



Citizen Science Association of Southern Africa

Democratizing Knowledge for Action
Newsletter 1 – 9 April 2025

The Citizen Science Association of Southern African (CSA-SA) recently held the first of a series of events planned for 2025. The event held on **20 March 2025**, commemorated **World Water Day** and was co-hosted by the **Water Research Commission (WRC)**, the **IIE MSA** and **Ecolink Environmental Education and Training Centre**. The focus of the webinar was the launch of the Citizen Science Online Training Platform (WRC TT 933/23).

The Webinar started with a short introduction by Professor Jaqui Goldin, an interim executive of the Citizen Science Association of Southern Africa as well as an Extra-Ordinary Associate Professor in Anthropology and Water Sciences, at the Centre for UNESCO Groundwater at the University of the Western Cape and a Director of Ecolink.

Prof Goldin emphasized the global and regional growth of Citizen Science Associations, and shared the vision for the CSA-SA, which is one of growth and inclusion across disciplines. She highlighted that the plan for growth included an association formalized as a legal entity which would host the Citizen Science Association for Africa Conference in 2027. Long term plans for member fees, working groups and an academic journal were also shared. Prof Goldin defines Citizen Science quite simply as taking science out of the library and out of the laboratory and into real life. She ended off her brief introduction to the CSA-SA by quoting Nelson Mandela and sharing the hope that the Association would make a difference to many people's lives.

"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others."
Nelson Mandela

She was followed by Mr. Bonani Madikizela from the Water Research Commission (WRC) who welcomed all attendees and highlighted the WRC's support for Citizen Science including the development of various tools, digitisation efforts and plans for certified training. He shared plans for standardized citizen collected water quality data for national and international use and announced the first citizen science-based State of Rivers Report in South Africa which has just been completed.



In addition, the launch included a keynote address by Dr Stuart Warner, Water Quality Specialist for the United National Environmental Programme (UNEP) Global Environmental Monitoring System for Freshwater (GEMS). Dr Stuart provided an enlightening analysis on "the role of Citizen Scientists in global water resources management: SDG Indicator 6.3.2 as a means to track progress."



Dr Warner emphasized that Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.3.2. cannot be achieved without meaningful citizen engagement. Currently, SDG data shows that only 60 000 of 2 million data measurements on water quality come from the lower income countries of the world. Therefore, there is a lack of data in these countries which limits planning and effective management and increases risks of continued water quality degradation.

"But where we don't have data, we simply don't know. We don't know what's happening, so any trend information that we see, it's unreliable. It's not robust enough to really draw any conclusions"

Dr Stuart Warner

Dr Warner also provided a number of examples of where Citizen Science collected data has been utilized for official SDG reporting, including those in Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania and Sierra Leone. He also highlighted the need for normalizing the use of Citizen Science collected data in countries who are signatories to the SDG: 2030.

Ms. Gugulethu Shabalala and Ms Charlene Russell from GroundTruth then introduced the attendees to the Citizen Science Online Training Platform (WRC TT 933/23) which outlines how individuals or community groups can combine online and physical training in monitoring the water resources in South Africa and beyond.



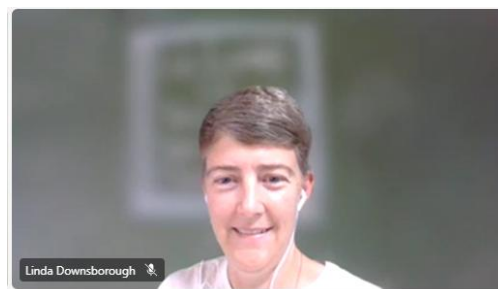
A summary of the research undertaken as well as a demonstration of monitoring tools, such as MiniSASS was provided. Further, lessons learnt from the project implementation within a community setting were discussed and included the

importance of closing the loop and reporting back the findings to the community. Important to note was that although the content was designed as an online course, some participants still required some in-person support in order to achieve the necessary learning including WhatsApp or phone calls. Training is critical to ensure quality control of CS collected data for decision-making. Until further action is taken, these tools and most of CS data collected by several communities are housed at GroundTruth, the developer.

The content for each tool can be found using this link:

<https://www.groundtruth.co.za/olt>.

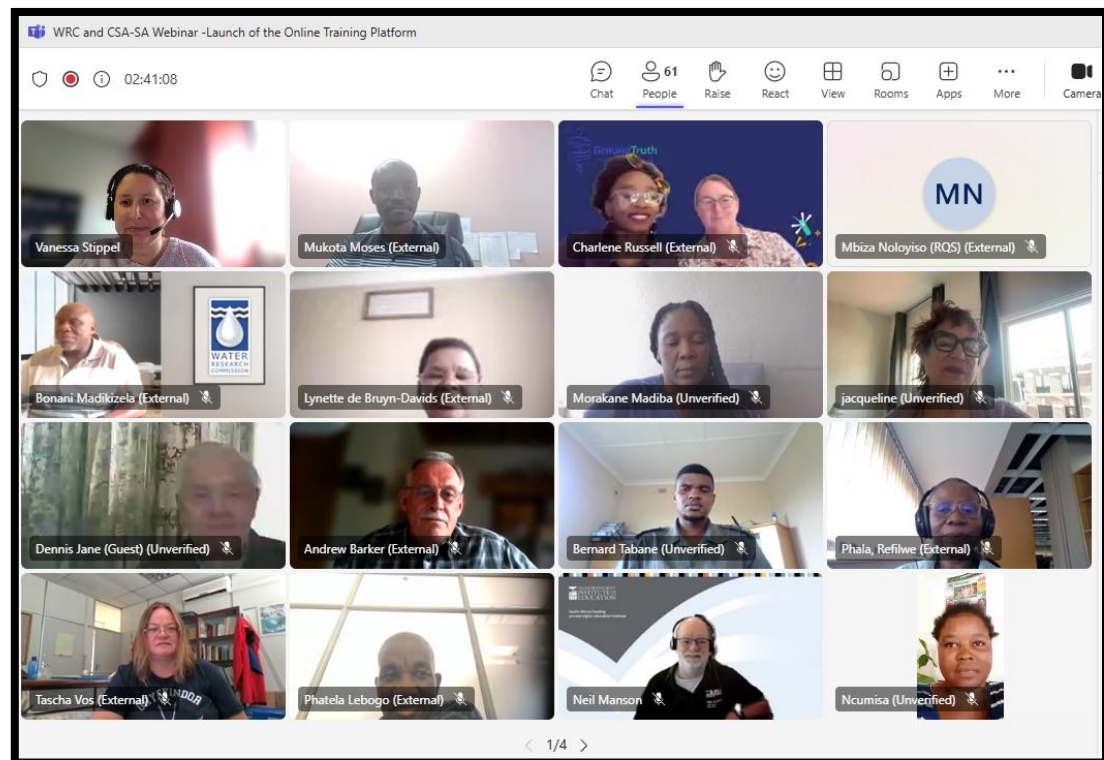
In closing, Ms. Linda Downsborough from the IIE MSA, provided a heartfelt and reflective summary of the event.



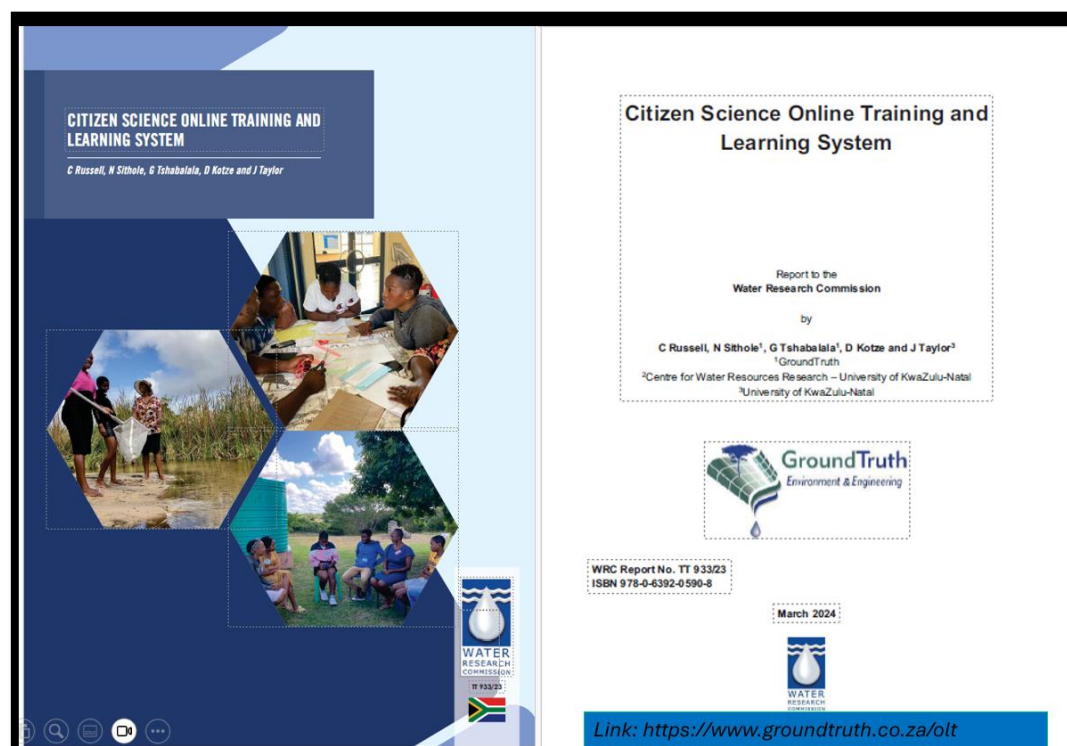
She noted the emergent uses and long-term potential of citizen science and called for the development of sustainable funding mechanism that would allow Citizen Science to move beyond short term projects, dependent on cyclical funding.

"Sustainability is not something to learn; it's something to live."

Below is a snapshot of some of the attendees at the webinar, which attracted close to 70 participants including a keynote speaker, from UNEP/GEMS, Dr Stuart Warner.



Below is the cover page of the CS online training report (TT 933/23) available from the WRC website.



Upcoming CSA-SA Events

The CSA-SA is proud to announce its planned activities for the upcoming year. Invitations will be sent prior to each event.



Webinar 1 - World Water Day

- Launch of the Citizen Science Online Training Tool



Newsletter 1

- Feedback from 1st Webinar
- CSA-SA Activities for 2025



Webinar 2 - Africa Day

- Overview of Citizen Science Activities in Southern Africa



Newsletter 2

- Feedback from the Inaugural Citizen Science for Water Quality Monitoring Conference in Delft, Netherlands
- Feedback from Webinar 2



Activity 1 - Mandela Day

- Monitoring and Clean up Activity



Newsletter 3

- Feedback from Mandela Day
- Citizen Science Stories



Activity 2 - Water Testing Week

- Water Quality Monitoring