

Chapter 3: The Case of the Mbila Community and the Sodwana Bay Tourism Industry

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The case of the Mbila community and the Sodwana Bay tourism industry is a typical one of where a rural community is involved in the day-to-day realities of living in a fragile environment which offers limited opportunities towards their livelihood essentials. Chapter 2 provided examples of similar situations together with the reasons the rural community's failed to participate sufficiently in the developments and their subsequent benefits. Chapter 3 will now focus on the current tourism development situation in Sodwana Bay and on the involvement of the Mbila community therein.

3.2 THE STUDY AREA

3.2.1 Location

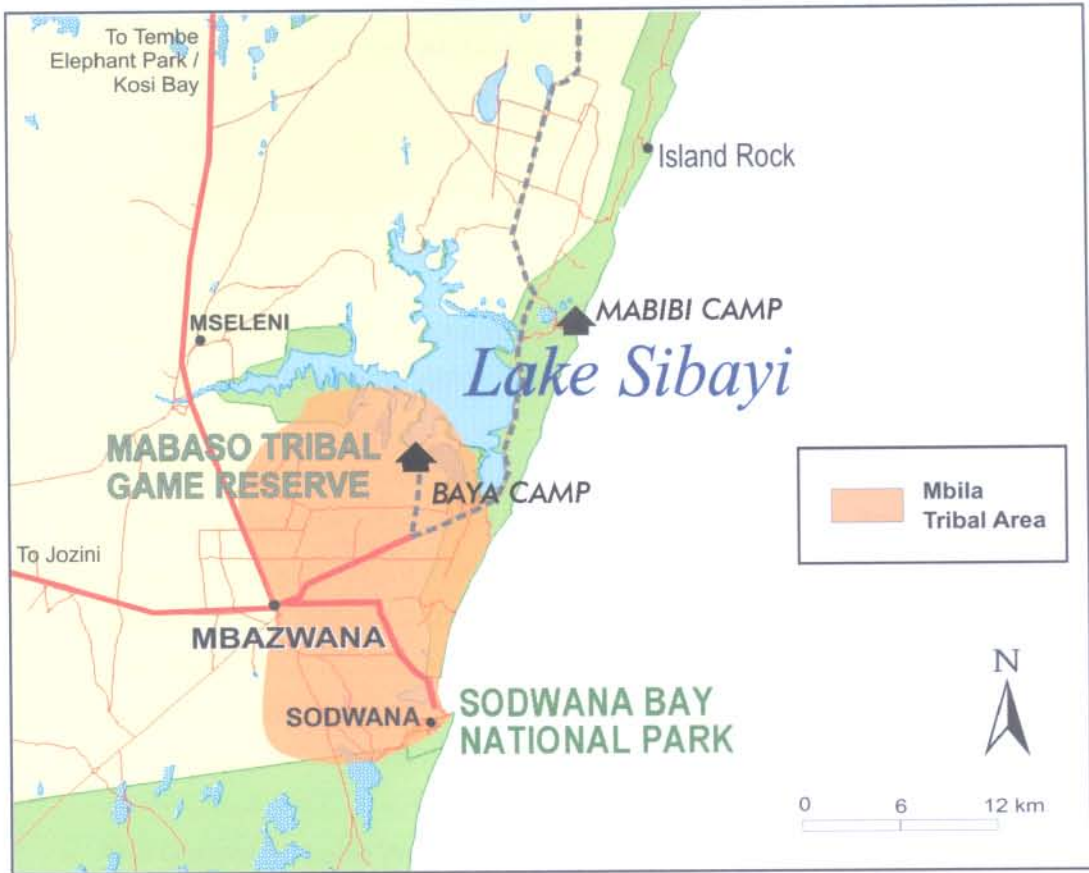
Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 provides an idea of where the study area is situated within the broader context of South Africa. Figure 3.1 indicates the location of the study area more specifically in relation to some of the major landmarks in the area. The study area is quite unique in terms of its specific land use patterns and the way that these patterns influence the everyday livelihoods of the people that lives in the area. The basis for the specific development patterns in the area can, to a large extent, be attributed to the tourist products itself and will, in addition to other significant aspects such as the specific land ownership of the area, be discussed during the course of this chapter.

3.2.2 The Natural Resource Base

The importance of a healthy natural resource base from a global sustainable development point of view becomes evident in the literature of this study. Sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.2 of Chapter 2 point out that within the framework of the main goal, which is to arrive at satisfactory levels of sustainable development and sustainable livelihoods, the benefits of conformance to sustainable modes of development should firstly be to ensure a healthy sustainable environment. From a community-based tourism development point of view, this healthy state of the environment should then lead to increased levels of tourist interest in the area. This should then create a greater number of tourism activities

that would in turn lead to increased opportunities for the rural community in the tourism industry.

Figure 3.1: The Study Area



In the case of Sodwana Bay and the Mabila community, as in many other cases in the world, the natural resource base is still contributing significantly towards the traditional livelihood essentials of the local people. These essentials include basic essentials such as the affordable supply of potable fresh water, additional sources of sustenance, fuel for cooking fires, as well as building materials for houses and traditional medicines for the treatment of ailments. The natural resource base of the Mabila community is therefore still of vital importance to the community and the area as a whole.

From a tourism point of view, the unique variety of natural assets that the region has to offer (both the tourist and the tourism developers) is indicated by the fact that on a single trip to the area, it is possible to experience all of the following:

- Pristine beaches on the edge of a lukewarm Indian ocean, which teem with a variety of marine fish, including sharks such as the impressive Ragged toothed

Shark and some of the most sought after game fish in the world such as the Sailfish and the Black Marlin species; see Figure 3.2

- Occasional visitors to the area include the majestic Humpback whale as well large schools of various species of dolphins and highly endangered turtle species, popularly known as the Loggerhead and Leatherback turtle varieties;
- The southernmost stretches of tropical coral reefs on the African coastline, replete with many species of tropical fish, some of which are found in this location only;
- The highest vegetated coastal dunes in the whole of Southern Africa, set within a unique ecological niche which has already produced a substantial amount of scientific and other texts;
- Coastal freshwater lakes such as Lake Sibayi, Lake Mgobozeleni and Lake Bangazi that constitute the largest freshwater lakes in the southern hemisphere and which form part of a series of wetland systems that include such a diversity of bird, fish and plant species (of which many are endemic) that they have been recognized as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention,
- The Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park, which is an internationally acclaimed World Heritage Site that boasts a local tourism service, which offers a variety of game fishing, scuba diving and other experiences to a number of tourists, and which brings the tourist in close contact with these exceptional marine and terrestrial environments (Van der Elst, 1980; Tinley, 1985; Pinnock, 2001; LSDI, 2001a; LTFCA, 2001; Maputaland Tourism Alliance, 2000).

From a community point of view, however, the natural resource base has a completely different meaning. The Zulu's call Maputaland *uMhlaba'yalingala*, which literally means 'the earth which is flat' (Mountain, 1990). This name refers to the area's unique morphological characteristics and points to the large stretches of low-level planes vegetated predominantly by the Coastal Bushveld Grassland limited patches of the rare Sand Forest vegetation types (Acocks, 1988; Pooley, 1994; Rebelo and Low, 1996).

Figure 3.2: Sodwana Bay – The Beach at Jesser Point



Source: Olivier, W., and Olivier, S., 1996.

These unique ecological zones were sculpted primarily by the actions of the advancement and recession of the ocean as well as the aftermath of the drainage of many rivers through the area (Maud, 1980). One of the principal results of these geomorphologic processes was the creation of a sand bed which covers the whole of the area and reaches up to 30 metres in depth at certain locations (Maud, 1980). The presence of this sand bed is an important ecological determinant in the area which, in relation to the socio-economic development, has played a leading role not only in the way that the area has developed physically, but also in the material day-to-day livelihoods of the Mabila people themselves. (Maud, 1980; Bruton, 1980b; Mountain, 1990). To illustrate the practical implication of how this ecological feature influenced the relations between the different developmental variables, it is useful to briefly discuss an example of some of these interactions.

The physical characteristics of the sand bed that was formed dictates that the upper horizons of the soils of Maputaland and the study area itself are of a very poor organic nature. The explanation behind this natural phenomenon is simply that the bulk of the nutrients that are produced during the natural processes of decomposition are washed away by the vast amount of rain that the area receives annually (between 950 and 1100 mm per annum). These nutrients are thus washed away to a depth in the soil horizon where they are unavailable for the roots of the plants in the upper soil layers (Maud, 1980).

Palaeontological and archaeological records of the area do however provide evidence of the evolution of a unique ecosystem that was and still is able to survive within this nutrient-deprived environment (Avery, 1980; Mountain, 1990). In the case of Lake Sibayi, for instance, the number of species present indicates that viable species richness is still possible, although the number of the individuals of a specific species is low and the individuals within that species are also significantly smaller than individuals of the same species, in other more nutrient-rich systems elsewhere (Bruton, 1980b.). This phenomenon is also visible in most of the other species that are geographically limited to this area, perpetuating this pattern throughout the entire region.

As for the rural community itself, the influence of this infertility of soils means that any form of subsistence agriculture is very difficult to produce. Fields can only be used for a very limited time and then also produce only a meagre amount of agricultural produce (Mountain, 1990; Mathenjwa, 2003). This means that crops have to be rotated regularly and this often results in the destruction of patches of threatened coastal forest and wetland (Weisser, 1980; Mountain, 1990). Cattle and goat husbandry have been introduced in the area but have also had to contend with the low level of nutrients in the grasses as well as the limited amount of suitable grasses themselves (Mountain, 1990).

Section 3.2.4 of this chapter further demonstrates the immense role that the natural resource base is playing in the lives of the rural community. Mountain (1990) reports that the Rural Communities of the area have until very recently, still collected up to 75% of their required annual food intake from the natural environment. It is therefore clear that the partial failures of these agricultural recourses, in combination with the ever increasing population demands has led to rather harsh pressures being exerted on the local natural resource base.

These factors have eventually led to the near extinction of many of the species in the area (such as the Samango monkey, the Red duiker, and the Suni duiker), and the subsequent listing of these species on the IUCN's list of Red Data Book Species (Ferrar, 1989; Mountain, 1990; IUCN, 1994). In addition, increased conservation measures have been imposed by the conservation authorities and the hardships that the Rural Community has to endure have substantially increased.

The tourism industry at Sodwana Bay has therefore come as a welcome change in development opportunities in the area, in that it offers the prospect of a decreased level of pressure on the natural resource base whilst providing the opportunity for the Mbila community to receive benefits that will assist them in the provision of their livelihood

essentials (View also shared by Mathenjwa, 2003). Although this scenario is absolutely possible (Section 2.4.2.7), tourism can also be quite detrimental to a sensitive environment such as that of the Sodwana Bay area, and therefore has to be planned and managed very well to be able to achieve this goal.

3.2.3 The Cultural Resource Base

The cultural resource base of the region can play an equally important role in the tourism industry of the area and can, if managed correctly, help to uphold and to strengthen the cultural identity of the rural community as well (Prosser, 1994; Inskeep, 1998). The area has been visited by foreign visitors from as early as the late 1400s. These visitors have played an important role in the development of the area and have also enriched the area with interesting history. The author believes that although these historical accounts are of a foreign nature, they also form a part of the cultural milieu of Sodwana Bay and can thus be fashioned into a tourist attraction in their own right.

In the case of the Mbilá community, the community has already expressed their need to protect their cultural identity within the realization that the tourism industry of Sodwana Bay can provide them with the economic upliftment they require (Wilson, 1999). The interactions of the rural community with themselves, their environment and with the foreign settlers that settled in their vicinity brought about a cultural richness that adds to the uniqueness of the area and helps the visitor to obtain a better understanding of the area as a whole. The following is a description of the most celebrated of these cultural resources.

On a broad scale it is important to firstly mention the archaeological significance of the region. One of the most important archaeological sites in southern Africa – Border Cave – is situated on the western face of the Lubombo Mountains, roughly about 100 kilometres northwest from Sodwana Bay. This site has revealed over 69 000 primitive implements as well as the remains of at least five *Homo sapiens sapiens*, and a myriad of animal remains, some of which dates back to the Middle to early Late Stone Age period. (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d). These led to important new conclusions on early hominid evolution in sub-Saharan Africa and also offered insights into the people of the region and their utilization of the natural environment over the ages (Beaumont, *et al.*, 1978).

From the 1500s onwards the literature reveals many encounters of the predecessors of the Mbilá community, participating in numerous trade incentives with the early

Portuguese traders that sailed up and down the East African coast at that time (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d). Accounts from the early 1800s tell stories of the initial conflicts between the British and the Portuguese because of the lucrative trade routes on the Maputo and the Pongola rivers and of the subsequent proclamation of the South African border on the northern periphery of Maputaland.

This proclamation was instigated under quite controversial circumstances by the French president, Marshall McMahon and had far-reaching consequences for the tribes that inhabited the area (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d). What nobody knew at the time was that this border had in fact cut a straight line through the traditional homeland of the Tembe community (which today still occupies the area) and would ultimately cause much despair and the creation of a new community on the northern side of the border (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d; Mountain, 1990).

The latter part of the 1800s and the 1900s bears witness to the race between the Boers of the ZAR and the British of the Natal colony to obtain a harbour either at Sodwana Bay or at Kosi Bay (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d). This race led to frequent skirmishes between the two parties and eventually provided the grounds for the British to claim Maputaland as well (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d; Mountain, 1990). This in turn gave rise to the *divide and rule* legislation of Sir Theophilus Shepstone, which influenced the development in the area for many decades to come (Mountain, 1990; Duminy and Guest, 1995; Carton 2000).

Later on in this time period the DDT spraying of the famous Nagana campaign took place. This was accompanied by the culling of thousands of head of animals, in order to try to rid the area of the Tsetse fly that was believed to be a carrier of the dreaded sleeping sickness parasite. Many scientists that carried out studies on the area in the aftermath of this campaign revealed that the majority of the insect and animal species never fully recovered and that traces of the DDT toxin are still present in much of the species of the area (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d; Mountain, 1990).

The Tsetse fly was eradicated rather successfully, but the natural systems that support the malaria disease and the malaria parasite itself, recovered and adapted and were responsible for mortality rates that, in addition to the low soil fertility, kept the Sodwana Bay region out of the running for any major development proposals for many years to come (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d; Mountain, 1990).

The fact that the rural communities of the area have adapted to this harsh environment meant that they were relatively immune to the western influences of the early 1900s, as

these influences were, to a large degree, kept out by the region's environmental determinants (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d). Mountain (1990) states that the first significant changes came with the development of the industries in the major cities and in the nearest towns during the latter half of the 1900s and that this was typically caused by the experiences of the migrant workers in the social surroundings of these industries.

Further developments such as the tourism industry and the forestry activities in the area must also have contributed to the westernisation of the region. The harshness of the natural environment of the Sodwana Bay area therefore contributed significantly to sustaining the traditional lifestyle of the Mabila community.

Much of the traditional lifestyle of the Mabila community (and many other rural communities across the globe) flows from their use of the natural environment (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d; Pooley, 1980; Mountain, 1990). The production of palm wine or *uBusulu* is probably one of the most prominent traditions visible to the tourist visiting the area. This tradition involves the pruning of the iLala palm's (*Hyphaene coriacea*) leaves and the tapping of the sap via an insertion in the tree's stem. These palms can often be seen standing in the veld, striped of their leaves and with a small container hanging from their stems (see Fig. 3.3). The wine is not very intoxicating and is said to be very nutritious.

A more recent custom in the area that has already attracted much interest from the European tourists especially, is that of the locally owned taverns or *shebeens*, as they are called. The shebeens usually stock an ample supply of the locally brewed palm wine and provide an excellent opportunity for an enlightening, interactive, participatory experience (Section 2.2.2) between the local community and the visiting tourists, as well as a much needed alternative source of income for the community.

Other traditional practices consist of the harvesting of reeds, grasses and papyrus for the construction of traditional dwellings and other household utilities, such as mats for flooring and a variety of baskets for a variety of uses. This tradition has also become very popular with the tourists and has resulted in the mass production of a variety of different designs of these mats and baskets as well as an array of other household utilities, in the form of dustbins, grass mats and even trays for tables (see Section 3.5).

The collection of plant and animal parts for traditional medicine or *Muti* is another accepted traditional activity among the traditional healers or *iZinyanga* of the area and has spread to some of the other members of the community too, because the substantial trade that has developed in these goods. This has unfortunately resulted in serious

environmental damage in some sections of the coastal dune forests and has subsequently led to a number of conflicts between the community and the KZN Wildlife authorities.

The collection of the hardwood species of the area for construction purposes, cooking utensils and cooking fires (and more recently for the barbecue fires of the tourists as well) is another form of traditional activity that is still being practiced by the rural community of today and which has also spread to the tourism industry. The curio trade, which was only introduced to the Sodwana Bay over the past few years, has in addition to the collection of other species of the natural resource base, caused serious concern for the future of the already damaged forests.

Members of the local European curio traders have therefore stepped in, and held workshops to illustrate the benefit of working with the softer and exotic *Eucalyptus* and *Jacaranda* wood species (see Section 3.5). These workshops seemed to pay off well as most of the curio and firewood bundles that were observed during the fieldwork were of this *Eucalyptus sp.*, although substantial numbers of the local hardwood species were occasionally still seen.

Some of the traditional practices of the rural communities, which are not so observable, are those that have to do with the fishing and hunting methods of the rural people. Part of the reason for this is that most of the biodiversity in these lakes and forests are now formally protected and those that remain outside these reserves are unfortunately hunted to severe levels of rarity. Previously though, fishing in the shallows of the pans and some of the wetlands was a great community affair (Bruton, 1980b; Pooley, 1980; Mountain, 1990).

Traditional fishing methods ranged from the catching of small fish with homemade, seine nets (used by children) and the use of fish traps, to the massive *fonya* basket fishing drives involving hundreds of people and which was organized by the headmen or *Indunas* in consultation with the *Izinyangas* (Bruton, et al., 1980d). Today this legacy still lives on in the form of the *fonya* baskets, which are part of the local products at the curio market of Sodwana Bay. The author envisages that this form of fish harvesting can still be performed in a managed fashion and can actually contribute significantly to the local tourism product.

3.2.4 The Dependency of the Mbila Community on the Natural Resource Base

The considerable significance of the natural resource base in the traditional lives of the Mbila community is quite evident in the discussion of sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2. The availability of veld foods has repeatedly provided the people of the region with a buffer against occasional droughts and their subsequent food shortages as well as against the ever-present plague of unemployment and poverty (Bruton, 1980d; Pooley, 1980; Mountain, 1990).

A researcher, Dr. Anthony Cunningham, who has done extensive research on the use and the dietary importance of the plants in Maputaland, found that during a twelve-month period from November 1981 to October 1982, nearly a million litres of the palm wine or *uBusulu* that were extracted from the iLala palm were sold. This generated an income of R185 000 from the immediate sale, transport and resale of the wine at other centres throughout Maputaland and provided an important supplementary income to at least 500 local people (Mountain, 1990).

Research done during the 1990s has furthermore revealed that the levels of exploitation of the palms situated in the palm-belt zone could be sustained, or even increased, if certain improved methods of tapping could be introduced (Mountain, 1990). The palm-belt zone covers significant sections of the Mbila tribal territory (Moll, 1980) and various examples of the extraction of the sap were encountered during the time in which the fieldwork was completed (see Fig. 3.3).

In addition to the wine obtained from the iLala palms, there are numerous other plant species that are also used to supplement the Mbila diet. There are 76 edible species of fruits and 26 species of spinaches which provide important vitamins that are deficient in the Mbila tribe's starchy staple foods (Pooley, 1980; Mountain, 1990; Mathenjwa, 2003). Although this resource represents the third food source (after the food that is bought at the local grocer and that which is harvested from the subsistence agriculture) it still provides significantly in the food requirements of the poorest of the poor (Pooley, 1980, Mountain, 1990).

Plants in the Mbila territory are also used in a variety of ways. Plant material such as reeds, thatching grass, tree branches, bark and creepers, as well as poles and laths are all used in the construction of the traditional houses and other structures in the region (Pooley, 1980; Mountain, 1990).

Figure 3.3: Extraction of Palm Sap from the iLala Palm



Source: Department of Anthropology, UP, 2000

The reeds and sedges of the wetlands and the hardwoods of the coastal forests and the scrub thickets in the area are also used in the manufacture of everyday household utensils, such as dishes and grain stumpers (Pooley, 1980; Mountain, 1990). These items have become very popular with the tourists visiting Sodwana Bay over the years and have since evolved into a flourishing crafts industry (see Figure 3.4 and Section 3.5).

The Mabila tribe has traditionally also made extensive use of every resource that the area offered. This includes the fish, animals, birds, reptiles and even the insects of the marine and terrestrial environments. (Pooley, 1980; Mountain, 1990; Mathenjwa, 2003). Although some of the traditional methods of the use and harvesting of these resources are mentioned in Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, it is quite impossible to do justice to the cultural wealth of these activities in the scope of this study and interested parties are therefore advised to refer to literature describing these in more detail. The latter described resources have been harvested much more intensively though and have sadly all but disappeared from the areas not protected in the KZN Wildlife reserves (Pooley, 1980, Mountain, 1990, Van Köller¹).

¹ Personal communication with Mr J. van Köller, former Ranger, Sodwana Bay National Park, March 11th 2002, Sodwana Bay National Park.

Figure 3.4: The Craft Market at Sodwana Bay



The last three years saw the proclamation of additional reserves in the Mbila area (the Mabaso Game Reserve on the southern end of lake Sibayi, See Fig. 3.1) and the start of the re-stocking of these reserves with species of animals that originally occurred in the area. Although this formed part of a community conservation initiative, serious poaching problems have been experienced in the reserve (Porter, 2001) most probably due to the critical shortages of affordable sources of protein in the area.

3.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

3.3.1 History and Origins of the Mbila Community

Indigenous settlement reached its peak at the end of the sixteenth century (Davidson, 1991). During the first ten centuries indigenous peoples from Chad migrated as far as the Congo and Rhodesia (Present day Zimbabwe) (Davidson, 1991). Near the beginning of the fifteenth century, under pressure from the Nilotics of the northeast, the east-central indigenous peoples resumed their march to the south, pushing back the Khoi San and the Khoi Khoi, to their present locations (Davidson, 1991). The indigenous peoples' migrations to the south followed various routes, keeping to the far east and west of the African continent and spreading inward the further south they moved (Davidson, 1991).

The Nguni (who comprise the Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Swazi people of today), the Shangana-Tsonga, Chopi and others, followed the coastal plain down the eastern seaboard of Africa (Mountain, 1990). The present Mbila community is a mixture of Nguni and Thonga people, the Thonga people being an offshoot of the Shangana-Tsonga people (Bruton, Smith *et al.*, 1980d; Mountain, 1990). The Tembe community is one of the biggest Thonga communities in Maputaland and came into being when iNkosi Tembe broke away from the Karanga tribe and settled in the Delagoa Bay area in approximately 1554 (Mountain, 1990).

The present day Mbila community is one of a whole host of other community groups that form part of the Thonga people that live in Maputaland today and who originated from the original Tembe community. (Bruton, Smith *et al.*, 1980d). Apart from the Mbila community, there are several other community groups in Maputaland - 271 in total (Felgate in Mountain, 1990). Of these, the Tembe, Ngubane, Mdletshe, Mabaso, Manukuza, Mashabane, Mngobokazi, Myeni, Ndibele and the Sigakati are probably the most numerous (Bruton, Smith *et al.*, 1980d). Thonga people were, described somewhat derogatively, by the Zulus as the non-Zulu people living to the northeast of them (Mountain, 1990). This is due to the fact that they were frequently overrun and raided by the Zulu war parties from the south, who then typically took the Thonga as slaves to their own kraals in the south (Mountain, 1990).

The Swazi also invaded the communities living in Maputaland, but like the Zulu, these invaders, failed to successfully establish their cattle (due to the tsetse fly) and maize (due to the infertile soils) and therefore never settled there in significant numbers themselves. Today the social and political structures of the communities of Maputaland are largely intact despite the heavy influence from the Swazi and the Zulu intrusions (Bruton, Smith *et al.*, 1980d; Mountain, 1990).

The reason for this according to Junod, a missionary who worked amongst the Thonga around the early 1920s, and Felgate who did extensive research in the area around the 1960s, can again be attributed to Maputaland's harsh ecological determinants and the failure of the foreign communities to adapt to the environment to the level that the Thonga did (Mountain, 1990). Presently, the rural community living in Maputaland refer to themselves as Zulus and have also almost totally refrained from speaking the Thonga dialect. The motivation behind this seems to stem from the notion that the members of the community (especially the youth) prefer to be linked to the much celebrated Zulu heritage rather than to that of their own. A fair amount of disagreement exists around this notion, however, and some believe it to merely be the natural result of acculturation, which was, in any account, inevitable.

3.3.2 Socio-Political Organization

Despite the influences of the invaders of the Maputaland communities, much of the social and political organization, such as their land tenure system, the arrangement of their homesteads, their marital traditions and their funeral rites are still more related to the Thonga customs than to those of the Zulu (Mountain, 1990). This is quite observable in the Mbila tribal area where the homesteads are set very carefully within the natural environment so as to seclude them as far as possible from the neighbouring homesteads. Felgate found that the most common reason given for this behaviour was fear of witchcraft (Felgate in Mountain, 1990). He observed that 'the straying of fowls, the barking of dogs and the escapades of children are regarded as being capable of creating such tense relationships within the community that they can ultimately result in witchcraft accusations' (Felgate in Mountain, 1990:26)

This arrangement of the homesteads deviates considerably from that of the Zulu arrangement, which is characterized by tightly structured units which are centred around a focal social area. The Mbila homesteads are further distinctive in that they are not built out in the open, but within the bush or the forested area where this is permitted. The sharp rise in the population over the past two decades as well as the proclamation of the protected areas in the region makes this settlement pattern rather impossible around the Sodwana Bay area at present, although the homesteads situated deeper within the tribal area are still positioned in this manner.

The traditional Thonga homestead is relatively small, often consisting of only one hut in which the husband, the wife and the children live. There is, of course, a fair amount of variation on this theme especially in situations where the husband is reasonably affluent and has more than one wife. In Maputaland, each man's house is said to be his castle and not even the community Chief or *iNkosi* has the power to command a man to do anything in his own house. Furthermore, in the case of a casual visit to a traditional Mbila homestead it was found that it was best to always stay with the individual that has invited the visitor or with the head of the homestead, as far as practically possible. These individuals would then inform the visitors of the areas of the homestead that they may and may not enter.

The traditional Mbila dwellings are very well constructed. The dwellings are constructed from reeds and grasses as well as saplings and the branches of trees. The saplings and thicker branches usually comprise the frame of the structure, whilst the reeds are used to

close up the walls and grass is used as thatch for the roofs. Some of the older more traditional huts are decorated with intricately woven patterns of grass and the leaves of the iLala palm (Mountain, 1990).

Many of these huts can be seen from the main road whilst driving between Mbaswana and Sodwana Bay. From here it is also easily observable that the traditional houses are giving way to more modern structures built either from mud and stone, with thatch roofs, or from mortar and bricks, with tiled roofs. In some of the cases where more than one dwelling exists on one property, one of these dwellings would typically be of the modern variety whilst the other would typically be a mixture of a bark and thatch hut. (see Figure 3.5)

The bark of the bark dwellings originates from the government and private sawmills in Mbaswana and is sold to the community as off-cuts at minimal prices. Sadly, this type of building material seems to be more readily available than traditional building materials and also requires much less skill and time to build with. It is, however, not nearly as attractive to the eye as the traditional dwellings and these structures are also much more stuffy than the cool reed structures.

The homestead serves as the centre point of the Mabila society. The husband and the father of the homestead is the head of the homestead and is responsible for the economic survival of that homestead. He usually also owns everything including the land on which the homestead is built, on behalf of his family. Where the husband is not present, this role falls to the first wife, although it has also been experienced that the lead income earners of that homestead would stand as its head in the absence of the father. Research revealed that these income earners were sometimes as young as thirteen years of age, and supported their parents as well as their grandparents and their brothers and sisters.

Traditionally, the wives and the daughters of a homestead were responsible for the cultivation of the subsistence crops, the collection of firewood and the drawing of the water supply, whilst the boys were responsible for herding the livestock. Presently though, any member of the homestead is permitted to acquire an outside income to support the homestead because of the limited amount of income-generating opportunities available in the area.

Figure 3.5: Traditional and Modern Buildings



The political organization of the Mbila community begins at the homestead level, where the father is responsible and answerable to the outside world for the behaviour of his family. The boys and the girls of the homestead are only seen as men and women when they get married and this is also the time when they are relieved of the duties of their father's homestead to tend to those of their own. Traditionally, the boys may not take part in the discussions at the iNkosi's or headman's court, they may not acquire any land and they may not sit down with the other married males during the major community meetings.

The next level in the political hierarchy of the Mbila tribe is that of the Elders or *indunas* (also called counsellors) (Torres, 1980; Mountain, 1990). Mountain (1990) describes two kinds of *inDuna*, namely the sub-headmen and the headmen. The sub-headmen are responsible for the upholding of the law of between 20 to 50 homesteads. Their task is to try and settle disputes that occur among the community members before they are taken to the headman's court (Torres, 1980). The headman is usually a brother or a cousin of the iNkosi and is also appointed by the iNkosi himself.

The headman has jurisdiction over a number of the sub-headmen's districts. He is the presiding judge over the headman's court, which is a very important judicial institution in the Mbila community (Torres, 1980; Mountain, 1990). If a dispute cannot be adequately

settled at this level, the relevant party has the option to appeal to the iNkosi's court, but has to do so through the headman. The majority of the cases in the Mbila community are, however, resolved with the headmen.

At the top of the hierarchy is the Chief or the iNkosi. The current Mbila iNkosi is iNkosi James Sonto Zikhali. The chieftainship is hereditary and passes from father to son. The iNkosi is advised by his headmen. They are the ones that have to inform him of all that he has to know in the community as a whole and the iNkosi would typically rarely act independently of these headmen. Although the various headmen handle the majority of the community cases, iNkosi Zikhali rarely seems to have a weekend without any scheduled court hearings.

The roles of the iNkosi and the headmen in Maputaland have been reinforced by the introduction of the Tembe Tribal Authority in terms of the Black Authorities Act, 1951 (Act 68 of 1951) (Mountain, 1990). This act was a cornerstone in the previous government's policy of separate development, which aimed at the creation of alternative self-governing institutions for each of the major black ethnic groups in South Africa in separate National States (Mountain, 1990). Where practicable, these National States were to become independent 'countries' within the geographical boundaries of South Africa (Mountain, 1990). Maputaland was therefore incorporated into KwaZulu through this act and consequently stood as a non-independent National State (Mountain, 1990).

More recently, however, the post-1994 government has promulgated the Transitional Local Government Act (TLGA) 1995 (Act 98 of 1995). This legislation, in addition to the Communal Property Associations Act, 1996 (Act 28 of 1996), was aimed at strengthening the specific authority of the local tribal authorities, and legalized the Mbila Tribal Authority (MTA) as a legal local government entity that can act as the appropriate authority in cases such as the restitution of land (South Africa, 1995 and 1996a). The difference, of course, is that the latter acts served to empower the community where the 1951 act had a somewhat ulterior motive.

The essential purpose of these tribal authorities and the regional authorities above them was to entrench traditional tribal political structures and through this to enable each tribal and regional authority to act as a hierarchy of local authorities in their respective areas of jurisdiction (Mountain, 1990). Maputaland was divided into six of these tribal authorities of which four are situated in the Ingwavuma area to the north and two at Ubombo near Jozini. The Mbila community therefore falls under the Mbila Tribal Authority in Ubombo,

which in turn falls under the jurisdiction of the Uthungulu Regional Council (URC) that represents the whole of Maputaland.

The Mhla Tribal Authority has legislative powers over the land in the Mhla Tribal area although the land itself is the property of the community (See also Section 3.2.4.2). Therefore, any person that wants to acquire land in the Mhla tribal area has to have the blessing of the Mhla community before the request can be sent to the offices of the Mhla Tribal Authority in Ubombo. Here the request for land will be evaluated once more before a final decision is made. The Uthungulu Regional Council is responsible for the socio-economic planning and development of the Maputaland region. Their duties incorporate a broad spectrum of features and include aspects ranging from the infrastructural maintenance of the region to the land use planning of the various areas.

The Uthungulu Regional Council works in close partnership with all the relevant government and provincial departments on these aspects. The physical work that results from the requirements of the different areas is, as a rule, also performed by these departments but is referred to the applicable private service providers (the telecommunications company Telkom, for instance) where these government or provincial departments do not exist. A recent project in Sodwana Bay arose out of the need of the Mhla community to take a look at the various land use patterns in their area.

This was communicated to the Mhla Tribal Authority who in turn contacted the Uthungulu Regional Council. The Uthungulu Regional Council went ahead and held a meeting in Sodwana Bay where all the relevant parties were invited. The aim of this meeting was to provide the background to the current land use patterns as well as the specific need for the land-use exercise and to decide on a representative committee that could represent the different stakeholders in this regard. The committee was formed and currently consists of representatives of the Mhla community (iNkosi Zikhali), the Uthungulu Regional Council, KZN Wildlife authority, the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative and members of the private tourism operators in the Sodwana Bay area.

The outcome of the first meeting was said to be very positive and iNkosi Zikhali mentioned that although much disagreement existed as to the different land use values and it's related development, that the parties attending the meeting exhibited the will to work towards acceptable solutions². The second meeting was scheduled to be held on

² Personal communication with iNkosi J. M. Zikhali, March 24th, 2002, Mhla Tribal Court, Mbaswana.

the 7th of April 2002 and was planned to discuss the first actual proposals from all the different representatives. The meeting was also said to be successful.

Some of the other social structures that are present in the area include representations of the national political parties and local political groupings, self-interest groups as well as mixed community-based associations. On a national political level the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) are the only political groupings that enjoy local support. Presently the IFP are the ruling party with a majority vote of 2947 votes won, against the 863 votes of the ANC in the last local elections (ENPAT, 1998).

Local political groupings consist chiefly of the different Tribal Authorities and the different Tribal Councils within these Authorities. Self-interest groups and community-based associations in the area are those of the Mbila Plant Resource Harvesting Committee, the Mbaswana iZinyanga Association (Traditional Healers Association), the Ubumbano Craft Group, the Velasibone Communal Garden Group, the Mbila Land Claim Committee, the Mbaswana SANP Youth Desk and Several Eco Clubs in the local schools of the Mbila Tribal area. It seems as if the formation of these associations is swiftly becoming a trend in the region. Many of these associations are formed when a collective difficulty is identified and when the community has a desire to deal with this. When the difficulty incorporates other interest groups such as the KZN Wildlife authorities, these groups are also represented in the applicable committees.

3.3.3 Socio-Economic Conditions

Section 3.2.2 have already shed some light on the environmental challenges that the Maputaland region presents to its inhabitants and to the people that have tried to settle there. These are also the same determinants that, for the most part, kept development out of the region and subsequently caused the rural communities to live in severe poverty-stricken conditions (Bruton, 1980e; Mountain, 1990). The government of the 1980s and 1990s predicted progressively worsening conditions in the Maputaland area if some form of significant development could not be introduced to the area and therefore initiated a wide range of studies through the whole of Maputaland to seek out some kind of development that could provide viable economic upliftment in the area (Bruton, 1980e; Mountain, 1990).

The results of these studies revealed the following options for the Mbila tribal area. Firstly the studies provided evidence for the possible cultivation of sugar cane and a few

varieties of sub-tropical fruits (Bruton, 1980e; Mountain, 1990). This was, however, deemed to be impractical because of the fact that although the area is rich in water, its soil infertility and the physical characteristics of the soil itself would involve a sustained inflow of fertilizers and machinery to properly cultivate the fruits (Mountain, 1990). This option was therefore deemed uneconomical and the only productive cultivation of fruits and sugar cane in the area exists on the edges of the swamp forests of the region, which is so destructive to the area's sensitive natural environment that it has now been declared illegal (Mountain, 1990; Porter, 2001).

Afforestation as the second option was developed in the Mbaswana area and to the south of Lake Sibayi (Bruton, 1980e; Mountain, 1990). In this case the rate of the timber growth per hectare did not compare well with other areas in the northern Natal region (Mountain, 1990). In addition the nature of the subsoil effectively caused large tracts of forest to drown during the high rainfall seasons and presented difficulties that could not be dealt with in an economical fashion (Mountain, 1990). Afforestation was therefore also discarded as a viable form of economic development in the area and much of the original forests are now community woodlots used in a non-commercial manner (Mountain, 1990).

Tourism therefore came as a welcome alternative. The KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (A predecessor of the KZN Wildlife Authority) proved this with a small camping facility, which they ran at Kosi Bay in the extreme north of Maputaland (Mountain, 1990). The Bureau had a policy of returning part of its earnings from its resorts to the local communities, which in the case of Kosi Bay paid out R11 000 in 1986, R17 000 in 1987 and R36 000 in 1988 (Mountain, 1990).

This proved that tourism, as a form of development that could be managed in a less consumptive way, could actually aid in the economic upliftment of many areas in Maputaland (Mountain, 1990). The idea grew even further when, in July of 1998 the governments of Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa launched the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative (LSDI) aimed at creating a manageable protected area that would become one of the greatest tourists attractions in the world and subsequently bring the desired economic upliftment which the area so desperately needs (LSDI, 2001a).

Currently, the existing plane of socio-economic development in the Mbila tribal area is of a relatively low level. The Mbila portion of the Maputaland region has a population of approximately 11 704 (ENPAT, 1998). The area has a major employment problem with 48% of the economically active population classified as unemployed (ENPAT, 1998;

Wilson, 1999; LSDI, 2001b). In addition the limited development options in the region doesn't allow for satisfactory salaries, resulting in 90% of rural households earning incomes of less than R800 per month (LSDI, 2001b).

Although a great number of schools exist in the Mabila tribal area, many of these suffer severe infrastructural deficiencies. The area also suffers from a severely handicapped education system (inadequate education and training programmes and ineffective governing bodies and training staff) resulting in some of the lowest literacy levels in the region³ (LSDI, 2001b). Hospital beds and doctors are of a reasonable supply with the Mission Hospital at Mseleni and the newly built consulting rooms at Mbaswana, but there is a definite need for more clinics in the more remote areas further away from the major roadways (LSDI, 2001b).

The field research revealed that it was decided by the Mabila Tribal Authority that water and electricity should first be supplied to the schools in the area. The fact that the major schools in the region are distributed rather evenly over the area will cause the infrastructure to be in relative close proximity to most of the homesteads throughout the area and these services could then be supplied if the owner of the homestead could afford its monthly dues. Currently, however, only the homesteads nearest to the major water and electricity consumers such as Mbaswana, the private tourism operator's premises and Sodwana Bay National Park itself are supplied with these luxuries, and homesteads deeper in the Mabila Tribal area still get their water from the main water distribution points and use candles as the main source of light in the evenings.

The freshwater supply to the area is very abundant, firstly because of the presence of four large freshwater lakes in the area as well as the high percentage of precipitation that the area receives annually (see Section 3.2.2). Public water reservoirs are also provided at other designated locations along the main road and individuals can buy their water there at 50 cents for 5 litres. The money is used by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) to cover the maintenance of the reservoir. Most of the people interviewed explained, however, that although these services could be supplied that many of the homesteads could not afford their tariffs. This notion is also applicable in the case of the supply of telephones in the area.

In the case of the Mabila tribal area, it is necessary to go beyond the quantitative form of approach to clarify the way in which the physical environment influences the socio-economic development in the area. Figure 3.1 illustrates how the main road from

³ Personal communication with Sam Masinga, owner of the local newspaper, The Maputaland Mirror, March 22nd, 2002, Mbaswana.

Hluhluwe and Jozini meets up at Mbaswana and how it proceeds from there to Sodwana Bay. The stretch of road between Sodwana Bay and Mbaswana is about 15 kilometres in length and covers an interesting area.

Mbaswana itself is seen by many as the northern gateway to the Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park (LSDI, 2001a). This is a park of international recognition (see Section 3.1.2) which makes Mbaswana important, not only as a type of an advertisement of what the region holds, but also as an important development point in the area. Consequently, the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative in cooperation with the Uthungulu Regional Council has over the last two years completed major infrastructural enhancements in and around this town. These enhancements came in the form of the replacement of the rather treacherous dirt roads from Hluhluwe, Jozini (still under construction) and Phelindaba (also still under construction), with new tar roads, as well as the building of a shopping centre in the heart of the town.

The shopping centre includes a filling station, a general dealer, a hair salon, a furniture store as well as a few medical consulting rooms and an array of other smaller shops. On the opposite side of the shopping centre, the town has also received a number of carefully arranged market stalls. Here the local people can hire a stall at a minimal rate and sell anything from curios to the fresh produce from their vegetable gardens. (see Fig. 3.6) The Crafts Development Centre contains lecture halls, administrative offices and workshops and was built as a facility where the craft groups from the greater Mbaswana area could further develop their skills, and the crafters from the Mbaswana area could sell some of their work. These complexes were also provided with a new taxi rank, which shuttles people to and from Sodwana Bay, as well as the other major centres in the area.

Sodwana Bay is the second point of activity and is situated at the extreme eastern end of the study area. The beachfront at Jesser Point serves as the only launching site for the boats that ferry the divers and the deep-sea anglers to the various dive and angling sites along the Sodwana Bay coastline. Apart from these activities (which constitute the two main tourism-generating activities in the whole region) most of the other activities also involve the main beaches around Jesser Point.

The principal tourist accommodation facilities are also situated within the boundaries of the Sodwana Bay National Park and accommodate the majority of the tourists that visit the tourist attractions there. It is therefore clear that any party that wishes to profit from the benefits of the tourism generated at Sodwana Bay would achieve this by firstly, being located as close as possible to the beach and secondly, by being in close contact with tourists that use it.

Figure 3.6: Mbaswana Market Stalls



When the decision was passed that a curio market would be built to aid in the selling of the crafts of the Mbila community, it was of the utmost importance to place the market in a location where it would enjoy the highest level of tourist exposure. The Ubumbano Craft Market was therefore located next to the main road leading to the primary tourism camp and within walking distance from the beach. This market has since become the biggest and most frequented curio market in the Mbila tribal area.

Other curio stalls exist along the main road between Mbaswana and Sodwana Bay as well as in Mbaswana itself. These markets are of a much smaller scale, however, and are situated far from the main tourism activities at the Sodwana Bay beach. The owners of these stalls experience much less tourist visits and implied, in more than one instance, that they were also thinking of moving to the Ubumbano market.

The service facilities and the premises of the private tourism operators represent the third point of activity in the area. These include a shebeen owned by a member of the Mbila community, as well as three additional taverns and two restaurants. Here the developments are also located alongside the main road, about 4,5 kilometres from the beach at Jesser Point, and on the edge of the Sodwana Bay National Park. The reason for this location is that the boundary of the Sodwana Bay National Park is situated here and these positions provide the closest opportunities for private settlement near the beachfront at Jesser Point.

From a geographic point of view, the study area presents a fair amount of difficulties to its local inhabitants. The long distances from the beach mean that the private tourism operators to haul their diving and fishing equipment over this distance and that the nature of the road they have to travel causes unnecessary wear and tear on their equipment and on their vehicles. Furthermore the private operators are in a way forced to rent camping sites for their clients at the main tourist camp in the Sodwana Bay National Park. This happens especially during the busy holiday periods, and occasionally limits the ability of these private operators to provide the kind of packages they would like to.

The real difficulties, however, are faced by the members of the rural community who do not own their own vehicles and therefore have to travel these lengthy distances on foot. The first difficulty is the road network itself. The main road between Mbaswana and Sodwana Bay constitutes the only tarred road in the vicinity of the Mbila tribal area. The dirt roads that make up the rest of the road network consist of deep sand that makes travelling extremely difficult and very time consuming as well. Travelling to and from work therefore takes a lot of effort and many of the tourism operators admitted to the fact that their employees are regularly late for work. Some even provided their employees with bicycles. This helped in getting some of the workers to work earlier although some came even later because they now had to haul additional weight over the long stretches of deep sand road.

Those members of the community that are blessed to own homesteads closer to the main road are only favoured by this if they live in close proximity to their employer as well. If this is not the case they still have to walk long distances to work, or hitch a ride if they are fortunate. When all of these alternatives are exhausted, they have to make use of the local taxi service. Some of the problems experienced with this service are that they do not run at scheduled times like a bus service, for instance, and more critically, that they are very expensive and are therefore simply unaffordable for most.

3.3.4 Previous and Existing Forms of Land Tenure

3.3.4.1 Tenorial History of the Area

Land tenure in the Mbila tribal area has an interesting past. The first claimants on the Mbila's traditional territory were the Zulus and Swazis who frequently overran the Thonga people living in the area where the Mbila community is situated today (Bruton, *et al.*, 1980d, Mountain, 1990). The British would be next to claim Mbila territory with their

annexation of British Maputaland and the instatement of their typical '*divide and rule*' tactics of the late 1880s (Mountain, 1990; Duminy and Guest, 1995; Carton, 2000). These tactics in turn gave rise to the division of the Zulu kingdom into smaller chieftainships (which is the origin of all the present tribes in Maputaland) and the establishment of the 'Native Locations' Acts (Mountain, 1990; Duminy and Guest, 1995; Carton, 2000).

The Native Locations Acts entitled the British to settle the Thonga people in '*Native Locations*' as they saw fit and typically involved measures such as settling these peoples in areas regarded to be of little or no use to the crown (Mountain, 1990; Duminy and Guest, 1995; Carton, 2000). These laws were the first to discriminate against the rural communities of Maputaland and impeded the free development of the rural communities at that time already (Mountain, 1990). These laws gave way in 1913 when the new Union of South Africa passed the 'Black Land Act' which basically involved the continuation of the previous set of laws and therefore the extension of the limitation of the rural communities' ability to manage their own environment as well.

The Black Land Act was changed in 1936 and in 1971 again (Mountain, 1990). The National States Constitution Act of 1971 resulted in the creation of KwaZulu and granted internal self-government to those areas set aside for Zulu occupation (Mountain, 1990). The latter changes devolved the authoritative powers concerning land ownership specifically back to the rural communities of Maputaland and formed part of the 1960s and 1970s government's strategy to create separate independent self-governing states within the Republic of South Africa.

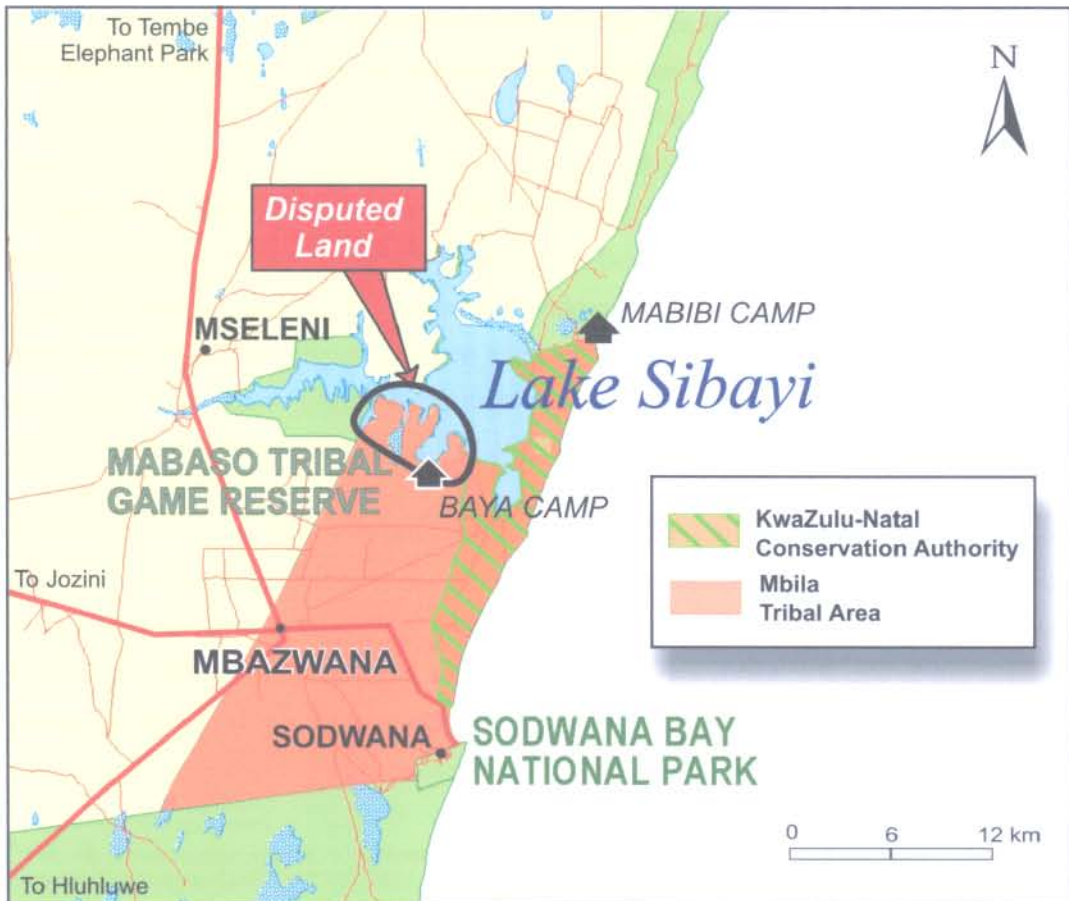
Although the latter changes effectively empowered the local communities in the area by giving them authority over their own land, it also impaired them quite drastically as this legislation was passed as compensation for the fact that they would not have equal rights in the rest of the country. However, by the time of the first true democratic elections in 1994, the devolution of powers by the pre-1994 governments meant that, in stark contrast with many of the other rural communities in South Africa, the Mbila community already had a fully functioning Traditional Authoritative structure (the Mbila Tribal Authority) that had legitimate powers over the majority of land in their tribal area.

3.3.4.2. Present Forms of Land Ownership

Presently the Mbila Tribal Authority has control over large tracts of the traditional Mbila territory (See Fig. 3.7). The physical land ownership structure of the area works as follows: in principle, the land firstly belongs to the Ingonyama Trust. This Trust is effectively the trustee of all the land belonging to the Tribal Authorities in the area and falls under the powers of the Zulu king, King Goodwill Zweletini. On the local level, the land of each homestead belongs to its owner. This land sequentially again belongs to the Tribal Authority that falls under the Ingonyama Trust and in this way completes the circle of land ownership of the Mbila community and Maputaland in general.

Although the Mbila community have access to a reasonable portion of their land, they also have to share large portions of it with the other authorities in the area. The areas that still fall under other authoritative structures are divided into two categories. Firstly, those under the KZN Wildlife authorities and secondly, a piece of disputed land that falls under the authority of either the Mbila Tribal Authority or that of the neighbouring Mbaso Tribal Authority. These areas are indicated in Figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7: Existing Land Tenure



3.3.4.3 The Mbila Land Claim

Following the settlement of the Mbila community according to the European laws of the late 1800s and the first part of the 1900s, fractions of the community would yet again have to re-settle because of the influences of external forces. The land to the east of the Mbila territory was initially estranged from the Mbilas during the early years of the Second World War. This land contained sections of the Coastal Forest reserve and the Sodwana Bay National Park and links up with other large sections of land to the north and to the south of the Mbila tribal area (e.g. Kosi Bay and St. Lucia Lake areas) which were used by the military to guard against enemy attacks from the Indian Ocean⁴.

By the mid 1970s, the land that the military had seized for its activities (which should have been given back to the community) was handed over to the Department of Forestry⁴. The final handover of this land happened in 1987 when the land was put under the guardianship of the Natal Parks Board⁴ (predecessor of the KZN Wildlife Services). The Natal Parks Board in turn added this land onto the land occupied by the Coastal Forest Reserve, which was proclaimed in 1952 as part of the Seashore Act 1935 (Act 21 of 1935) and that of the Sodwana Bay National Park, which was established in 1959 (Bruton, 1980e).

In total, the land occupied by authorities other than the Mbila Tribal Authority, but within the Mbila tribal territory thus include the eastern shores of Lake Sibayi, Lake Sibayi itself, the disputed area south of Lake Sibayi as well as the coastal dune forests that run all along the eastern boundary of the original Mbila tribal territory (Proclaimed in Government Gazette No. 1160 of 1952 and presently zoned under the St. Lucia and Maputaland Marine Reserves) and Sodwana Bay National Park itself (KZN Wildlife, 2000). Exclusions like these caused the Mbila community to be alienated not only from large sections of the natural resource base on which they were still very dependent, but also from significant tracts of tourism generating natural attractions which could contribute extensively towards their quality of life.

Restrictions on the natural resource base were imposed on these communities in typical top-down protectionist fashion (see Section 2.3.1.1) and subsequently caused a lot of strife between the affected communities and the KZN Wildlife authorities (Bruton, 1980e; Mountain, 1990). Fortunately the 1980s and 1990s saw a rise in focus of the livelihood issues of communities around protected areas and caused conservation authorities

⁴ Personal communication with Mr. S. Ngobese, Mbila Community member and Community Conservation Officer, Sodwana Bay National Park, March 18th, 2002, Sodwana Bay National Park.

worldwide to re-examine their conservation policies in light of increased community involvement (see Section 2.3.2.2).

The Natal Parks Board is said to be one of the first among such authorities in South Africa to initiate the participation of neighbouring communities in the issues involving these communities and the protected area concerned, on a policy level (Financial Mail, 1991; Cowling and Oliver, 1992). Of these initiatives, the provision of jobs and the partial use of the natural resource base in certain specified areas of the Sodwana Bay National Park comprised some of the more common initiatives to be practiced at Sodwana Bay (Bruton, 1980e; Mountain, 1990; Ngobese, 2002⁴).

Although these initiatives represented some definite steps in the right direction, the control of the resources and the land on which they exist still remained with the KZN Wildlife authorities and thus still meant that the Mbila community were significantly deprived of the benefits that were generated from tourism in the area as well as of their ability to influence the area's development.

Post-1994 legislation had a dramatic effect on the rights of communities like these however, and effectively granted them the legal power to reclaim the land which they had lost. In the case of the Mbila community, the following legislation is applicable:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996; (South Africa, 1996).
- Section 25(7) of the Constitution's Bill of Rights, which provides for the restitution of land lost as a result of racial discrimination by previous governments with the
- Restitution of Land Rights, Act 22 of 1994 as the legal vehicle to enforce this law (South Africa, 2002).

In addition to this legislative support, the Mbila land claim was further assisted by additional shifts in the KZN Wildlife authority's policies regarding its involvement with the communities adjacent to the protected areas that it administers (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2002). These policies have provided for increased levels of participation with the neighbouring communities, as well as the establishment of partnerships to facilitate the interaction, which is needed for cooperation in matters such as the development and conservation of the area (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, 2002).

The process involved in the Mbila Land Claim can briefly be described as follows. The Land Claims Committee convened a meeting for all the interested and affected parties

⁴ Personal communication with Mr. S. Ngobese, Mbila Community member & Community Conservation Officer, Sodwana Bay National Park, March 18th, 2002, Sodwana Bay National Park.

on the 20th of July 2000 (Porter, 2001). This meeting was convened to determine all the relevant role players in the claim as well as to provide these parties with all the pertinent information regarding the claim (Porter, 2001). Further meetings were also held in August of that year to properly introduce all the stakeholders and to discuss each of these parties' negotiation positions (Porter, 2001).

In addition, representatives of the Mbila and Mabaso Land Claim Committees as well as of the KZN Wildlife Authorities held various other meetings during February and March of 2001 to settle the claims in the Coastal Forest Reserve and the National Park sections and to try to resolve the dispute between the two Tribal authorities (Porter, 2001). Discussions were also held at the homesteads of the affected families to ensure that the process was transparent (Porter, 2001). The handover ceremony was scheduled to occur on the 21st of March 2001, but it was discovered at that stage that certain key stakeholders had not been involved in the process. This resulted in the process having to be restarted, this time with the attendance of all the relevant stakeholders (Porter, 2001).

The final result of the land claim was that the land (except the Mbila – Mabaso disputed land) now again falls under the authority of the Mbila Tribal Authority, but that the KZN Wildlife Authority would still be the principal administrator of this land (Roesch, 2002). Settlements were also reached with regard to the issuing of licenses to harvest some marine and terrestrial species in the Park and that the Mbila community members would in every circumstance enjoy the privilege of being given the first opportunity to fill vacant jobs at Sodwana Bay as far as possible. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.5. According to Mr. Ngobese of the Sodwana Bay KZN Wildlife authorities and iNkosi Zikhali, no final agreement could be reached regarding the matter of the Mbila - Mabaso disputed land (see Fig 3.7) and much negotiation would still have to occur to settle the matter.

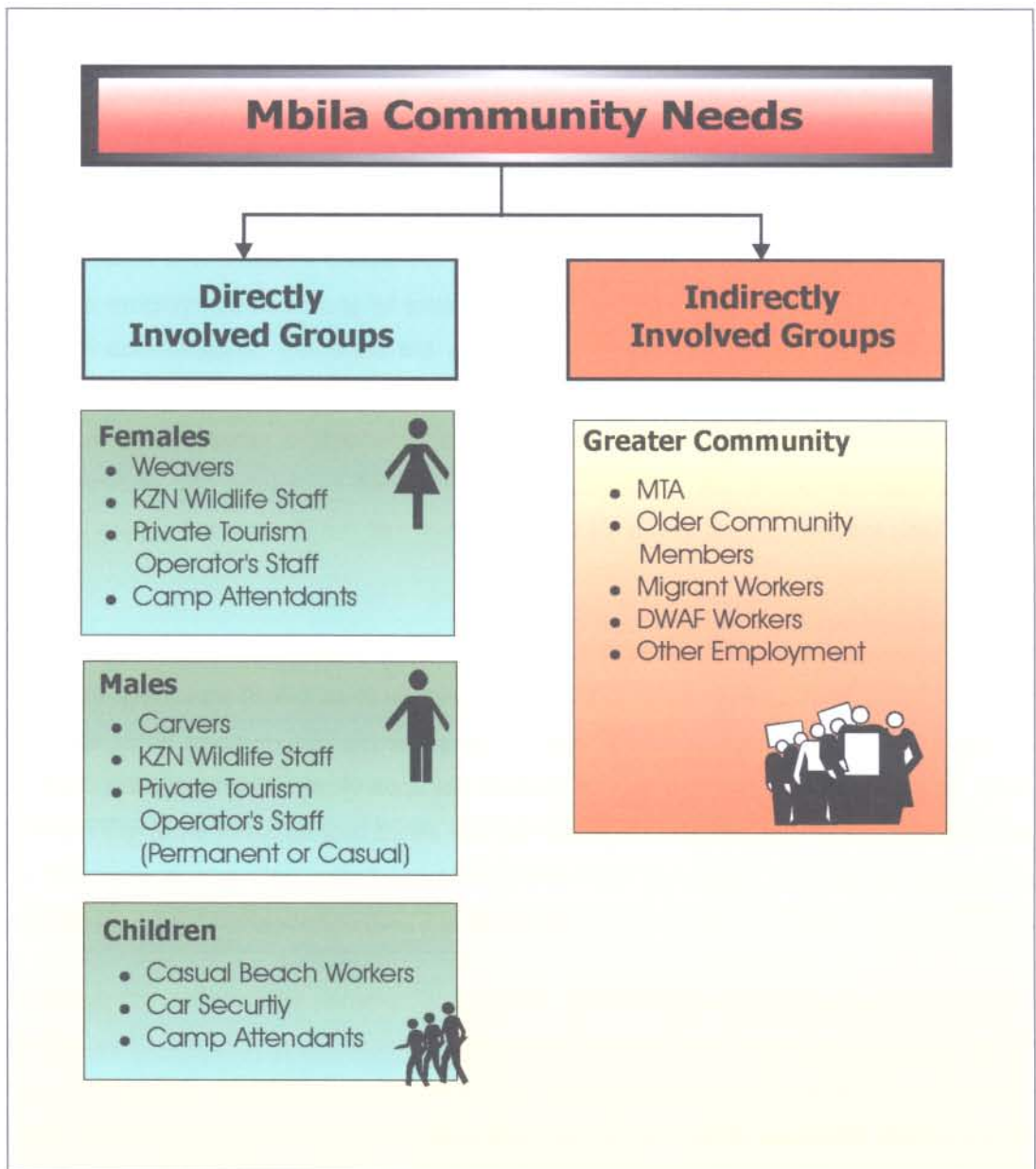
3.3.5 General Perceptions of Community Needs

Concerning the general community needs in the Mbila Tribal area, in relation to their involvement in the local tourism industry, the research revealed two major groups within the Mbila community. Those that are directly involved in the tourism industry and who are almost entirely dependent on the benefits of this involvement, and those that are not directly involved and who derive their earnings from other sources (See Fig. 3.8).

It is interesting to note how the influence of the existence of the tourism industry in the region is so prominent that some of the members of the community have developed needs that can be directly linked to this industry. A good example of this is, for instance, where women at employable occupational ages have developed a need for jobs and

cheaper transport where these women would traditionally be busy with household responsibilities such as the collection of firewood and the fetching of water. In the same way the young boys of the area, who traditionally would have tended their fathers' live stock have also developed a need for transport since this transportation takes them to where the tourists are, where they can also find a number of casual employment opportunities.

Figure 3.8: Major Tourism Interest Groups in Relation with General Community Needs



The interviews held with various individuals of the Mabila community during the fieldwork of the study revealed that the community need that was perceived to be most important by the males, the females and the boys of the community was that of jobs (employment opportunities) and this clearly because of the limited range and number of employment opportunities in the job market of the area (Table 3.1).

For the men and the boys, the second most significant need was that of transport and this seemed to stem from the fact that, in addition to those who are privileged enough to have a permanent job and have to be at work on time, the rest of the opportunities would fall unto those that were present when these jobs become available. Seeing that the main tourist attractions at Sodwana Bay presently consist of scuba diving and deep sea angling, it means that the workers that help to ready and launch the boats have to be there at 05:30 if they want to secure a job for the day. Literally a situation of the early bird catching the worm.

For the females, transport ranks third in order of importance and this can most probably be attributed to the sexual division of labour in the Sodwana Bay workplace (Table 3.1). Female employment consists of jobs such as waitressing and cooking at the private tourism concessions, domestic aid around the campsites as well as curio and fruit vendors. Although the females of the community have to compete with the males of the community, for some of these jobs the majority of the latter kind of employment opportunities still seems to favour them. Opportunities like these are also in much greater supply because of the fact that they cater for all the tourists and not only a select group.

The need for water and electricity supply to the women's homesteads appeared to be of greater importance than that of transport (Table 3.1). This is most likely due to the fact that the Mabila tradition still demands that these women perform all of their traditional tasks in addition to their newly acquired tourism-related day jobs at Sodwana Bay. Mabila custom therefore requires that these women supply the homestead with water and fuel for the cooking fires. Currently these commodities can be bought, but they still have to be carried over long distances to their homesteads.

Although the males of the community assist the females in getting these resources to the homesteads, the lack of affordable transport still makes this a very arduous task, which could be greatly simplified by the supply of water and electricity to the homesteads. Other needs that seemed to be of less importance, but which were still mentioned by many of the female respondents, consisted of aspects such as education for their

children, the enhancement of the quality of the roads as well as the supply of telephones in some of the areas.

The third most important need of the male respondents was that of land (Table 3.1). This feature is also closely related to the employment opportunities of the area as Mbila tradition only permits males to obtain land of their own if they marry. To get married is a very costly affair, especially due to the bride wealth tradition (*Labola* as it is popularly known), which still remains firmly intact in the Mbila community. Afterwards, it is also of great importance to the males of the Mbila community to provide sufficiently for their families not only because of the benefits for the family but also as a matter of personal honour. Other needs that also appeared to be of importance to the males were that of the supply of water, electricity and telephones to their homesteads as well as the improvement of the roads (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Mbila Community: Paired Ranking by Interest Groups of the Most Important Community Needs, 2002

Females	Males	Children	Community
1. Jobs	1. Jobs	1. Jobs	1. Roads
2. Water and Electricity	2. Transport	2. Transport	2. Water and Electricity to Schools
3. Transport	3. Land	3. Education	3. Land for Settlement
4. Others	4. Water, Electricity and Telephones	4. Others	4. Land for Grazing
	5. Others		5. Transport
			6. Others

The children involved in the tourism industry at Sodwana Bay were mostly boys. Young girls were much less dependent and for the most part move around with their mothers. Boys function much more independently though, and compete with the male group for employment. Tulani Nxumalo is a thirteen-year-old Mbila boy and an excellent representative of this group of the community. He has already worked for two years as a campsite attendant and as a casual worker at the diving and fishing charters of Sodwana Bay. He prefers the diving industry, however, and was busy washing scuba equipment while he was being interviewed.

At thirteen years of age he is already looking after his mother, one of his grand parents as well as his two sisters and was well informed about the benefits of tourism. He saw education as his key to this industry and already has plans to start a business ferrying tourists between the beach and the Sodwana Bay National Park campsite, in order to solve the present parking problem at Sodwana Bay's beach. The distance from the beach to the parking area is the cause of many problems at Sodwana Bay at present, which serves to demonstrate this boy's insight into the needs of the tourists as well as his eye for an opportunity. His belief in the importance of education was shared by many of the other boys of his age and older, although he was certainly the most enthusiastic. Many of these boys recognized school fees, textbooks and stationery as some of the other most pressing needs.

The Indirectly Involved Groups (Fig. 3.8) expressed a rather different set of needs. This is most probably due to the fact that they are not as dependent on the benefits of tourism in Sodwana Bay although they do understand the development significance of the tourism industry in their area. Some of the elders (counsellors) of the Mbilal Tribal Authority, for instance, expressed the need to first of all supply the schools of the area with water and electricity, but also expressed their need for extra land to settle on as well as for additional grazing for the cattle of the community.

A handful of the older members of the community that live somewhat further from Sodwana Bay uttered their need for better roads in the more rural areas, whilst one or two of the individuals articulated their concern about the amount and the depth of the discussions held between them and the KZN Wildlife authorities.

The needs mentioned here, as well as those of the more involved groups, are however only the primary ones that were identified in the limited time that this study allowed for fieldwork, and are sure to be more numerous and more complex if the social structures of the area are studied in more detail.

3.4 The Tourism Industry at Sodwana Bay

3.4.1 Introduction

Visitor opportunities and activities at the Sodwana Bay National Park are strongly associated with the marine environment (see Section 3.2.2). The reefs off Jesser Point present the southern most occurrences of tropical corals along the east African coast and safe launching conditions are unique along the North Zululand coast (Haynes and

Hornby, 1994). Deep sea angling as well as rock and surf angling and scuba diving especially, have grown enormously over the last twenty years and has subsequently contributed significantly to Sodwana's status as the premier diving and fishing destination in South Africa (Hicks, 1991; Haynes and Hornby, 1994; Pinnock, 2001).

3.4.2 Current Tourism Ventures at Sodwana Bay and the Involvement of the Mbila Community

3.4.2.1 Government Ventures: Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife

The KZN Wildlife authorities stationed at Sodwana Bay serve as the chief conservation authority in the area and have jurisdiction over all of the nationally proclaimed protected areas in the region (see Section 3.2.4). The main beachfront with the launching areas as well as the main tourist accommodation facilities lies within the boundaries of the Sodwana Bay National Park and is also administered by the KZN Wildlife authorities. The number of visitors to Sodwana Bay is presently determined by the carrying capacity of the beach and amounts to 3 600 resident (including management and staff), and a total of 2 000 day visitors per day (Haynes and Hornby, 1994).

At present, the KZN Wildlife authorities at Sodwana Bay do not control any of the principal tourism activities (e.g. diving, fishing etc.) in the area (see Section 3.4), these are controlled by the private tourism operators. The provision and the maintenance of the accommodation facilities at Sodwana Bay National Park, Baya Camp and Mabibi, and the conservation of the proclaimed protected areas therefore represent the primary tourism ventures and are thus also the principal providers of tourism-related opportunities for the Mbila community from the part of the KZN Wildlife authorities. The delineation of permanent staff in the Sodwana Bay National Park is as follows:

Table 3.2: Description of Employment Opportunities Provided by the KZN Wildlife Authority

Activity	Employment	Description
Campsites	25 staff members	This includes tasks such as the cleaning of the ablution facilities and other facilities such as the fish cleaning tables, as well as

Table 3.2: Description of Employment Opportunities Provided by the KZN Wildlife Authority (Continued)

Activity	Employment	Description
Log Cabins	17 staff members	the clearing of the campsites and the roads that lead to them This includes the cleaning and general maintenance of the log cabin camps such as the Gwala Gwala Deluxe camp
Maintenance	8 staff members	This includes the general maintenance tasks on all the facilities and management offices in the park
Workshop	4 staff members	For the mechanical repair and maintenance of all the KZN Wildlife vehicles
Security	13 staff members	The security staff that guards all the gates and also handles the security-related complaints from the tourists
Trading	7 staff members	These people handle the fuel sales as well as the payments for the caravan and boat storage facilities and the freezer room
Field Rangers	13 staff members	The field rangers are generally occupied with patrols along the coast and in the interior to monitor the harvesting of the natural resources, but also to fulfil any other tasks that are summoned by management.
Management	11 staff members	These employees consist of the clerks at the service counter of the Sodwana Bay National Park, that issue the tourists with their accommodation permits as well as all the relevant administration regarding special permits (e.g. boat licences, beach driving

Table 3.2: Description of Employment Opportunities Provided by the KZN Wildlife Authority (Continued)

Activity	Employment	Description
Other Workers		<p>permits, fishing permits, etc.). The other management staff members consist of senior management staff that manages all the various departments needed to operate the park successfully.</p> <p>These workers are those that the park utilizes in addition to the permanent staff. They are either contract workers, contracted for whatever speciality the park needs (e.g. building, tiling, plumbing, etc.) or casual workers that are used to aid the permanent staff during the peak holiday periods as well as during the big Deep Sea Angling competitions and Scuba qualification dive weekends. The latter are also employed in whatever capacity the Park needs them and are also employed by the tourists themselves as campsite attendants.</p>

The KZN Wildlife authority procures 95% of the Sodwana Bay National Park staff from the Mbila and Mabaso communities (Porter, 2001). The reason for the involvement of the Mabaso community arises from the fact that the KZN Wildlife Authorities also manage some of the territory adjacent to their tribal territory and therefore has to provide them with a number of employment opportunities (see Section 3.3.4.1). Preference is given to the Mbila community, however, because of the fact that they represent the most prevailing community in the area and 100% of the contract and casual workers are also recruited from them (Porter, 2001). Further opportunities that exist out of the Mbila - KZN Wildlife partnership will be discussed later in Sections 3.4.2.

3.4.2.2 Private Ventures

The majority of the tourism -related employment opportunities in the area are created by the activities of the diving and the sport fishing operations. Apart from these activities the area also offers activities such as guided horse riding and hiking trails, site-seeing drives, game drives to the nearby Mabaso Game Reserve, turtle tours, microlighting and other more recently introduced activities such as 4x4 and quad bike adventures.

Sodwana Bay is currently served by approximately 10 scuba diving operators permanently stationed in and around the National Park. A further 5 to 10 additional dive operators also use Sodwana Bay on a weekend and holiday basis, bringing the total number of employment opportunities that accrue from this tourism activity to about 80 permanent positions and an additional 50 casual opportunities during peak holiday periods.

Typical duties that arise out of these operations involve the equipping and the launching of the boats that ferry the divers, the ferrying of the divers to the diving locations, the attendance of the dive itself in order to aid the divers underwater and to certify that they have followed all the necessary procedures to qualify them at a specific level, the filling of the cylinders, the carrying of the diving gear to and from the launching boats, the washing of the gear after a dive and the management and maintenance of all of these practices and equipment (see Fig. 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Typical Involvement in Dive Operations



The running of a dive operation is said to be very technical and cost intensive⁵. This stems from the fact that dive equipment and the boats used to ferry the divers are very expensive and also very costly to maintain. Currently the duties that accrue to the Mbilas that work at these dive operations include all of those mentioned above except the management of the operation, the launching of the boats, the ferrying of the divers to the dive locations and the dive instruction itself. The fact that the Mbila community members until recently never went out to sea was probably because of the respect that they have for the ocean due to the many ships that ran aground in the Sodwana Bay area as well as the diving accidents that occurred there over the past few years.

The research revealed that some of the younger male members of the community are well aware of the benefits of qualifying themselves in these professions and are currently busy with their training in spite of the reservations that they have regarding the safety of these activities. Sodwana Bay currently boasts 2 of the only 4 black divers in the whole of South Africa (2 others at Aliwal Shoal) and is currently in the process of training 3 more. The area also contains 3 qualified Mbila compressor operators and 2 qualified commercial skippers. Other members are also receiving training in these capacities.

With regard to the deep sea angling operations, Sodwana currently has 5 permanent angling ventures with a general number of two ski-boats each. This number rises drastically over weekends, but especially during the sport fishing competitions held annually at Sodwana Bay where there could be anything between 100 to 180 vessels present. Typical duties that arise from this activity include the preparation of the boat before a launch (this is a very important part of the whole operation and takes great skill to perfect), the transportation of the boat to the launch site, the launching of the boat, the search of the correct fishing area for the specific game fish that the client hopes to catch, the retrieval of the boat and the washing of the boat as well as the fish that were caught on the day.

At present there are around 30 permanent Mbila workers involved in the Sodwana Bay game fishing ventures. One boat will typically involve 3 to 4 workers and therefore supplies quite a few extra casual work opportunities over the weekends and during the sport fishing competitions. The nature of the fishing also involves a vast amount of skill and can only be acquired through long term hands-on experience⁶. In this case, a few of the Mbila interviewees again mentioned their reservations concerning the ocean-faring

⁵ Personal communication with Mr. S Roberts, Manager, Coral Divers, Sodwana Bay, March 18th, 2002

⁶ Personal communication with Mrs. M. Lee, Partner Captain Lee Fishing Charters, Sodwana Bay, March 19th, 2002 and Mr. M. Visagie, owner, Vis Agie Fishing Charters, Sodwana Bay, March 21st, 2002.

part of the job and stated that they are more interested in the land-based activities regarding the running of such operations.

A further example exists in the case of an Mbila employee working at a local fishing charter by the name of Captain Lee Fishing Charters. This individual has been trained as a deck hand (the person that has to prepare the boat for a launch on the following day) and has since become skilled to the degree that he now is in charge of this aspect of the operation. The owner approached the individual to start training on the high seas as well, but the individual declined after one day out on the ocean.

The remainder of the adventure tourism ventures in the area is still under development and currently supplies only between 10 to 20 additional employment opportunities. Some of the ventures, such as the microlighting, also involve expensive equipment and training procedures and are therefore not expected to contribute significantly towards employment opportunities for the Mbila community in the near future. No official utility service provider exists in the area and these are usually contracted from outside Sodwana Bay or on an individual basis, where possible. One construction-oriented company exists in the area employing 12 Mbila community members at present. The private accommodation and restaurant ventures contribute approximately 140 job opportunities at present and are sure to increase in the future due to the rapid development of these activities in the area.

Males and females of the Mbila community are employed in the accommodation and restaurant ventures (males - maintenance and barmen, females – receptionists, waitresses and domestic workers) and also receive in-house training. Most of the employers interviewed require that the staff that is in direct contact with the tourists be able to speak English fluently and some also require the staff to be able to read and write in English as well. Although no trained staff were available out of the resident Mbila community, the in-house training process revealed huge successes in most of the instances with some of the staff even being accepted into some of the more upper class lodges in the area, even as far as Johannesburg⁷.

3.5 TOURISM-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Tourism-based community development projects are one of a whole host of outcomes of the sustainability and sustainable development doctrines of the late 1980s and 1990s

⁷ Personal communication with Mrs. C. Herman, Partner Mseni Lodge, Sodwana Bay, March 18th, 2002.

(see Section 2.3). The actual projects that exist on the grassroots level of many of the Rural Communities around the world are the product of the translation of these doctrines into policies and legislation which effectively empowered the communities to participate in Tourism-based Developments in their areas (see Section 2.4). The Mbila community of Sodwana Bay is one of the examples of a situation where this empowerment is slowly but surely beginning to effect positive change in the area through the initiatives that started as a result of the greater level of involvement of the Mbila community in the tourism opportunities of their area.

However, aspects such as the past poor relations between the KZN Wildlife authority and the Mbila community as well as practical constraints (i.e. the limited development opportunities and the low level of literacy in the area) are still slowing down the development of these community-based initiatives⁸. Efforts by the KZN Wildlife authorities to erase the aspects that were responsible for the poor relations between them and the Mbila community as well as the response of the Mbila community on these efforts have contributed greatly towards the increased involvement between these two parties and the subsequent increase in the number of community-based initiatives. Some of these initiatives are as follows.

3.5.1 Community-based Initiatives

Initially some of the community-based initiatives were proposed through meetings held between members of the community and the KZN Wildlife authorities. These meetings were held to discuss the further development of community activities that were already taking place at Sodwana Bay and that could be managed in a way to attract more tourists (Ngobese⁹). The Sanlam/Ubumbano Craft Market Initiative is a good example of such discussions where interested ladies were approached by the KZN Wildlife authorities to attend a few workshops in order to teach them how to diversify their products to make them more attractive to tourists (Ngobese⁹). Government representatives and the business sector (Sanlam, Empangeni) were invited to become involved in the initiative and subsequently sponsored the building of a Market at the Sodwana Bay National Park. A number of field trips to other craft initiatives were also held to swap ideas and to give the ladies ideas on how to improve their own products (Porter, 2001).

⁸ Personal communication with Mrs. J. Porter, Former Community Conservation Coordinator, KZN Wildlife Authority Sodwana Bay National Park, March 11th, 2002.

⁹ Personal communication with Mr. S. Ngobese, Mbila Community member and Community Conservation Officer, Sodwana Bay National Park, March 11th, 2002, Sodwana Bay National Park.

The KZN Wildlife authorities are involved in this initiative on an ongoing basis and continue to help the ladies to attract further opportunities (Porter, 2001; Ngobese⁹). The craft group has, for instance, been assisted with the publication of a craft catalogue and with the completion of a wholesale order from one outlet in Cape Town (Porter, 2001). This order was unfortunately cancelled due to difficulties on the part of the receiver, but it has shown that such possibilities exist (Porter, 2001). Agreements also exist between the KZN Wildlife authorities regarding the supply of affordable harvesting licenses to aid the ladies in obtaining the materials they need (Porter, 2001). Furthermore the ladies have elected a steering committee and they are encouraged to keep in constant contact with the KZN Wildlife authorities on matters regarding the initiative (Ngobese⁹).

The Sodwana Bay area also contains a few male carver groups. Although these groups are still in the process of formally organizing themselves, they illustrate many of the same features of the ladies' crafters group and also receive the same type of support from the KZN Wildlife authorities. Interviews held with Mr. S. Ngobese revealed that in addition to being the current Community Conservation Officer of the KZN Wildlife authorities at Sodwana Bay, he is also a member of the Mbila community and is personally involved with one of these carver groups. He feels privileged by this in the sense that it gives him the opportunity to understand the difficulties from both sides and enables him to then find quick solutions to these difficulties because of his insight into the background of both parties.

According to Mr. Ngobese, other projects that also arose out of these activities are the popular Camel Trophy Adventure Series, which had its finals at Sodwana Bay and the recently launched Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) Coelacanth Research project. Both of these projects required memorabilia that were connected to the project and to Sodwana Bay and the opportunity was therefore proposed to the local carver groups to sculpt the required objects. The carver group that won the tender managed to earn significant monetary returns from the Camel Trophy project which funded trips to Durban and Cape Town Based markets to obtain new ideas for their own carvings.

The Velasibone Communal Garden Group is one of the first projects initiated solely by the efforts of a local Mbila group. The local Induna of the area initiated the project and

⁹ Personal communication with Mr. S. Ngobese, Mbila Community member and Community Conservation Officer, Sodwana Bay National Park, March 11th, 2002, Sodwana Bay National Park.

approached the KZN Wildlife authorities for aid. The KZN Wildlife authority responded and attracted sponsors in addition to the money collected by the community itself. A 100m² area was cleared and fenced and the KZN Wildlife authority invited experts to run workshops on aspects such as rotation of land, fertilizers, etc. The group was also taken to Pongola and Eshowe to observe similar projects there. The ultimate aim of the project is to firstly provide for the requirements of the homesteads involved and then to spread out into the rest of the area if the project is successful.

Projects such as the local shebeens and the provision of wood for the barbecue fires of the visiting tourists are further projects that are driven by members of the Mbila community. These are not formalized, however, and currently exist on a level which the author believes to be far from its true potential. According to a local tour guide, Mr. John Roux¹⁰, a number of his clients (especially those of European origin) exhibited keen interest in these local style taverns, indicating an opportunity which should perhaps be looked into.

Yet another opportunity that has considerable potential to become a thriving community-based tourism development project is that of the Baya Camp tourist camp on the northern border of the Mbila territory. This camp was originally planned by the KZN Wildlife authority and developed by local contractors. The camp is situated on the banks of Lake Sibayi and provides unsurpassed experiences of the beauty and the splendour of the area within the comfort of suitably designed facilities (see Fig. 3.10).

The camp has been the scene of a number of highly charged meetings about which tribal property it is actually built on (Mbila or Mabaso), as well as a few armed thefts and has therefore received only a trickle of tourists in the last few years. Negotiations to settle these difficulties are however underway and it seems as if the camp could be developed into a community-based venture (Mbila or Mabaso) in the future (Porter, 2001).

3.5.2 Government Initiatives

3.5.2.1 The Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative (LSDI)

One of the most significant tourism development initiatives in the area is that of the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative. The Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative was launched in July of 1998 by the then president of the RSA, President Nelson

¹⁰ Personal communication with Mr. J Roux, Shop owner and Tour guide, Sodwana Bay, March 20th, 2002.

Mandela, Mozambique's president, Joaquim Chissano and King Maswati of Swaziland to promote the rapid development of the area and to remove the obstacles to realizing the region's economic potential (LSDI, 2001c).

Figure 3.10: Baya Camp, Lake Sibayi



The initiative aimed to achieve this by creating a trans-frontier park that would become one of the greatest tourist attractions in Africa, thereby creating employment and prosperity through community participation in tourism ventures (LSDI, 2001c). The Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative is also encouraging connections between tourism and other sectors, particularly in the areas of services, cultural tourism, agribusiness, building and construction, light manufacturing, and crafts production (LSDI, 2001c). Special emphasis is also being placed on the creation of a stable climate for investment, for example, the efficient movement through borders, maximum government support in all sectors, security of tenure, as well as enabling an environment for public-private partnerships to further enhance the development opportunities of the region (LSDI, 2001c).

Concerning the Maputaland region, the inadequacy of the road infrastructure was seen to be one of the major reasons for the minimal tourism development in the region (LSDI, 2001c). The governments therefore regarded the building of a new road as the first step to opening up the area for tourism development, thereby unlocking the investment potential and getting the development wheel rolling. Other Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative projects in the study area involve assistance in all the current and

planned infrastructure supply schemes, the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative craft initiative and support in the fencing of the Mabaso Game Reserve.

Other than the planned infrastructural aid (water supply, electricity) and the Maputo-Hluhluwe road, the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative craft initiative represents the only other Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative Tourism-based community development initiative encountered during the course of the fieldwork. This initiative involved training in product management and business skills as well as the passing of knowledge to other members of the group and occurred, to a limited extent, throughout the year (Porter, 2001). Workshops were also held with the representatives of the groups to discuss the difficulties encountered by the craft groups and to consider possible solutions (Porter, 2001).

Communication with the administrators of the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative in the region seems to be a major difficulty, however, and many respondents from the KZN Wildlife authority as well as the Private tourism developers and even the Mbila community themselves expressed their utter frustration in their efforts to communicate productively with the administrators of this initiative. Many feel that this situation is severely hampering their abilities to function to the best of their abilities so that their benefits can respond accordingly.

3.5.2.2 Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Services

A major driving force behind the funding and the initiation of community-based tourism development projects at Sodwana Bay is that of the community levy system, which is implemented by the KZN Wildlife authorities at the Sodwana Bay National Park. This levy is generated through payments made by the tourists that visit Sodwana Bay and is used to fund community-based development projects. (see Section 3.5). At the time of the completion of the fieldwork a levy of R20 was charged per person per day for day visitors, a further R2 per day for overnight campsite visitors and R5 per day for chalet visitors from the first night of stay onwards. The money collected in this way is divided into a 90% - 10% ratio for the Mbila and Mabaso communities, respectively. In the case of Sodwana Bay it is divided according to the percentage of land occupied by a specific community adjacent to the Park.

The money is administered by a Community Levy Committee and is currently managed in the following manner. One of the main activities of the Community Levy Committee is

to encourage the rural community to initiate their own projects¹¹. In order for a project to be considered, the community must approach the Community Levy Committee with a fully prepared business plan explaining what they propose to do. The KZN Wildlife authorities at Sodwana Bay National Park aid these community members in the writing of the business proposal and then send it to the KZN Wildlife authorities head office in Pietermaritzburg.

The KZN Wildlife authority headquarters is also the assessment seat of the Community Levy Committee where the proposal will be adjudicated and from where further steps will be taken to support the community in whatever means they need depending on the outcome of the ruling on the proposal. Presently the Community Levy Fund has already assisted in the renovation and the electrification of a few schools in the Mbila tribal area, but the progress with the submission of proposals by the community is said to be very slow and plagued by an array of difficulties¹¹.

3.5.2.3 Private Sector Initiatives

The private sector tourism development projects in the area seem to be originating predominantly from the activities of the private tourism operators themselves. These projects are extremely limited, however, which can again be attributed firstly to the limited variety and number of general opportunities in the area, and the existing limited variety of tourism ventures and the opportunities within these ventures. Private tourism ventures in the region currently amount to 20 operations. Of these, the diving, fishing and accommodation/restaurant operations comprise 14 operations of the total amount and are also the only operations that are substantial enough to allow a work force greater than 5 individuals per operation.

The community-based tourism development initiatives that are derived from these ventures consist mainly of training programmes that equip the community members with the appropriate qualifications for the area. These qualifications consequently furnish these individuals with skills that are in frequent demand at Sodwana Bay as well as in similar tourism ventures elsewhere, thereby increasing their employment prospects considerably.

Private sector initiatives, other than those originating from the diving, fishing and restaurant/accommodation ventures in Sodwana Bay, originated predominantly out of

¹¹ Personal communication with Mr. S. Ngobese, Mbila Community member and Community Conservation Officer, Sodwana Bay National Park, March 18th, 2002, Sodwana Bay National Park.

the crafting capabilities of the members of the Mabila community. Three of these initiatives were instigated by the only European-based curio shop in the area and are as follows; Firstly that of a t-shirt and hat painting initiative. In this initiative the owner supplies the t-shirts, the hats, the paints and the paintbrushes and provides the necessary training to paint colourful motives on the shirts and the hats to be sold in the shop. The ladies involved were also supplied with a workplace, their own t-shirts, hats and materials, as well as a day off from work to paint shirts and hats that they could then sell for themselves.

Although the ladies exhibited great skill in this craft, the initiative did not expand because the ladies involved felt that their weekly wages from the shop were sufficient and that they needed the day off to attend to other chores¹². The owner also initiated a craft initiative, providing examples of alternative and more workable exotic timber species as well as examples of popular sculptings from other parts of the country. This initiative also provided a workplace for the crafters, to help cut down on the travelling time and cost for the ladies and men involved in this initiative (the curio shop is located halfway between Mbaswana and Sodwana Bay) as well as tools and materials.

This venture unfortunately also failed to grow into a significant initiative, this time probably because of the fear of losing clients at the main curio market at Sodwana Bay itself. The author believes that some of the ideas did catch on, however, and although the crafters are very enterprising themselves, they are sure to have benefited considerably from this initiative. The owner also supports another venture which involves a member of the community supplying the shop with cards (post cards, etc.). The owner and this individual frequently exchange ideas thereby streamlining the product and increasing the probability of sales.

Another private sector initiative that exists in the area is that of the local manufacturing of items such as corporate gift packages as well as various kinds of gift-wrappings and other associated items. This initiative is focused on the female members of the community and is administered from the Mbaswana crafts workshop. The products are manufactured on a consignment basis and are sold as far as Johannesburg. Although small, the initiative does provide a source of alternative income for the ladies involved and is said to produce good quality products, thereby increasing the likelihood of its continuing to do so in the future and even expanding if more assignments can be procured¹³.

¹² Personal communication with Ms. M Brockbank, partner, Ocean Inks curio shop, Sodwana Bay, 20th of March 2002.

¹³ Personal communication with Mr. M. Van Der Velde, owner, Sandton Scuba, Sodwana Bay, 21st of March, 2002.

3.6 TOURISM BENEFITS ACCRUING TO THE MBILA COMMUNITY

3.6.1 Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife

In monetary terms, the first and foremost tourism-based benefits that the Mbila community receive from the part of the KZN Wildlife authorities are those of the temporary and permanent employment opportunities that are produced by the activities and facilities of this institution. The training that the employees receive almost certainly serves as the chief benefit in the region, however. This is done in the following manner. Many of the employees that are currently employed at Sodwana Bay National Park completed only their Grade 12 secondary qualification with no other tertiary qualifications. The in-service training that the Mbila employees receive at Sodwana Bay qualifies them in the conservation and tourism-based fields, which are fields that have experienced enormous growth in Southern Africa and in other similar destinations over the world in the past few years and are set to grow even more in the future (see Sections 2.2.4 and 2.3.2.2).

In the case of Mr. S. Ngobese, for instance, he also typically started his career in the KZN Wildlife services as a mere utility worker but through merit progressed through all the relevant levels of work and training to where he now fulfils the role of the KZN Wildlife authorities' regional manager of community affairs¹⁴. The training that the Mbila people receive at Sodwana Bay therefore not only guarantees them a well-compensated job, but also provides them with continuous instruction in fields that have a secure future. Other training and educational initiatives that also developed from the part of the KZN Wildlife authorities' include a variety of field trips that are organized for the local schools and representatives of the Mbila Tribal Authority.

These field trips are aimed at informing the local people about the critical importance of the biodiversity of their area and of biodiversity in general, as well as the role that they can play in the conservation and sustainable management thereof. A series of Eco clubs have also been established in the schools, and the private sector has been involved in these in order to fund some of the excursions. Project PADI AWARE is an example of one such an initiative and has already sponsored several of these projects. Additional focus has been placed on sharing information with the representatives of the Mbila Tribal

¹⁴ Personal communication with Mr. S. Ngobese, Mbila Community member and Community Conservation Officer, Sodwana Bay National Park, March 18th, 2002, Sodwana Bay National Park.

Authority about the influence that tourism can have in the area and the role that the community can play in the enhancement of this industry.

This has also been communicated to the community as a whole and has since yielded much reward. The area has, for instance, previously been plagued by a serious theft problem. This had quite a detrimental effect on the tourism activities in the area and even caused the closure of two of the privately owned tourism operations¹⁵. When this was discussed with the Mbila Tribal Authority their response was unanimous and with the help of the Mbila community the theft problem was eradicated within 6 months time¹⁵. The interviews that were conducted during the fieldwork of the research revealed a sound knowledge on the part of the community of the value of tourism and also exhibited their commitment to the safety and security of the tourists and their belongings. This is a sure example of the mutual interdependence of the tourism industry and the Mbila community to ensure a healthy tourism industry and a constant supply of benefits to the community.

The community levy fund is another significant benefit that was born out of the tourism operations of the KZN Wildlife authorities. This fund is still in its early stages of management, however, and does not yet perform at its full potential. The main reasons for this seem to be the lack of knowledge on the part of the community as to how to present possible development project as well as the lack of proper communication between the relevant representatives from the community and the KZN Wildlife authorities.

Currently the community levy fund has helped considerably in the renovation and electrification of a few schools in the area. Education in the relevant fields holds the key to better employment opportunities in this area and therefore makes the provision of facilities and equipment that enhance the learner's ability to achieve this, of the utmost importance. The scope does however exist to expand on the current community-based tourism development initiatives, and the levy fund can aid significantly in the establishment of these. It is therefore imperative to overcome the obstacles that suppress the founding of new initiatives.

The improvement of the roads leading towards Sodwana Bay and the Mbila tribal area can, without a doubt, be seen as the most noteworthy contribution of the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiatives to the area. The main road that has been upgraded from

¹⁵ Personal communication with Mr. S Roberts, Manager, Coral Divers, Sodwana Bay, March 18th, 2002.

a gravel road to a tar road effectively opened the area up for any person that owns a vehicle and is thus accessible not only to those individuals that own a four wheel drive vehicle. This and the popularity of the area as a diving and fishing destination are already attracting an increased flow of visitors¹⁶ and can therefore play an important role in the future development of additional development opportunities for the Mbila community.

Although the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative craft initiative is also experiencing difficulties with communication between the involved parties, steps have been taken to resolve these and further workshops were set to take place when the fieldwork for the study was done. If these difficulties can be overcome, the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative can provide extensive support in the further expansion of tourism initiatives in the area, which would in turn supply the Mbila community with an increase in employment and other development opportunities.

3.6.2 Private Ventures

As in the case of the KZN Wildlife authority, the main benefits produced by the operations of the private tourism operators have to be those of employment and training. Quite a few members of the Mbila community have already received expensive in-service training from these operations and others were in the process of receiving their training during the time of the fieldwork of this study. In some of the cases (see Section 3.4.2.2) the training has already resulted in some of the Mbila's obtaining high-quality employment in similar tourism activities in Sodwana Bay and elsewhere in the country.

In addition to the training given to the adults in the region, it was also found that many of the private tourism operators were involved in aiding some of the children of the area in their educational needs. Because of the critical importance in the area of being well-spoken in the English language some of the private operators offered incentives such as supplying weekend jobs on the condition that the children supply them with satisfactory school achievements in this language. This incentive was found to be quite common and working well, as much of the interviews held with the children revealed the importance they associated with their education and especially with speaking English.

On a social level, the private tourism operators were also found to be actively involved with the sponsorship of many other Mbila activities. Soccer is a favourite sport in the

¹⁶ Personal communication with Mr. N. Patmore, Manager, Sodwana Bay Lodge, Sodwana Bay, March 20th, 2002 and Mr. M. Visagie, Owner, Vis Agie Fishing Charters, Sodwana Bay, March 21st, 2002.

area and every other team was found to be sponsored either by one individual private tourism operator or by several. One of the private tourism operators was also instrumental in the establishment of the local community Youth Police Desk. This group is actively involved in curbing tourism-related criminal activities (theft from cars and from camp sites) in the area, but also plays a role on an informant basis, in helping the local branch of the South African National Police (SANP) force in cases relating to the safety and security of the community itself.

Besides these, many instances were found where close personal relations existed between some of the Mbila community members and the private tourism operators. In one instance, a private tourism operator was found to be one of the founding members of a private school in the Mbaswana area. The school was founded with the permission of the Mbila iNkosi and principally out of the need for a more appropriate curriculum with a standard that meets the necessary educational requirements. Although the Mbila community can, in most cases, not afford to send their children to the school, the school is still very popular with them. The school governing body therefore evaluates candidates that demonstrate good potential and a willingness to progress and then sponsors these students' education.

Another example of these relationships is where a local private tourism operator aided a former employee to establish his own shebeen. The shebeen has since turned into a very popular social spot in the area and has subsequently yielded substantial benefits to its owner. The owner of the shebeen and the tourism operator pay frequent visits to each other and the operator has aided his former employee with various aspects of the management of the shebeen. In addition, the private operator has provided the shebeen owner with advice regarding the purchase of vehicles and property, as well as many other similar choices he has had to make.

In addition to the above-mentioned examples, others also exist where the local community work in close collaboration with the private tourism operators in the Sodwana Bay area.

3.7 Conclusion

The Problem Statement in Chapter 1 of the study (Section 1.2) identified certain of the most significant constraints that the Sodwana Bay area is presenting the local community with. Aspects such as the limited range and depth of the participatory

opportunities in the tourism industry as well as the low level of applicable education and training and the limited access that the community hold to the available resources, proved to be the most pressing of these constraints. Other limitations included insufficient access to funds for development initiatives as well as the lack of knowledge on how to develop Sodwana Bays' tourism potential sensitively towards the cultural identity of the Mbila community and towards the areas' natural environment. The Objectives of the study (Section 1.5) followed on, on the Problem Statement by recognizing the need to carry out a range of investigations that would provide the necessary insights into the reasons for the abovementioned constraints.

Chapter 3 (this Chapter) was dedicated to the investigation of the Sodwana Bay environment and focussed specifically on the factors that influenced the past and present state of Mbila participation in the tourism-based developments of the area. This proved to be a very valuable exercise as it provided answers to all of the issues that were raised in the Problem Statement and in the Aims (Section 1.4) and Objectives of the study. Chapter 4 will now continue in analysing the findings of Chapter 3 against the set of Fundamental elements required for equitable rural community participation, developed in Chapter 2.