

# ECOTOURISM

## can yield a crop of new jobs

## if communities will only wait for the harvest

By Johan Erasmus

**A**lthough responsible tourism aims to benefit the environment and create new jobs, there is a real danger that communities living in or near nature conservation areas are losing interest in the possibilities of the tourism industry for their own development. This is one of the conclusions of a report by the HSRC based on a consortium study of nine ecotourism sites commissioned by the Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Sectoral Education and Training Authority (THETA).

The highly labour-intensive tourism industry has the potential to create sustainable jobs, especially with the commitment of business and government to market South Africa aggressively as a tourist destination, promote the entry of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) into the sector, and train new learners in travel and tourism.

### SA AMONG TOP TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Tourism has been the world's fastest-growing economic sector over the past 30 years, and South Africa has become one of the world's 25 top tourist destinations. The World Travel and Tourism Council reports that South Africa had annual growth of 17% in international tourists and 27% in overseas tourists from 1996 to 2000. Tourism was expected to generate 3% of gross domestic product and 492 700 jobs in 2002. The industry has been forecast to experience close to 5% real annual growth between 2002 and 2012, with 3% growth to 679 200 direct tourism jobs. Ecotourism is perceived to be the fastest growing tourism subsector.

Last year THETA gave the green light to implement a multimillion-rand Integrated Nature-based Tourism and Conservation Management (INTAC) project, which aims over the next three years to provide 6 500 people with skills to work in transfrontier conservation areas, biospheres, national parks and along tourism routes.

Local communities need a measure of control over such ventures in their areas, and the assurance that they will share equitably in the benefits. Without the full support of these communities and local authority structures, selfish and monetary interests could sabotage such projects.

The study found that because of the long turnaround time between initial investment in these projects and the production of tangible economic, cultural and social benefits, the emerging ventures might alienate rather than benefit local communities, especially when business is the driving force behind ecotourism ventures.

The pilot phase of the INTAC project was launched in November 2002 in Madikwe

Game Reserve in North West Province, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) in Northern Cape, Greater Limpopo in Limpopo/Mpumalanga, Greater Addo National Park in Eastern Cape, River Rangers in Eastern Cape and the Free State, Thunga Thunga tourism route in Eastern Cape, Blyderivierspoort Game Reserve in Mpumalanga, Waterberg Biosphere in Limpopo, and Greater St Lucia Wetland Park in KwaZulu-Natal.

So far, the INTAC project has initiated skills training across eight of the ten pilot sites, in tourist guiding, hospitality, SMME development and conservation management. By the end of the pilot phase in September 2003, 1 000 learners will have attended skills-development programmes through INTAC.

INTAC project co-ordinators helped identify 1 176 community representatives, 23 authority representatives and 1 107 relevant enterprises for the respective pilot sites. Information from all representatives was gathered and analysed to develop a demographic and labour force profile of the areas surrounding the sites; describe relevant employment (such as hospitality, gambling and lotteries, tourism and travel services, sport and recreation, and conservation and leisure); profile the SMMEs in these subsectors; and establish the role of public authorities and community leaders in integrated ecotourism and conservation management.

Of these representatives, 33% were interviewed for the study. The study was conducted between September and December 2002 and the findings presented to THETA.

It was found that the populations in these areas were relatively young, predominantly African and poorly educated. Unemployment rates were higher than in the provinces overall, resulting in above-average male absenteeism and households without any income.

At the time of the survey, hospitality enterprises predominated in the pilot sites, followed by conservation and leisure enterprises, travel agencies, and sport and recreation facilities. Mainly low to intermediate skills are required in the ecotourism and hospitality industry. The owners or managers of the enterprises surveyed were



sharing and employment creation, disharmony and social decay, and self-interested leadership – which together led to impressions of disempowerment.

There is a fear among communities that development will lead to an increase in crime in their areas. In Mpumalanga, a large number of respondents referred to crime as a disadvantage, and some raised the recent reports on the British tourist who was shot and another who was raped as critical issues, with the clear indication that they see these events as a threat to employment in the tourist industry. Another fear among these communities is the spread of infectious diseases.

predominantly white. African workers were employed mainly at lower occupational levels. A high level of illiteracy was reported, which might explain why community respondents called for training in their home language.

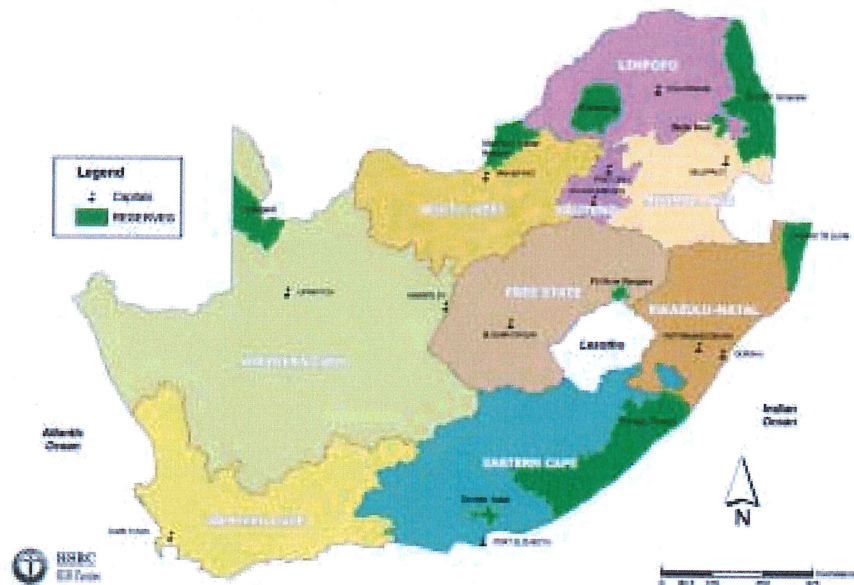
Various communities reported that they needed tourism-related skills training in nature conservation, game ranging and land utilisation; tour, project, hotel and business management; tour guiding, communication, hospitality, catering and cooking; and, in general, skills such as development, job creation and computer skills.

In roughly half the pilot sites the communities were very aware of and involved in integrated, nature-based tourism and conservation management projects. These included the decision-making and planning process of related sub-projects, for example, burning practices, infrastructure development of roads, construction works, electricity and water supply and botanical gardens. Community participation was especially high in the Kgalagadi TFCA, Waterberg Biosphere, Greater Limpopo TFCA and Madikwe Game Reserve. The Makuleke Communal Property Association in the Greater Limpopo TFCA is one example where their participation led to tangible benefits. They successfully lodged a land claim and now own land, known as the Pafuri Triangle, in the Limpopo TFCA. In the Madikwe Game Reserve the Lekgopong community had similar success and now also owns a portion of land.

In other sites, INTAC project co-ordinators

have just started to consult with stakeholders. These are the communities in and around the Blyderivierspoort Nature Reserve, the Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park, the Free State River Rangers site, the Greater Addo National Park and the Thunga Thunga Tourism Route (including the Eastern Cape River Rangers site). The pilot sites in the Eastern Cape are examples of recent developments, or expansions, as in the case of Addo.

However, all respondents felt that rural people were not sufficiently involved in the process and were therefore losing interest in the possibilities of INTAC to create jobs. Their concerns included restricted access to the resources of a protected area, low profit

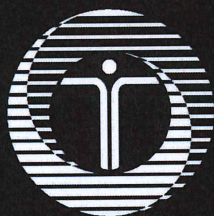


In sites where INTAC project co-ordinators have just started to consult with stakeholders, the development message still has to filter through to the communities.

According to Ms Thami Vallihu, Chief Executive Officer of THETA, the findings of the study will be published in a booklet for each of the INTAC pilot sites and used by the co-ordinators in the implementation of the project. For more information on INTAC, contact Clive Poultney, telephone +27 (0)11 803 6010. •

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## SOUTH AFRICA INTO AFRICA: Corporate expansion and political influence



Human Sciences Research Council

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