee #R02 (2019) indicated making use of sessions wherein feedback is provided to stakeholders and partners on programmatic matters, but also on the working process and how it has unfolded, challenges and successes. This meeting-based report-back to stakeholders has proven useful for informing future planning (#R02, 2019).

#### ***4.3.3.2 Learning mentioned***

Learning was mentioned as being facilitated through reflection, especially when done collectively, and although efforts were made in this programme to design reporting to encourage collective reflection, this did not always happen (#R03, 2019). A key constraint seemed to be time pressures of project teams, resulting in a neglect of the collaborative, reflective way in which reporting was intended.

Rosenberg, Kotschy, Burt, Mudau, and Pollard (2019) noted certain findings from the project teams that indicated reporting for learning. The participants from the survey and focus group sessions were asked to reflect on both individual and organisational learning as well as learning at multiple levels. Findings indicated that the reporting system offered them a space to reflect and gain new insights. Project teams have found this type of reporting significant in facilitating learning. Examples of this include: “I am finding the monthly report and its current format to be useful for reflecting learning”, “the B2O is very productive, especially if you do it as a team and straight away because you carry that energy from the meeting into it” (ibid., p. 21).

The collective design of the reporting tools was also mentioned as significant as it “forces one to not simply repeat what happened or what was said in the meeting (Rosenberg et al., 2019). Interviewee #R04 (2019) also noted that although many people might not be familiar with this type of reporting, through this process they are bound to learn how to reflect which might potentially improve their practices.

One interviewee (#R02, 2019) suggested that the report itself does not support learning, but it does assist implementers in reporting the learning or the unlearning of certain practices within the programme. This interviewee also explained that learning was constrained if one was not a decision maker, especially where there could be room for improvement. One could make suggestions but ultimately the decision to implement those decisions lay with a different person. This meant that learning from making changes was constrained.

Also, “the learning happening is usually for the person who puts together the report” (#R02, 2019) as one cannot assume that the next person has learnt from information being transferred or having been engaged in an issue, as this person might not contextualise information nor be as reflexive as the previous person.

This is evidence that there were missed opportunities for learning as the reports were not being utilised in the way they were intended. No learning was mentioned in the interviews in relation to the data on number of hectares affected and number of beneficiaries reached or capacitated.

Informal spaces have been mentioned as one area where considerable learning was taking place, because project teams have an opportunity to discuss programmatic aspects with other colleagues, and then get new perspectives or insights regarding an issue. This was also achieved through attending engagements facilitated by other projects, which was appreciated and viewed as a form of learning within the programme (#R03, 2019).

#### ***4.3.3.3 Type of learning supported***

The RESILIM-O MERL framework has been shaped by organisational principles and processes including social learning and strategic adaptive management (see Chapter Two). Thus, one would expect that reporting would support single, double as well as triple loop learning.

At both the programmatic and project levels, there is evidence of the three different types of learning. The redesigning of data collection tools or templates collectively is evidence for triple loop learning as it involves learning about learning. This created a space for many ideas to be reflected upon and thus selecting one that works best. This change in templates came after the realisation that the tools that were being utilised were not adequate to facilitate reflection and learning. Also, when project teams work together, they are likely develop new insights that can potentially support double loop learning.

Project teams need to stick to the rules of the system by submitting what is required of them timeously (single loop learning), however the format of the templates provides them with flexibility and the opportunity to do more than simply follow the rules, by encouraging reflection which might potentially lead to a change in the adopted practices, methodologies or new ways of thinking, thus facilitating learning (double and triple loop learning). One can then make conclusions that the reporting system does facilitate learning although there are many factors that prohibit this.

#### ***4.3.3.4 Other learning opportunities***

There are many platforms that have been created within the programme to enable the facilitation of learning. Project team members mentioned several activities which they viewed as (opportunities for) learning.

The monthly RESILIM-O Day meetings were designed by the programme directors as learning spaces wherein project teams from across the programme meet once a month to share and learn about a theme or project that was selected for that period. The meeting is activity packed but also designed to accommodate and encourage reflection. The design and implementation of reporting for learning as well as monitoring and evaluation (such as theory of change discussions) also took place collaboratively in these spaces. Project teams were appreciative of these efforts (#R01, 2018; #R03, 2019), although these meetings were not consistently associated with learning. One interviewee (#R02, 2019) said “I wouldn’t call RESILIM-O a learning platform. I remember someone saying it is supposed to be an opportunity for other people to learn more about what others are doing but for me that is not a learning platform... They treat it as a workshop, but I don’t know what to call them.”

In addition to the RESILIM-O Day, there were ‘shared learning events’ convened annually by the programme directors. They were aimed at facilitating learning among the programme teams but also with external stakeholders and partners. One of these events was specifically designed and facilitated for the project teams, with a focus on monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning. This event provided an opportunity for all AWARD staff to reflect on what they had learnt through the programme and the role that monitoring and evaluation had played within this learning. Some of the reflections from this meeting are recorded in the discussion of findings (Chapter Five). The project teams expressed their gratitude for such spaces that stimulated their learning while also enabling them an opportunity to reflect on their projects.

There were also other project workshops from time to time and projects teams have also indicated that in terms of own learning, “they learn a lot when they get invited to attend other project events as they get to see how they work, what challenges they come across as well as how they overcome them” (#R02, 2019). This was deemed useful as one gets an opportunity to contribute to the project. One interviewee also expressed that this ‘learning’ taking place during workshops was facilitated by prior knowledge and insights gained by going through project reports, which stimulated their reflection of that project. Therefore, although the

specially designed learning opportunities mentioned here are not forms of reporting, they were informed and complemented by reporting, and reporting therefore had a role to play in the learning associated with other programme interactions.

#### **4.4 Question 3: What are the underlying factors that promote or constrain reporting for learning?**

This question was designed to open space for the more systemic analysis of the reporting practices of the three different organisations and programmes, as a way of identifying factors potentially enabling or constraining learning associated with reporting. In this instance, constraints will be reporting related factors that prohibit or are not favourable to enable learning to take place, while enablers will be those reporting related factors that might, at least to a certain extent, promote learning or assist in the facilitation of learning. Both these types of factors could involve a range of things from templates, to the rules of reporting, data collection processes, the levels of reporting, or the direction and intended purpose of reporting.

For this analysis, I will use the cultural historic activity theory (CHAT) framework by Engeström (1987) to explore learning constraints or enablers by looking at the: tools, subjects, rules, community, division of labour as well as the object associated with reporting. I used the CHAT framing because I had an expansive learning process (Engeström, 2001) in mind as a second phase to this study, which for reasons mentioned in Chapter 3, I was unable to implement. These reasons relate mostly to how busy the programme implementers and managers across all three cases were. They were too busy to engage in an expansive learning process to work on reporting to support learning. This would suggest that time may be a significant factor constraining opportunities for learning in the programmes studied here.

CHAT supports expansive learning by surfacing contradictions in systems, and in my analysis, I looked at factors that either promoted or constrained learning as the basis for potential recommendations.

## 4.4.1 Case study 1 – DEA WfW Upper Blyde

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### 4.4.1.1 Tools

This section considers the reporting guidelines, templates, and other reporting tools that may enable or constrain reporting for learning in this programme. I scrutinised each of the documents related to reporting that I collected, outlining the constraints or enablers I was able to identify. I also draw on interview data.

#### **(a) The Chief Directorate Business Plan**

This is not exactly a reporting template but a national guide which details specific indicators that each programme within DEA needs to report on. It is the basis for the reporting focus for a period of five years. It details elements that the programme needs to report on, as well as the targets for the year, quarter and month that need to be monitored as well as the type of evidence that is required to support a claim. This guide neither enables nor constrains learning though it has a strong quantitative focus which could be a learning constraint. Such a narrow focus in a high-level document seems a missed opportunity for the facilitation of learning.

#### **(b) Contract Progress Summary Report**

This is not a departmental requirement but rather a regional initiative created with the purpose of learning how and what contractors are doing, to better manage their progress. This report gives details on what has been achieved, what is outstanding as well as the amount of resources needed to complete the outstanding work. It was mentioned as one of the learning opportunities at a contractor level as initially, they had no tracking system in place which made it very difficult to report upwards on the work done. Reported work is also likely to be a learning opportunity, especially in instances where one would adapt future planning based on previous records.

#### **(c) Project Progress Reports**

These are reports compiled by area managers and then submitted to the national monitoring and evaluation team through the regional programme leader. Initially these reports were compiled by regional programme leaders based on information that was being submitted to them by area managers, but it was decided that it was best for them to collate the information, which is then presented in monthly performance review meetings.

I view this change as a learning enabler because now area managers become more aware of how their contracts work and where there might be issues that need to be addressed. The monthly review meetings also enable this learning by encouraging scrutinising and verifying information before submitting for monitoring and evaluation.

Area managers become more aware of and are able to rectify errors, and so do others which then makes it easier to be accountable: “Everyone in the whole chain is being involved in that so it has been a learning area in itself, especially around being accountable for the performance of your own individual project, so that if I’m not here the PC can easily report or account for it” (#W01, 2018).

#### **(e) Water Information Management System (WIMS)**

The WIMS is a project-based planning system based on GIS that allows for the tracking of clearing activities and expenditure against targets. Within WfW, WIMS is used to capture information based on the EPWP requirements, namely employment figures, training and payments. The GIS section draws up a labour analysis report which is mostly a numerical report. There are no indications of any learning associated with WIMS in the programme and it is unclear whether this type of reporting tool is an enabler or a constraint to learning.

However, the data quality audit that is conducted could potentially be a learning enabler as it requires more than mere numbers. There needs to be evidence of what has been reported, but also auditors are responsible for their own site inspections. This can foster a culture of quality reporting and facilitate learning through accountability to the auditors as it opens up a space for questions, discussions and corrections where necessary: “So sometimes the numbers don’t tally and they ask questions, like why does the timesheet say so much but the system says so many days” (#W01, 2018). The kind of learning enabled could however be narrowly focussed on detecting errors in reporting.

#### **(f) Bi-annual Report**

This is done at the regional programme leader and chief directorate level and it is usually focused on reporting targets for the entire cluster. Programme leaders also use the bi-annual report to share challenges with other clusters and according to one interviewee, this opens space for learning as programmes engage with each other on matters that might be cluster-specific: “It is an opportunity to share your challenges with the other colleagues in the cluster, for

example in Limpopo ... and those reports get discussed and it's an opportunity to learn how they are dealing with it in Limpopo, and Northwest and so forth" (#W01, 2018).

### **(g) Financial Reporting**

The basic accounting in financial reporting assists programme staff with tracking whether they are over or underspending on their budgets. It involves keeping a record of all transactions at each level and can be used to detect how far along the project is based on the amount of funds utilised but also assists the programme staff in adapting their practices to be more efficient. This ensures that the programme staff are accountable for the utilisation of public funds by making sure they stick to the budget, without exceeding or underspending what was allocated. This reporting tool forces staff to be reflexive in instances where they do exceed the budget or underspend.

The regional programme leader indicated that in the next financial year, one is able to reflect on how much money was used for a certain percentage of work and this assists with better planning and implementation going forward: "If you monitor that, you get to pick up a trend to say, if we only start planning in April that means we are definitely going to underspend, so in itself it's a learning process to say okay let's perhaps adapt our planning or rather shift around our scheduling of activities in preparation for implementation" (#W01, 2018).

Although this is a financial tool and its focus is mostly on numbers, the programme leader's reflections indicate that it does enable learning, towards better project management in relation to budgeting.

### **(h) Project Operational Standards**

The Project Operational Standards is a DEA guide that details the way programmes should conduct their activities as well as being the basis against which compliance is measured. This is the same tool used by the Kruger to Canyons – SANParks Biodiversity social projects. There is no mention of any learning associated with the use of the guide, nor does it give any indication of a need to report on learning; this, in my opinion, restricts opportunities for learning. The template takes the form of a tick-box exercise with teams only needing to populate the tables with the (limited) information that is required.



There were many other tools that were mentioned that are being utilised by staff to guide programme activities, but not necessarily for reporting and learning. These include the Public Finance Management Act, the Medium-Term Strategic Framework, the NRM Data Management Guideline, the Public Service Act as well as the NEMBA regulations on invasive alien species.

#### ***4.4.1.2 Subject – who is involved in reporting and why?***

As shown in Table 4.1, the Working for Water reporting chain consists of beneficiaries, contractors, project coordinators, area managers, GIS technicians and data managers, regional programme leaders, managers in the EPWP programme as well as the monitoring and evaluation team within DEA, and the National Treasury. Each person's roles and responsibilities have been outlined earlier in Section 4.2.1. Contractors work with their respective teams (beneficiaries) on the ground and they are the main data collectors.

Reporting responsibilities of contractors and project beneficiaries range from hectares cleared, person days, training days, beneficiary data, the amount and type of herbicides used, occupational health and safety matters and financial information. This information is collated into different reports depending on the requirements and is then forwarded to project coordinators as well as the GIS and data management section.

The GIS and data managers are responsible for capturing person days and hectares cleared on the WIMS. Project coordinator's reporting is centred around work submitted by the contractors, which they must collate and verify. They are also responsible for conducting site inspections and compiling key indicator reports which are discussed at the performance review meetings then forwarded to area managers. Area managers compile reports they receive from project coordinators into area key indicator reports which are then presented and submitted to the regional programme leader. Area managers are also responsible for verifications and corrections of information recorded on these reports. The manager's role is therefore strongly directed to collating and checking reports, before sending them up the system.

The regional programme leader is responsible for verifying and signing off on reports submitted and for communication with the reporting entities, DEA as well as the EPWP. He needs to ensure that reports are submitted on time and should there be a need for verifications or corrections, he needs to liaise with the rest of the staff.

The monitoring and evaluation unit within DEA has a role to support programmes with their reporting. The unit, from time to time, sets meetings with the programme staff to go through verifications and corrections, to assist them with their reporting challenges and to give feedback on their progress: “So, in our quarterly meetings, we give him a slot to report back to us, how are we performing at this point in time” (#W04, 2018).

#### ***4.4.1.3 Community - who else is involved in reporting or should be involved?***

This question seeks to understand the wider community of the programme, who may be involved with reporting, or those that should be involved but are not.

The WfW projects have project advisory committees made of stakeholders who meet on a quarterly or bi-annual basis (depending on what was agreed) to discuss the project progress as well as the challenges. They are important because the progress and success of alien clearing projects depend on the buy-in of the local communities. This space provides the public or stakeholders with an opportunity to co-engage with the programme (and the team) through provision of inputs as well as suggestions for addressing challenges raised. It is an opportunity for these stakeholders to potentially learn and for the project teams to learn how to address challenges and progress. Thus, these report-backs and engagement meetings seem to be important enablers of learning.

#### ***4.4.1.4 Rules - what are the formal/informal rules that support or constrain reporting for learning?***

There seem to be cultural historical norms that govern reporting, which have been in place since the programme inception and these are determined by the funder, DEA. Basically, all reporting needs to adhere to the Department’s guidelines to align with its mandate and make aggregation of data across projects possible. Several formal rules were outlined during the interviews in terms of how reporting is or should be done, and almost all templates and data collection processes are guided by the Department.

The reporting templates that are used within the programme are sent from the national Department of Environmental Affairs and are designed according to their reporting requirements. This assists the Department with ensuring that all programmes submit information that is relevant to the Department’s goals and meet the same standards: “... these guys send us a template. It’s just a reporting template actually, because they want you to make

sure that all information that they want is in there” (#W04, 2018). This indicates that the Department has the biggest control over how reporting is used, and over learning that might potentially take place, especially since the programme staff have little control over what is reported, when and how.

On a monthly basis contractors are reporting on employment created in the form of person days, on hectares cleared of invasive species, volumes of herbicides used, as well as number of incidents that might have occurred within the site. This is basic information that reports against given indicators. This is evidence of accountability reporting and is not necessarily linked to any learning. When programme staff make changes to the system, it is ironically to add more reporting, to make the required reporting and meeting of targets easier. As explained in Section 4.4.1.1 , the addition of the contract progress summary report is a new reporting requirement rule that was initiated by the regional programme.

The rules of the DEA reporting system place considerable emphasis on physical evidence and verification and on frequent reporting. This rule is linked to the fact that contractors should not be paid and programme managers should not receive budgets if they have not done the work. Interim inspections should be done on a weekly basis as contracts are being implemented to track the extent of a contract completion. These inspections are carried out on site and should be done for every contract that has been awarded.

There seems to be a big focus on achieving the targets set and complying with the set standards which is highly connected to accountability reporting. This can be seen through the performance and development management system which the programme staff consider “a stick that the department will hit you with” (#W04, 2018). The system requires that the set targets are achieved within the specific time frame, and if this is not achieved, one needs to account for the under achievement. The rules about meeting targets on time, frequent reporting and verification create time pressures for the contractors and programme managers, who often struggle to keep up with the reporting: “So according to the standards, I have to update the KPI report weekly and submit it to my area manager. And if we can stick to that, I can tell you that by the end of the month we will be having a correct figure” (#W04, 2018).

The focus is on achieving targets, with little or no emphasis on learning. However, in addition to the reporting against a set template and indicators, there are monthly key performance review

meetings. These could be an opportunity for learning as this is where the KPI reports compiled by the area manager are discussed in the presence of both the area managers, regional programme leader as well as the GIS and data management section. With the strong formal and informal rule about meeting targets, the participants use this discussion to focus on single loop learning only. They do a comprehensive check and verification of the information reported as well as corrections where necessary to ensure that accurate information is submitted to the monitoring and evaluation unit in DEA. An opportunity for reflection and learning that might challenge the overriding performance culture, is not used.

There are a few conflicting rules, that enable and constrain reporting at the same time. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that: “we will be only workshopped [by the DEA M&E unit] after they notice that we are making a mistake” (#W04, 2018). This creates very little room for learning beyond first order or single loop learning (learning what the rules are and how to follow them), and if reporting is done correctly, there is no opportunity for engagement. This also suggests that learning is considered as an afterthought, when there are problems with reporting. It also supports the idea that one needs to learn only if one makes mistakes.

#### ***4.4.1.5 Division of labour (roles)***

There is no monitoring and evaluation section within regional offices. All programme monitoring and evaluation is done at the departmental national offices, this means that all information that is required by the section is collected and collated by the different teams in different regions then forwarded to the division. The beneficiaries, contractors and various levels of managers have a role to collect, verify and clean up information and report it upwards.

The monitoring and evaluation division is responsible for providing the reporting templates to fit into the M&E database.

DEA also assists programmes to report better. The monitoring and evaluation director is present during programme regional meetings, either monthly or quarterly. This aim is resolving their data collection and reporting challenges through guidance from the top. It also gives the director a sense of the challenges faced by the programme. This could be an opportunity for the M&E director to reflect on their data collection tools and/or reporting periods, the strain that it puts staff under, and the associated contradictions (quality of reporting and learning). Such shared reflections have the potential to lead to change.

The Extended Public Works is responsible for conducting data quality audits. This is verification of all information that has been submitted to them through the labor analysis report which details the total number of contractors as well as programme beneficiaries, their daily rates, as well as the total number of person days for that contract. With audits, the EPWP samples a project in which the programme staff would have to provide all evidence to support what has been reported, and to answer questions which the auditors might have. There is no evidence to support any learning taking place here; the audit is mostly focused on numbers as well as the evidence that supports a claim that has been made.

Insufficient verification and submission of evidence was outlined as one of the root causes of many reporting challenges within the region, so the internal data management unit does verification of the data that has been submitted to the office from contractors and beneficiaries to assist with addressing those challenges as well as reducing inaccuracies (#W01, #W04). Several staff in the reporting chain therefore has roles related to making sure that reports are accurate, in terms of numbers.

#### ***4.4.1.6 Object - what can we observe that is happening in relation to reporting for learning?***

Both interviews and documents reviewed suggest that there has been a realisation in the programme and its wider context that learning needs to be one of the key focus areas. Certain steps have been taken to ensure that it happens, but this is however less focussed on reporting ways. It takes the form of creating learning spaces (outside of programmatic meetings).

Project teams are serious about learning, for example they use informal interactions as well as inter-team meetings, and they created additional reporting tools at regional levels to capture data more regularly. The object of this learning is to perform better and to report better.

Project teams have also expressed the need for “reporting for learning”, but their data collection tools cannot be altered as they fit into a bigger system. In the bigger system, the object or purpose of reporting is accounting for expenditure, against the indicators related primarily to employment and training, SMMEs contracted and hectares cleared.

## 4.4.2 Case study 2 – K2C-SANParks Biodiversity Social Projects

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### 4.4.2.1 Tools

#### (a) The Operational Standards (Guide and Template)

This is the same guide used by DEA as mentioned above. It details the way programmes should conduct their activities as well as the basis against which compliance is measured. The guide also contains an excel template in which reporting should be done accordingly. There is a section within the guide that is named **planning and reporting** that only details the activities that need to be conducted as well as the persons responsible. There is no indication of the need to report on learning nor any learning mentioned. This restricts opportunities for learning from reporting, as the template takes the form of a ‘tick-box’ with teams only needing to populate the tables with the (limited) information required. There is also no space for reflections on the information provided, or to raise anything else that seems relevant, which can be very key in facilitating learning within an organisation.

A few interviewees have expressed that they find this template difficult to use, there is no form of induction and programme staff must ‘wing it’. This often results in a lot of errors as well as communication of incorrect information. Not only are the templates time consuming, but they are tailored to collect only specific information, which does not give room for extra comments or suggestions that might be useful in running the programme going forward.

#### (b) Operational Standards Assessment

This is a guide used to conduct monitoring and compliance within the programme and is applied once every quarter. This assessment looks at certain standards that each programme needs to adhere to and scoring is made according to their compliance. There are 17 standards that range from planning & reporting, contract & contractor administration to employment, social development and training. This, like the operational standards, uses scores to rate compliance or non-compliance. It also has no space for reflection, nor is any reporting on learning required or mentioned. It suggests that it is simply a compliance or accountability tool that tracks narrow departmental interests and thus constrains learning from taking place. “You are going to be monitored or audited according to those chapters . . . , if they say herbicides, they are going to check how you mix them and apply them” (#S03, 2019).

This assessment features to some extent single loop learning in the form of corrections after an assessment, however the way the template is designed as a scoring system may constrain any additional learning from taking place. The scoring system is used more as an accountability tool rather than one which facilitates learning, as the emphasis is more on the scores achieved for a site.

Also, with the corrections, should one achieve a lower score or points, they are given a time frame to rectify that which is wrong or not in compliance with the standards, and then they need to provide evidence for that rectification in a form of a report and pictures (#S03, 2019). According to my interpretation, there is nowhere within the template that allows for one to reflect on why they got a lower score and what they plan on doing to ensure they rectify their errors. This suggests that teams are not allowed to make mistakes and challenges are not seen as opportunities for learning.

There were other guidelines mentioned as well during the interview, such as: The public finance management act, national water act, basic conditions of employment, compensation for injury and diseases act, conservation of agricultural resources act, environmental conservation act, national environmental management act, national environmental management act for biodiversity, SANParks policies on occupational health and safety as well as the promotion of access to information act. These documents were not analysed. They may have some influence in what is reported, for example the emphasis on health and safety reporting, and financial reporting, and therefore they may be shaping the direct tools (templates) that the programme uses.

#### ***4.4.2.2 Subject – who is involved in reporting?***

According to the interviewees, the K2C SANParks-BSP reporting system consists of beneficiaries, contractors, data capturers, programme managers, cluster area manager, among other others. The responsibilities of each person have been outlined in [4.1.2](#). Contractors and beneficiaries are the main data collectors and reporters on the ground. Project beneficiaries have reporting roles depending on the specific project each one is working e.g. health and safety, peer educators and supervisors. This information collected is compiled into a report which is sent to the project managers.

Project managers have a reporting role that ranges from finances, operational, person days as well as training. The role consists of collecting this information from the beneficiaries and

contractors, collating and forwarding to the cluster manager monthly. The cluster manager is responsible for collating this information for different projects and share with the implementation manager and the information collated includes finances, hectares and community impact (through the number of SMMEs supported).

The reporting system is one directional, in the sense that an interpretation of the data at an aggregated level, is rarely shared with project managers, contractors or beneficiaries other than to discuss errors in reporting. This means those reporting at the lower levels are not seen to have a role in interpretation and decision-making or making changes other than to correct errors, and this is a constraint in terms of the kind of learning that is enabled, or not. Furthermore, not everything that is reported gets submitted to the department, and this means that there is less chance that the more senior managers or DEA national can learn (or co-engage for learning) to address challenges that may require a re-thinking of the underlying assumptions and or practices. There are also indications that one is not allowed to make errors as these reports are somehow “cleaned up” before they are submitted to DEA to ensure perfection (#S05, 2019). This suggests that there is less opportunity to learn from (shared reflections on) mistakes. Also, some of the problems that contractors and beneficiaries encounter are not reported at all, because the system only makes space for a limited set of indicators like person days worked, hectares cleared, SMMEs contracted, people employed, and trainings conducted. One instance where reporting seems to be more of a two-way street is the stakeholder meetings, where both programme managers and community members have an opportunity to raise challenges and discuss how they could be resolved, towards the successful completion of projects. This is discussed next.

#### ***4.4.2.3 Community – who else is involved reporting or should be involved?***

Stakeholders, including MTPA, communal property association as well as tribal authorities and their respective councils have been mentioned as key groups who are part of the system although they are not employed in the programme. #S06 has indicated that every quarter, these groups get feedback on the programme achievements, challenges, as well as highlights. This, in my view could be a significant opportunity for learning as it affords stakeholders an opportunity to give inputs (which programme teams could learn from), and potentially tackle and address challenges together but interviewees did not mention these as learning. In line with the SANParks reporting chain, there are programme implementers as well as senior managers who were mentioned during the interview, whom I did not get an opportunity to interview.



#### ***4.4.2.4 Rules – what are the formal/informal rules that support or constrain reporting for learning? What are the cultural historical norms that govern reporting?***

As in case 1, there are cultural historical norms that govern reporting, which are highly influenced by the funder, DEA. Different interviewees mentioned different rules regarding how the reporting plays out. The annual plan of operations (APO) has been mentioned as one of the key rules affecting reporting: all projects need to have an APO to which they need to adhere from the beginning to the end of a financial year.

The rule is that, whatever is planned for the year needs to be achieved and this includes the number of hectares to be cleared or restored, the target number of person days as well as training days. A large part of the purpose (see also Object) of reporting seems to be to ensure compliance with this rule. The two rules of the APO are; not deviating from the guide as well as using reporting strictly to show compliance. Rules like this can be a learning constraint as one tends to focus on the deliverables rather than the process and how it unfolds. This rule also indicates that there is not much space for one to learn and make mistakes, and then to adjust course through the year, but rather to always provide positive results against the course set at the start.

Operational reports must be done monthly and the focus is on communicating the amount of work done, person days achieved in training as well as the type of training completed. Financial reporting is also done monthly, and this is a simple process of tracking financial expenditure which might assist one in identifying mis-expenditures as well as indicating instances of under-expenditures. These sets of rules around the financial reporting are to make sure that the allocated budget is spent by the end of the financial year and that becomes the main focus: “It is going to tell you if you are overspending, underspending or on point because remember that we are planning per month, so in April it will tell you that you must spend this much money and if you don’t then it means that you are underspending” (#S03, 2019). Rules like these restrict learning from taking place as the emphasis is more on making sure that money is spent, especially because if a project does not exhaust the budget, it is taken and given to another project that is running successfully.

The health and safety reporting is also done monthly and these reports are as per DEA requirements. This monthly process seems to be aimed at reducing the risk of injuries to workers which could result in reduced person days among other negative consequences. All

reporting done is guided by a fixed template with no space for any additional information: “We are given a template, a table on how to populate your report, ... and you cannot add more information..... I would say the fixed reporting structure is limiting “(#S06, 2019). A fixed reporting structure can work in both ways, as an enabler or constraint. However, in this case, the template is restricting learning from taking place, both for the persons completing them, and for those receiving the reports.

Finally, another rule is that reporting should be timeous and late reports are not encouraged. While this rule, along with all the other rules above, clearly have purpose and merit, it also has a downside, in that reporting done in a hurry also does not encourage reflection and learning. The time pressures could be reduced through less regular reporting, but the rules for regular (weekly, monthly, quarterly) reporting would mean that information is not lost or forgotten. This is a good idea except that in this case, the reporting is against a narrow set of indicators, meaning that some information is potentially lost anyway, despite almost continuous reporting. This is a contradiction where the process undermines the very same purpose.

#### ***4.4.2.5 Division of labour – to what extent does this allow for learning to happen?***

The different roles within the reporting system have been outlined in Section 4.2.2 which are almost the same as the role division in Case Study 1.

There seems to be confusion about monitoring and evaluation vs monitoring and compliance within the SANParks BSP, as these concepts are often used interchangeably by interviewees (#S03, #S04, #S06, 2019). One project manager mentioned that monitoring and compliance is conducted by an individual based in Cape Town as well as the manager responsible for that site. What is clear however is that resources are allocated to verification and auditing as significant roles in the reporting system. These roles are shared among various parties, some internal and some external to the programme. The monitoring and compliance audits are usually done four times a year or quarterly internally but there is no time frame for when the external compliance monitoring takes place. This process follows the operational standards self-assessment that I discussed under the operational standard tool above.

The Department of Environmental Affairs also conducts site verifications with the programme staff. Usually a site is selected by the Department then the programme managers need to take them to that site where they conduct inspections and make recommendations should there be a

need. This monitoring and compliance is guided by DEA's specific rules in terms of how the programmes should roll out. There is no space for programme implementers to try out alternative ways of doing things and as such, this division of labour or role allocation, constrains learning.

The role of checking, verifying and auditing is also internal. Project managers have indicated that they do their own internal assessments as a way of assisting each other to identify errors but also relying on other managers' comments to further improve the programme. This for me is a learning enabler because it gives an insight into their programmes and an opportunity to develop alternative ways to sort out a challenge that was identified before the external audit is done. This not only assists them in solving problems, but also with being aware of how this process is conducted and what is required.

***Object – what can we observe that is happening in relation to reporting for learning?***

The purpose of reporting in this case study is, as in Case Study 1, focussed on accountability as described above. Reporting for learning is not necessarily a primary focus within the K2C-SANParks BSP. There is evidence that learning does take place, but it is learning how to better report and how to better meet the targets, that is single and perhaps double loop learning. As explained in Section 4.2.2, this type of learning entails following given rules, and this can be seen at all levels of reporting.

Programme staff interviewed (#S06, 2019) indicated that using reporting to support other forms of learning could be worth considering, although the DEA templates and guidelines might be a challenge.

#### **4.4.3 Case study 3 – AWARD's RESILIM-O Programme**

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AWARD's reporting requirements are slightly different to those from the other two case studies. They consist of programme level as well as project level reporting, given that the programme consists of both a central component, and projects implemented by sub-grant holders. In this study, I focus mostly on programme level reporting although I might touch on aspects of project level reporting where relevant.

#### **4.4.3.1 Tools**

##### **(a) The Back to Office Report**

The B2O consists of field notes which are compiled by the project staff immediately after a field trip. It is guided by a reporting template with carefully designed questions aimed at both capturing data and encouraging reflection and therefore learning, for example, on what they found challenging or encouraging within that particular activity. Ideally, project implementers need to discuss that field activity and fill in the template together on their way back from the field. The questions on the template are aimed at ensuring that activities are identifiable at a later stage, but also to ensure an opportunity to reflect.

The template in Appendix 1 is divided into the four sections. The first section is aimed at collecting information related to the event itself as well as the authors. The second section is directed towards collecting capacity development data linked to USAID's indicators. The third section is on reflections with the aim of facilitating learning. The reflection questions include outlining new insights, new questions, and challenges that might have emerged from the event. The last section is focused on communicating programmatic work, and this includes submitting photographs to the MERL team as well as a note for social media posts. The questions have been designed with ongoing inputs from staff themselves, to encourage in-depth thinking and have been used as such within the organisation.

##### **(b) Register**

This is a tool that supplements the B2O field report and focuses on collecting quantitative data for a programme event which includes the names of attending stakeholders, their designation and organisations, the type of event, contact details, as well as gender. Much of this information is important for aggregating the number of people capacitated under several indicators, for USAID's reporting to the US Government. For the RESILIM-O implementers, this tool neither constrains nor enables learning.

##### **(c) Work Plan**

This document is drawn up annually as per the requirements of the funder, and details all programmatic projects, objectives, activities and targets for the year. It is the first point of reference from which reporting takes place. It is also used to inform the funder of all the activities that the programme will undertake for that year. Although this is a tool used to guide reporting, it is neither a constraint nor an enabler. However, the director and MERL manager

both reported that they found it very useful to work with programme staff to put the work plan together. This is discussed further under Rules in Section 4.3.3.4..

#### **(d) Monthly Report**

Monthly reports were introduced relatively recently in the programme's life, in 2016, when it became clear that back to office reports were inadequate in giving a complete picture of the month's activities. Monthly report templates are relatively open ended and they collect both narrative and quantitative data, programme staff's reflections and pictures, for monitoring, evaluation and learning as well as communication purposes.

Under the activity tab, data includes the project and the specific key result area, the purpose of the activity and specifying whether activities should be counted as capacity development, either for climate change or biodiversity conservation (the chosen USAID indicators). The reflection question focuses on sharing any significant developments, contributions to the main objectives, main challenges and how they could be addressed. This is where the report aims to facilitate learning through the 'tool' of specific questions in the reporting template.

#### **(e) Quarterly and Annual reports**

As explained earlier, the programme needs to submit three quarterly reports and one annual report every year as per USAID requirements. These reports are compiled by the monitoring and evaluation unit with inputs from project teams and then checked and finalised by the directors. There is no specific template for them, but over time AWARD worked out a balance in reporting on progress (quantitative and narrative data), achievements, challenges and finances for the quarter, with the annual report, being a comprehensive report that provides an overview of the same topics for the whole year. The format itself represents a form of learning, as it has been worked out over time to be the ideal balance between the different reporting forms and content topics, that works for both AWARD and USAID.

#### **(f) Newsletters**

Newsletters are a recent addition to the communications department and are compiled by a sub-grant holder with assistance from programme staff. They focus on highlights or important activities that took place within a month. They are essentially a communication tool which can be used to inform staff and outside stakeholders of exciting programme developments.

**(g) TraiNet**

This is a USAID database that captures details of training events and the financial resources used. It is quantitatively based and captures information ranging from training events, dates, training types, the number of people aggregated according to gender as well as the amount of money used. While it is potentially useful in showing trends across programmes to USAID, the RESILIM-O implementers do not draw information from this platform and hence it does not serve them with a learning purpose.

**(h) AidTracker+**

This is another online reporting system that was introduced into the programme by the funder, USAID. It requires input of results against targets for indicators on a quarterly or annual basis. It is quantitative and involves a summation of data drawn from the monthly reports. As it is only accessed by the MERL team, and presumably USAID, there is no learning for programme staff that is being facilitated by this reporting tool.

**4.4.3.2 Subject – who is involved in reporting?**

Unlike the two government case studies, with AWARD’s RESILIM-O programme, every project team member and everyone in the organisation is involved in the reporting, from the administrative staff, interns, researchers, project managers, the MERL team to the executive director. This reporting starts at the field level whereby project implementation teams have to report and reflect on activities that took place in the field (see Section 4.2.3). Their responsibilities do vary to some extent, however, as project staff are less involved in quarterly and annual reporting, which is done by the monitoring and evaluation team and the directors.

Another difference from the first two case studies is that programme staff all have an opportunity to contribute to the development of the reporting tools, to make sure they are easy to use and reflect what staff regard as important. The B2O reporting template has been changed through inputs from staff received at several workshops and in discussions with the MERL team. AWARD’s directors had an opportunity to shape and reshape what they report in the quarterly and annual reports, in discussion with USAID, over several reporting periods, until both sides were satisfied that it captured relevant content in a user-friendly way.

The way the tools were developed, and the way in which the reporting system is structured exposed every person in the organisation to all aspects of MERL.

#### ***4.4.3.3 Community - who else is involved reporting or should be involved?***

Stakeholders were mentioned as another party that is involved in reporting, through giving inputs and feedback and receiving the reports, rather than in the compilation. Different project teams have indicated that they have feedback sessions with their respective stakeholders where they discuss issues ranging from the project approach, activities, feedback on activities conducted, challenges as well as planning for future.

AWARD also has a reference group of peers to whom the directors informally report on an annual basis on matters which they have jointly identified as important. The reference group meetings span several days, and the agenda is intentionally focused on matters that are not related to operations and performance, but are more conceptual or strategic in nature. It is nonetheless informed by reports, including verbal reports (presentations). AWARD also reports on matters identified as important to peers in the field implementing similar programmes ('shared learning events' mentioned earlier). This is specifically designed to share lessons learnt with the community of practice, and to learn from their feedback. There is however little reporting from the other community members at these events.

#### ***4.4.3.4 Rules - what are the formal/informal rules that support or constrain reporting for learning? What are the cultural historical norms that govern reporting?***

The AWARD reporting system has been shaped by the requirements from USAID, in terms of reporting frequency and chosen indicators, but also by AWARD itself. For AWARD, the formal and informal 'rules' have involved a hybrid model, of meeting the funder's requirement, as well as its own requirements, which are to have impact on the ground and to learn all the time, how to achieve and improve this impact. Thus, its rule for reporting is that it should be accountable to the funder but also encourage learning. To achieve this, the organisation has refined its reporting system several times with inputs from the project implementation teams.

Each reporting requirement has its own specific rules for how they need to be compiled and by when, but the rules consistently encourage both accountability and learning. The back to office reports need to be compiled and submitted to the monitoring and evaluation team after every field activity, which can either be meetings or workshops, so as not to lose data, but the rule is also that it should where possible be done collectively, so that team members can learn from each other's insights into the field event, and deepen their understanding as they reflect to others. Weekly meetings are attended by all project teams every Monday and each person is

responsible for reporting on activities conducted the previous week as well as activities planned for the following week. The rule being applied here is collective planning and accountability to each other.

Monthly reports are also produced by all project teams every month and submitted to the monitoring and evaluation team on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the following month. These reports detail activities for the month, highlights, challenges as well as reflections. There is also a rule that they should be written not only by project managers, but the project teams should sit together to compile and reflect together. The monthly reports are then read by the MERL team and they too are encouraged not only to collate, but to synthesise, pull out threads and reflect on their relevance. This is then shared with the directors who do the same when the quarterly and annual reports are put together.

Quarterly and annual reports are a USAID requirement and are compiled by the monitoring and evaluation team with inputs from project teams. When compared to the other two case studies, this reporting system is not as linear.

#### ***4.4.3.5 Division of labour***

The involvement of all project team members in reporting, according to the explicit intention of being accountable and learning, is a good way to encourage learning and reflection. There is a downside to this in that reporting is experienced by some staff (#R03, 2019) as a daunting task, especially because of the different components and time pressures, considering that project teams have many responsibilities besides reporting.

Another constraint to learning seems to be the fact that project staff feel they do not always have room to propose changes or make changes (#R03, 2019). They may reflect on challenges, but they cannot always address them, presumably because actions are reserved for more senior staff or directors. This seems to create some frustration as to how much can be learnt from reflection, if there is no follow-up action.

Although reporting responsibilities are shared amongst project implementation teams and other staff, there are specific duties that are for the monitoring and evaluation team only. The MERL team consists of one full-time MERL officer, one near full-time MERL manager, and a part-time senior research associate with an oversight role. The MERL manager is responsible for the day to day coordination and management of M&E implementation within the project as



well as its sub-projects; and must summarise performance data against the outputs and impact indicators, provide technical assistance to staff and sub-projects on how to plan and report and on the hybrid MERL system in place, oversee data quality management and support the MERL Officer, and report on MERL activities.

The MERL officer is responsible for monthly data collection using the given monitoring tools, provides logistical support to M&E processes, document version management and archiving of reports and reporting on MERL activities. The responsibilities of the senior research associate are centred around the conceptual design and signing off of the MERL framework and associated tools, ensuring conceptual coherence into implementation, assisting with analysis and feeding into reflections and strategic planning. Although it is not possible to say how these shared responsibilities constrain or enable learning, the MERL team is the wheel behind ensuring that reporting for learning is implemented and functions smoothly. It is also an indication that the organisation and the funder take MERL very seriously, having made all these resources available for this purpose.

#### ***4.4.3.6 Object - what can we observe that is happening in relation to reporting for learning?***

The key features of the RESILIM-O programme include the notion of strategic adaptive management, based on social learning as learning together what is not known yet (AWARD, 2017) facilitated through in-depth reflexive learning processes. This intention is evident in how reporting is approached. Reporting, like the MERL system in general, has a two-fold object or purpose which is accountability and learning (ibid.). Reporting is more than a compliance exercise and reflection, either structured or unstructured, is a central element of the monitoring and evaluation framework.

To enable reporting for learning, several changes were made to reporting templates such as the back to office reports, monthly reporting headings as well as the formats for the quarterly and annual reports to assist in generating narrative data and supporting reflection. These changes were aimed at embedding the reflexive practice into the organisation and ensuring that it was included and visible within the templates or tools. Every month, a day was set aside for the completion of monthly reports, to reflect on activities, progress and challenges for the month and this has proved to be a powerful tool for facilitating organisational learning (Rosenberg et al., 2019).

Despite the intention that reporting includes learning, there were a few challenges. The system intended for project teams to report and reflect collaboratively, but due to time pressures and other responsibilities, this does not always happen and often each person compiles their part of the report separately then forwards it to the next person who also does their part until the report is sent to the MERL unit.

In the next session I discuss the findings of the three case studies and make concluding statements including recommendations.

# **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations**

## **5.1 Overview of the Chapter**

This final chapter starts with a summary and discussion of the first two case studies combined, given the similarities found in their government-based reporting systems. Case Study 3, with different findings based on its context of an international donor funded programme implemented by an NGO, is summarised and discussed thereafter.

This is followed by an overview and discussion on the factors that may enable or constrain learning in the reporting systems of all three cases combined. A few contradictions in the various systems are highlighted. This section also considers the different ways in which learning was understood by the respondents; the type of learning that is being supported through reporting as well as additional learning opportunities that were available to implementers in their programmes.

Based on the foregoing discussion, some recommendations are then proposed, for these and other similar natural resource management programmes, on how they could strengthen the value of reporting for learning. Recommendations for further research are also included. The chapter then closes with a reflection on the methodology and analytical frameworks used.

## **5.2 Reporting Processes and Associated Learning in the WfW and BSP Programmes**

In the reporting chain, functionaries at each level have particular different roles. At the lower levels the beneficiaries and contractors report and provide evidence. Some get to use the findings of reports, albeit in a limited way. Specifically, the health and safety workers and contractors on site use the issues and incidents identified during inspections on which they report, to present to the teams (toolbox talks) on how to reduce incidents, or they order new equipment when this runs out, or work out how to work around conditions on site. This is mostly single and, in some cases, double loop learning.

Project managers use reports to inform planning and implementation, to ensure their performance matches the targets set in the plans. At the next planning round, they adjust targets

based on what they have learnt about their implementation and spending rate. This too is mostly single and some double loop learning.

Managers at all levels in the system get to collate and check reports before passing them up the chain. A large part of their role is to verify that the reported work has indeed been done; there are also additional personnel like the GIS units responsible for collating and checking data. Another role is to 'clean up' reports so they are acceptable at higher levels in the reporting chain, and much of their time is dedicated to working with lower levels to improve reporting in terms of conforming with given rules. There are however also opportunities for discussion among managers from different areas or from different levels. Much of this discussion is about how to deal with implementation challenges and meet targets. It is a form of adaptive management with evidence of single and double loop learning.

Reporting in these two programmes is focused on a narrow set of indicators, although challenges could also be listed for noting and discussion by managers. What is reported to DEA and the EPWP are simply headline indicators: person days (as an indicator of employment created), and hectares cleared or restored; and expenditure; in the case of BSP the number of SMMEs supported is also included.

Mapitsa, Popiwa and Tirivanhu (2019) explained that the way in which monitoring and evaluation in Africa has rolled out, was strongly influence by the new public management approach, which was a response to the role of donors in both public finance and social development. This involved a very strong focus on accounting for the spending of donor or public funds. This explains the emphasis on auditing and verification in Case Studies 1 and 2. In these programmes, reporting is most strongly associated with performance management and comparison with budgets, the programme's annual performance plans and the managers' key performance areas, although instances of single and double loop learning are evident.

The learning associated with the DEA reporting system reflected in the first two case studies, is focused on learning the rules of the programme in which reporting on and verification of work done against targets and resources used (budget, herbicides, etc.) play a big part. The participants in reporting need to learn how to report, and much time and effort (reports go 'up and down') is used to get reporting right within the given system. The purpose of reporting (the object) in these two programmes is to show that resources have been used accountably and that progress is being made as planned. This releases further budget to managers and payments to

contractors. This also allows DEA to reflect to Treasury that funds are well spent and therefore further funds can be unlocked. This reporting does play a big role in making the EPWP and WfW programmes possible.

Within this system, implementers are however also asking questions as to the eventual and long-term outcomes and impact of the work they do in the programmes, beyond whether the work is done on time and within budget. One implementer noted that communities are asking questions about the actual benefit for beneficiaries, who seem to be poorer after their participation in the programme. Similarly, invasive alien plant clearing in the area has been happening for nine years but there seem to be even more invasive aliens now than before. He felt that these questions could not be answered. Such ‘triple loop’ questions, about the intended purposes of the programmes and whether they are being achieved, are not part of the reporting system, and at the levels where this study took place, the reports are not used to encourage or inform such deliberations or changes.

### **5.3 Reporting Processes and Associated Learning in AWARD’s RESILIM-O Programme**

In AWARD’s RESILIM-O programme the reporting system was different, in that the process was more central and widely shared. The reporting is the responsibility of every project team member, although the high-level reports were compiled by the M&E team but with inputs from project teams. Staff were involved in more extended reporting processes, which were also more horizontal, that is, teams reported to each other as well as to the directors and the funder. Here reporting was explicitly focused on both accountability and learning.

For accountability there was financial reporting and quantitative reporting against a limited set of indicators. The quantitative data was aggregated by USAID in their TraiNet and AidTracker systems. Significantly, this indicator-based reporting was complemented with room to report on processes as well, and reflection towards learning was encouraged.

As in the case of the government programmes, RESILIM-O implementers also set targets and worked towards meeting them. In earlier research (Rosenberg et al., 2019), it was noted that at the time of setting targets, teams work together to reflect on what was achieved before, why or why not, and how they could go about things differently in the next cycle. This was informed by the process of reflections and it was also informed by reflections on the project’s theory of

change. Working on the theory of change for each project in the RESILIM-O programme, as well as on the overall programme theory of change, has also been a collective exercise, where programme implementers get to think about what a project or the programme should achieve and about the different ways in which they could go about working towards the intended outcomes and impact. This is similar to the adaptive planning phase of SAM, as outlined in Chapter Two.

This allowed the RESILIM-O programme implementers to rethink not only whether they are progressing along the given track, but whether this was the right track to be on, or whether they should change direction or try a different strategy (with the potential for double loop learning). This did not seem to be possible for the implementers in the WfW and BSP programmes, where employment and clearing had to happen according to the given formula.

Another difference with the government programmes is that RESILIM-O implementers also had opportunities to help shape the reporting system and tools, and they made several changes to these over the course of the programme's life. Interestingly, as in the case of the Blyde WfW, additional reporting that was not required by the funders (contract progress summary reports) helped them better capture what was going on, while it was happening. In this case, the emphasis was on a wider range of activities as well as processes, and not simply expenditure and quantitative indicators. But this addition of reporting by programme implementers, beyond what the funders require, is an indication that reporting is important for implementers, even though it is time consuming.

#### **5.4 Factors Enabling and Constraining Learning in Reporting Systems (Across All Three Cases)**

An interesting finding was that the many reporting tools seemed to have both the potential to enable learning and to constrain learning. For example, many templates and interactions with staff are aimed at helping them report accurately, and to verify that the information provided is correct. If false or inaccurate information is reported, nothing can be learnt from it, so it is important to support learning.

However, an overriding focus on checking and correcting can constrain learning if it suggests that there is no other way to do things than the current system, or if it creates an atmosphere of mistrust, where people do not trust each other, or if it suggests that mistakes are not allowed.

In learning organisations there is a culture of mistakes being seen as opportunities to learn, not simply learning by the individual how to correct, but also for the organisation to reflect on why mistakes occur, and whether something in the system could change to prevent this. This can be seen within the WfW case where programme staff indicated that the training they attended or that was scheduled by the programme was for the purposes of intervention to solve a challenge.

How the tools are used would probably depend on the culture in the organisation. In the two government programmes, most interviewees did not associate reporting with learning, except in terms of learning how to report. When asked about opportunities to learn, they often mentioned formal learning in the form of bursaries or short courses for professional development purposes. Some managers mention meetings that are specially designed for learning within and among teams of people or communities of practice. This shows that these organisations are not against or unaware of organisational learning, in fact they are seeing organisational learning as important. However, many of them do not see a role for reporting in the learning associated with these meetings. Reporting seems to be reserved for providing data and evidence of performance according to plans, and this is strongly shaped by the given guidelines and templates.

It was not possible in this study to analyse all the many documents that had a bearing on reporting in the government programmes, the WfW and BSP. What was evident, however, is that there are many policies and legislation that provide strict guidelines and place constraints on the reporting process that programme staff cannot change, although programmes do create spaces that train them to report better.

The frequency of reporting with verification of data submitted was a challenge for managers, even though they believed it was important not to lose data, or to wait too long before reporting which would mean losing data. In the BSP extra reporting was even introduced, in addition to the DEA requirements. There is a contradiction here in reporting frequently so as not to lose data, but only against a few narrow indicators, because reporting against only a few indicators means much information is lost anyway. For example, there is no data collection and reporting on the outcomes of training, whether beneficiaries are learning something they can use after their employment ends, or what their livelihoods are like after employment on the programme. On the ecological side, there is no reporting on what the conditions of the cleared hectares are after a few months or regarding any unintended consequences of clearing the area.

There are some mandates or goals of DEA, the EPWP and WfW programmes as informed by the National Water Act, or the NEMBA, that are not really captured in the current reporting. This involves the impacts of the work on water, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the longer term impacts of short-term employment and training on the livelihoods of workers and contractors.

If there is additional reporting or evaluations that address these questions, the findings are not communicated back to the programme implementers. This is a pity as it could help with motivation, if positive; if the impacts are not positive, they may be able to contribute to finding of solutions, given that they get to know the contexts quite well. However, this would require a change in the organisational culture.

It was noted that many interviewees associate the term ‘learning’ mostly with formal studies, getting qualifications to move up the career ladder. A broader view of learning as part of daily work, was not widely held in the government departments. One important thing to note is that learning cannot be enforced, so if programmes need staff to engage in a learning process, they would need to create an environment that enables this.

In the RESILIM-O programme, the reporting templates allow for indicator-based reporting, but also encourage reflection for learning. There are also events that have been initiated and whose role is to facilitate reflective sessions and encourage learning. These spaces have been found to be useful by other programme staff, for example project teams have appreciated how these spaces provide them an opportunity to learn from other projects and also to reflect on their own projects. However, there are others that did not find these spaces as learning enablers. The lessons from this are that learning is specific to individuals and is understood differently by many people, but also the process of facilitating learning is not standard and there are many factors that need to be considered. These could include, but are not limited to “the organizational culture, a flexible strategy, and the organizational structure” (Fiol & Lyles, 1985).

Some limitations to learning seem to be linked to reflection that is not taken further into action or where the participants are reflecting, but do not have the power or space to do something about the issues on which they reflect: this can be seen from two programmes observed where project teams indicated their frustrations on processes where they are meant to reflect on the



programme, then come up with inputs or suggestions which are not taken into consideration. There could be another contradiction here; it may be difficult for senior managers to run programmes with everyone else at every other level making inputs as to how the programme should be run, as this could involve many different viewpoints and slow down progress. However, making progress in the wrong direction or without everyone on board, could also waste time, and it loses the benefit of everyone's learning being considered, and even enhanced as we learn more from doing, applying our learning and then reflecting on the outcomes, according to the experiential and expansive learning theories introduced in Chapter Two.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Quoting McKay (2007), Mapitsa et al. (2019, p.4) argued that “technocratic approaches to evaluation focus on creating monitoring systems, measuring outputs and providing M&E training, which are far from sufficient for successful M&E systems”. They argued that one should engage with the reasons why one should do monitoring and evaluation (and therefore reporting) and should raise awareness of the uses and value of M&E to strengthen a culture of learning. Mapitsa et al. (2019) argued that there is too much technocratic M&E that responds only to the accountability drivers at the expense of promoting the learning agenda through evidence from evaluations. They claimed that “the check list to ensure evaluations get done” is often more important than how they get done.

This study has shown that learning is considered important within the three programmes, although the extent to which this is supported through reporting varies with each case. It is important to note that if reflection spaces are created, this is a step towards the right direction.

The recommendations below are on how to use reporting both for accountability and to support learning through:

- Adding to reporting templates a space for reflections to ensure that the programme both reports on the quantitative data needed for accountability purposes and also creates space (without increasing reporting responsibilities) for learning.
- Seeing more than mere numbers (learning behind the number).
- Encouraging discussion about ‘mistakes’ such as failure to meet targets, why they occur, and what we can learn from them.

- Commission evaluations that programme implementers can use to improve their reporting challenges.
- Understanding the programme's definition of learning, and their diverse learning needs, which can potentially contribute to a working strategy that the organisation can build on when initiating learning spaces.
- When learning events are organised, taking the inputs of participants seriously and developing ways in which this could be taken into actions from which further learning can stem; simply reflecting on and raising issues without an opportunity for action is frustrating.
- The process of enabling reporting for learning takes time and organisations might not get it right the first time around (trial and error) and a strategy that worked for one organisation might not necessarily work for the next organisation.
- When designing a learning strategy, it is important to consider the needs of the organisation.
- Strategic adaptive management has proven to be an effective strategy in solving a range of issues, ranging from conservation to basin management and impact assessment. Although the application of Strategic Adaptive Management principles are not so clear within the case studies, it could potentially be one of the processes used to help programmes achieve their learning goals, be it through re-developing the monitoring and evaluation system or designing new learning spaces which could potentially lead to improved reporting.

The study has also shown that such innovations are not easy to implement; there are challenges like time and competing priorities which means that people do not always have time to sit down, work together on reports and reflect with each other in order to learn from and with each other. Another constraint is the bigger systems like the DEA and EPWP regulations that are also shaped by other systems like the Public Finance Management Act . Similarly, it may also be difficult for senior managers to run programmes with everyone else at every other level making inputs into how the programme should be run, as this could involve many different viewpoints and eventually slow down progress. However, making progress in the wrong direction or without everyone on board, could also be a waste of time.

For this reason, these recommendations should be taken into other research processes as part of action research/action learning processes, so that implementers themselves have an opportunity to make recommendations, based on the considerable learning they have experienced, and then try out their recommendations. To this point, I recommend the principles of Strategic Adaptive Management as one of the processes for enabling learning.

This study was conceptualised as the first stage of a two-part research project. In the second stage, the contradictions, limitations and challenges associated with reporting and learning would be mirrored back to all parties involved in reporting, including those to whom they report, to discuss and work out ways in which to strengthen reporting so that it is more able to support learning, of the double and triple loop kind.

This would require an organisational culture shift in those organisations that do not see reporting as part of learning processes, but rather only as a performance management function. Such a shift could be supported by action research and expansive learning studies into reporting.

## **5.6 Reflection on the Research Methodology and Analytical Frameworks**

The choice of case studies and data sources had some advantages and some limitations.

In terms of data sources, it would have been good to have also interviewed some of the senior managers in the respective funding agencies (DEA and USAID) to understand what learning takes place at the level where all the data is aggregated (e.g. from TraiNet, AidTracker+ , and all the WfW reporting nationally). However, it was not possible to set up meetings with these senior people in the available time; indeed it was already difficult to pin down the people who were interviewed, and much time passed waiting for potential interviewees to confirm a date and time.

In terms of documents, although a criterion for selection was communicated with the interviewees, I still had to rely on what they provided, and this was mostly guided by what the participants understood my purpose to be. With the two cases, BSP and WfW, most of their reporting is quantitatively focused and as such, not a lot of information could be extracted from them and those reports that were narrative based provided irrelevant information. With the AWARD case, this was slightly different as I had the knowledge of all documents from my time as the monitoring and evaluation officer which made the process easier. The absence of historical data was however a challenge as I did not have an insight into how the reporting was designed before my arrival in this role.

It was valuable to have three case studies; the similarities and differences between them helped to show up some patterns. However, undertaking as many as three case studies meant that one

could not do very in-depth data collection and analysis in any one of them, and there remain reporting and learning related areas that have not been covered in-depth. In the initial design, there was to be only one case study, with an interactive component, which would have allowed for more depth as well as a checking of interpretations.

A related limitation of the study is that it is very much dependent on the interpretation of the researcher regarding the types of learning enabled or constrained by the different templates and especially the documents, as the opportunity to check these interpretations were limited. While transcripts were shared with interviewees for checking, the interpretation of the data was not, due to time constraints both on the researcher's part and the programme managers' parts.

Many interviewees were not able to reflect on learning associated with reporting, beyond learning how to report or correct errors. Another data collection method, to help them with these reflections, may have been useful.

The analytic frameworks were the single, double and triple loop learning framework and the CHAT framework which was used to identify factors enabling or constraining learning through reporting. The CHAT framing was useful in exploring factors that might potentially play a role in enabling or constraining learning, but also as a way to gain a deeper understanding into what factors might need to be taken into consideration when designing a learning process for each organisation. The three loops of learning were a useful frame, as they gave clear definitions for the type of learning that I had to look for. This was useful because learning is broad and might extend beyond what the frame proposes and exploring the concept of learning in such breadth could have been a time-consuming and diffuse process. Expanding on this study would require ample time for CHAT or expansive learning workshops which could then uncover other types of learning that are beyond the three loops of learning framework.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Back to office report



Version-June-2019

## Phase II B2O Report

### Bringing Process Data and Statistics from the Field Back to the Office

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Complete within a week after a field event and submit via the Knowledge Management System before the end of the month. Please inform Karen ([karen.kotschy@gmail.com](mailto:karen.kotschy@gmail.com)) and Mulweli ([mulweli@award.org.za](mailto:mulweli@award.org.za)) of all submissions.

### Making the Connection

<b>What was the field event?</b> (Workshop, meeting, course, conference, talk, etc.)	
<b>Where did it take place?</b>	
<b>When did it take place?</b> (date)	
<b>Purpose of the event</b>	
<b>KRA and Project</b> to which the event relates	
<b>Intended RES-O Outcome</b> Towards Which the Event Contributes	
<b>Name(s) of Author(s)</b> Complete with colleagues where possible	
<b>Who else from AWARD attended?</b>	
<b>Who else should you (the author) send this B2O to?</b>	

### TraiNet Data

To decide if the data from this event should be logged on TraiNet, please complete:

Could participants learn new information or skills relating to climate change, biodiversity and/or water management?	
Was there a lead facilitator or instructor?	
Was there a defined learning program with learning objectives/ outcomes?	
Was the event run/organised/initiated or funded either by the Sub-Grantee or by AWARD?	
Did the Sub-Grantee or AWARD make a substantial input in the event (e.g. a presentation or planning the program)?	

## Reflections

Reflect on the event and what you have learnt about the catchment and your work. Consider things not immediately obvious from the agenda, that struck you individually or as a collective.

<p><b>What new insights did you gain from this event</b>, or this event in relation to previous ones?</p> <p>Please summarise any key observations regarding the context and/or about your role in the process or AWARD's work in general.</p>	
<p><b>Have any new questions emerged</b> (from you or others) about the context and / or your work arising from this event?</p>	
<p><b>Have you identified any new challenges</b> regarding the context and/or your work? Do you have any ideas as to what should / could be done about this?</p>	
<p><b>Have you gained any new insight regarding progress</b> in relation to the baseline conditions there were previously in this context?</p> <p>(You need not reflect on this if this is a new context or project.)</p>	

## Communications

Help us communicate about the catchment and our work.

- Submit photographs of the event to the Media and Communication or MERL Unit.
- Send a note about potential social media posts to the Media and Communication or MERL Unit
- Did you hand out any RESILIM-O pamphlets, media packs, calling cards, reports, educational materials, etc? Please name the items and the number you distributed:

RESILIM-O material distributed	Number of Copies Distributed
Land Use Guidelines	
Calling Cards	

- Were you given any pamphlets, reports, calling cards, educational materials etc.? Please list these below and send copies to the AWARD Media and Communications team.

*You are done! Please submit your B2O to the Knowledge Management System (and inform [karen.kotschy@gmail.com](mailto:karen.kotschy@gmail.com) and [mulweli@award.org.za](mailto:mulweli@award.org.za)). Include copies of supporting documentation like the register, minutes, agenda or reports.*

.....

NAME

DATE

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS APPENDED:

.....  
.....

## Appendix 2: Monthly report



### Monthly Project Report Template and Completion Guide

#### Introduction

- A very brief background and overview of the activities carried out during the month.
- Make a brief connection (if any) with previous activity or activities How do these activities connect with what you have done in the past?

#### Activities

- Specify the relevant KRA and project(s)
- Briefly describe what happened and the role of USG supported staff /sub-grant holders
- Include the purpose of the activity
- Indicate which of these activities (if any) should be counted as capacity development in relation to climate change, and why
- Indicated which activities (if any) should be counted as capacity development in relation to biodiversity conservation, and why

#### Reflection

- What has been the most significant development this month and why?
- What has been the role of RESILIM-O in this development, if any?
- Has this development made a contribution to your objectives and / or the catchment? How?
- What were your main challenges this month? (These could be contextual, programmatic or implementation difficulties.)
- What should or could be done to address these challenges?
- Do you have anything to share on the AWARD website or Facebook page? Why do you regard this as worth sharing?

#### Pictures

- Include wherever possible some pictures in the report, with captions. Please also include the pictures as jpg files when you submit the report.

#### Conclusion

Imagine you meet Dr Sharon Pollard or Doreen from USAID making tea and you have two minutes to update her on activities, achievements or challenges this month. Write down what you would say as a conclusion to your report.

## Appendix 3: Interview schedule



### Interview schedule

<b>Date</b>		<b>Place</b>	
<b>Interviewee</b>		<b>Time</b>	

#### Opening

- Researcher to introduce herself, and give a background on the research, including its purpose as well as the motivation behind the study as well as time period for the interview.
  - What are the programme's reporting requirements?
  - What are the guidelines/legislations of your reporting system?
  - Who does the reporting/who is involved in the reporting?
  - What kinds of reports does the programme produce/ what kind of reporting are you involved in? Who else is involved in this?
  - What are your reporting periods?
  - What kind of data is collected?
  - What are these reports used for?
  - How do these reports help you in carrying out your work (planning, correction measures, reflexivity...)?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses associated with the current reporting system?
  - In what way is your reporting system aligned to your monitoring and evaluation system? How does this particular system work (M&E)?
  - Who does the Monitoring and Evaluation?
  - Who else is involved in this process? How this process is shared within the organisation?
  - What are the challenges associated with your reporting system with regards to learning?
  - In what way do they impact on organisational learning?
  - What are the strengths of your reporting system in relation to learning?
  - How, if at all do you think this can be improved?
  - What other learning opportunities are available in the organisation?
  - How, if at all are they related to reporting?
  - What aspects do you think can be worked on in this organisation in order to improve reporting for learning?
  - Do you see learning as a critical component in your reporting and your M&E system?
  - What mechanisms are currently in place to address your reporting challenges?
  - How are these mechanisms assisting you in improving the learning component of your M&E system?
  - Do you have relevant skills and tools to implement these mechanisms?
  - Is there any additional required support and from who can this be sourced?
  - What other learning opportunities are available within the programme?



## Appendix 4: Document analysis schedule



### Document analysis Schedule

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This will include gathering information, and studying it's content and structure to determine the extent to which they support or constraint learning as well as understanding the type of learning that is being supported.

#### Set of document types to be sourced (this will vary as per programme);

- Field reports
- Monthly reports
- Quarterly and annual report
- Minutes of meetings

#### Goals and objectives (themes to look at)

- Purpose
- Who to who
- Reporting period timeline
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Evidence for learning – Learning mentioned and Loops of learning
- Constraints and enablers

Date:

Analysed by:

Type of Document	Descriptive notes	Reflective notes( learning identified, constraint/ enabler)

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