

Chapter 5: Participation of the Mbila Community in the Tourism-Based Developments of Sodwana Bay: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 the problem statement established that the research of this study would concentrate on three principal aspects. These include the relevant levels of **Control**, which the Mbila community have with respect to aspects of their participation in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay, the **Opportunities** that the tourism industry in the region offers and the **Responsibilities** of the applicable stakeholders to contribute to the overall participation in the tourism related-activities of the area.

Chapter 2 continued by discussing the world trends in protected area management and the tourism-based developments in and around these areas. It also revealed the influences that these developments had on the rural communities living there. This chapter concluded with the development of a set of fundamental elements that are believed to be critical to the success of proper rural community participation in tourism-based developments. These elements were then used in Chapter 4 to measure the present state of Mbila participation in the tourism-based developments of the Sodwana Bay area (Chapter 3).

The focus of Chapter 5 will now be on assimilating the finds of the previous chapters as well as to provide a discussion on these findings. Recommendations will also be presented. These recommendations are those that are believed to be required to enhance the present state of rural community participation in the tourism-based developments at Sodwana Bay and will be presented in terms of the outputs that were recognized in the analysis of the findings (Chapter 4).

5.2 FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS REQUIRED FOR EFFECTIVE RURAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM-BASED DEVELOPMENTS

According to the research done in this study, it is obvious that rural community participation in tourism-based developments is a multi-faceted concept with numerous

aspects that influence its application in an area. Despite this, however, it was found that certain of these **elements** are **fundamental** to the success of any **participatory** approach and that the omission of these elements has led to frequent failures in rural community participation programmes (see Fig. 4.1). The research also revealed that although certain fundamental elements are critical to the success of community participation in development projects, these elements are only useful when they are adapted to complement the situations unique to a specific place.

In recognition of the above statements this study has determined that the level of control which a rural community have over their land and over their own governance on that land stands at the forefront of the success of the participation in any development that occurs there. However, in order to arrive at these satisfactory levels of community control it is necessary to first put a few elements in place. Figure 4.1 illustrates that the first important element towards true rural community participation in tourism-based developments is that of empowerment. Satisfactory empowerment consists of the development of suitable policy and legislative measures and their implementation by effective institutional organizations. This will then present the community with the level of control which they need to be involved in the further levels of these developments.

Further levels of involvement typically consist of aspects such as the official granting of legal stakeholder status to the community, the development of their capacities and their partaking in the benefits that accrue from the developments that were initiated. If these levels of involvement could be achieved in addition to the proper empowerment of the rural community, the process would have completed the full circle according to the research in this study, and it would imply that the communities would have participated sufficiently. The following discussion will now evaluate if this is the case with the Mbila community of the Sodwana Bay area.

To begin with it is important to firstly look at an overview of the principal opportunities and constraints that influence the ability of the Mbila community to participate in the tourism-based developments of the Sodwana Bay area. A summary of these is presented in Table 5.1.

5.3 EVALUATION OF THE PRESENT STATE OF MBILA PARTICIPATION IN THE TOURISM-BASED DEVELOPMENTS OF SODWANA BAY

5.3.1 Levels of Mbila Community Control

The previous chapters of this study (Chapters 2, 4 and 5) have demonstrated the way in which the level of Mbila community Control lies at the very centre of the whole question

Table 5.1: Summary of the Opportunities and Constraints of the Present State of rural community participation in the tourism-based developments at Sodwana Bay.

Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sufficient authoritative political will ➤ Sufficient translation of policies into appropriate empowering legislation and strategies ➤ Strong governmental institutional structure ➤ Adequate local institutional framework ➤ Strong rural community Based Organizations ➤ Presence of governmental development initiatives ➤ Significant private sector contribution towards rural community empowerment ➤ Positive rural community stance towards tourism development ➤ A natural resource base which presents opportunities for the broadening of the local tourism product ➤ Presence of rural community entrepreneurs ➤ Presence of rural community development initiatives ➤ Available funds for rural community development initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Certain restrictive legislation ➤ Unresolved land ownership and land development issues ➤ Inadequate communication between community and certain institutions ➤ Insufficient insights of rural community into current and future Sodwana development plans ➤ Occasional insufficient community representation on relevant committees ➤ Occasional mistrust among local institutions ➤ Insufficient integration between local institutions (Community and others) ➤ General lack of insight into rural community, Developer's and Government institution's needs ➤ Infrastructural constraints ➤ Underdeveloped rural community and other institutional capacities ➤ Insufficient rural community education and training ➤ Inadequate literacy levels ➤ Lack of variety in tourism-based opportunities ➤ Tourism activities that are foreign to Mbila cultural background ➤ Insufficient tourism-based benefit creation and distribution of these benefits in the community ➤ Insufficient and problematic access to available funding

of effective rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay. The study also revealed that elements such as the national and international Policy frameworks as well as the Legislative and Institutional capacities of the relevant governing authorities play critical roles in the adequate empowerment of rural communities and that proper rural community participation is impossible without the effective implementation of these elements.

At the global level, the emergence of the sustainable development doctrines and the associated shifts in standpoint towards rural community participation in development projects have led to the development of a whole range of international policies that strongly endorse rural community participation (such as Agenda 21 and Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry). The Mbila community is therefore more than adequately provided for with international policy agreements that stress the importance of rural community participation in tourism-based developments (see Section 4.2). These policies are however only supportive if the local national governments adhere to these policy agreements and perform the relevant local policy reforms necessary to empower the community. In this regard, the Mbila community is fortunate that the South African government has done this, with the development of policies such as the Local Agenda 21, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the Growth Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR).

The next level of empowerment in the process towards Mbila control consists of in the effectiveness of the legislative framework to empower the Community to legally own their resources and to Participate as a legal entity in the developments (especially tourism developments in the case of Sodwana Bay) that occur on their traditional territory. In this case the government has again risen to the occasion and developed the required legislation which has resulted in the Mbila community successfully reclaiming and owning sections of their ancestral land and also being able to legally represent themselves (in the form of the Mbila tribal Authority) in the matters that influence their future participation in the tourism developments in the area.

Although this has produced significant improvements in the Mbila's authoritative stature, they have not yet been able to enjoy the full benefit of this empowerment due to internal and external factors. With regard to their representation the community is always involved when aspects concerning their land are under discussion. In most cases, however, this involvement is unfortunately merely to attain their consent for the development to proceed and at present does not include broader participation in the process of these developments. Certain key committees also exist (Community Levy Committee) where the community are not represented at all and where these committees play a significant role in relation to the participation of the Mbila community in the developments in the area.

In terms of their settlement agreement, the community are still only enjoying limited access to some of the reclaimed sections of their territory. However, most of this land falls within the sensitive and rare coastal protected areas, which identifies its significant

conservation status. The Mbilas community are however not fully aware of this need for conservation need though. It is believed that deeper involvement through information sessions and actual visits to these areas (to reveal its conservation significance), would surely give the community a new outlook.

Another constraint imposed on the Mbilas consists of a number of restrictive legislation prerogatives (see Section 4.3). These measures are definitely required in areas of the country where damage has occurred as a result of the lack of this type of legislation. The uniqueness of the socio-economic (employment in particular) and environmental (conservation) situation at Sodwana Bay and past experiences of the consequences of certain of its land uses and activities (Beach driving and juvenile casual labour) demand that legislation should protect and build on the locally available opportunities.

The concluding aspect that has a specific bearing on the level of Mbilas community control consists of the existence and effectiveness of the relevant institutional bodies in the region. Here the national government has provided the Mbilas community with an effective institutional framework from the national to the local level. With regard to the all-important empowerment of the community to be acknowledged as a legal institution themselves, the presence of the institutional framework at Sodwana Bay contributed by translating the relevant legislation into practical measures at a grassroots level. This legislation (which was designed to empower communities) has therefore not been only an ideal or mere words on paper, it has come to life and facilitated actual aspects of the true empowerment of the Mbilas community.

The full potential of this institutional framework must however still be acknowledge. Specific difficulties with this framework include a significant lack of communication between the various institutions and the consequent misunderstandings that result. The research has shown that these problems most probably occur because of the presence of a degree of mistrust reminiscent of previous governments, and because of the lack of insight into the intentions of the KZN Wildlife authorities and the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative. It is felt that an asserted the KZN Wildlife authorities to clarify issues such as the community levy fund and an increase in the resolve of the Mbilas community to learn more about the necessity and inner workings of conservation matters, will greatly assist the integration of these institutions as well as their future participation in joint projects.

In connection with the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative, it is evident that both the community and the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative need to come together to

discuss the real needs and aspirations of both institutions. This will hopefully then lead to information and training which are sensitive to the Mbilas' needs, and in turn result in a community that understands how to approach and to work with the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative in order to arrive at the maximum level of mutual cooperation.

5.3.2 Existing Participatory Opportunities

In Chapter 2., the literature revealed that subsequent to the initial empowerment of the community, they now possess a level of control which affords them the powers they need to be involved into a much greater degree than before (see Sections 2.4.3.4 and 4.5). If greater levels of empowerment could be achieved, the community would be able to participate as equal stakeholders in the tourism-based developments in their area and would also have a greater say in the type and quantity of benefits which they receive.

In the case of Sodwana Bay, the importance of equal Stakeholdership in the Tourism-Based opportunities is almost self-explanatory. chapter 3 has described the harshness of the physical environment and has also revealed the fact that the tourism industry provides the only significant development opportunities in the area. The extent of the tourism potential in the area and how this potential can contribute to the livelihoods of the Mbilas in the region, also became evident.

From a legislative and institutional point of view the Mbila community have been given the authority over their resources and have been recognized as a legal and existent institution. Although this stakeholdership has contributed significantly towards their participation in the present tourism-based developments of the Sodwana Bay area, the actual level of involvement (on paper) of the Mbila community does not seem to have changed notably from previous years. Difficulties regarding the involvement of the Mbila community are varied, but the main causes of concern can be pinned on the limited variety and number of tourism opportunities, the nature of the present tourism activities themselves and on the relationships between the tourism stakeholders.

In addition to the accommodation and food components (that serve predominantly as a by product of the other tourism activities in the area), the region mainly supports two tourism activities which supply significant involvement opportunities. These activities consist of the scuba diving and sports angling varieties and are of a very technical nature. The activities also involve a lot of ocean-going activity, which unfortunately contrasts sharply with the traditional background of the Mbila people. Although some of

the Mbila people involved in these activities have proved their abilities to excel in the technical components of these activities, the majority have not yet been able to overcome their traditional reservations concerning the ocean and therefore miss out on the greater part of the main tourism-based involvement and development opportunities that Sodwana Bay has to offer.

When looking at the physical environment in relation to the range of presently available tourism activities it is evident that the area is severely underdeveloped. While the area holds extensive natural features apart from its noteworthy marine environment, no significant nature-based activities were encountered and only a few adventure-based activities were present. These activities were however still in their initiation stages and therefore also did not create satisfactory local involvement. Diversification however, is, a definite step in the right direction and can contribute significantly towards the overall tourism product of the area as well as to the subsequent increase in the involvement opportunities of the Mbila community.

Tourism opportunities in the form of new initiatives are slowly but surely also making their appearance. From the part of the government, the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative and the KZN Wildlife authorities are stimulating a number of tourism-based initiatives with the aim of amplifying the community involvement. Although smaller projects are also being initiated (Velasibone, Garden Group, male carver group), the most prominent community-based tourism initiative presents itself in the form of the Ubumbano Craft Initiative. This initiative has already attracted healthy numbers of the Mbila women and has culminated in a few corporate contracts. Difficulties such as the internal organization of this initiative as well as the liaison with the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative and the KZN Wildlife authorities are however hindering its potential and should be eradicated. Other initiatives such as the locally run shebeens are very popular with overseas visitors especially, and should also be expanded upon to attract more of these visitors.

As for the relationships between the various tourism stakeholders, it became apparent that the difficulties that are experienced centre around aspects of control and understanding. Control in the sense that the main tourism stakeholders, apart from the Mbila community, still seem to exert the bulk of the control over the tourism activities and facilities as well as the areas where these features occur; and understanding in the sense that the Mbila community and the tourism developers in the area are not always aware of what their mutual needs and how these institutions can assist each them in ways that complement their present situation. The Mbila community also require a

deeper understanding of the way in which Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative and the KZN Wildlife authorities are managing resources (both natural and economical) and how this is benefiting them. On the part of the KZN Wildlife authorities and the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative especially, there seems to be a lack of understanding of the true needs of the Mbila community. A better understanding here would definitely assist the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative in the creation of training sessions tailored to fit the Mbila community's needs and at a level that would enable the Mbila people to start applying what they learn right away.

The benefits that accrue from the tourism-based developments of a region signify another important characteristic of an adequately involved rural community. Section 2.3 of this study has highlighted the fact that tourism-based developments have, in the past, provided compensation and employment as the only means of benefit that a rural community would receive from a tourism-based development, and has thereby clearly revealed these managers' position towards meaningful rural community participation in tourism-based developments. In tourism-based developments where rural communities were effectively involved, the benefits of those developments presented themselves by the community firstly, being able to participate in a benefit-generating opportunity; secondly, by being part of the stakeholders that decide what the tourism venture would include; and thirdly, by being an equal receiver when the benefits eventually start arriving.

Here the Sodwana Bay tourism situation and the Mbilas' involvement again seem not to be performing at their highest levels. Although the Mbila community seem to be sufficiently empowered and own most of the land where the tourism activities are being operated from, they certainly do not appear to receive the benefits that accompany this involvement. Presently the main benefits that are being generated by the tourism activities in the area consist of employment opportunities, the government, private and community-based initiatives and the community levy scheme. Whilst these benefits form a vital part of the daily income of many of the Mbila community members, they fall far short of what the literature describes sufficient tourism-based benefits to be.

Principal reasons for this situation can be attributed to the lack of sufficient Mbila integration, the unsatisfactory state of appropriate education and training as well as the nature of the tourism activities themselves. With regard to the lack of integration it was found that a number of aspects are particularly important. As for Mbila land claim, this process has only recently undergone its first stage and although the Mbila people technically regained their traditional territory, both them and the KZN Wildlife authorities

concluded that much negotiation still needs to be done to decide on the appropriate joint management of this land. Negotiations are progressing very slowly however and this, in conjunction with the community's lack of knowledge, with regard to the importance of the conservation of the said areas and the lack in variety of the tourism developments available severely hampers the Mbilas in harnessing more of the potential benefits that the area contains.

The lack of appropriate education and training has a devastating impact on various levels. At the grassroots level, these deficiencies are depriving the community of life-sustaining job opportunities, and at the control and management levels, they are causing ineffective communication between the various stakeholders, which in turn again leads to unproductive integration. This is especially disadvantageous to the community because the repercussions of rural community involvement at these levels produce exponential non-participation at the lower (poorer) levels of the community where the benefits accruing from tourism-based developments are extremely important.

The inaccessibility of the majority of the tourism opportunities at Sodwana Bay has been discussed at length throughout the study. The simple truth here is that this is causing the Mbila people to miss out on the tourism developments that are being operated on much of their own territory and that these opportunities are often going to beneficiaries which are not of the area. The literature specifies that, for an area to be managed sustainably, its resources and the benefits that accrue from the use of these resources should be reserved for its local populations. Measures that would allow the Mbila people to harness the maximum benefit within sustainable levels of consumption of Sodwana Bay's resources should therefore be put in place to justify its conservation and to enhance the quality of life for the Mbila community.

5.3.3 Stakeholder Responsibilities

Throughout the study it became evident that in order for sustainable development to succeed it is necessary that people take **responsibility** for the management of their resources. When people do take up this responsibility and refrain from conventional, over-consumptive behaviour in favour of more sustainable actions, this usually means that changes will have to be made to these earlier unsustainable lifestyles. In terms of the rural community participation in the tourism-based development of Sodwana Bay, one of the most important responsibilities contributing towards sustainable development includes the appropriate development of **local capacities** in order to make it possible for

all the relevant stakeholders to participate productively in the management of the tourism developments of their region.

In Section 2.4.3.6, the literature describes Local rural community capacity and capacity building as the ability of the rural community in an area to use their ownership and access to knowledge and technology as a means of sustainably managing their environmental and social resources for the benefit of themselves and their future generations. While this is very true, the literature has also revealed that access to knowledge and technology is a very rare commodity in the rural world and, as in the case of Sodwana Bay, illiteracy especially is one of the principal contributors to the lack of rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of that region.

Illiteracy is unfortunately not the only constraint which the Mbila people have to endure since this restriction is exacerbated by the permanence of low levels of applicable education and training in the schools of the area. Additional limitations present themselves in the illiteracy levels in the governing bodies of these institutions as well as the unavailability of sufficiently trained teachers in the region.

An area where the Mbila people can however contribute significantly in their capacity as the inhabitants of the local natural environment is through their knowledge of the ecology of the region. Indigenous Knowledge Systems, or IKS as it is known, have contributed significantly to the conservation of biodiversity and to developments in ecologically sensitive areas worldwide, and can (and have in cases) also be adapted to serve in a guiding capacity for tourists interested in the local ecology of the area. Western conservationists and developers have unfortunately been slow to recognize the value of the IKS resource base and rural communities have therefore basically lost their opportunity to participate in developments in this sense.

In conclusion, an additional factor that has influenced in the ability of the Mbila people to participate in the tourism-based developments of their area involves the incapacities of the local governance structures and developers to appreciate the true needs of the Mbila community and to create developments in the area that promote the participation of the Mbila community. Although the current tourism opportunities are attracting tourists to the area and are supplying much needed employment opportunities, it is believed that the area boasts much more opportunity for the development of additional tourism ventures and that these can be developed to promote Mbila participation, in particular.

The principal responsibilities that the various stakeholders have in connection with the aim of involving the Mabila community as far as possible in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay, are therefore quite apparent. In the first place, it is of the utmost importance that all the relevant authorities that are involved with the schools and the education and training programmes that are currently being offered, should meet to discuss the present situation of the schools in the region. Serious attention should be given to the level of literacy in the area. Specific focus should also be placed on the current curricula and on the possibilities of adapting it to involve subjects that are more tourism-oriented and which would allow successful candidates a better change of attaining employment in the tourism industry of Sodwana Bay.

With regard to the government and private tourism developers and operators in the region, more should be done to incorporate the Mabila people in the tourism activities of the area. This should be done focusing on specifically their cultural background and on a creative means of incorporating this in the local tourism product. Many examples exist of where the cultural uniqueness of a rural community was incorporated into the local tourism industry of the area and where this produced good results. The study does, however, recognize the current initiatives of the government and private tourism developers and operators in Sodwana Bay as well as the positive results which these initiatives have already achieved.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.4.1 Mabila Control in the tourism-based developments at Sodwana Bay

The research of this study has established that the principal determinant with respect to the level of control which the Mabila community has in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay, consists of their legal empowerment to participate. With regard to the policy environment it was found that the policies and strategies that have a bearing on rural community participation in tourism-based developments rules clearly on its relevance and importance. The relevant authorities should continue to develop these policies and strategies and should focus on expanding them in such a way that they can facilitate practical changes that would enhance rural community participation practices on a grassroots level.

Legislative measures such as the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act 22 of 1994) and the Communal Property Associations Act, 1996 (Act 28 of 1996) have prove the

South African governments political will to empower the Mbila community and has resulted in the Mbila community being a recognized and legal stakeholder in the developments of the region. Although this has already facilitated much more involvement by the Mbila community, it is believed that additional measures should be developed to illustrate the full capacity of this legislation to the community, as well as the practical implications that this has on their level of control over the tourism-based developments in their area. Awareness campaigns, for instance, can assist the Mbila community in the realization of their rights and responsibilities concerning the relevant legislation and should explain how the legislation brings about the change that it does. This would then hopefully give the community a better idea of how to implement this legislation to allow maximum rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of their area.

Restrictive legislation identified by this study presents itself in the form of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act 107 of 1998), Notice No. 22690 of 2001 (beach driving), and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997, Section 52A of the Child Care Act (Child Labour Legislation). With regard to this legislation, it must be emphasized that the difficulties experienced have a bearing only on the research of this study and that their applicability at other sites is unconfirmed. With regard to the Sodwana Bay area, legislation that does not unnecessarily obstruct the specific socio-economic and environmental characteristics of the region should be presented. The local authorities and the tourism developers should be assisted on a practical and implementable level by the national government and should not be left to deal with the outcomes of the restrictions that the new legislation brought about, on their own. This should be done in ways that sustain and enhance the current economic situation whilst still achieving the desired conservation of the aspects described in the legislation.

With regard to all the relevant institutions in the area, the research has revealed that the Mbila community were adequately empowered as a legitimate institution and that the area was well represented by other institutions that embody the various interests in the area. These institutions were found to be in reasonable communication with each other, but some of the relationships were also experiencing serious difficulties. A recommendation in this regard would be that a series of introductory open days should be organized where every institution would be allowed to represent themselves. This representation should include aspects such as their role and function in the development of the area as well as their most significant needs in relation to the other institutions as well as comprehensive lists of contact details of all the relevant departments.

The communication between the Mbila community, the KZN Wildlife authorities and the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative is especially important. The Mbila community in particular, need to know how they can involve themselves in a greater degree in these institutions and in the developments that they plan for the future. On the topic of the initiation of new developments and the relevant training and aid programmes, institutions like the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative will also benefit immensely from an effective understanding of what the true needs of the Mbila people are, seen from their perspective.

5.4.2 Tourism-Based Opportunities

Adequate stakeholdership in the tourism-based developments of an area constitutes one of the first and foremost tourism-based opportunities that a tourism destination can provide a rural community with. The South African government empowered the Mbila community in this regard by providing them with the legislative means they need to achieve equal stakeholdership. Although the community does have a significant level of control over the developments that are being proposed in the area, this control has not yet culminated in enough participatory opportunities at a grassroots level.

In addition to this it is believed that the cultural and natural resources of the Sodwana Bay area have the potential for a significant amount of additional tourism-based activities. These resources should however be developed in a holistic fashion so as to ensure that the proposed developments involve the maximum number of Mbila people at all the different stages and levels of these developments. Care must therefore be taken not to develop supplementary activities that burdens the cultural and natural resources whilst not contributing significantly to the Mbila community's livelihood in the region

In relation to the type of benefits which the current tourism opportunities are yielding, it became apparent that the nature of these opportunities is not yielding the benefit flows that substantiate the level of control which the Mbila community was given through the legislation. Attention must therefore be given to developing tourism activities that are culturally sensitive and which allow a greater number of Mbila people to participate. The Mbila community also have a role to play here in terms of their education and training thereby ensuring that they stand a better chance of procuring better involvement in the present and future tourism-based activities of the Sodwana Bay area.

It is again recommended here that the Mbila community, the KZN Wildlife authorities and the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative work toward a greater level of integration. This would ensure that the benefits which are being generated (such as the community levy and the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative training programmes) reach the community and that they are distributed to the areas where they can be utilized in a sustainable fashion e.g. schools, clinics, compensation for lost resources, training programmes, future community-based tourism initiatives, etc.

5.4.3 Stakeholder Responsibilities

Stakeholder responsibility represents one of the most significant components in the successful involvement of all the interested and affected parties in the tourism-based developments of an area. In the case of Sodwana Bay, it was identified that the level of education and training in the region as well as the level of insight of the local authorities and developers into the true needs of the Mbila community presented the main incapacities. These capacities would have to be built and expanded upon to ensure that both the Mbila community and the other tourism stakeholders in the area are sufficiently involved and that they share in the benefits that accrue from these developments.

With regard to the education and training, the study revealed that the local educational institutions in the area were failing to provide the level and type of training which is necessary for the Mbila people and required by the local tourism industry. Illiteracy was found to be common throughout the Mbila community and training in tourism-related fields such as tourist reception, waiting personnel, tourism-related house-keeping and maintenance, and especially management and administration staff were found to be non-existent. Recommendations would be to organize meetings with all the relevant stakeholders to discuss and determine what the educational and training needs of the area are. The curricula of the area should then be adapted to these needs and supplementary training should be provided where this is not possible. The relevant authorities (national, provincial and local government and institutions) should also ensure that adequate governing bodies that would be able to monitor the educational needs of the area and manage it accordingly are elected. Attention should also be given to the educational infrastructure of the schools in the region. Here the authorities should ensure that government resources and those created by the local tourism industry are used in a manner that complements the results which are expected of these institutions.

On the subject of government and other institutional incapacities, the study revealed that the principal constraints presented themselves in the lack of understanding of the true needs and aspirations of the Mbila community and in deficiencies regarding the integration of the various institutions with each other. Concerning the misconceptions in relation to the Mbila community's needs and aspirations, it is recommended that the governing authorities and other stakeholders develop a proper understanding of these. This should enable the authorities to develop initiatives that are responsive to the Mbilas' socio-economic requirements whilst still being sensitive to their cultural background and the integrity of the natural environment.

As to the integration of the various institutions, the study once more reiterates the importance of this aspect. The responsibility here again falls to all the pertinent institutions to implement the necessary procedures that would allow maximum cooperation (see Section 5.4.1). This should facilitate developments and initiatives that are sensitive to the requirements of all the interested and affected parties and which are appropriate to the region.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In short the main aims of this study focused on attempting to determine the level of control which the Mbila community possess over their traditional resources and how this control enhances their livelihood by securing greater levels of participation for them in the tourism-based developments of the area. The primary objectives of the study were therefore to describe the Sodwana Bay area in terms of its resources and its tourism-related opportunities as well as the levels of control which the various stakeholders in the region have in relation to these resources and the tourism-based developments.

The findings of the study are portrayed in Chapters 4 and 5. These findings were determined by measuring the present levels of the Mbilas' participation in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay against a framework of fundamental elements that were derived from the literature research, performed in Chapter 2. The set of fundamental elements and the analytical framework in which it was placed are by no means seen as the only measure to establish the accomplishments of rural community participation initiatives, but were valuable to this study in the determination of the broad successes and failures of rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay.

Looking at the earlier developmental opportunities in the Sodwana Bay region, the research revealed that the natural environment had until recently (last 100 – 150 years) only allowed a very narrow level of existence. The inhabitants of the area (man, beast and plant) also had to be very well adapted to survive here and early visitors were usually driven off very quickly. This was not due to the nature of the Tonga people that inhabited the area, but due to the ferocity of the environmental determinants themselves (see Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3). Whereas this might seem harsh, the significance of this unreceptiveness would eventually produce an exceptionally unique natural and cultural environment, which in today's day and age still embraces much of its original character.

From a socio-economic developmental perspective, the area undoubtedly produced many difficulties. Government efforts to determine possible economic development projects did not produce any viable enterprises and although transportation significantly enhanced the traveller's reach, malaria and Maputaland's sheer ruggedness would not permit tourism to produce an alternative means of development until well into the 1980s. This was about to change radically however and by no other means than the progress of the environmentalist movement and the birth of the sustainable development doctrines.

With the introduction of the sustainable development philosophy and the huge rise in the popularity of adventure tourism (as well as the medical advances in the prevention and treatment of tropical diseases) came the promise of a whole new way of development for Sodwana Bay and the Mbila community. The area's natural and cultural environment revealed it as a haven for the naturalist and adventure traveller and the commitment of the South African government to develop the region was made visible through initiatives such as the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative.

One of the primary objectives of the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative was therefore to develop the necessary infrastructure that would allow tourists into the area as quickly as possible. This was done with the specific intention of stimulating enough tourism-based economic activity in the area, which would allow the Mbila community to be involved to the degree where significant poverty reductions would be achieved. It was also envisaged that the rural community participation in the tourism-based developments of the region would grow to eventually involve them at levels in these developments where they would be able to procure sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their children, in the present and in the future.

According to the set of fundamental elements that were developed to determine the success of this participation, it was discovered that the relevant authorities have indeed

demonstrated considerable commitment towards this empowerment by implementing the policy, legislative and institutional measures that endow the Mbila community with sufficient control to be intimately involved in the tourism-based developments of their area. On the other hand the analysis of the findings has also described (in detail) that significant tourism-based opportunities exist and that the possibility of others are also very real. The findings have also shown that the Mbila community reacted well to these tourism-based developments and that they are even showing progress in the activities that contrast sharply with their cultural background. In recognition of all of this, the principal finding of this research is, however, that the Mbila community are not sufficiently involved in the tourism-based developments of Sodwana Bay, despite all of the above mentioned facts.

In view of this the next logical question would probably be to ask why the community is not sufficiently involved? The reasons for this are described in Table 5.1 under the constraints towards the proper involvement of the community and although quite a few exist, the main themes of these restrictions can probably be summarized under the main headings of restrictive legislation, insufficient capacities which exist within some of the key institutions, insufficient levels of education and training among the community and an insufficient supply of appropriate tourism-based participation opportunities.

The findings thus reveal that although there are definite steps towards the empowerment of the Mbila community, certain key elements are still preventing their satisfactory participation. In relation to institutions such as national governments, it is believed that these kinds of authoritative structures will always play a critical role in the true empowerment of rural communities to participate in all kinds of developments and especially in tourism-based developments, as in the case of Sodwana Bay. These institutions have the absolute obligation to implement strategies and legislation that empowers rural communities in the simplest and strongest possible way.

The private tourism developers in Sodwana Bay have by their contributions shown that they also play a very important role in the involvement of the Mbila community. These commitments should be dually appreciated and asserted efforts should be made to create the necessary partnerships that would sustain their involvement in the joint development of quality tourism products in the Sodwana Bay area. With regard to the Mbila community, the study has found that the community is well aware of the possibilities that sustainable tourism offers. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that they as a community identify the constraints which are preventing their proper

participation in the tourism opportunities and that they systematically work towards eradicating these constraints as far as possible.

The literature and the field research has provided enough testimony to prove that true rural community participation is possible in tourism-based developments such as those in Sodwana Bay. Whether or not the relevant authorities and institutions will carry out the actions that need to be performed to make this possible, remains to be seen.