

# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

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## 1.1 MOTIVATION

Examples of rural community participation in tourism-based developments such as that of the Mabila Community in the Sodwana Bay area, have emerged as a major trend in the Developing world during the last three decades (Boo, 1993; Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1993; Ashley and Jones, 1999). There are many reasons for this, the most accepted of which probably stemming from the persistent influences of the environmentalist movement and the strong community participation convictions of the modern day sustainable development Imperative (Wells and Brandon, 1992; Ghai, 1994; Little, 1996). Additional aspects which contribute almost naturally towards this trend include the substantial comparative advantage of the Less Developed Countries in terms of the variety and extent of their unspoiled natural environments as well as a huge increase in the interest of tourism to these areas (Cater, 1994; Ashley and Jones, 1999).

The idea of rural community participation in tourism-based developments basically entails the empowerment of rural communities to be sufficiently involved in the planning and implementation of developments that have an influence on them and the area they live in (IIED, 1994a; Little, 1996; IUCN, 1997a). The involvement of rural communities does not only aim to resolve the possible negative impacts which the developments may have on these communities and to increase the extent of the benefits accruing from the venture, but also concentrates on maximizing the level of control which communities have in the planning and management of current and future tourism developments in their area (Hall and Lew, 1998; Inskeep, 1998; Goodwin and Roe, 1999).

Today it is an often-cited fact that tourism is the world's largest and fastest growing industry (Lindberg and Hawkins, 1993; Inskeep, 1998; Muller, 2000; Hall, 2000). Consequently, many governments and development consultants have regarded tourism as the answer to the majority of the development needs within rural areas (Wells and Brandon, 1992; Little, 1996; Inskeep, 1998). History has shown however, that although tourism can indeed function as a powerful rural development tool, it is significant not only because of the number of tourists and money it brings to a destination and how many people it employs, but also because of the immense impact it has on people's lives and on the places where they live (Kemf, 1993; Ghimire, 1994; Hall, 2000).

Cases where the tourism market entered sensitive areas and caused considerable long-term damage in their social, economic and ecological sectors are well documented (Inskeep and Kallenberger, 1992; Turner and Ash in Prosser, 1994; Hunter and Green, 1995; Kandelaars, 1997; Hall, 2000). Classic examples are those of the large-scale luxury hotel developments of the mass tourism era. In the case of the Maldivian and Mauritian islands of the Indian Ocean, for instance, hotel developments caused environmental degradation such as pollution in the areas around the developments and in the ocean, which in turn led to a decline in tourism and a subsequent decline in tourism income for the local rural communities (Ramsamy, 1994; Brown et al., 1995).

In the African context, the repeated removal of rural communities from their traditional territories for the sake of conservation and tourism developments constitutes some of the harshest influences inflicted upon rural communities. Initially motives for the proclamation of many of the protected areas may have seemed to focus on the conservation of natural heritage only, but signs that noticeably tie these areas with early tourist experience are clearly visible (Anderson and Grove, 1987; Fuggle and Rabie, 1992). The writings of Earnest Hemingway (1936), Karen Blixen (1937), and Elspeth Huxley (1959; 1962), for instance, 'bear eloquent witness to the function of Africa as a wilderness in which European man sought to rediscover a lost harmony with nature and the natural environment' (Marx, 1964; Olwig and Olwig, 1980 in Anderson and Grove 1987).

Since these early times rural communities have had to share their resources with conservationists and developers to an increasing extent. The Makuleke community of the Kruger National Park, South Africa, for example, was forcefully removed from their ancestral land so that the park could be enlarged (Harries, 1984; Carruthers, 1995; Gilfillan, 1997 in Tapela, 2001). Other communities such as the Kakumbi and Nsefu communities of South Luangwa National Park, Zambia (Butler, 1999), and the Richtersveld community of the Richtersveld National Park, South Africa (Meintjies, 1989; Boonzaier, 1991; Deacon, 1993 in Mosidi 1996), were removed from their land with the promise of adequate compensation in return for the land and resources, which they would lose.

In most of these instances, however, rural communities found themselves in situations where they were cut off from significant tracts of their natural resource base whilst the benefits which they were promised in return, did not yield sufficiently to provide for their needs. Development and conservation, which were supposed to be representative of

prosperity and a better future according to conservationist views (Bell, 1987; Fuggle and Rabie, 1992; Tillman Lyle, 1993), therefore became ideas which the rural communities in Africa associated with inequitable benefits destined only for the limited group of wealthy Europeans who owned and visited these reserves (Els, 1995; Vivian, 1995; Little, 1996).

Tourism-based community development emerged as part of a new form of tourism development that materialized in accordance with the emergence of the sustainable development paradigm (Lindberg and Hawkins, 1992; Inskeep, 1998; Zeppel in Hall and Lew, 1998; Hall, 2000). Policy changes such as those initiated at the 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environments began shifting towards integrated development and resource management strategies which canvassed for greater levels of participation of rural communities in rural development projects, and therefore also greater levels of control over decision-making and over the benefits that would flow to the rural communities (Hall and Lew, 1998).

Rural community participation gained further momentum when, in 1987 the concept and practice of sustainability and sustainable development came into public acceptance use with the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development – Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report. Five basic principles of sustainability were identified in this report, two of which addressed the issues of human diversity conservation and a better balance of fairness and opportunity among nations (World Commission On Environment And Development in Hall, 2000).

At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), popularly known as the Rio Summit, the sustainable development approach was further elaborated and expressed in Agenda 21 (Yeld, 1991; Inskeep, 1998). Agenda 21 represents a blue print for action and carries a strong moral obligation to ensure the full implementation of the sustainable development strategies adopted by the 178 countries at the summit (South Africa, 1998a). Chapter 26 of the document specifically recognizes the value of the traditional knowledge and resource management skills of the rural communities and their role in sustainable rural development practices (South Africa, 1998a). Furthermore, the document also describes the importance of promoting rural community participation in order to maximize the rural community's ability to own and to manage their environments (South Africa, 1998a). The conference subsequently adopted Agenda 21, which was followed by Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry, issued by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 1995 (Inskeep, 1998).

As a result, the international surge towards sustainable development as well as the contributions of international and national tourism authorities in conjunction with the rural communities of the world have managed to create a framework aimed at enabling sustainable tourism developments. These developments would ultimately make it possible for the tourist, the tourism developer and the rural community to benefit. This new form of sustainable tourism, which has also been described as 'new tourism' (Poon, 1994) or 'alternative tourism' (Prosser, 1994) prescribes a form of tourism and tourism development, that is progressively more aware of and sensitive to the natural and cultural environments in which it develops (Bosselman, et al., 1999). It also advocates 'small-scale developments with local ownership and control, and tourists who are well versed in the ethics of sustainable travel' (Wheeler, 1993 in Queiros, 2000).

In Southern Africa, as in many other international destinations, sustainable tourism developments emerged in the form of joint ventures between rural communities and tourism developers in and around protected areas (Butler, 1999; Goodwin and Roe, 1999; White, 1999). Ashley and Jones (1999) describe the emergence of contractual partnerships between rural communities and private investors to establish and operate tourism ventures in which both the developers and the rural community have the right to benefit from and the responsibility to contribute to the enterprise.

The South African scenario does, however present its own set of unique challenges to the idea of rural community participation in tourism-based developments and this is largely due to its unique environments and the multitude of external influences (Anderson and Grove, 1987; Poulthey and Ngubane, 1990; Els, 1994). Colonialism and Western development initiatives have for instance caused some of the major challenges in Africa and Southern Africa's past and present development history. Aspects such as land tenure, ownership of wildlife resources, the chasm in perception between scientists, developers and donor agencies of what real sustainable development in the rural context is, as well as what the needs and aspirations of rural communities are, sensitive to the rural community's traditional background but within the context of modern day development, present some of the principle of these challenges (Bell, 1987; Els, 1995; Goodwin and Roe, 1999).

In the case of Maputaland and the Mbila community of the area around to the Sodwana Bay National Park, it is evident that this region and its indigenous rural communities have also suffered the consequences of foreign settlement, alien conservation policies and its associated environmental problems. In addition to being relocated several times, the Mbila community have also had to contend with a harsh environment that holds very

limited development prospects. These factors have contributed significantly towards the extreme levels of poverty and other social deficiencies such as the inappropriate levels of skills and training in the area.

What is equally true however is that some examples do exist of developments where the essential ingredients, which are necessary to make sustainable rural developments happen, are present and where these developments are successful. Various examples exist, of instances where different governmental departments, conservation agencies as well as developers and rural communities have come together and demonstrated the will to aid each other in the process of developing sustainable rural developments (Pinnock, 1996; Robinson, 1996; SANP, 1998; Wilderness Safaris, 1998a; Wilderness Safaris, 1998b).

The author therefore perceives the challenge to be that of introducing sustainable tourism development into this culturally diverse and naturally sensitive environment as a form of environmentally sensitive development. The aims of these developments would be to provide a unique experience for the tourist, equitable socio-economic involvement and benefits for the rural communities as well as worthwhile monetary returns for the developers. This study will now endeavour to examine the question of the present state of rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of the Sodwana Bay area.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The Mbila community of the Sodwana Bay area is a typical example of a rural community that inhabits a rural area that is failing to provide sufficiently for the needs of the people. The difficulties faced by the community are of a very complex nature and arise predominantly from the relationships between the community and their social and natural environments. A simple illustration of one of these relationships is that of the limited range and depth of participatory opportunities available in the local tourism industry at present, set against the reality of the constant rise of the community's population.

The unemployment rates are also soaring thus leaving the majority of the community in a state of moderate to extreme poverty. These difficulties are exacerbated by other factors such as limited rights to the use of the land and its available natural resources, insufficient access to funding for development programmes as well as a low level of applicable training. From a different viewpoint, there is also a perceived lack of scientific knowledge regarding the potential of tourism-based activities to effect viable socio-

economic development in the area in addition to a lack of understanding on how to effect economic upliftment whilst protecting the natural environment and the cultural identity of the community. The research emphasis will therefore be on answering the following questions:

### **1.2.1 The Issue of Control**

- What level of control do the Mbila community possess with regard to the resources in their area and how does this influence the community in relation to their participation in tourism-related developments?

### **1.2.2 The Issue of Opportunity**

- Do the current tourism opportunities in the Sodwana Bay region possess the specific requirements that will allow long-term active community participation?
- How can present and future tourism opportunities in the region be enhanced to increase equitable community involvement, thereby improving the region's levels of socio-economic and ecological sustainability?

### **1.2.3 The Issue of Responsibility**

- What are the responsibilities of the government, the local tourism industry and the Mbila community in terms of enabling maximum rural community participation in the Tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay?
- What are the changes that need to be made to allow for better integration of all the relevant stakeholders into the tourism developments in the region?

## **1.3 STUDY AREA**

The study area is situated in Maputaland, in the northeastern part of the KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa (see Fig. 1.1). Geographically, the Mbila tribal area and the Sodwana Bay National Park are located in the region between Lake Sibayi and the northern shores of Lake St. Lucia. Although the Mbila community effectively occupies the whole of this area, it was discovered that the bulk of the tourism-based activities and the involvement of the Mbila community therein, resides in and around the Sodwana Bay National Park itself. The study therefore focused on the areas where heightened tourism activity takes place and where the Mbila community interacts with this, although a few interviews were also conducted deeper within the Mbila community territory.

Figure 1.1: Map of the General Location of the Study Area



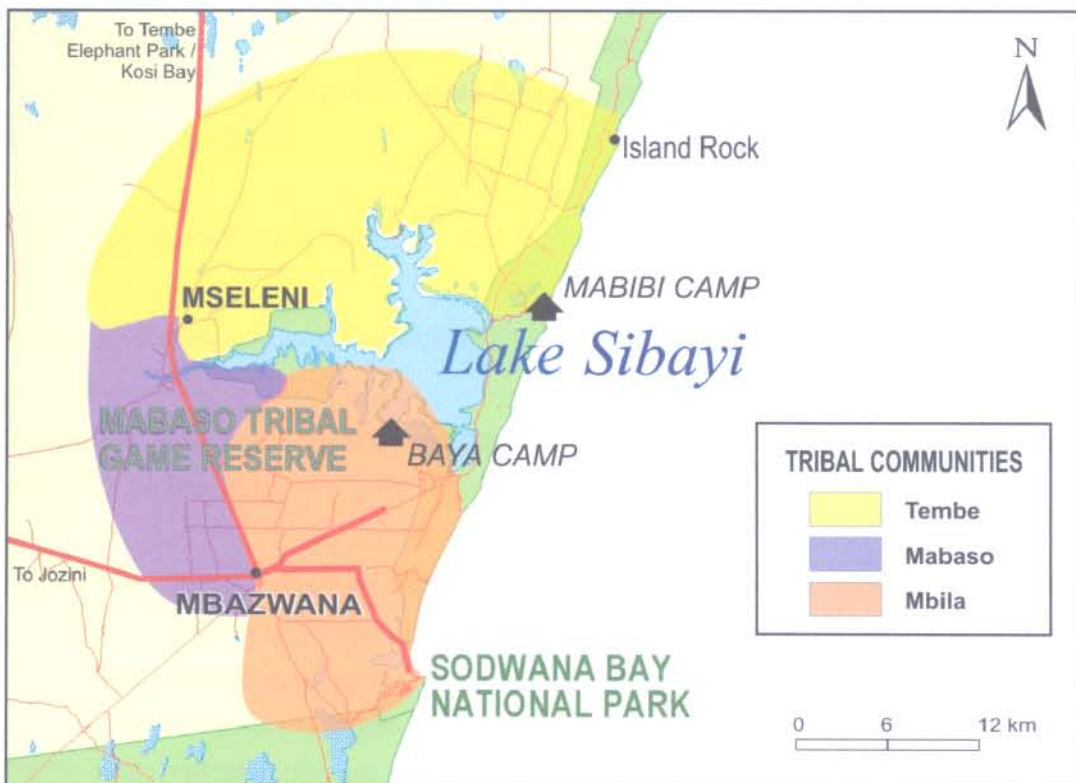
The remainder of the territory around the study area is occupied in the following manner; The Tembe community occupy on the northern shores of Lake Sibayi, up until the Mseleni Mission station and northwards from there; the Tembe's are neighboured by the Mabaso community, which occupy the region from the Mseleni Mission to about 5 Km around the western tip of the Lake; from there the Mbila community occupies the area stretching towards the Indian Ocean in the east and Sodwana Bay in the west. The Mbila community is therefore the most prominent of all the communities in the study area. (see Fig. 1.2).

### 1.3 AIMS

In the light of the past and present developments in the fields of rural community participation and tourism-based developments in and around protected areas, this study will aim at providing insights into a number of questions concerning the traditional

methods of conservation of natural resources and into the manner in which rural communities were involved in this regard. The study will also explore the current situation in terms of the level of rural community participation in the tourism-based developments at Sodwana Bay. Upon completion of the abovementioned tasks, the study will then aim to establish a framework on how the present levels of participation can be changed to permit a greater degree of rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay.

**Figure 1.2: Distribution of Communities in the Study Area**



## 1.5 OBJECTIVES

- To conduct a literature study on the subject of rural community participation in Tourism-based developments, in and around Protected areas: what it is, how it developed, and what its potential and pitfalls are (see Chapter 2)
- To use the literature study to develop a set of fundamental elements deemed to be critical to the success of rural community participation in tourism-based developments (see Chapter 2)
- To provide a short background to the Sodwana Bay area: its history, its natural and cultural resources, and the land tenure (see Chapter 3)



- To paint an objective picture of the resident tourism industry: the protected areas, the tourism activities and facilities, the current involvement of the community and the contributions of the private tourism developers and the government institutions (see Chapter 3)
- To determine the level of control that the Mbila community have over their resources, how this is influencing their participation in the tourism-based developments and to verify the benefits that accrue from this participation (see Chapter 3 and 4)
- Based on all of the above-mentioned information, to provide recommendations that could direct future tourism-based community participation at Sodwana Bay (see Chapter 5).

## 1.6 RESEARCH METHOD

### 1.6.1 Methods of Data Collection

The study made use of both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources included the following:

- **Workshops** – Workshops were held at the Universities of Pretoria and Zululand as well as at the Sodwana offices of the KwaZulu-Natal Conservation Services. The workshops were attended by academics, field researchers and environmental managers involved principally in the fields of conservation, tourism and rural development. The workshops were held during the initial stages of the research as well as later on during the study and aided the study essentially, by defining the real issues that needed to be studied.
- **Open-ended group interviews** – These interviews were conducted with any interested or affected party in the Sodwana Bay area, with the primary undertaking of getting to know the area from a local perspective.
- **Interviews** with the focus groups in the area (e.g. males, females, youth groups, carvers, weavers, literate and illiterate people, Mbila tribal leadership, KwaZulu-Natal Conservation Services staff, etc.) – Interviews with these groups were held with the aim of gaining information about their specific fashion of participation in the tourism-based developments of the area, in the past and at present, and how

this involvement has influenced their livelihoods in Sodwana Bay. The interviews were conducted in groups in order to assess the outcomes of the interviews within the position of the group dynamic and to verify these outcomes in terms of the individual and other interviews.

- **Individual interviews** – These interviews were also conducted with specifically chosen members of the Mbilal community, the local tourism industry and the KwaZulu-Natal Conservation Services, and so, to gain information from their specific vantage points.
  
- **Participant observations** – This form of interview was held with all the abovementioned groups but in a way that gave the participant the freedom to discuss whatever he/she/they wanted to, within the general confines of the research question, but without the interview being led by the researchers questions. This method was preformed to allow issues to be raised from the local viewpoint and not only those anticipated by the research.

Qualitative research methods were favoured over quantitative research methods mainly because of the high level of illiteracy in the area, and because of the anticipated limitations of quantitative methods in capturing the grass root socio-economic issues of the region. Secondary data sources consisted of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) based maps and other maps, published and unpublished texts by governmental and nongovernmental institutions, academics and other researchers. Data collected in this fashion is presented in diagrams, tables, maps and textboxes.

### 1.6.2 Methods of Data Analysis

Chapter 2 of the study introduces the reader to the relevant literature concerning rural community participation in tourism-based sustainable development. The information contained in the literature is portrayed in a manner, which aims to highlight the failures and victories of sustainable development, sustainable tourism-based development and rural community participation initiatives, during the history of these initiatives. The current situation of the Sodwana Bay tourism industry (described in Chapter 3) is then tested against a defined set of fundamental elements (developed in Chapter 2) derived from the literature on these initiatives.

## 1.7. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

**Chapter 1** introduces the reader to the relevant aspects of rural community participation in Tourism-based developments similar to that of Sodwana Bay. It also states the research problem, the location of the study area the study's aims and objectives as well as the research procedures used. Lastly, it describes the structure of the study.

**Chapter 2** contains the literature study and discusses the central issues regarding rural community participation in Tourism-based developments within and around protected areas. This chapter will aim to define a fundamental set of elements against which the present rural community participation situation in Sodwana Bay will be tested.

**Chapter 3** provides a background to the Sodwana Bay area: the history of its tourism industry and the involvement of the Mbila community in that industry, its natural and cultural resources and land tenure. This chapter will also shed light on current tourism activities and facilities in the area as well as the existing local community-based tourism involvement and how the communities are benefiting from these activities.

**Chapter 4** of the study contains the analysis of the findings. The analysis relies on the fundamental set of elements (which are described in Chapter 2), measured against the present state of affairs in Sodwana Bay (described in Chapter 3). The main themes of the analysis are presented under the principal headings **Empowerment** and **Involvement**, i.e. the appropriate levels of Empowerment, which are needed to enable rural community participation in tourism-based developments and the relevant levels of **Involvement** necessary to allow rural communities to participate to their full potential in the tourism-based developments of their area. A summary of these themes is shown in Fig. 4.1.

**Chapter 5** concludes the study and presents a discussion of the findings of the research. Recommendations are made on how the present debilitating aspects of the rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay can be changed or enhanced to permit greater levels of involvement, which would then hopefully lead to a better quality of life for the members of the Mbila community as well as sustainable forms of tourism development in a healthy environment.