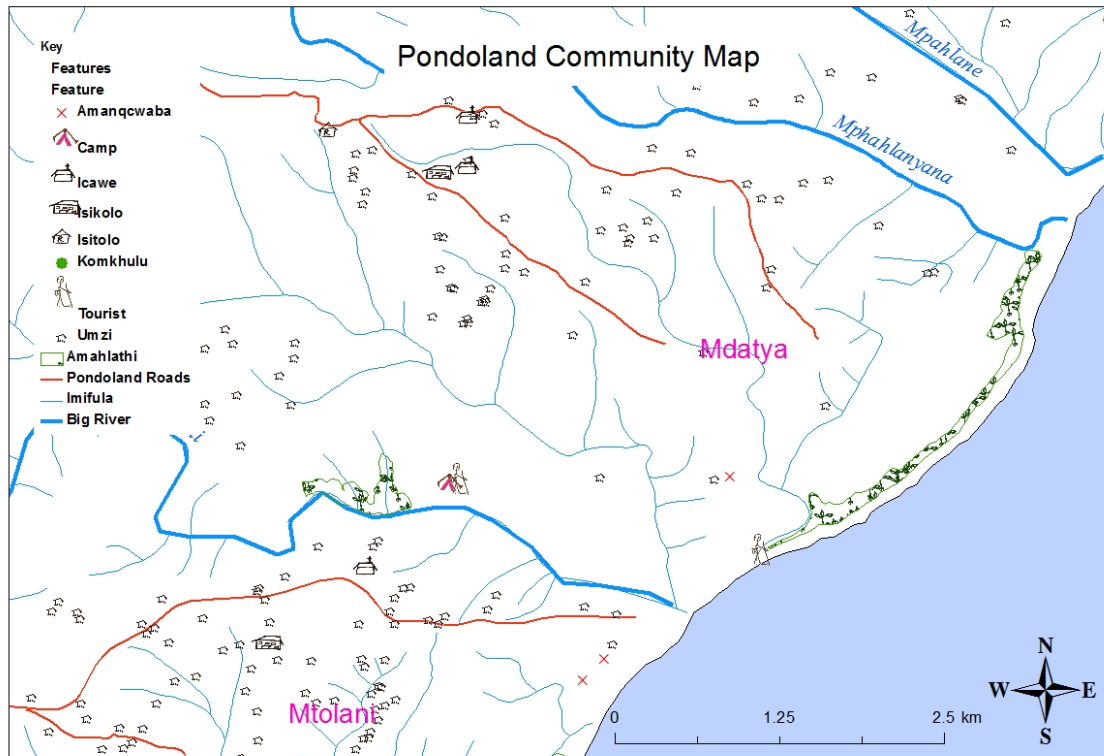


SWC REPORT End of grant May 2012

Participative community based environmental management planning and livelihoods for the region north of Mkambati

PART ONE – REPORT

Mapping



In the interim report I omitted to mention that some of the 3-day mapping workshop was filmed. With none of us being practiced in this skill and with a very limited budget we only purchased 6 spools of film expecting the exercise to be only mildly successful at best. Well we underestimated ourselves and all the spools are useable. We now know to film whole workshops for a full record. In this instance we mostly filmed the feedback sessions as this is essential to understand community needs to be able to represent them correctly in the Environmental Management Plan. This raw footage has been cleaned and downloaded onto 3 DVDs and forms part of this report package. They will be posted from Johannesburg.

The last phase of the Participative Community Based Environmental Management Planning will be to translate these DVDs from Xhosa to English for use by the Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) who will be drawing up the EMP from this and the maps themselves. A funding proposal to complete this work has been submitted to the French

Institute as part funding along with the initiation of the scientific biodiversity inventory that will begin in October in partnership with French scientists.

Kirsten Oliver began the combination and digitisation of the 6 hand drawn maps of the present which is shown above. It is currently incomplete and inaccurate but has shown that the exercise is doable and well worth finding further funding to complete this process

Elements additional to the mapping and livelihoods (specific to this funding) have also been reported on hereunder as everything that happens in community is interrelated and has bearing on all else.

Nokwanda's and Mzamo's trip to Germany for Eco-village training Aug/Sept 2011

Application and preparation for the trip

We heard about the training from an e-mail forwarded by Sandy of SWC, one of those e-mails that is forwarded to a number of contacts so anyone interested would make use of. I and Nokwanda expressed our interest in the training. We were forwarded application forms by a lady called Kosha from GEN Europe. They needed only 3 South Africans and had approximately 40 applications to choose from. We applied and never heard from anyone till we all forgot and we thought we were not successful. We later received e-mail asking us for some more information, then asked to start preparing for the journey. That made us very excited. We started reading all the details about this place we were now to go to. We got interested in the beginning because of the course was to be about starting an eco –village. According to our understanding eco villages meant any village that would have plants or and litter managed, that was our narrow understanding. We noticed there would be some prayer sessions on something; we read the shoes would be taken out when entering some places we then needed to have socks. It sounded like we would be forced to change our religion and bow to some kind god when we get there. When looking at learning session times they did not sound correct. There were sessions that were attended by nine pm, we thought this would be night time. This made us even more sceptical. This did not discourage us enough though.

The course was starting on 11th August to 12th September 2011; it was effectively a month long course. It was taking place in an eco-village called Sieben Linden, North East of Berlin ,Germany. The course was called Train The Trainers (eco-village design)

Travelling : We had no difficulties on the way except for the fact that there is so much checking on security gates employer company gates. It takes time and is scary, but we had printed documents from where we were going and from SWC as our employer in South Africa. When we got to German side they seem to appreciate Okodof that appeared in our documents none of us knew what this was ,but they would let us pass every time they read Okodof (Okodof is German and it means eco-village)

We travelled by bus from Berlin to Sieben Linden it took atleast 4 hours to get there. We noticed days were actually longer there than here in South Africa hence some sessions seem to be very late in a day. On arrival we were welcomed and then shown our rooms in which we had towels, tooth brush a box of what I and my two friends from Malawi had all the reasons to believe was organic soap as mentioned in the information sent to us prio arrival. We all used this as soap in the shower, when washing with it, just no foam came out as of the normal soap no big deal to us. It was supposed to be organic soap (which we had never used before) not normal soap .We only heard in the morning that this was actually a chocolate.

The actual training:

The training was an interactive both in the hall and also very practical. We explanation of what an eco-village is. We got to understand that an eco-village is a community that has been purposefully formed, decide on objectives for such village. One obvious reason why one would start an eco-village is to minimise impact by human onto nature. Lessons on how to start an eco-village were given then afforded opportunity to meet the community of Sieben Linden where we were accommodated, learn from them how they started , what was is good and what were the challenges. This community was very open and happy to share with us. We learnt about permaculture, renewable energy, houses that are built to regulate temperature and save energy. Also learnt about global economy. There a lot of presentations by facilitators with different expertise and from different countries. This course was very rich it does not only deliver theories but shakes out people feelings and beliefs. There would be time for meditations in the hall and outside in the sacred places of Sieben linden.

One of activities for this course was visiting Berlin to learn about the history of this city, Berlin wall etc. We also attended world peace conference in which our Bishop Desmond Tutu was expected but did not make it there. We got opportunity to represent our community battle in the presentation space allocated for GEN International. It was exciting moment to be involved in such event. There were a lot of interesting presentations, we learnt a lot there.

There was a German cultural festival that we attended, this was happening after we had come back to Sieben Linden. We were able to see the ancient German cultures performed.

Sieben Linden community did not allow animals for consumption or meat in the community as they believed it was not right for animals and also poses a lot of carbon emission to the atmosphere. Everybody had little options to access food with meat. The food was free of meat.

This community hardly use cars, you get everywhere with bicycles, cars were discouraged unless you want to get to town that is far from this place.

We had fun as well in the community of Sieben Linden. Fruit was free, we picked from trees apples, pears, prunes ,all the expensive fruits that you pay a fortune to buy here was everywhere around us for free of charge.

Coming back.

On 12th of September 2011 was our day to come back to South Africa. Weather turned very bad. Communication in the airport was disturbed by lightning and extreme rain all flights suspended on both airports Tegel in Berlin and international airport in Frankfurt. Flights resumed at 10:45 pm exact time that our flight to South Africa from Frankfurt was supposed to take off. So we missed it and we were on standby and apparently another flights were organised, the staff that were working that night had to leave at one , they said unions there do not allow them to work till that time. New staff came in telling us we had to go to the hotel and taxis were organised this was now at 3 am. Next morning we were helped to have tickets for a new plane that was leaving at night too. So the whole day we were walking, window shopping around the airport waiting for the time to fly back to South Africa.

Report for the month Of October 2011 compiled by the team (Nonhle, Mzamo and Nokwanda)

This month we visited few local communities to check how are doing in person. And we finally succeeded to do the educational trip for three schools to Mtentu Estuary which is in north of Mkambathi nature reserve. This trip given five scholars from each school and one educator each school to share ideas and through horizontal learning as they have different levels of knowledge and experiences. Interacting with the nature made our weekend very special to all of us as we were smelling the greater taste of living in that special pristine beautiful area of Pondoland.

Mpindweni village

We have held a meeting with Mpindweni community towards the end of September. They already fence the vegetable garden, twelve members inside garden. They ask if there is no possibility to get some seeds because they were not aware about how to keep the seeds for next season.

Mabaleni village

The meeting at Mabaleni was on the 7 October 2011 with whole community. They told us the grinding mill worked very well, it is not giving them any problem even the people they paid the money very well for grinding their maize. Now they paid R100 monthly for one person is looking after grinding mill and take care of people. The community says their representatives from Simbadame are not active because there are no meetings called by them even on what they agreed within their meetings nothing happening. We did ask them about the mapping one of the Simbadame member told us that, there is no report back yet

about the mapping and then we ask them to report back while we here. The community was very happy about the map and then also add the hospital should be serving the whole amadiba administrative area because the ST.Partrics hospital is very far. The Amabaleni community have problem of shortage representatives at Simbadame because three representatives were passed away, now the community agreed to call another meeting of adding their representatives.

Sigidi village

The meeting at Sigidi was on the 8 October 2011 with the members of the poultry farming. They still not selling the chickens but now they have an idea of making that project not collapse or fall down each member come up with the project work for her or himself. The idea is to make more projects within the community but these entire projects will fall under one project although there are different activities. The aim is to give one member the money for one year, after one person started her own project the money is going to other member and then you left with the profit to continue the project.

Mtolane village

The meeting at Mtolani was on the 11 October 2011 with community. In this meeting we talk about Simbademe committee, Mapping, fencing and Chicken project

Simbademe Committee

The attendance for this meeting was not that good and they were complaining about the issue absenteeism that is rising within their meetings. So we were given names for new Simbademe members as there was urge need to add members since other members now left because they found jobs out of the area. In all Mtolani now have four new members with one old member.

It was reported that the mapping is still not yet reported to the entire community as there was still the issue of committees that they still need to be elected and accepted within the community, now that committee are in place they will do reporting.

Fencing

They reported that they have finally use the fence, they were not going to allowed to have their fence taken to other communities, they say they will show us on next meeting where they have fence. They mention that because the area is big they have shortage of 4 rolls of fence.

Chicken Project

This project has been dormant for a while now. They are keeping money which they are aiming to start a new project, we asked them on how much they have and it was reported that since the chickens were selling in two places even the money therefore is in two

places. Mtolani have R1675 and Sihlolotyeni is having R3800. We do emphasize that they have to start other project that they will be able to manage and make it work as soon as possible. They say they will discuss it on their next meeting on what project they are going to do. They ask us on what project they can do, in this

We left the meeting leaving community members to discuss the date for their next meeting where they will find answers for what they did not answers to give.

Mdatya village

The meeting at Mdatya was on 19 October 2011 with the farmers. They already planted the vegetables on their garden but not selling the vegetables yet. They need some sort of training because some of the vegetables they never plant before. They ask maybe three rollers of fence because their garden is not finish. Their Simbademe representatives not workshop or tell them what they have learnt during Simbadame workshop that is why now they do not even know how to keep vegetable seeds for the next season.

School Environmental Education trip

On the 14-16 of October 2011 we have our first school wilderness trip, it happen as planned so we have a trip to Mtentu camps in northern part of Mkhambathi nature reserve. The schools we took are Sigidi senior primary, Sijadu senior primary and Khumbuza junior secondary school. Each school we were taken five scholars plus one educator/teacher. This first trip for our environmental education, was facilitated by team (Nokwanda, Mzamo and Nonhle).

In this schools outreach we covered few topics that form part of different subjects within school curriculum. The first day was arrival where we focus on group building. For group building we did not use big tools but it was done by working together, having scholars work together in building their tents and preparing meals, playing ball together, mixing scholars from different schools on sleeping arrangements.

On the second day we have two groups going in two different directions. The group that go to the south of Mtentu to Mkambathi nature reserve learn more about marine life, ecosystems, the important of estuary to animals life and human being, rocky pools, ship wrecks, strandloper falls and history around Mkambathi river.



There was also awareness around poaching that is a big problem for Mkambathi nature reserve (stop poaching statements).

The other group take the direction to the north of Mtentu estuary where they learn about Pondoland as centre of endemism, identifying endemic species that are found within that area e.g. Pondo palm, learning more about medicinal plant within the area, grasslands and wetlands (on their protection and species that grow) also linking culture and plants making an example of art from plants e.g. making grass mats and other important grass material that is used on our traditional wedding ceremony



that is called bucket (ibhakede). This group also learn about history of shipwrecks in wild coast. Part of the learning's was about stone tools that were used by community in ancient times and rehabilitation of the dunes. Also in this group there were learning's about history



of shipwrecks in wild coast. Since we were talking more about plants we linked some of classroom workshops and experiencing the reality which led to end –up talking about climate change and coming event in South Africa which is climate change conference Cop 17.

Getting back to the camps there were presentations each group mentioned what they have learnt which was very impressive

The day was closed by social part which was a debate. The topic that was debated was teenage pregnancy. Scholars and educators were so much participating.

On the third day it was swapping of the groups to different directions to experience what they were told by other group on presentations. Which our excursion was closed by heavy rain which makes everyone wet.

The last thing that was done was evaluation which was very positive from both teachers and learners. One of the educators even said if this outreach does not have cost involves they will happy to have it every year so that many scholars have this learning's that covers lot out of their curriculum.

It was very successful because the kids gained a lot plus their teachers. One of the teachers on their feedback told us that, this outing making a very big difference within their students because it helps the kids to talk freely when they do presentations and also helps them to question if there is something they cannot understand. To bring different schools together it helps the kids to accommodate each other minimize the tribalism because of schools. The teachers ask us to visit their schools try to motive the kids to keep practice speak English because now on this trip they see the kids, never speak/talk at school but talking freely. These two nights we did not having any problem of the kids become sick.

Lesson learnt

Scholars learn much when they are given chance to talk. They learn a lot through peer learning.

Educators also participate in learning new things in closer are which they didn't think they can learn anything from it.

It was also learning curve for us as it was our first group outside the school.

With weather allowing us go to these communities and finally do this schools environmental educational trip we were happy as road condition has went from bad to worse.

Report for November

Before the launch of TOO GREAT A TOLL calendar me and Mzamo we were invited by the ward councillor of ward 24 Mr Hlebo including the branch of ANC, ward committees and community development worker at Ebenezer hall. They have seen so many newspapers talking about toll road. The reason for inviting us they want to know our concern about toll road. Our concerns: 1. no clarities on how people will be compensated if they going to be removed, how about their graves and also grazing fields. 2 where are the bridges for animals and walking over. 3 it is only eight bridges for animals and walk over between Wild Coast Sun and Lusikisiki. 4 it will be fenced to protect pedestrians and animals. 5 crimes will be very high because of migration of people looking for jobs and also culture will be lost completely. 5 wild coast will be lost completely because it will be a township no more people caring of nature. People were not just listening what we telling them there are questions and comments: like is there any document we have about N2? Are we working for businesses that will suffer when road bypassing them? Are people aware of the problems of the toll road? Who are you representing?

The answers:

We do not have any documents about N2 because we are not working for SANRAL. We are not working for anybody; we are here as affected and interested parties. Yes that is why you have heard people of Sigidi and other villages having a concern about the N2.

Comments:

Meetings of toll road bypass the affected people; this is a division of community

Bee keeping

I've seen another very good project for Simbadame bee farming especial for Mabeleni village. We have met a group of 5 youngsters want to do bee farming on the Lurholweni village which is under UMgungundlovu administrative area. We take them to Cwebeni (Port ST Johns) where there already business bee operating for two nights. Why I think this project is good? Firstly the successful of bee farming depend on environment such as how people take care of plants and water.

It was very fruitful this trip because we have met a person who was sent by Pick'n pays as mentor to give people more training, and then he give us a lot of information about the bee farming, now we very clear what is needed on this project. Now we know that the first you need to know where are you going to get bees?, where are you going to farm? You need have uniform, you need to be trained, and you need to have money to hives.

On the 8 August we were invited at Sjadu SPS to attend the programme so called QLTC (quality learning teachers campaign) The teachers, parents, departments and stakeholders we committed themselves what are they going to do to motivate the level of education within the school kids. As ARC we would like to contribute in the improvement education by introduction of environmental education into schools. Introduction of learners through fields excursions or camps which is very rare opportunity for rural based scholars. Motivation of learners to gain more confidence in expressing themselves. Instill sense of pride of their cultural background through studying of medicinal plants, izisele (maize pity), traditional songs, storytelling, and traditional attire in the evening during camps. If there is information available on our side that could be useful to school or department of education we will share it. If a particular skill needed in the schools or department of education that may possibly be sourced from our networks, we would happily organize or facilitate organization of such. E.G science week (presenters), volunteers etc. Respect learning time. (Will not interfere with critical time like exams).

We meet a guy called Kjell for Plant for the planet, he is based in German, he trained the youth and also school kids on climate justice to become ambassadors for environmental justice. He is running one day academy in schools doing presentations. At the end of academy kids pledge the projects. On the 14 November we manage to organise the

academy at Plangeni J.S.S. We also planted the trees help by the educators and also school kids.

Report for December

On this month I visited all the villages that have Simbadame projects.

Sigidi village

I held a meeting with the community that are involved in the projects to do a follow up about their way of making more projects, they all already started buying a fence for project of sweet potatoes which is on demand on these days in markets because they use organic farming.

Mdatya village

They planted lot of vegetables but destroy by the rain because it was coming on the wrong time, especial cabbage because it does not need a lot of rain. I think the other reason coastal is sandy soil when there is too much rain it might be facing challenge of lacking of food.

Mtolani village

There is no success at Mtolani since the committee was not managing their funds well. I think let's start to work with new committee next year and see if there is no difference.

Mtentu village

Mtentu village doing so well because their school is progressing, and also the department of education promising to add some qualified teachers. They doing very well to manage the camp at Mtentu River mouth because of this month both camps are fully booked from December to January which is a big success, although there is a lot of challenges caused by department of environment trying to stop the community to make tourism going ahead but the trust which is ACCODA now is dealing with the department. The department complaining about the toilets were being built at camp without consulting them to do the environmental impact assessment. Now the trust is inviting the department to come down to the camp because those toilets are very eco-friendly.

Mabaleni community

The Grinding mill works so well at Mabaleni, and also there are two young men started the bee farming which is a good progress of looking after the forest because now they benefiting from the forest now are dependent on each other .Next year the community want me to held a meeting with them to introduce the new members of Simbadame of Amabaleni.

COP17



As the eyes and ears of the world turned to Durban in 2011, we got together a group children aged between 9 and 19 years that worked together with a performance artist and other facilitators to put up performances with relevant messages at the COP 17 events.

The Process

This initiative was made possible through the very kind support of individuals from across the world many of whom were participants at the Eco-Village Design (EDE) course that took place at Sieben Linden Eco-Village in eastern Germany in August and September 2011. The sponsors contributed in cash and in kind to make this project possible.

The selection of the children was done through a poem and essay writing competition. We had 2 children for Malawi, one from Zambia, 2 from Mpumalanga in the North East of South Africa and 3 from Wild coast also in South Africa. The process of selecting the children was decentralised to each country and region in the case of South Africa and a few challenges in the process resulted in a gender imbalance in the group.

We travelled from our 5 different directions including the UK where Kerry Ann, the performance artist came from and converged in Durban on the 30th of November. We stayed at the Banana Backpackers in Central Durban just a few blocks away from the Durban Convention Centre which hosted the official United Nations negotiations. The venue was perfect for all intends and purposes and we did a lot of self catering in order to make ends meet with our shoestring budget. We had no sponsorship at all from the donor community (Foundations, charities etc) but the combined efforts from volunteering and pooling of small donations by ordinary people made us pool through.

Activities

The creative materials produced by the children were used to thread together a script for the performances during the first 2 days and this was soon followed by lots of practice. The performance was made up of poems, songs, dance and drama under the theme: ***Seeds of the future, saving our planet.*** The rehearsals were interspaced with visits to the exhibitions and ongoing presentations by other participants. On the 3rd of December we all joined in the mass street demonstration which was part of the global day of action for climate change.

And soon the clock ticked towards our first performance on the 4th of December which was at the launch of the Alliance for Food Sovereignty for Africa. The room for the launch was full to the brim but the children acquitted themselves quite well for a start and received a warm response from the audience. After the performance we made contact with the media and retreated to our base and worked on the banners for use at our next performances which were due the following day. And then it was time to go to the beach at the end of a hectic day.

On Monday the 5th of December the children had their first stint in the interview area on the eastern end of the venue. This performance was filmed and beamed live on South African National Television station. By this time the children were much more confident and a string of other performances followed including an impromptu one which was done at the car park for a large group of school children who were waiting for their buses. In between the performances there were interviews with the media.

It was not over yet after the impromptu presentation as the children were invited to join the Plant-for-the-planet ambassador training event on the northern end of the city in the late afternoon. The children pulled through the training and qualified to become ambassadors for plant-for-the-planet a role which will require them to train other children in their areas. And what a better way to end the day than another trip to the beach! However the weather was not friendly on this day and soon it was time for the farewell dinner at the traditional African food restaurant. Tears were shed as people bid farewell to Mayaba and Gertrude who were catching the evening bus on their long trip back to Zambia. It had been only 5 days that we had spent as a full group and yet the group had bonded and jelled so much that it was painful to say good bye. This was in spite of the differences of age, sex, language, race, culture etc. This has indeed been a memorable, life changing event especially for the children coming from remote areas of Wild coast as it was their first exposure to such an event

Outcomes

We believe that our participation at the COP 17 achieved the following outcomes among others:

- ✓ Raised awareness among the participating children, and the audiences of the urgency of the global climate change situation.
- ✓ Raised awareness of relevant issues among all the people that we got into contact with including family members, schoolmates, workmates, service providers, media workers, etc.
- ✓ Empowered the young people involved with a voice that will help them to protect their future
- ✓ Created the core group for a platform for youth exchange, sharing and advocacy on environmental and related issues in the region

- ✓ Developed an increased capacity for advocacy in the children, their facilitators and the within our Programme and other participating institutions.
- ✓ Showed the audiences that we can all make a difference in spite of our limitations
- ✓ Made useful contacts with the media, sponsors, and other potential partners for future work

The impact of some of these outcomes will hopefully outlive us and contribute towards the turning point that is needed to save the planet.

Participants

The young heroes

Name	Sex	Age	Country	School	Contacts	Other info
Portia Busisiwe Dlamini	F	15	South Africa	Mbombi High	c/o 07967700694 nonhlem@vodamail.co.za	Wild coast ARC
Siyabonga Ndovela	M	19	South Africa	Khumbuz a	c/o 0710084989 mzamord@vodamail.co.za	Wild coast ARC
Mayaba Michelo	M	13	Zambia	Naledi	c/o cycm@coppernet.zm 0975861223	CYC Lusaka
Alen Simanga Nkosi	M	15	South Africa	Ngilandi	c/o 07997406339 magneticbatwind@gmail.com	Mpumalanga, Umphakatsi
Mzwanele Mdweshu	M	16	South Africa	Khumbuz a	c/o mzamord@vodamail.co.za	Wild coast ARC
Sibusiso Ndumiso Motha	M	16	South Africa	Ngilandi	c/o 0825030042 magneticbatwind@gmail.com	Mpumalanga, Umphakatsi
Ibtisaam Hanif	F	9	Malawi	Nyasa Junior	c/o rhanif@poly.ac.mw	Limbe
Casper Magombo	M	10	Malawi	Christian Heritage	c/o chrispinmagombo@yahoo.com	Lilongwe

Overall observation

This was most remarkable experience for us and children from our schools as it was our first experience in COP. Even the schools are so proud of these children as a result they seem them as a main resource at school. When we were planting the trees at schools teachers recommended that planting must be oversee by those children as their pillar on environmental issue. It was not only a learning curve it also has built capacity to the children they are now so bold to speak in front of others. This confidence has been observed even in the new school where other child is now learning. They are now are green ambassadors as they started planting trees and plants in their homes as well as Mtentu camp which

Siyabonga (one of participated learners) started a team which they are determined to create awareness's even in other communities.

Report for January

Sigidi village

The money of the project is still used by one member as according to their agreement next year the money will go to other person start her own project.

Mdatya village

They doing very well on their garden because now it's not only vegetables also planting the yams(amadumbe) in case vegetables giving them a problem like now weather is unpredictable, if is not too much, it is extremely hot.

Mtolani

I held a meeting with committee of Mtolani and also members of the project, there is a big progress because now they already started to plant potatoes on their vegetable garden, and also start to use that fence was bought by SWC long ago. It seems the problem resolved.

Mpindweni

I meet the members of the project; they were doing very well in terms of harvesting from their vegetable garden.

Mtentu

Members of the committee still worked on convincing the department of education to increase their classrooms at Mtentu crèche.

Mabaleni

Their grinding mill still works very well.

Other activities

On the 25 of January we were having a meeting with these stakeholders: Eastern Cape parks board, Agriculture and fisheries and Wild Coast Project at UMgungundlovu tribal authority including the tribal council and also ACCODA. Wild Coast project were here to tell us that, they are very interested to work with the Amadiba area about the environmental project like do rehabilitation of some places where the erosion, removal of aliens plants on our indigenous forests e.g. Mzamba to Mtentu forests, giving the community skills like trainings; hospitality and also help to revive the tourism for example renovate the existing camps, and then do the greening within the schools. Now the tribal authority refer all these

departments to deal with Accoda trust because for them are very keen about these projects.

Report for February

Sigidi village

The members of the project at Sigidi still one person working on their money.

Mdatya village

This month I didn't visit instead I phone them. They told me that there is no issues, things are still the same.

Mtolani

I travel all the way to have a meeting with Mtolani people, they told that there is nothing change and also no issues at the moment.

Mpindweni

I meet the members of the project; they were doing very well .

Mtentu

Members of the committee still worked on convincing the department of education to increase their classrooms at Mtentu crèche.

Mabaleni

Their grinding mill still works very well. The community of Mabaleni asking us to be available when they electing the committee which is going to represent them on behalf of the grinding mill. what we need to go there is petrol, if SWC can help us with that to facilitate the process we will appreciate.

Other activities

A school excursion was done on 17 of February 2012 we were having a good time with kids at Mtentu, the schools were taken down is Baleni high, Marina high and Plangeni junior secondary. For the first time we did have the media on our environmental education. (Note from Sandy: Scott Ramsay who has undertaken A Year in the Wild sponsored by a number of organisations visited Mkambati at exactly the right time to be invited to be able to experience people interacting with nature. Until then his trip had been purely about nature and he welcomed the opportunity to add



another dimension to his blog. See his article attached as Appendix 1) At Baleni high school the headmaster just introduce us to the school governing board, the evaluation we have got from them it was so good and amazing because they were telling us that the future for this world it depend on this generation but if we keep destroying the environment we can survive on this world. What the parents was very impressed about it to teach their kids about the medicinal plants, which is the most undermine by the African because of some group of people they want to satisfied their needs. The evaluation from the kids and their educators was very helpful because all of them were born here at Amadiba but they never get a chance to learn about the history of Wild Coast. The educators asking us to continue with this programme because it groomed the leadership skill to the learners.

Report for March 26, 2012 with communities.

SIGIDI Community

They still working on their agreement of giving one person by starting her/his own project at the moment there is no challenges.

MDATYA Community

They doing so well because there are no issues, the Simbademe members still monitoring the project and also pass all the information what they learn during Simbademe workshops to the members of garden.

MTOLANI Community

This community is improving because now on their garden they already starting planted the vegetables. It seems after one of the member kicked out by the community the problem is solved, although they are no longer doing the chicken project because they told me that the money is not enough.

MPINDWENI Community

The mpindweni community doing very well on their garden because now the Spazza shop starts to buy from them the vegetables, and also members of Simbademe doing so well to pass the knowledge they have got during innovation program.

MTENTU Community

The Mtentu community asks the ACCODA TRUST (Amadiba Coastal Community Development Association) in money generate by Mtentu camp help them to build the crèche because the building is not enough for the kids.

MABALENI Community

This community doing well in terms of looking after their grinding mill, what they need is to help them to build their structure.

ENVIROMENTAL EDUCATION

On this month we manage to plant the trees with two schools, Kane Gaze donated us about 200 trees from his nursery. When the schools open we were planning to planted two schools but the biggest challenge is to transport the trees, because is not budgeted even those two school we already planted the trees we owing the bakkie.

Report for April 24, 2012 with communities.

On this month I was suppose to hold the meetings with all the communities to talk to them face to face not making phone calls but It was very challenging because there was no budget for transport, and also even if you try to walk it's impossible because of the distances between the villages, sometimes if you try to use the local transport is not working because in the morning all the bakkies were going out, afternoon all of them coming in which means there is no ways of using the local transport because I have to travel in the opposite way. I was trying walk to the villages but the weather was against me because this month is too much rain while there is lot of river crossing between the villages.

The money for these trips was supposed to come out of CORC funds but this is finished. Sandy has found funds in the CEPF/SWC budget for this. We will be visiting all the villages to meet and collect in the maps as soon as the roads are passable as we have had very heavy rains. We will complete this even if it is after April which is officially the end of the project as we work by the weather and the availability of the communities and not by the dates written on paper.

MTOLANI Community

This community is improving because now on their garden they already starting planted the vegetables. It seems after one of the member kicked out by the community. Now what they need from the facilitators to come and help their community at least to run one workshop because it seems all the members of the project are new.

MTENTU Community

The Mtentu community gets table and chairs for their crèche on this month. When we deliver it was during the weekend, we couldn't take pictures with kids but one member of school governing board was there.

ENVIROMENTAL EDUCATION

On this month we manage to plant the trees with two schools, Kane Gaze donated us about 300 trees from his nursery which means in total six hundreds trees. Now we manage to do greening four schools although it was very difficult because we do not have budget for doing this. The camping for this week we were postponing because of rain. We think also the healthy of children because we using tents for sleeping while the ground was completely wet, we were worried kids getting by flu.

PART TWO – REFLECTION

ANALYSIS

The table below was created to plan the completion of the programme in line with deliverable commitments. The final column has now been added as a reporting tool for the benefit of this report.

WORK PLAN April 2012 - CEPF funds					
April	Activity	Skwash	Nonhle	Mzamo	Completed/not
25	Meeting	x	x	x	Yes
26	Planning	x	x	x	Yes
27	Municipal meeting		x	x	No- it was cancelled
28	REPORTS	x	x	x	Yes
29	home-stay marketing (Richard)		x		'Thought document'
30	(Richard Spoor)				
2nd	DAY OFF				
3rd	Complete report	x	x	x	
4th	Trail training with Sine	x	x	x	Yes
5th	Trail training with Sine	x	x	x	Yes
6th	EASTER				Yes
9	field trip logistics	x	x	x	Yes
10	Sigidi & Sijadu schools - tree planting	x	x	x	Yes
11	story writing/village visit	x	x	x	Yes - Sigidi
12	field trip prepararion	x	x	x	Yes
13	field trip for 2 schools	x	x	x	Yes
14	field trip for 2 schools	x	x	x	Yes
15	field trip for 2 schools	x	x	x	Yes
16	DAY OFF				
17	EC Park meeting - conservation		x	x	Yes
18	village visit/story writing	x	x	x	Yes-done in May - Mpindwini
19					Done in May - Mtolani
20	village visit/story writing	x	x	x	
23	village visit/story writing	x	x	x	Done in May - Mabaleni
24	village visit/story	x	x	x	Done in May - Mdatya

25	writing village writing	visit/story	x	x	x	Done in May - Mtentu
26						
27	HOLIDAY					yes
30						

Checking on project commitments Part 1 (Livelihoods)

Below is the original planning document with successful key performance indicators highlighted and deviations explained in red.

OUTPUT		KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Delivery Approach	Target Audience	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 1: Introductory workshop N.B. To be held at the end of April before Nonhle leaves for Cape Town <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discussion leading on from last workshop ○ Decision on what the R30 000 still to be spent from previous funds will be spent on ○ Explanation of why the environment management planning is coming before more livelihoods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ how funding world works ▪ necessity to secure the space against industrialised development ▪ this will be the base of the planning to extend/network the homestays and livelihoods projects into the broad stated vision of community based eco-tourism ○ Agreement that env management planning should happen ○ Explanation of logistics of next workshop (3 consecutive days) and agreement/alternative 	30 Simbhademe members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remaining money from previous project allocated and distributed • Agreement on environmental management planning • Logistics of next workshop resolved • Date set

<p>planning</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 2: Continuous project visits It is impossible to plan this ahead as visits must fit into community needs and timing. A far better idea will be had once the workshop is complete and planning will be on a weekly/monthly basis from there onwards. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team leaders receive repeated requests for visits/meetings from all villages • A minimum of one visit per village per month This proved to be too frequent as community processes move slowly. It was reduced to one visit every 2 months with telephonic contact in between. • Problems are sorted out in the 3 weakest villages • The 3 strong villages each begin a new livelihoods project funded by their older projects. 2 of the strongest villages extended projects rather than initiating new ones. • Simple production records are initiated It was decided that this is a very foreign concept and required a dedicated workshop for which there are currently no funds. • Homestay criteria are drawn up. WESSA has drawn up general eco-tourism ethics for display at each establishment. A workshop on homestays is required. • Further homestays are identified. A further homestay has been established at Mtolani • Open Africa is introduced to the area With my oversight of this programme being of a voluntary nature I could not give sufficient time to make this happen. • Marketing begins in partnership Ugu District Tourism Agency and Wild Coast Tourism

		<p>website. SWC website is currently being upgraded and the link to tourism will initially be here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly report submitted to SWC from alternate members of the team • A story is written up in 6 months time about each village This is still being completed. See below.
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Creating a village story

We are currently writing the 'story' of each village as a project deliverable for use as an evaluation tool to allow the SWC Board to reflect on effectivity of the work in which we are participating. These will not all be complete by the time of submission of this report as rain has prevented us accessing the area for a few weeks as the roads are destroyed. I am happy to send the stories on to CEPF once the remainder are complete.

Questions to be asked of each village:

- *What was good about in the past?*
- *10 years ago were those good things still here?*
- *What has happened over the last 5 years with the influence of SWC/Simbhademe/media visits/social worker support and others?*
- *What difference if any has Simbhademe made to the whole community, not just the 5 representatives?*
- *What is the difference between and the other villages? (This will have to be answered by the Team, not at the meeting)*
- *Please report back on the Simbhademe/ARC projects. (These headings will vary from village to village but please check that everything is covered)*
 - **Food security**
 - **Chickens**
 - **Tourism:**
 - **R1 600 individual grant**
 - **Environmental education**
 - **Development**
 - **Local government elections**
 - **..... community and the Team**
- *What has Simbhademe done wrong?*
- *Outstanding individuals in the community?*

The story below was constructed by Sandy interviewing the Team in order to perfect the questions to be asked and to train the Team in the methodology – an adaption of Appreciative Inquiry.

The Story of Sigidi

What was good about Sigidi in the past?

Ubuntu – sharing everything. There were no orphans. If you didn't have family, your neighbour was your family. If someone was sick, the whole community took care of the family. Family ceremonies automatically included everyone; the message passed instantly and people came in numbers. People were very united. Families were big and encompassed everyone. The whole area felt like one family so there was a high degree of respect. A child respected everyone and everything was done collectively. Discipline was done by everyone without involving the police; children who stole from a campsite were dealt with by the whole community. All the elders were connected to each other. One worked towards the development of the youth through showing how to do things and supporting them. There was supportive discipline. With *ubuntu* even the *mlungus* (people who came from the ocean) were accepted and welcomed.

Land has always been protected; offerings of beer and money for land were rejected. The way things were dealt with was to tell the stranger that he would be called to be given an answer, and then there was no call-back! Sigidi was the only community without a 'cottage'.

10 years ago were those good things still there?

Yes. Things had changed slightly. The youth started to drink but everyone was still united. More children were encouraged to go to school and graduate.

What has happened over the last 5 years with the influence of SWC/Simhademe/media visits/social worker support and others?

Some things are now not there because of the negative issues. There is a greater involvement in politics and competition. Education has denegated the elders work, practice and traditional values.

Old traditions were being slowly lost but they are now being reinforced by positive outside influence that understands traditional values. Media attention has had a positive effect. It is good to be taken seriously. Without the media there would have been internal fighting. People have the sense of a debate going on so they feel they must wait for the outcome before reacting. There was a request for illegal guns at one time but media interest stopped that from happening as things had to be quiet. The media brought hope that we are winning this battle. People would have been chased away by burning homesteads. It has also revealed some internal snakes.

What difference if any has Simbhademe made to the whole community, not just the 5 representatives?

Big – few were planting before. Other vegetables were planted long before and then stopped. Now it has started again. In the whole community people were given undeserved respect just because you were educated. Now they have the self-respect to voice their own opinions even if it is against the educated opinion. Traditions are respected as a way of staying united and keeping the land. It has influenced the politics; Simbhademe was objective and has brought the people together and has taken away the politics. There is no longer factionalism; Simbhademe has played a role in uniting the people. Before municipal programmes such as Coast Care were only for the pro-mining people. This has stopped because the people took control and the Simbhademe fairness prevailed by doing things publically and openly. Now everyone has an opportunity for a job.

What is the difference between Sigidi and the other villages?

Meetings are well attended. People are accurate; they do what they say. The spirit of *ubuntu* is still there. They acknowledged that the chicken programme was not going well and that it must change. There was no fighting over who was to go first with the individual project using the community profits. Eco-tourism is going further here as they are self-developing. They do not depend on the Simbhademe Team to make things happen.

Please report back on the Simbhademe/ARC projects.

Food security: This has been individual gardening from the beginning. The gardens are still strong. They are keeping seeds and are distributing and have even given some to Nokwanda. Everyone in the community has a garden – approximately 80. All still operate. Even the person who everyone questioned why she was getting seeds because no-one believed she would look after her garden! She has used the gardening to get exercise and has not given up!!

Chickens: This was a great community project for about 18 months. The money that was made was used to put glass in the school windows, plant trees in the school grounds (which the goats then ate!), buy sheets and mattresses and crockery to start the village based accommodation. Then because of *ubuntu* it did not seem fair that the people who could not afford to buy chickens could not eat chicken so they were given credit if they wanted it. This they could not pay off so profits declined. It was decided to use the money that was left and to rotate that amount of money to those who wanted to start individual chicken projects based on business principles – no credit. The first person chosen has been operating for 6 months. The same amount of money will be passed on to another person after 1 year.

Tourism: There was no village-based accommodation before Simbhademe. In those days the first accommodation was at Mphahlana. There is an average of 10 people sleeping per month and the most day visitors at one time has been 150. The Wild Coast Sun is now recommending the village-based stay.

R1 600 individual grant: Individual chicken projects based on business principles – no credit. The first person chosen has been operating for 6 months. The same amount of money will be passed on to another person after 1 year.

Environmental education: The whole primary school has been involved with an environmental day including an area clean-up. 50 trees have been planted with pupils volunteering to adopt a tree to take care of. Grades 5, 6 and 7 have had classroom workshops of 2 hours each. 5 pupils were selected from Grade 7 to participate in a 3 day (2 night) wilderness camp along with a teacher.

Development: The whole community has an understanding of development, know how to compare the different types and know what kind they want. This includes the need for a foot bridge and not a car bridge.

Local government elections: The people gave each other advice on how to decide on a candidate but allowed each other to think for themselves. They should look for trust. They are happy with their Ward Councillor and their Ward Committee Member. The Committee Member is a Simbhademe participant who has been brilliant. She was not known by everyone before but Simbhademe has brought her leadership to the fore.

Sigidi community and the Team: There is a high level of trust in the Team. They were asked to advise during the local government elections.

What has Simbhademe done wrong?

It has not yet been able to develop more leaders. There has been no funding for long-term education/training.

Outstanding individuals in the community?

The growth of one person (Nonhle) has been remarkable.

Checking on project commitments Part 2 (Mapping)

Below is the original planning document of the mapping element. This was revised before it took place as an international mapping expert made himself available (reported on in the Interim Report). Acting on his advice and time constraints the design changed to that in the second table below.

OUTPUT		KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Delivery Approach	Target Audience	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 1: Mapping workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Day 1 – Changing 3 dimensions into 2 dimensions. Introduction to community mapping. Types of mapping to suit different needs. ○ Day 2 – Cultural mapping. Selection of categories to be mapped, tutorial on using the GPS, recording. ○ Day 3 – Ecological calendars. Selection of 5 reps from each village for GPS work and 5 for artistic ‘map’ creation.. 	<p>Simbhademe members + invited guests as train the trainers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the concept of 2 dimensions. • Accurate use of GPS • Stories told of the ecological/seasonal cycle. • Everyone has participated in some way - in either the discussions, practical work or story-telling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 2: Mapping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June-August(fallow agricultural season) – each of the 6 villages uses the GPS for a month to record the sites that have been decided upon during the workshop. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 3: Workshop 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September/October (before the preparation of fields) – 2 months of fieldwork to resolve any problems reported at the workshop. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 3: Workshop 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September/October (before the preparation of fields) – 2 months of fieldwork to resolve any problems reported at the workshop. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 4: Map creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November - Jan – creation of the ‘maps’. Each village will probably assemble for one day bi-weekly (intensive agricultural season and travel is difficult due to swollen rivers) to create their map. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 4: Workshop 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February or March (depending on the rains) – 3rd workshop for each village to present their map/s to each other, attended by scientists doing the Biodiversity Assessment and local municipal officials. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April - Public display of the 6 individual maps at a local municipal event 		

Second planning iteration

OUTPUT		KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Delivery Approach	Target Audience	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 1: Mapping workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Day 1 – Introduction of Million Background to mapping Creating the Key Draw village maps of the past Group feedback ○ Day 2 – Complete feedback Map of the present Feedback School bag donation hand-out Small grp Ecological calendar including elders ○ Day 3 – Map of the future Feedback Ethiopian prizes Small grp Ecological calendar including elders 	<p>Simbademe members from 6 different villages covering the Amadiba Tribal Authority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone has participated in some way - in either the discussions, practical work or story-telling • Animated discussions in the group • Questions from the audience during feedback • Stories told of the ecological/seasonal cycle. • Filmed record of the feedback sessions • Written record of the ecological cycle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 2: Mapping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original maps are returned to each village for consultation with the whole community. 		<p>Maps taken home and demonstrated</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 3: Mapping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Team attends community meetings to assist with compilation of the maps 		<p>Maps deliberately altered through wider consultation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 4: Digitisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digitisation of maps sought. (There is no funding for this from this funding) 		<p>Find digitiser</p> <p>Seek additional funding. This did not have to happen as Kirsten managed to wangle the digitising into her other work. We are very grateful to her. So the process has begun but is not complete.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 5: EMP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations with an EMP consultant on how to transform these maps into an EMP acceptable for submission to Local Gov. (Again no funding) 		<p>Identify consultant A funding proposal has been submitted to support the final stages of creating an EMP as well as to cover activity 6.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY 6: Display <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April - Public display of the 6 individual maps at a local municipal event. (No funding) 		<p>Collect maps back. This is still being done as the area has been inaccessible due to heavy rains.</p>

SYNTHESIS

Over and above the project deliverables that are reported on above this year-long funding from CEPF enabled three local leaders to dedicate themselves to essential work in their own communities without losing these indispensable people to ‘jobs’ in the city, by providing a salary for the first time. Had they not remained in the area during this crucial time the extension of the ‘development’ work as well as the ‘advocacy’ work would not have been possible. Both of these are essential processes in the Pondoland Centre of Endemism, as both enable the resistance to conventional development processes which threaten biological and cultural diversity.

The Mapping and Livelihoods work (CEPF funding through SWC) has been combined with the Environmental Education work (CEPF funding through CORC) over the past year. This has proved to be highly effective as the Team’s interventions are perceived as being seamless which is what community life is all about. And because they have been in the area continuously they have been able to give leadership to the advocacy issues without needing separate financial support for this. Mzamo, Nonhle and Nokwanda’s insight into village life

(social, economic and political) through their association with 'development' work in the area through SWC's support over the last 5 years has been fundamental. The biggest progress so far is in intangibles such as growth in self esteem and communication skills. It takes time for these to morph into tangible improvements - but there is ample evidence that this is happening.

The absolute imperative of having them in the area has raised our awareness of the necessity for other leaders to emerge so that both the development and advocacy work does not remain hinged around only 3 people. But their value in the area and the success of what they are doing and the high esteem in which the communities holds them affirms SWC's approach of placing as much focus on people as on projects. With the correct 'human resources', 'natural resources' have a far greater chance of being conserved through correct utilisation.

With this above insight SWC applied for and has received funding for a further year to continue the Livelihoods support in the form of a youth leadership development process. This will mean that Mzamo, Nonhle and Nokwanda (the Team) will mentor 3 new community leaders in the Amadiba/Xolobeni area to take over their core role so that they can spread their wings and gain more experience in other areas. The Team will begin roll-out of the Innovations Programme/Simhademe (the personal development empowerment programme) to another set of communities on the coast near Port St Johns and will slowly release leadership of their 'home' communities to the new youth leaders. Another 3 youth leaders will be mentored by the Team in the roll-out area.

As well as this a funding application has been submitted to enable the completion of the Mapping element in conjunction with the initiation of the Biodiversity Survey with a South African/international scientific collaboration.

Subsequent to their training in Germany and with support from SWC, Nokwanda and Mzamo have both submitted their own (for the first time!) funding proposals to German organisations. Mzamo's proposal is in support of a climate change/agricultural extension of the Livelihoods programme whilst Nokwanda's is a continuation of the Environmental Education programme.

A second proposal for support of the Mapping element is currently being written.

SWC as an organisation

SWC works on the principle that solving 21st Century challenges requires new, innovative organisations in order to implement new approaches – that 20th Century organisations and approaches will not solve 21st Century problems. Subscribing to the understanding that 'business as usual' is the cause of, and exacerbates the challenges that the planet is facing both ecologically and socio-economically and that as Ghandi said 'we need to BE the change we want to see in the world' SWC strives to organise itself and run our programmes in a

manner that challenges the dominant paradigm and explores a 'different' way. Whilst this is no easy task, and often confounds outsiders, including funders we are rethinking what it means to be an organisation, to challenge conventional understandings about 'bringing development' by imposing from the outside and within these to look critically at the neo-liberal 'rights based approach' - what rights, whose rights, are those rights imposed in the first place, do they meet the needs of the people upon whom they are being imposed? The evidence of failed 'development' programmes and projects worldwide is overwhelming. For us this does not only mean that somehow 'development' has to be done differently but that the organisations and approaches driving the 'development' also have to be transformed from 20th Century thinking.

SWC is a registered Section 21 Company in order to comply with existing legislation as well as meeting the needs of funders and authorities for strict financial accountability, legal compliance and reporting. To this end we provide fully audited organisational accounts based in the First Economy (Exclusive Economy) whilst respecting, and operating in the Second Economy (Inclusive Economy) locally. To operate 'differently', the organisation functions without fixed infrastructure or employees and therefore has minimal ongoing 'sunk' operational costs; we mobilise capacity through a network of volunteers and contractors. All funds are spent on local scale implementation of programmes that create the space for local people to envision and choose their own futures. Our key principle here is the belief that local solutions are found locally within the context of that socio-ecological landscape and that only from this basis can sustainable programmes emerge. In working within and with the local system and strengthening internal and later external connections, local cultural convention is respected and utilised to bring out local knowledge, ideas and preferences before introducing relevant external knowledge and practices to guide the programmes in their interactions with external forces and collaboratively into the future.

SWC fully recognises the challenges introduced through our non-formal approaches. One of the key challenges is working with funders to enable recognition that without salaried employees in oversight roles, funding budgets must of necessity include components for oversight: project management, administration and reporting in line with the formal requirements of the funders. With this not having been allowed for in the granting of the money from CEPF a cost of R95 000 was incurred by the programme manager at her own expense. This is of course unsustainable and it is very important for SWC to develop relationships with funders who are in themselves prepared to think (and act) out of the box in the granting of funds in order to find sustainable solutions to ecological challenges.

Mkhambathi Nature Reserve...I've found what I'm looking for

Posted: 21 Feb 2012 08:41 AM PST

I think I have found what I'm looking for. **Mkhambathi Nature Reserve** in the Eastern Cape is one of the most photogenic, pristine and priceless places I have been on my Year in the Wild. There is so much to admire about this relatively small 7000 hectare reserve on the northern Wild Coast of South Africa. Excuse all the superlatives which you'll come across in this blog..but this place deserves them.



The reserve runs along spectacular coastline, where calm inlets offer respite from the huge crashing waves indicative of the Wild Coast. Emerald grasslands roll down to the shores, and are dotted with eland and hartebeest, which you'll often see against the blue backdrop of the Indian Ocean.

Pockets of thick coastal forest echo with Knysna loeries, while shy kudu antelope hide away in the blanket of greenness. The most extensive forest lies in the north-west of the reserve, in an area known as "The Superbowl". Here, a massive amphitheatre of sandstone cliffs surrounds several hectares of luminous high-canopy forest. In the middle of the crescent of cliffs, a river cascades thirty metres down on its way into the gorge below. You can stand on the edge of the cliffs, listening to the crash of water, and hundreds of birds tweeting, looking down at a scene that is simply breathtaking.

The main three rivers from south to north – Msikaba, Mkhambathi and Mtentu – cut deep gorges through the sandstone bed rock. Two sizeable vulture colonies thrive in the cliff faces of the Msikaba and Mtentu gorges. All the rivers and streams in the reserve are crystal clear, and most of the Mkhambathi River's catchment area



falls within the reserve. You can drink straight from the streams and waterfalls, of which there are several. How many places in South Africa – in the world – can you do that these days?



In fact, it's the waterfalls which make Mkhambathi extra special. Within the space of a few hundred metres, the Mkhambathi river tumbles down several precipices into deep, dark rock pools, some close to a hundred metres in size. I have spent several hours admiring and photographing Horseshoe Falls, Strandloper Falls and Mkhambathi Falls. The last cascades directly into the ocean, a remarkable setting and climax to what is a spectacularly scenic reserve.

Schools of fish move up and down the estuaries and rivers. Fishing here is controlled, and the Pondoland Marine Protected Area has done much to conserve the abundant marine life. But there's

still much to be done. Enforcement is difficult. Some fishermen in the area confided that they had fished in areas where it was illegal.



But it's still a largely untouched place, a place which could almost be described in Utopian terms. It is probably what most of the east coast of South Africa once looked like a few hundred years ago: plenty of wildlife sharing their space with cattle, while locals lived a life deeply connect to the rhythms of nature, pastoralists and fishermen living off the land and sea, wanting for nothing, yet receiving everything they needed- all the food, water and health they required. A benign climate means you will never have to put on a jersey, and swimming in the warm rivers and sea at any time of day or night is considered totally appropriate and without worry of getting cold.

Incredibly, this place used to be a leper colony until the mid 20th century. What a place to be sent to...if you're going to have leprosy, then Mkhambathi is the place to have it. The name comes from the local term for leprosy...but its exact origin is not entirely understood or known.

But like all of South Africa's most beautiful and pristine areas, Mkhambathi is under threat. The curse of unchecked capitalism, commerce and development is lurking. For several years, the Pondo people and organisations like [Sustaining the Wild Coast](#) and [Wild Coast Project](#) have been fighting mining companies which want to strip the sands and soils of its titanium. However, the Pondoland community, under leadership of their king Mpondombini Sigcawu, has forbidden any mining.



I spent the weekend with local environmental activist and educator Nonhle Mbuthuma while she was conducting a workshop for local kids at Mtentu, on the northern border of the reserve. She told me that the local people don't see how mining can benefit their community, as the mining will only destroy the rivers which the locals use for drinking water, and eliminate the grasslands, which their cattle graze.

Besides, the mine will completely ruin the aesthetic value of the area, and will only last for twenty-odd years. All the jobs that are created will be for outsiders, and most of the money will end up in the bank accounts of a few individuals. "What are we supposed to do once the mine has destroyed our land?" Nonhle told me. And the income generated from nature tourism to this beautiful area of South Africa would – like the beautiful rivers – dry up immediately.



Another threat – more insidious – is the N2 national road, which government wants to extend through this part of the Wild Coast. It would not only ruin the incomparable natural beauty, but as Nonhle told me, its expensive funding could come from foreign companies who in return want access to the mining rights in the area.



I've seen the effects that highways have on natural systems – from Addo Elephant National Park to Garden Route National Park. Not only do they mess up natural ecosystems, but they create massive ribbon development, which eventually destroys the spirit and soul of a place, the very things which make tourists come to the area in the first place.

Besides, locals have told me that the government wants a toll road to be built because they say it will improve access for the community, but the government hasn't committed any funding to build decent roads from the toll road into the communities themselves. The roads in this region are terrible – why not improve existing infrastructure, and still preserve the soul of the Wild Coast?

There's no doubt that Mkhambathi Nature Reserve and its marine protected area could be one of South Africa's flagship reserves, taking its place alongside the likes of Table Mountain National Park and Kruger National Park as one of the most beautiful and special. For a tiny reserve, this is no small feat, yet – incredibly – its long term safety and preservation is uncertain. I challenge anyone to come to Mkhambathi and to tell me that South Africa's authorities should not do everything to conserve it and its surrounding areas.

Now, what would I do if government gave the go-ahead to the mines near Mkhambathi? Just thinking about it makes my blood boil and my heart break. Some will no doubt say that I'm being sentimental and "green", but again, I ask you, come to Mkhambathi and see for yourself. Then decide.

Important note to travellers and visitors: Mkhambathi may be one of the most beautiful places I've been to, but if you come here, be prepared for some travel challenges. The roads in this part of the Eastern Cape are shocking (who knows what politics is being played out, especially in light of the N2 toll road project). The roads in the reserve are also terrible – if you don't have a bakkie or high-ground clearance vehicle, don't bother coming. Reserve manager Vuyani Mapiya tells me that Eastern Cape Parks & Tourism have been trying to get the roads fixed for several years, but the relevant provincial minister has not yet signed off the funds, which are apparently available. I do think the roads are a major issue for visitors, but then again, I don't really mind, because I quite like it when there aren't many people around, and I have a 4x4! Seriously, however, if Eastern Cape Parks & Tourism want to play their part in developing this region sustainably, then they do have to get the roads fixed, whatever it takes. Plus, they need to make sure that the hot water gas geysers work in the chalets, that the toilets flush, that the chairs aren't broken, that there is at least some cutlery in the kitchen, and that the staff are trained in tourism. I do get the feeling that visitors here are very welcome, but that staff aren't quite sure what to do with them when they arrive! If the proposed mining is to be stopped once and for all, Mkhambathi needs to play its part and show that it can generate sustainable, nature-friendly revenue. The area sells itself as a nature-loving destination, but the tourism basics must be done correctly if the reserve is to be taken seriously.

These num-num berries grow all over the place on the wild coast...and are pretty tasty! "Nature can survive without us, but we can't survive without nature" - Nonhle Mbuthuma



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