

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM VENTURES: A QUEST FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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### 1. Introduction:

Community based tourism is enthusiastically touted as a solution to the problem of rural underdevelopment. In South Africa, community based tourism emerged as a result of seemingly successful tourism ventures in neighbouring countries, such as Zimbabwe. Portrayed as one of the most promising tourism destinations of the African continent by the World Tourism Organisation (*White Paper on Tourism*, 1996), South Africa has also experienced significant growth in tourism since 1994.

However, where poor rural areas previously did not benefit from the tourism boom this gradually started to change in the late 1990's due to government policy intervention. Well-known examples of government-supported initiatives are the Lubombo and Wild Coast SDI's where tourism became the main vehicle for developing disadvantaged communities. Despite concerted efforts by government and private sector parties, success stories have been few and far apart. Project implementation was in many instances met with a multitude of problems, reportedly the result of a lack of understanding of key social processes and dynamics (Kepe 2001).

Gaps between theory on community participation in tourism ventures and practice therefore seem to exist. This research consequently examined the elements that create an enabling and sustainable environment for successful tourism development with the participation of local communities.

This paper highlights the preliminary results of three case studies by comparing practical experiences with community-based tourism development theory. A mainly qualitative approach that consisted of in depth interviews with a variety of stakeholders was followed in gathering information.

### 2. Tswaing Crater Museum

#### Background

The Tswaing Crater Museum is the only crater museum and the first environ-museum in South Africa. It is also one of eight satellite museums of the National Cultural History Museum. Its mission statement is the sustainable conservation of this cultural and natural heritage. The land, on which the museum is situated, is government property that was previously used by the Agricultural

Research Council (ARC) as an experimental farm. They had to stop their agricultural activities and pull out because of tension with the adjacent communities. The land was then transferred to the National Cultural History Museum, a parastatal in 1992. The land however has not been formally proclaimed as a nature reservation or conservation area and is still zoned for agricultural purposes. The land itself however is not under contention as it has been government owned since the 1880s. No community can therefore lay claim to it.

### **Community involvement/participation**

Despite this, one of the key elements of the museum was to engage the adjacent communities in consultation. This process of community consultation started in mid 1990s and took about 10 years. Fifteen communities, which include Soshanguve, Winterveldt, Stinkwater, etc., surround the museum. It was initially difficult to find out whom to consult or talk to during the early 1990s; mostly traditional leaders, civic organisations and political parties were consulted. The process improved after the Tswaing Forum was established in October 1993. This was to ensure that all interested and affected parties were involved in the planning and decision-making process.

All 15 communities surrounding the museum are represented in the Tswaing community forum. Other members include specialists such as museum scientists, agricultural scientists, botanists, zoologists, businesspeople, geologists, educators as well as representatives from various non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations. The extent of people or communities' involvement usually depends on where people live, who their representatives are and how well the message is communicated.

The relationship between the different role players, especially the museum and the communities is good, though complex at times. Despite the amicable relationship between the forum, which is essentially the mouthpiece of the community and the museum management, tension sometimes arise, especially when the community perceive the museum management as taking too long on delivering on promises. This is because the management is not autonomous and has to report to and take its mandate from the NFI (Northern Flagship Institute).

### **Benefits to the community**

Tswaing is the largest impoverished area in Gauteng. Two hundred and twenty five thousand people live in the area surrounding the museum, of which the youth and middle age constitute 70 – 80%. Unemployment is rife. The museum attracts a lot of foreign tourists; community members therefore perceive it as potentially important for job creation and poverty alleviation purposes.

The museum management are careful to inform people on a 'need to know' basis on whether jobs are available or not as they do not want to create unrealistic expectations. So far +/- 200 people

from the adjacent communities have been employed in various capacities over the years. The current staff comprises 6 permanent employees and 20 – 25 casual employees. The mandate is to employ people from the surrounding areas who are also qualified. Since forum members from the ward committees have experience in how to procure labour, the forum looks at the criteria and experience of prospective applicants. The Education Manager for example, is from Mabopane, one of the adjacent communities. Her qualifications include a UDE diploma and a Btech diploma. Training is provided for a few jobs only, e.g. for tour guides and additional training was provided for the Education manager to better perform her duties.

A small number of SMME opportunities also arose, e.g. some jobs e.g. catering are outsourced to community members or women's groups, when the museum has a heritage day celebration, etc. A builder, who was involved in construction at the museum, was approached by others for building jobs, etc. About 15 artists are currently exhibiting their crafts at the museum in the hope that tourists would buy it. A site for future exhibitions has been constructed on the premises. Community members are also encouraged to form strategic partnerships in line with government policies, e.g. 80 people were employed through the Working for Water project.

Other benefits include education opportunities. For example, education on conservation issues (i.e. environmental education) is offered at the museum. More and more people from surrounding areas are beginning to appreciate the museum for its cultural and natural heritage, and do not only see it as a recreational facility. Some of them are even in the process of obtaining diplomas in conservation. Surrounding schools are also visited and teachers and learners informed about the cultural and natural heritage of the museum. Forum members have also learned how to organise fund raising events and other capacity building opportunities also arose.

### **Threats to sustainability**

It is imperative that the museum is seen as a much needed or valued commodity. Not seen as such is the biggest threat to its sustainability. The museum therefore needs more visitors (feet through door) and more hits on its website. The museum needs a better and more effective marketing strategy in order to attract more visitors (tourists).

Efforts to attract a wider tourist base include building more chalets, with the necessary infrastructure, e.g. electricity and the reintroduction of various game into the nature reserve. Future endeavours include a possible traditional farm with Nguni animals and a muti garden. Already more community members are beginning to appreciate the museum for its natural and cultural heritage and are encouraging conservation and environmental education opportunities, especially for local people and schoolchildren.

The museum receives R26 million annually from government to finance conservation activities. The fees and revenue that the museum generate, is part of the overall budget and not counted as profit. The museum is running at a loss and cannot generate an income.

The museum will therefore never be financially self reliant, but as it is a government institution, it is their (government's) responsibility to fund it. The museum management sees the prospect of private sector involvement as over enthusiastic at times. Private investors are only interested in making a profit and would therefore rather invest in golf courses and chalets. They want to make money and are not necessarily investing to conserve or preserve the pristine environment or the historically and culturally significant artefacts, which is after all the core function and objective of the Tswaing Crater Museum. Private investment is therefore welcome, but not essential for the sustainability of the museum. What is essential is that government sees the museum as an important cultural heritage and thus not only continue funding it, but increase the funding. For this to happen, the museum needs to increase its visitors.

### **3. Pafuri river camp**

#### **Background**

Pafuri river camp is situated in the north-eastern part of Limpopo Province. It is located on land belonging to the community of Mutale Bend, named after the Mutale River and falls within the jurisdiction of the Mutale tribal authority of the former Venda homeland. This was the ideal location to develop a tourist venue due to an unspoilt natural area, close proximity to the Kruger National Park and Makhuya Park, a tarred road and a clean source of water.

A private investor initiated negotiations with the tribal authority in cooperation with the Mutale Bend community early in 1996. After conclusion of an agreement, construction of the camp started late in 1996. This was despite the fact that the investor had numerous problems in securing a PTO from government to occupy the land.

Being a fairly isolated community, problems with identifying the Mutale Bend beneficiaries did not present any problems during negotiations. According to the agreement, only members of Mutale Bend community would be eligible for employment at the camp, except in cases where specialized skills are needed. The investor decided that a profit-sharing scheme would not be viable due to the fact that it would have taken a number of years before the venture showed any profits.

As part of the agreement, community members were asked to refrain from letting their cattle graze near the camp. They were also requested not to fish directly in front of the camp. In exchange,

management of the camp agreed to transport local people to more favorable fishing spots along the river to offset the negative impact on some community members.

### **Benefits to the community**

Economic benefits to the Mutale Bend community therefore comprised the fulltime employment of between 13 and 15 community members. The community also received a yearly lump sum of R800 for the lease of the land. This amount is set out by National Government. An additional amount of R1500 was paid over to the Mutele tribal authority annually as a gesture of goodwill. However, In February 2000 this practice ceased when the original camping site referred to as Mavhulani bush camp was destroyed when the Mutale river flooded its banks. Being without insurance against such an incident, the whole existence of the camp came under threat. The investor was nevertheless persuaded by the management of the camp to supply the necessary funds to build a new camp.

Although not part of the original agreement, the investor planned to build a local arts and craft centre along the tarred road to the Kruger Park. This was pushed on to the back burner due to the costs involved in building a new camp in 2000. Plans are nevertheless once again on the cards after recent talks between the investor and the Tribal Authority. It is envisaged that the centre will benefit most communities within the bigger Mutale area. It is foreseen that community members will manage the centre. Currently, baskets and place mats manufactured by local women are bought by the camp and sold to guest.

### **Threats to sustainability**

The Pafuri river camp case study highlighted issues that might have a significant bearing on the sustainability of tourism initiatives and which does not receive much attention in community-based tourism literature. Financial sustainability seems to be one of the major issues not addressed in literature on community-based tourism. Among others, advertisement costs, insurance costs and labour bills were identified as issues that have a profound impact on the sustainability of the initiative. The managers words regarding advertisement costs as an example sums up their predicament: "It is sort of a catch 22 situation, you need to market to get people here but you need to have people here to be able to market." Besides the obvious impact of financial implications, relations between the local community and Pafuri river camp may also be influenced by not being able to share profits with the community or paying employed community members a living wage.

#### **4. Boschpoort farm, Kroonstad**

##### **Background and aim of study**

The third case study formed part of a research study conducted by Democracy and Governance Programme on Commonages in the Free State Province. The overall aim of this research was to assist municipalities with effective management of commonages as well as to provide information useful for future economic and development planning.

For the case study, the aim was to determine the feasibility of initiating tourism activities at Boschpoort farm as well as to provide the municipality responsible for this farm with guidelines on how to develop a marketing strategy and business plan to promote the farm as a tourist area.

Boschpoort farm is found on the south-western outskirts of Kroonstad, 16 km from Maokeng. Part of the farm lies in the valley of the Valsche River. Interesting rock formations, Bushmen paintings, different types of game and fossils of all great mammals are found on the farm.

The Department of Land Affairs bought the farm for Mohlakeng municipality in 1999 as a commonage, mainly for agricultural and economic development projects. The commonage management committee, comprised of various groups, has a ten-year lease to use the land.

Farming practices include crop production, egg production, livestock farming, beekeeping, etc.

It is clear from the discussions held with stakeholders at Kroonstad that the implementation of a development initiative should be driven by the local community and community needs.

The participation of the local community in this tourism initiative in this instance should be a precondition for developing and sustaining the initiatives. Involving communities in tourism initiatives is nevertheless a difficult and time-consuming process with many drawbacks.

#### **5. Conclusion and lessons learned**

The lessons learned in this case study show that sustainability entails processes of negotiations, building trust, exchanging ideas and essentially meeting the needs of communities. All three case studies showed that

- Local communities should be seen as fundamental to the tourism initiative. However, defining a community can in some instances be problematic in terms of determining what exactly constitute a local community. A detailed understanding of the social reality is essential in determining who and what constitute a particular local community in order to avoid or resolve conflicting interests. Local interest groups should be given a major but not

exclusive role in deciding who belongs to the community and who does not. The onus should be on the community itself to define who its members are.

- Local communities need not only benefit from tourism initiatives, but also need to be involved in how they are managed. Without the involvement and active participation of local communities, tourism initiatives may not reach their full potential and may even fail.
- The legal context in which community participation in tourism takes place is often complex with issues such as clarity on land ownership, legal representative bodies, definitions of who needs to be included or excluded from a particular community etc. needing clarification before any initiative can be pursued.
- Adequate information must be both given and received in the development process if any empowerment and participation is to take place. The strategy to be employed in a tourism initiative should facilitate information sharing among the various stakeholders thus allowing them to participate in and embrace the tourism initiative.
- A project manager with entrepreneurial skills needs to be appointed to oversee the development of the tourism initiative.
- Experts are needed to provide specialised skills and knowledge e.g. environmental conservationists, geologists, experts on fossils, etc.
- Marketing and advertising plans need to be developed in order to generate finances to sustain the tourism initiative.
- Crucial financial choices needed to be made with the conceptualisation of any project because of the profound implications that it might have on the sustainability of any tourism initiative.