

‘Growing Together’: supporting local community participation for conservation action in the Pondoland and Albany hotspots

**Final report
25 November 2014**

Overview

This scoping project was intended to lay a foundation for future project development engaging low income communities around their local nature areas in the Pondoland and Albany hotspots. The Pondoland region is identified as a priority biodiversity corridor in the CEPF ecosystem profile, while the Albany region is also under significant threat. These regions are home to significant low income communities whose dependence on well-functioning ecosystems places them at risk.

Key areas for further project development to emerge from the scoping exercise are:

- Ongoing facilitated local community development driven dialogue with local government and other institutional role players
- Community eco-tourism lesson sharing and learning exchange

Key lessons from this scoping project are:

- Local communities are the most reliable partner in a fractured and unstable institutional environment.
- Engagement with local government is still important, and enabling this requires a deep long-term commitment.

What we did

We engaged with a range of role players in government and civil society, to scope out possible projects with potential for further development.

1. We met with the **Eastern Cape People and Parks Forum**, which aims to bring together government departments in conservation and land affairs at national and provincial level, local government and community representatives (7 August 2012). We were originally informed that the forum would be a useful place to connect with the full range of government role players, but in fact community role players were better represented. *Our intention, based on earlier interaction with the provincial Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs, had been to explore the need for training around Growing Together and the creation of a learning network space amongst nature reserve managers, but this was not appropriate given the nature of participants.* The conversation at the Forum focused on preparations for a national People and Parks Indaba, but on the item around the scoping project the general request was for SANBI to play a role in brokering relationships with municipalities which are seen as extremely difficult to work with. The intention of community representatives was to influence municipal planning as well as infrastructure developments.
2. In Buffalo City, we met with the Environmental Manager and explored several potential sites for engagement with low income communities, none of which appeared to be immediately suitable given their distance from these communities (6 August 2012). SANBI is in the process of establishing a new National Botanical Garden at Kwelera Nature Reserve, and it is felt that there will be value working with the Nature Reserve and the low income communities that are planned for the surrounding area. This work will only emerge over the next few years.
3. On request from community stakeholders in the Amadiba area, who we met at the CEPF MPAH stakeholder workshop in late 2011, we met with **Bizana Municipality** in the Alfred Nzo District of which

the Amadiba area forms a part (27 September 2012). We reached agreement with the Municipality to host a biodiversity dialogue between the municipality and community organisations. The Municipality provided a list of organisations they work with and we agreed to make contact with as many civil society organisations as we could to ensure the widest representation at the workshop possible. The workshop was due to be held on 5 March 2013, but was cancelled by the Municipality just days before due to councillors wanting to avoid embarrassment at non-delivery on promises made around the proclamation and marketing of the Umtamvuna Nature Reserve.

We since heard that the senior leadership in the Municipality, including the Municipal Manager, were instructed to withdraw from their positions by the ANC National Executive Committee, and it appeared that this Municipality is too unstable to work with.

Given this situation, we engaged with Sustaining the Wild Coast around an alternative approach. They advised us of a community that is interested in establishing a botanical garden and research centre by way of attracting tourism to the area as an alternative to mining. We were uncertain of the viability of such an initiative, and brought together relevant role players to engage with the community – Tilla Raimondo from SANBI's Threatened Species Programme and a Wild Coast tourism expert recommended by Open Africa (27-29 October 2013).

4. We established a partnership with the Wild Coast Project to support one of several **Participatory Forest Management Committees** (PFMCs) they had developed in order to secure protected area expansion. The Wild Coast Project has worked with the Participatory Forest Management Committees to build Local Economic Development projects that will provide viable income sources for community members from their engagement with the protected areas. Our partnership with them is intended to support these PFMCs in securing their infrastructure needs for these LED initiatives from municipal IDPs and consequent budget allocations. We piloted this approach with the Monubi PFMC - comprising representatives from three villages surrounding the Forest Reserve - by seconding the Municipal Programme's NRF to the Wild Coast Project to build the relationship with Mngquma Local Municipality.

The intern made good progress in engaging the LED Manager and getting the Municipal Manager on board, to the point that SANBI and the Wild Coast Project, together with a range of government and civil society stakeholders, were invited to provide input into the master plan for the socio-economic initiatives on the Wild Coast for incorporation into the IDP by the Municipal Manager (February 2013). But that meeting was disrupted and disbanded by certain Councillors as the Chiefs had not been appropriately consulted beforehand. The Municipality was advised to consult with the Chiefs first before engaging with institutional stakeholders. *We may be called to engage again, but we no longer have the capacity of a skilled Municipal Programme intern to engage with this work in a dedicated way.*

5. We were planning to map community stakeholders in priority areas of the Amathole District, in support of processes related to the exploration of the formation of the **Amathole Biosphere Reserve**. A scoping visit was planned for April, then June 2013, but then postponed indefinitely. Given the lack of clarity around the Amathole process, it was decided not to focus on that area as part of this project.
6. We therefore focused the remaining funds in this project on further project development linked to the vision of the Baleni community in Pondoland. Sustaining the Wild Coast suggested a process that brings together community, provincial government, local government (Bizana Municipality and Alfred Nzo District Municipality), and private sector roleplayers engaged with Mkambati Nature Reserve. The idea was to present a summary of all the Baleni community's resources – the tourism report, a community desires project report, desk top research study into the area, a local knowledge centre concept

document – to institutional stakeholders, and create space for dialogue towards these plans being integrated within institutional frameworks and priorities. This idea was then expanded to include six other villages in the **Amadiba** area which Sustaining the Wild Coast has supported to build and articulate their own vision for their development. A report of the **Amadiba Development Workshop** is attached as Annexure A.

Alongside the process with Baleni and the Amadiba Development Workshop, a concept proposal was developed for learning exchange(s) with other community based research facilities such as in the Hantam (Nieuwoudtville), and community-run ecotourism initiatives at Bulungula, Umtamvuna and Mehlooding (near Matatiele). *This will be submitted in response to the call to be put out by the MPAH Capacity Development Project SANBI is implementing. Wildlands Trust have offered to match our contribution from their Blue Fund.*

Reflections

This project took a nearly a year and a half longer than anticipated, and it was good that it was given this extra time. The landscape is socially and politically complex, and even for our East London-based staff, Pondoland was unknown territory. We worked effectively through local partnerships – with the Wild Coast Project who were engaged with civil society structures on the ground through the Participatory Forest Management Committees, and with Sustaining the Wild Coast who have been working in Pondoland for many years.

The state of local government in the Eastern Cape makes it a particularly challenging area of engagement, and not one for short-term intervention. Capacity constraints are compounded by internal instability and often fraught relationships with local communities, to the extent that being seen as connected to local government can be dangerous in certain communities. At the same time, local government is responsible for key areas of delivery and also for decision-making in critical planning processes, so some engagement is required.

The Amadiba Development Workshop was the highlight of the project – SANBI was well placed to bring a range of institutional stakeholders to a local community-driven development process that would otherwise have struggled to find a voice within the formal frameworks. This process is worthy of ongoing support.

Lessons

This work cannot be done from a distance - being effective means building effective partnerships with locally grounded organisations.

Local communities are the most reliable partner in a fractured and unstable institutional environment. However, one still needs to find ways to engage local government, and this is trial and error. Where issues involved in relating to local government are as complex as they are in the Eastern Cape, this work requires a long-term commitment which holds an underlying integrity while being deftly responsive to changes in context.

It adds value to local community-driven development processes when the space is created for them to engage in dialogue with government institutions around their development vision and how to work within formal frameworks to realise their vision.

Financial status

Below is our income and expenditure report for the period **1 July 2012 – 30 November 2014**.

Income	Project Budget	Actual Income	Balance
Wildlands Trust	152 000.00	144 400.00	7 600.00
Expenses	Project Budget	Actual Expenses	Balance
Professional Services	37 500.00	9 999.99	27 500.01
Travel	89 300.00	122 477.63	-33 177.63
Meetings & Events	10 000.00	11 922.58	-1 922.58
Indirect costs	15 200.00	7 600.00	7 600.00
Total Budget	152 000.00	150 2000.20	-0.20
Final payment due		7 600.00	

Note: Due to delays caused by the last minute cancellation of the workshop to be hosted with Bizana Municipality and the indefinite postponement of the Amathole study tour, a no-cost extension was granted to December 2014.



A. Smith
Director: Finance - SANBI

20 November 2014

Date