22 48



# Investment into eco-tourism projects: KwaZulu-Natal Coastal Belt: South Africa

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# **Abstract**

Tourism has been identified as one of the fastest growing industry not only in South Africa but worldwide. As such the province of KwaZulu-Natal through its Provincial Growth and Development Strategy has put together integrated programmes through which all the development stakeholders have to be guided in terms of socio-economic planning. Among the programmes is the Integrated Spatial Growth and Development Framework whereby zones/nodes with economic growth potential have been identified and both domestic and foreign investment has been/is presently being sought to actually bring the strategy into fruition. The critical issues to be addressed are the following:

- lifestyle and spatial distribution of population around the identified nodes
- access to infrastructure and public services
- preservation of environmental resources and bio-diversity
- preservation of culture
- constraints and difficulties experienced in attracting foreign investment into the region.

The paper will try to bring light as to the actual spin-offs of investing heavily into eco-tourism as against other economic activities e.g. mining. It will further highlight the relevance of using geo-knowledge in socio-economic planning and decision-making for effective and sustainable development



#### 1.Introduction

South Africa had long been ostracised by the world communities for its apartheid policies. It was only after negotiations and first democratic elections in 1994 that international communities entered and or renewed their economic links with the country. This has been through investments into a variety of projects solely aimed at assisting the democratic government to pull its people especially the previously disadvantaged communities from poverty and other socio-economic problems experienced by the poor especially the rural poor living in the former TBVC and self-governing states.

The Government of National Unity then put up a skeleton plan through Development Facilitation Act whereby areas/nodes of economic activity were identified and left up to each province to flesh it up depending on their comparative advantages. The province of KwaZulu-Natal has therefore put up the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy with the sole aim of improving the socio-economic status of its people. This multi-programmed strategy is already operational and has identified among others Tourism as the one major industry which the province can rely on to improve its economy and above all to eradicate and or minimise rural poverty.

# 1.1 Motivation

KwaZulu-Natal has a number of tourist attraction points due to its unique and vast bio-diversity and historical events. It has a rich diversity of fauna, flora, and cultural and unique geo features.

People being part of the environment makes them a centre of concern for its sustainability. Culture, economic considerations, social systems, politics and value systems determine

- Interaction between people and natural ecosystems and habitats
- Use of natural resources and

 Value and meanings that people attach to life forms, an ecological system, physical and cultural landscape and places.

Tourism development depends largely on ensuring that development is environmentally sustainable and does not degrade the environment or reduce bio-diversity. As such active participation of local communities in tourism associated with protected areas and sites is of crucial importance.

The South African government through its policy on environmental management is aiming at promoting the conservation of bio-diversity through among others, ensuring that benefits derived from the use and development of SA genetic resources serve the national interest.

# 1.2 Paper Sequence

The paper is divided into five topics. This being chapter one. Chapter two is on article review on the following:

- Bio-diversity management and rural communities
- Socio-economic status of rural communities
- Eco-tourism and rural development
- KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Growth and Development Strategy
- Economic links with international investors

Chapter three is on approach used in collating the information. Chapter four is the overall discussion and chapter five is on conclusions and recommendation.

## 2. Literature Review

# 2.1 Bio-diversity management and rural communities

Tourism is of great socio-economic and cultural significance. Provided it is well managed it can act as an agent for economic and social change and for better

understanding between people of different cultural background. "The main purpose of tourism policy is to integrate the economic, political, environmental and cultural benefits of tourism cohesively with the people and destinations, to improve the quality of life and to provide a foundation for prosperity of the people" (Development and change vol. 12 no.5 October 1995, p 753).

Ensuring the sustainability of eco-tourism development requires a community centred and environmentally orientated tourism policy, which gives priority to the interest of local communities & other stakeholders. A balance has to be struck between economic and social objectives, between meeting the needs of the host communities for improved living standards and satisfying the demands of the tourists while safeguarding the natural and cultural environment. For tourism to be truly sustainable, it must be fully integrated into social, cultural and economic life of the people.

I fully agree with Helu Thaman, 1992 as cited by Hall for stressing the need for ecocultural tourism rather than eco-tourism per se so as to emphasise the cultural context within which eco-tourism occurs (Hall, p153).

Almost all the authors on the subject emphasizes the same point that eco-tourism development needs to be based not on the culture of the tourist or developers, aid givers or conservation groups but on the values and culture of the host community. The natural environment is a cultural resource as such the rights and heritage values of indigenous people need to be recognised on matters relating to bio-diversity and tourism management.

# 2.2 Socio-economic status of rural communities

The total population of KwaZulu-Natal is about 8 582 440 with the African Zulu-speaking as the dominant population ( see Population density map ) The socio-economic data from the 1996 census shows the spatial distribution of population within KwaZulu-Natal by urban-rural classification. 58% of the population is rural with some areas far worse off in terms of employment opportunities and access to public services. The poverty, economic, service need and the lifestyle segmentation

databases enable the decision -makers to easily identify the priority areas for infrastructure investment and service delivery.

KwaZulu-Natal is ranked second among the top three provinces in SA which are regarded as under-developed. The first being the Eastern Cape and the third being the Northern Province (see poverty and combined social service maps). Most of the households within these provinces are female-headed due to the migration of male counter-parts to the urban/semi-urban areas for employment. The unemployment rate for KwaZulu-Natal is 39%.

DISTRICT	Population	Urban	Rural	%Unemployed	Functional Literacy
Chatswoth	189885	189885	0	16	77
Durban	566120	566120	0	21	78
Hlabisa	198180	13425	184755	48	55
Inanda	794167	645653	148514	35	
Ingwavuma	171919	1893	170026	66	
Lower Tugela	177460	85792	91668	20	
Lower Umfolozi	241837	62083	179754	35	· .
Mtunzini	198898	40950	157948	43	
Port Shepstone	225918	63104	162815	31	63
Ubombo	132302	1325	130977	60	
Umbumbulu	194192	23428	170765	56	
Umlazi	339715	339233	482	46	74
uMzinto	238805	36142	202663	43	60

Table 1: Population statistics for districts along the coastal belt, 1996

# 2.3 Eco-tourism and rural development

Eco-tourism has the greatest potential to boost local economies, provide employment, induce investment into infrastructure and access to services and generate additional funds for conservation.

Funding the development of infrastructure would be the first step in opening areas for tourism and stimulating regional economic growth and development. Good infrastructure helps to improve living standards, raise productivity and lower production costs thereby improving the quality of life. Experience shows that

infrastructure often acts as a magnet for development projects (Wells and Brandon, 1992).

While improvement / provision of infrastructure e.g. roads may enhance local development by improving access to markets it may also pave way to easy access to wildlands and for activities that threaten bio-diversity for instance hunting, tree cutting and unauthorised settlement. If badly designed and badly managed provision of infrastructure can be a source of environmental degradation in both urban and rural areas.

Community support is needed for conservation sustainability. It is imperative to coordinate investment in infrastructure with the needs of small-scale entrepreneurs and
local community. The allocation of funds for infrastructure development as well as
support for small businesses in the eco-tourism sector should be guided by principles
of commercial viability. Concerning community development, the criteria should be
sustainability whether the project serves the interest of the community, whether new
areas are opened up for development and whether jobs and income-generating
opportunities are forthcoming. Linkages with other production and service sectors
could be established through subcontracting, partnerships or joint venture
opportunities.

It is worth mentioning that funding for eco-tourism need to be targeted in a way that makes tourism more meaningful by contributing to development.

(See KwaZulu-Natal Combined social service index map).

# 2.4 KZN Provincial Growth & Development Strategy

The view that development and growth need to be limited soon, to avert impeding resource shortages and environmental disaster is being replaced by policies aimed at harmonising economic development and environmental protection goals, in recognition of their independence. The Agenda 21 focuses on integrated policies and strategies to exploit the complementary between poverty reduction, economic

efficiency and sound environmental management in support of the goal of environmentally sustainable development with social equity. The provincial growth and development strategy is aimed at achieving exactly that.

The strategy had been formulated on the bases of the vision for KwaZulu-Natal, which is "The dynamic province of KwaZulu-Natal will be characterised by peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy, educated and democratic society, and as being attractive and competitive both in local and global terms".

As mentioned above PDGS is a multi-programmed strategy with seven central programmes viz.

- Building the winning province
- Enabling local economic development
- Fueling the powerhouse
- Addressing the needs of the poor
- · Human resource development
- Spatial growth and development strategy
- The development of institutions and implementation capacity

The Spatial Growth and Development Strategy is a well-informed strategy formulated in response to the existing and emergent patterns of socio-economic and spatial development in the province. The strategy is also in line with our macro-economic policy, GEAR (Growth, employment and redistribution) which emphasises the need to create an efficient and stable climate for local and international investors to assist in developing economic sectors with potential to contribute to the economic and reconstruction of our country.

The spatial growth and development strategy provides opportunities in the identified development corridors or SDI's (spatial development initiatives). The SDI's link the main urban centres and indicate the route along which generative economic growth and interaction are most pronounced. The strategy comprises of five main elements:

- Development corridors
- Major towns outside the corridors

• Spatial framework for the provision of public services

· Regional plans

• Legislative framework

Two main corridors have been identified, firstly along the coast from Port Shepstone to Richards Bay and further north towards Mozambique. This has been identified as an eco-tourism corridor, which this paper is all about. The other corridor is along the N3 towards Gauteng including areas where industrial decline is being experienced. Also a concept of 'a shadow corridor 'has been incorporated into the framework. A shadow corridor refers to the areas inland of the main corridors, which is populated by the rural poor with no basic facilities and or employment opportunities. These will also benefit from the development of the main corridors.

GIS was used to test the validity of the draft strategy and to ascertain

the strengths and weaknesses of the different sub-regions in the province

where development needs are greatest

where development potential is high and in which sectors

(See map: KZN Combined social & service index and Nature reserves maps)

2.5 Economic links with international investors

Funding for the conservation of South African natural and cultural heritage is under threat as no special funds are made available solely for conservation and funds to cover recurrent and capital cost are insufficient. As such conservation programmes need to be linked to programmes for upgrading infrastructure, developing small contractors, creating jobs and providing training. The international community as mentioned earlier have now begun to support SA to bridge the gap between the developed and under developed areas (e.g. European Union, Japan international cooperation agency, World Bank).

For funders/donors to invest in the region they need to be ensured that, the project is

replicable, sustainable and cost-effective. As such, investment security must be provided to gain investors confidence. Without this confidence, incentives on their own are of minimal value in attracting investment. The government needs to show its support for tourism by providing a better investment climate and ensuring that the country is perceived to be stable. The effective way to promote and finance biodiversity and sustainable development is through private foundation in partnership with European bilateral aid agencies. (Wells 1994). A substantial amount of EU funds are invested into the development of cco-tourism. The advantage associated with investing into this sector is that eco-tourism allows for cash to be received for the privilege of visiting the land but with no resource depletion. Economic benefits are thus gained with future land use option being retained.

The flaw associated with the western aid donors is that the proposals they put forward often served to reinforce the powers and wealth of the local elite, developers and consultants at the expense of the wider indigenous community. Western notions of conservation and the promise of eco-tourism have not been widely supported at the rock-face /grass-root level mainly for this reason and secondly because of different cultural perceptions of the relationship between society and the environment.

# 3. Methodology

The data has been collected from the secondary source e.g. economic journals, websites, policy documents and GIS Centre's databases etc. All the information has been thoroughly studied to gain an understanding of its relevance to the topic in question.

# 4. Discussion on eco-tourism projects

It is interesting to note that the three provinces ranked as the poorest in the country are the ones with vast bio-diversity of plant and wildlife and also unique and beautiful geo-features. Opportunities for investment should have long been exploited to actually benefit the locals of the areas in question (see Combined social service Index map for SA and the poverty map).

The KwaZulu-Natal coastal-belt stretches from Port Shepstone-Durban-Richards Bay to Maputo (see KZN Nature reserves map). This area forms the icon of the province due to its unique natural beauty, bio-diversity and diverse harmonised cultures. As mentioned above the Spatial Growth and Development Strategy is one of central programmes of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy. To bring the strategy into fruition the following projects have been identified and investment to kick-start these have been /is presently being sought.

#### 4.1 The South Coast

# 4.1.1 Mpenjati Nature reserve

This nature reserve is 51 ha in extent and comprises a unique dune forest, ilala palm-veld and a mosaic of wetlands. About twenty sites have been identified for the development of aesthetically designed chalets. Presently innovation is called for on the part of the investors, developers and operators in structuring the joint venture and /or other participatory schemes which ensure the flow of tangible benefit to the Conservation service, the local community and contributes to the local economy. Necessary infrastructure is now in place and the overall value of the project is approximated at R10 mil.

# 4.1.2 Oribi Gorge Health, Sport and Conference Resort

The Oribi Gorge hotel is situated adjacent to the ecologically renowned Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve in the South Coast. The site has beautiful views of the Gorge including Baboon's Castle, Baboons Castle waterfall and the famous Overhanging Rock. The project comprises three interrelated components that is a hotel, sports facilities and a health hydro. Phase one of the project is estimated to cost \$3 million with a return on investment of about 30%. Phase two is estimated at \$300 000 with a net return of approximately \$900 000 on initial investment and the continual annual net income is estimated at approximately 38%.

# 4.1.3 Umzimkhulu Game Reserve

The project consists of the establishment of a game reserve in the Umzimkhulu River Valley. This is to be a classic big-five game reserve occupying some 30-Km of the unspoiled Umzimkhulu River Valley. The budget for the entire project is approximated at R5-7 mil.

#### 4.1.4 TC Robertson Nature Reserve

The Nature reserve consists of 63 hectares of land and is about 30 minutes from Durban with easy access. Three hiking trails to the north, south and inland and an upmarket accommodation has to be developed. The hydrology study as well as the preliminary EIA has been completed. The entire budget for the project is R700 000.

#### 4.1.5 Mokonea

This is a two-phased project aimed at creating sustainable jobs through using the beauty and tranquility of the area by building both the hotel and conference centre and to give the tourists the feel for life in a rural area. The centre will be built on top of the Makonea hill which is one of the most scenic places in the area overlooking the Umkhomazi river and the rolling valleys and hills around the area.

For the second phase the land adjacent to the complex will be developed into a small game park. This park will be stocked with bucks, Impala, Zebra, Kudus and the wild beast.

#### 4.2 The Durban Metro

Durban is situated on the eastern seaboard of our beautiful country "South Africa". It covers an area of over 1300km. It is surrounded by game reserves, beaches, mountains and leisure facilities. Durban is also home to the busiest harbour on the entire continent and a gateway to South Africa and the Indian Ocean Rim Countries.

The following projects have been identified for investment opportunities.

- 4.2.1 Point water Front
- 4.2.2 Victoria Embankment
- 4.2.3 Wilson's Wharf
- 4.2.4 Umhlanga Beachfront
- 4.2.5 Valley of Thousand Hills
- 4.2.6 Amanzimtoti and Kingsburgh's
- 4.2.7 Inanda

The International Convention Centre, Hilton and Riverside hotels are the major tourism related investments completed in the late 90's the value of which amounts to R260mil, R240 mil, and R40 mil respectively.

# 4.3 The Dolphin Coast

The Dolphin Coast just as its name is a home to the bottle-nose dolphins that are visible throughout the year. Its shores remain undisturbed and combine both the golden beaches and the sheltered coves.

# 4.3.1 Zimbali

The Zimbali Coastal Resort comprises of a Coastal Forest and Golf Course Estate incorporating four hotel sites and a world class 18-hole golf course; and Mount Edgecombe Country Club Estate with two 18-hole golf courses and a club managed by the Dallas based Club Corporation of America.

Two sites have been identified where investment is sought to erect a 250-roomed hotel to cater for both international and domestic tourists. The EIA as well as site analysis has been completed.

## 4.4 The Lubombo SDI

The SDI stretches from the Umfolozi river near Richards Bay northwards along the coastal plain to the capital city, Maputo in Mozambique. It then stretches west to the Lubombo mountains, eastern Swaziland and the surrounding lowlands that run from north to south in all these countries. The unique features of the Lubombo SDI are its geographic beauty, cultural diversity, rich soils and subtropical climate. This region has six major inter-linking eco-systems, an area that is internationally known for the diversity of its plants life, game reserves and some of the most extensive unspoiled coastline on the eastern seaboard of Africa.

To date an amount of R630 million has been committed to regional support networks like roads, park infrastructure and restocking of the park with wide range of species. The following projects fall within the borders of KwaZulu-Natal.

# 4.4.1 Sibaya node

Lake Sibayi is the biggest freshwater lake in South Africa with abundant crocodile and hippo populations. The SDI has prepared a number of investment projects that take advantage of the area's wildscapes, beaches, cultures and recreational potential. These include the Ferry Theatre Music and Storytelling and a craft market.

#### 4.4.2 the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park

The Greater St Lucia wetland Park is located on the northeastern coast of KwaZulu-Natal. It is the South Africa's third largest park, comprising almost 300 000ha and extending some 280km from the Mozambican border in the north of Mapelane south of St Lucia estuary. In the east, the park is fringed by the Indian Ocean and in the west takes the entire Kosi and St Lucia lake system as well as the uMkhuze Game Reserve.

This is an anchor investment project designed to attract large-scale investment into the Lubombo SDI. The factors underpinning its outstanding economic potential for tourism-related development include the following

- The unique, unspoiled and spectacular natural assets (rivers, lakes, bushveld, beaches, estuaries, mountains and plains
- An abundance of rare and threatened species of wildlife, marine life, birds, plants and trees including the greatest diversity of birds in SA (526)
- The presence of the coast of the largest fish (whale sharks and two species of whale (southern wright and humpback), dolphins and big game fish
- The big five game viewing
- Sunny and hot climate with warm-water coast
- The designation of the park as the World Heritage Site.

The SDI has prepared a number of opportunities to invest in game lodges, beach hotels, leisure resorts, marinas and traditional villages. These include the Perrier's Rock, Mpate River, Ndlozi Peninsula and the Estuary View.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion I would like to put arguments in support of investing into eco-tourism as against other industry e.g. mining. Mining yes, can in the short-term benefit the local communities but seventeen or more years down the line the communities will be faced with poverty and joblessness as the mines will then be closed. Besides that, mining can only provide little incentive through low order manual jobs and provides no active and meaningful partnerships with the community as does eco-tourism.

We need to have learnt the lessons from Hlobane community which has relied on coal mining for a long period and are now faced with extreme poverty due to the closure of the colliery. It is only now that they realise the tourism potential of their area. An area with a number of endangered species like Natal Red Rock Rabbit (*Pronolagus crassicandatus*) and birds like the Bald Ibis (*Geronticus calvus*) and plants like *Sebea grandis*, *Morea spatulata* etc. and also an area where a number of historical events like an Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 took place.

A number of companies in enticing the government for mining licenses, design

plans/technology for environmental rehabilitation. Even if the mining companies can rehabilitate the environment later, there will be irreparable damage which could not be restructured, particularly internal damage whose effect on the external environment has never been researched and the severity and the period it will take for the consequences of such damage to be experienced by species on the external environment not known (asbestosis in South Africa is a good example). In short we do not know how and when the consequences of mining will impact on our biodiversity.

Although local communities have not benefited as yet from eco-tourism it seems and I strongly believe will remain the best option for sustainable development in the coastal belt because of the following benefits associated with eco-tourism

- National interest in foreign exchange
- Local job opportunities
- Can generate tax revenues
- Communities gain opportunities to have access, appreciate and learn about their natural heritage.

The delay so far experienced is justifiable. Short-lived processes usually bear no fruitful results. For any successful development effort, all stakeholders need to be taken through a facilitated planning process aimed at generating a holistic and integrated development strategy with shared goals and objectives. This usually ends up being a long process but the outcome of which will satisfy each and every party concerned thus ensuring maximum participation in development implementation. This is exactly what is causing the delay in fully resuming eco-tourism for the area. Community education programmes on biodiversity management, the importance of their support for tourism development and how to relate to the potential investors and people visiting their areas is of crucial importance before we can begin to reap the benefits of eco-tourism. On the other hand the investors too have to be educated on the social, economic and cultural profile of the areas with investment opportunities.

The positive impacts/results of eco-tourism can only be realised through partnerships and joint ventures. It need not be the sole responsibility of the KwaZulu-Natal

Conservation Services but multi-level stakeholders have to be brought together to create the economic vision and design development strategies for their future.

Although I fully support eco-tourism as an option for sustainable development, I'd also like to caution that it is not only mining or manufacturing that could damage our coastal environment, eco-tourism itself if not controlled can also pose threats to our bio-diversity e.g sport hunting, sport fishing and plant uprooting by foreign tourists to be used as souvenirs.

Provided proper consultation and maximum participation in the decision-making on environmental issues is ensured and practiced, emerging businesses especially from the previously disadvantaged communities stand to gain from eco-tourism. Their creative talents need to be unleashed so as to ensure local economic empowerment.

The government must also ensure that yield from eco-tourism is re-invested into the local communities.

Tourism more than any other industries rely on the exploitation of real estate. The government owns considerable pieces of land and may be able to attract investors by providing sites on concession terms, along with the necessary infrastructure such as roads, water and power. Natural and cultural resources must be properly managed and adequately funded (Krippendorf, 1982, cited by Kruger - Cloetep757).

The discussion above is showing how critical the application of spatial knowledge to socio-economic planning and decision-making is. The Province of KwaZulu-Natal has actually used the GIS technology for it's growth and development strategy and this will definitely impact positively on the lives of the rural poor. Looking at the maps produced it is clear that the districts that stand to benefit are the ones where there is a real need (Hlabisa, Ingwavuma, Ubombo in the north, and Umzinto, Port Shepstone in the south). These areas have also been identified as the priority areas for tourism infrastructure investment (Patii's) by the National Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

All of us in the GIS profession have a task to advise and guide our respective governments and potential investors on where the development funds should be invested. The critical part is not only to identify but also to quantify and map the extent of socio-economic needs of our people. Governments have limited funds so these have to be distributed equitably ( i.e. where they are needed most ). We therefore need to impart the knowledge and apply our expertise to every development venture. The flaw that is often made is to put more emphasis on the EIA, s and largely overlook the social impact of tourism development projects on the daily living of the local people. Which is why villagers used to be hostile to every conservation project. Dukuduku forest fiasco is a good example. Such hostility is perceived by investors as a risk thus resulting into slow inflow of investments.

Secondly communities need to have alternatives to make a living and survive. For instance if one is not allowed to use wood as an energy source what else is available, if one is prohibited to cut grass and put a roof over his/her head or make traditional mats to sell for a living what other alternatives are available?. These are all the social issues that need to be addressed first before we can even think of attracting investment into this sector (eco-tourism). In the absence of the alternatives to satisfy those needs people will continue to deplete the environment thus making it unattractive to the potential investors. This is a clear indication of how critical it is to lay a good infrastructure in-terms of basic services like water, electricity, roads etc.) as these form the bases for biodiversity management hence eco-tourism development. This is not to say that the KwaZulu-Natal Government is not addressing these problems but the gap between the service need and delivery has been so great in such a way that it will take some time for it to be completely closed due to limited funds.

To speed-up the process of attracting investments into this sector we also need to improve and use the new methods of information dissemination. A web-based GIS is recommended as this will minimise the costs of personal visits to the developed countries solely to market and inform the international community on the investment opportunities. This will also help the prospective investors to make wise decisions based on the visual mappings of socio-economic profile of the area/region of his/her interest.

The use of GIS is a powerful tool in socio-economic planning and policy formulation. The onus is on us as social scientist within the GIS field to collect socio-demographics and geo-reference these to enable the visual display of the true picture of the development status of our countries and regions. That will then form the foundation of our social and economic policies the implementation of which will contribute to a smooth and sustainable development. This will no doubt boost investor's confidence hence increased economic prosperity of our countries and regions and overall improvement in the quality of life of the poor.

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