INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL PARKS: THE SANPARKS PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has tourist destinations with unique attractions and world-class facilities which attract very high numbers of international and local tourists. From the point of view of the tourists, the quality of the infrastructure, such as that for travel and accommodation, also more basic needs such as water and sanitation and reasonable roads, is a major determinant of how much they enjoy the visit.

The paper describes a recent (2019-2023) major initiative (and touches on its 2023-2026 sequel) to improve the infrastructure across all nineteen national parks. Its main objective was the upgrading and maintenance of existing infrastructure, together with some new construction, all by labour-intensive means. Its next most important objective was to do as much of these as possible utilising people, who it would train appropriately, from the poor communities adjacent to the parks. Both objectives were achieved.

The type of work is not by any means unique, nor is the concept of creating job opportunities for the purpose. But the conservation area environment in all of the national parks is definitely unique. Not only that: teams working outside the camps but within the parks have, given the freedom of the "Big Five" to roam, been accompanied where necessary by armed field guides.

Illustrations when presented at SATC would mostly be drawn from roadworks.

Keywords: National parks, Infrastructure maintenance, Tourism, Job creation, Public works programme, Conservation infrastructure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a critical lever for social cohesion, community cooperation and individual participation. South Africa's strength and heartbeat comes from its ability to unlock cross-border, cross-cultural and cross-generational understanding.

The recently published Tourism White Paper (Department of Tourism, 2024), serves as a crucial blueprint for the development of the tourism sector in South Africa. This comprehensive policy document outlines key strategies for promoting tourism, with a focus on inclusivity, sustainability, and job creation. The White Paper emphasises the need for a tourism industry that is not only economically viable but also socially and environmentally responsible. It highlights rising issues such as: embracing technology, crisis management, accessing the destination, personal safety and security of tourists and facilities staff alike, social responsibility (e.g. to communities adjacent to the tourist facility), quality assurance frameworks, skills supply, creating employment and business opportunities, and quality tourist services (e.g. tour guiding, tour operators and travel agents).

Tourism scholars regard tourism infrastructure as imperative for tourism growth as well as destination competitiveness. The responsibility for infrastructure and tourism planning usually lies with the public sector, particularly in South Africa where all three spheres of government (multiple national, provincial and local government) and entities, particularly South African National Parks (SANParks), work together with many private sector and other stakeholders, including many communities playing a supporting role (Chettiar et al., 2022).

In more detail, Zengeni and Muzvidziwa (2018) further identify various agents of development, each with its own role and responsibilities crucially important for the development of public infrastructure. Firstly, the public sector or government is responsible for providing commercial infrastructure such as the roads, airports and seaports which are used for both tourists and local economic activity. Secondly, the private sector, seeking a return on investment it will make, creates viable businesses using the infrastructure provided by the public sector and also that, often within only one locality (e.g. a resort, or business or shopping opportunity), which it will develop.

Within the tourism sector, Panasiuk (2007) classifies tourism infrastructure into six elements:

- diverse activities and attractions offered;
- gastronomy facilities;
- accommodation;
- retail facilities;
- transport facilities;
- ICT facilities.

The accessibility and quality of these elements of tourism infrastructure ultimately determine the quality of the visitors' experience in a tourism destination. South Africa, as in the case of other destinations such as Malaysia (described in Abdullah et al, 2014), also faces challenges such as:

- resource constraints; and
- minimum maintenance systems in place where there are currently no clear policies and strategies for maintenance.

"Maintenance" (for the purposes of this paper, including repair and refurbishment) of fixed infrastructure assets is essential, as they are inevitably subject to gradual wear and ageing, which can occur at many different speeds, depending on the nature of the asset, how robustly it was constructed, how well it has been maintained during its lifetime – and, of course, the amount and nature of its usage. While budgets for maintenance are invariably inadequate in any country (by no means not just for tourism assets), in South Africa, as in many other countries "… government administrations do not make it the priority it warrants.… According to the Department of Tourism, assets are now nearing the end of their lifespans and are sometimes still in use while known to be obsolete or dire need of maintenance and improvement" (Department of Tourism, 2024b:3.)

2. IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE TO TOURISM – AN ILLUSTRATION

The importance of infrastructure to South African tourism was in recent years starkly illustrated by the trajectory of the tourism sector in KwaZulu-Natal as tourism worldwide recovered from COVID.

The KwaZulu-Natal coastline has, thanks to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, for many decades been a major year-round tourist destination, particularly during the Christmas and summer holidays (December-January). While all South African tourist destinations faced financial setbacks during the COVID pandemic, the lifting of restrictions during 2022 should have marked a strong recovery, with tourists returning in large numbers.

As the 2022/2023 peak holiday season approached, the KwaZulu-Natal towns struggled to prepare their recreation facilities, particularly the beaches (Carnie, 2022).

Unfortunately, ongoing reports of river and beach pollution, leading to frequent beach closures, deterred many potential visitors. As a result, tourism facilities, including accommodation, suffered financially.

"The number of tourists who visited Durban during the past festive season [fell] by almost 200,000 compared with the same period in 2019 as tourists shied away from the city amid concerns about poor water quality at its beaches. According to statistics released by the city yesterday, during this past festive season [approximately equivalent to the two months December 2022 and January 2023] 702,735 visited the city, which is a drop compared with 2019, when 900,000 visited the city" (Mercury, 2023: online)

Ongoing reports of water supply problems in towns along the coast contributed to the woes.

Viewing KwaZulu-Natal within the broader context of South African tourism, Table 1 illustrates that while national tourism rebounded strongly in 2022 from its 2021 low and continued to grow in 2023, the province experienced a similar recovery in 2022. However, the province then saw a decline in 2023, likely due to factors such as ongoing pollution and beach closures, together with the water supply problems, as noted above.

Table 1: Domestic tourism, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and SA

Year	*Trips (million)*		*Spend (R billion)*	
	SA	*KZN*	*SA*	*KZN*
2021	16.1	2.6	45.4	10.3
2022	34.0	7.5	99.2	19.4
2023	37.9	6.2	124.4	18.4

Source: Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, 2024:33

In contrast, Cape Town, despite its coastline being along the colder Atlantic Ocean, experienced a robust recovery, enjoying a successful 2022/2023 season, followed by another strong season in 2023/2024. This resurgence was likely bolstered by the announcement that several of its beaches had earned the prestigious Blue Flag award[1] (Keohane, 2023).

Latest statistics released by the CEO of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association show the extent to which KwaZulu-Natal has fallen out of favour relative to

[1] https://www.blueflag.global/

stronger tourist destinations in South Africa, in particular Kruger National Park and its vicinity, and the South Western Cape. Quoting a representative of the hospitality industry, room-night data shows:

- Cape Town and Kruger accounted for 60% of total room nights in 2019 – rising to 69% in 2024.
- KwaZulu-Natal's share fell from 8% to 5%. (Frost 2025, online).

3. THE SANPARKS PROJECT

During the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020, the entire globe was called to lock-down movement, with travel restrictions to combat the spread of the virus and ensure the safety of citizens. In 2023, international arrivals to South Africa reached 8.483 million, which was a 49% growth from the previous year, a significant recovery, but still lower than 2019 arrivals, which had stood at 10.2 million.

COVID had a disastrous impact on the viability of jobs and employment in the tourism industry. Statistics SA (2021) indicated that the related lockdown and travel restrictions imposed decreased the number of travellers (domestic and international) from 13.7 million in 2017 to 6.5 million in 2021. The Tourism White Paper (Department of Tourism, 2024:1) indicated that the total South African tourism direct Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached R208 billion in 2019, but fell to R140 billion in 2020, recovering to R234 billion in 2022.

In the financial year 2023/24, South African National Parks (hereinafter SANParks) received 6 million visitors spread among its 19 national parks (Figure 1), compared to 4.9 million in the previous financial year but still lower than 6.3 million in 2019/20. Tourism revenue grew by 21.1% to R2.162 billion in 2023/24, which was a significant increase from the previous year's R1.785 billion (SANParks, 2024 online). Furthermore, the Kruger National Park, the largest park by far, reported a strong but still incomplete recovery, recording visitor numbers 93% of those seen in the period of 2018/19. Within only the festive season of 2022/2023, approximately 180 000 visitors entered the Kruger National Park, compared with the 194 000 recorded over the same period before the pandemic (Tourism Update, 2023 online).

Of the order of 80% of SANParks' operating budget is generated by tourism in the parks. This means that the fulfilment of SANParks' holistic conservation mandate is heavily reliant on thriving and sustainable tourism – which, in turn, as pointed out earlier, is dependent on, among other things, functioning and attractive facilities, including engineering infrastructure such as roads and water.

SANParks is currently managing an infrastructure portfolio of approximately R 16 billion. A high proportion of the current infrastructure was developed in the 1970s, and has reached or will soon reach the end of its life. Maintenance over the years has not been what it ought to be.

Apart from the obvious reasons why maintenance is required (e.g. wear and tear), occasional catastrophic events, including natural disasters such as heavy downpours, fire and wind, can cause additional damage, usually over a very short space of time, requiring some immediate maintenance (to restore facilities for a usable condition) and also repair, and sometimes replacement, of infrastructure that has been damaged or destroyed. A very recent example relates to flooding in some of the parks, causing infrastructure damage – not uncommon. Kruger National Park has several major rivers running through it and has

several times in recent years, including early in 2025, suffered extensive flood damage. Apart from the physical damage, some access roads were closed, tourism schedules were disrupted, and some of the tourist camps were cut off for a few days (Daily Maverick, 2025 online).

Source: South African National Parks, 2024

Figure 1: Location of the 19 National Parks in South Africa

"When a destination understands the state of its attractions, it can take an informed decision and apply correct strategies to attract more tourists and plans to improve them". (Department of Tourism 2024b:3, quoting Pesonen et al., 2011:303).

Maintenance and infrastructure refurbishment has long been a serious concern for SANParks due to steadily increasing tourist numbers and demand for facilities, contrasted with every years' limited budget allocations for this purpose (the majority of its funding is allocated to conservation, not tourism). As a result, SANParks has not been able to keep up with maintenance and refurbishment.

However, just as the world braced itself for COVID-19, the planning and funding stage of a major SANParks maintenance, repair and refurbishment project was almost complete, and implementation was about to commence. This project, led by the Department of Tourism and SANParks, thus came at a time that was highly opportune for two reasons:

- because of the pandemic, chalets, lodges and attractions were under-utilised or altogether unutilised; and
- the pandemic was about to cause staff layoffs and reduced job opportunities throughout the country – particularly in the tourism industry, where the viability of many small businesses would come under threat. Thus the creation of job opportunities was timely.

This paper describes implementation of the SANParks 2019-2023 Infrastructure Maintenance Project (hereinafter "the project") in all nineteen national parks across the country. Funded by the Department of Tourism utilising an allocation from the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), this project was strategically aligned to the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan (TSRP) (Department of Tourism 2021) as well as the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP) (South Africa 2020).

Its primary objectives were:

- to improve maintenance of infrastructure in the parks, to enhance the tourism destinations in the park and thus the tourist experience; and
- to do this through skills transfer, job creation and small, medium and micro enterprise (SMME) development.

The paper also briefly touches on a 2023-2026 follow-up programme.

4. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope of the Project

As noted above, this project was led by the National Department of Tourism (hereinafter "the Department") and SANParks acting in concert. The R 120 million Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) funding came via the Department. Planning and overall management was undertaken jointly by the Department and SANParks, whereas SANParks was responsible for implementation.

The Department's project team of five[2] worked very closely with the project management team at SANParks to ensure its successful implementation and that all deliverables were met.

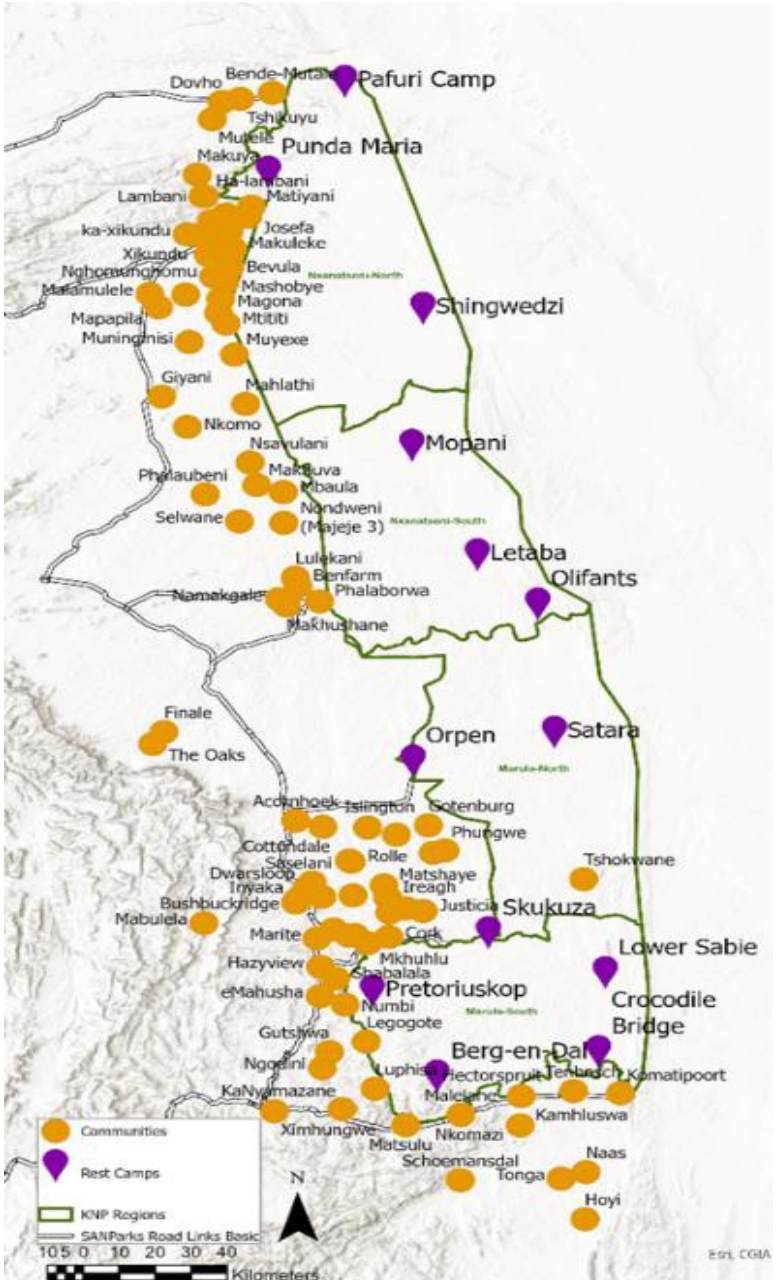
Implementation started in October 2019, and came to an end in March 2023. Overwhelmingly the greatest proportion of the funds was directed to Kruger National Park for the reason that is the biggest conservation area and that it has far more infrastructure requirements than the other national parks. But this emphasis is also understandable in that it is bordered by some of the poorest communities in the country, with extremely high unemployment, whereas a stated project objective of the project was to involve local community members in the work as far as possible.

At the planning phase of the project, during the first quarter of 2019, SANParks developed a detailed plan of what needed to be done to maintain and refurbish its existing tourism infrastructure and assets within the national parks across the country. The maintenance work was to be (and was) performed by small-and medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) and cooperatives comprised of people drawn from communities surrounding the national parks as first preference, and expanded according to the need in compliance with the Tourism B-BBEE Sector Code and the EPWP.

Their daily activities included paving, painting, building maintenance including plumbing and electrical work, roof repair (including thatching), and repairing roads and fences within the parks. Some teams also undertook beautification aspects such as cleaning the beaches and rivers, and the approaches to the national parks. The teams were supervised

[2] Dr Jacobs, the one co-author, was the leader of this team.

by and worked very closely with the well-established technical teams of SANParks, so that participants acquired technical skills such as electrical, plumbing and basic construction, as well as in maintenance and rehabilitation work, particularly of buildings, roads and culverts.



Source: South African National Parks, 2024

Figure 2: Location of Communities from where Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) participants were sourced for Kruger National Park

During the pandemic (primarily 2020, continuing for a while in 2021), the maintenance teams received COVID PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), to ensure their personal safety as well as an implementation of the project not interrupted by having to replace sick participants. This project therefore assisted in combating the hostile consequences of the pandemic, by supporting employment at this difficult time in the tourism industry and the country, as a whole, but particularly by educating members of the communities surrounding the parks from which the workers were recruited.

4.2 Management and Monitoring

From the start of the project, in 2019, until its completion in 2023, SANParks submitted regular reports to Department of Tourism, including the following:

- Quarterly Progress report developed by SANParks and the Department of Tourism.
- EPWP Participant sheet – Monthly.
- Financial Expenditure Report – Monthly.
- Copies of all invoices – Monthly.
- Identity Document of each EPWP Participant.
- Employment contract of SMMEs and participants.
- Progress Payment Reports (PPRs) – Monthly.

Since the project was implemented on a national basis, a Project Steering Committee (PSC) was established with quarterly meetings, initially at SANParks headquarters on the Muckleneuk Ridge in Pretoria, but during the pandemic, online. These were attended by Regional Project Managers of SANParks, and staff from the Department of Tourism. Some outside experts were also invited to become members of the PSC[3].

Regular site visits were conducted by the Department – all parks were visited several times during the implementation period. During these visits, representatives from the Department engaged with SANParks management and the EPWP participants to gain information on the support provided to the until then mostly previously unemployed people, as well as to identify possible issues of concern.

Over and above the above-mentioned reports, a site inspection sheet was developed for the team members visiting the national parks, as a synergised tool to engage with the maintenance teams where the various officials were able to:

- collect data and intelligence.
- monitor the implementation of the project.
- evaluate the socio-economic impact of the project.

These site inspections sheets assessed physical (the work done) and financial progress. They also assessed progress in terms of the following indicators:

- Demographics (gender, youth, people with disabilities)
- Socio-economic impact.
- Evidence of business compliance (for example South African Revenue Services (SARS) Letter of good standing, business registration, employees' contracts).
- Project feedback.
- Working environment.

5. THE INFRASTRUCTURE WORK UNDERTAKEN

5.1. General Maintenance and Repair

General maintenance and repair work was carried out in all 19 parks. Work completed included the following:

[3] Prof Wall, the other co-author, was a member of the Project Steering Committee.

- 9,778 buildings maintained, including internal and external painting, electrical and plumbing works, door and window repair or replacement, and the maintenance of roofing (including thatch repair where appropriate) and flooring.
- 4,269km of fences repaired and maintained.
- 408 buildings re-thatched.
- 159km of footpaths maintained.
- 1,121 (number) of welded items.

The working environment within all of the parks was unique in that these are conservation areas, requiring measures (the exact nature and severity of which depended on the park) such as ensuring plant (vegetation) material and soil brought in from outside the park's ecosystem would not, e.g. by introducing insects hostile to park insect or plant life, threaten the integrity of the conservation area. In some of the parks, moreover, there could be dangerous animals in the vicinity, including the "Big Five", all of these animals with freedom to roam. For the work in those parks, therefore, it was always required that, if the work was outside the fenced camps, the teams would be accompanied by armed field guides in order to ensure their safety.

5.2 Looking More Closely at the Roads Within the National Parks

Table 2 shows the roads deliverables year by year. Over four years, the project maintained 2,641km of road, and repaired over 3300 potholes, amongst other work. Note that, in addition to maintenance, considerable construction of "new" was also undertaken. The total expenditure for the maintenance of the roads was R 8.9 million, 25% above the planned budget allocation (R 7.2 million).

Table 2: Road maintenance deliverables achieved (Source: SANParks, 2023)

Activity	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	4 YEAR TOTAL
Km of roads maintained (fixing holes, removing rocks, etc.)	101	859	838	842	**2,641**
Km of road verges cleared (removal of vegetation/ rocks / etc.)	99	1,230	784	2,435	**4,548**
No of drainage structures cleaned, repaired or refurbished	535	210	441	143	**1,329**
No of potholes repaired	289	625	1,913	540	**3,367**
Paving Repairs (m²)	234	1,724	1,299	1,622	**4,879**
New Paving (m²)	360	3,933	8,740	1,449	**14,482**







Source: South African National Parks

Figure 3: Maintenance on roads and drainage, footpaths

6. RESULTS: JOBS AND TRAINING

The one main objective of the project was the upgrading and maintenance of existing infrastructure, together with some new construction, all by labour-intensive means. But the next most important objective was to do as much of this as possible utilising people from the poor communities adjacent to the parks, training them in appropriate skills.

6.1 Job Opportunities Created

The Socio-Economic Transformation Unit of SANParks assisted with the community liaison and recruitment of SMMEs and EPWP participants. Small contractor positions were advertised, and a process followed to select the successful candidate. EPWP participants started working in the latter part of 2019 in the Frontier Region of Parks Division, followed by the Garden Route and Northern Regions, Arid Region and the Cape Region. The recruitment in Kruger National Park could only be finalised after project management capacity was appointed, thus work started here in November 2020.

A typical maintenance team consisted of 10 people, i.e., 1 x contractor, 1 x skilled, 2 semi-skilled and 6 general labourers. Some of the teams employed more skilled workers where needed. All of the parks made use of more than one contractor.

Whereas the project had aimed to employ 600 people, in the end it created 953 temporary jobs. This apparent over-achievement was partly real, but mostly due to various staffing challenges faced during the implementation, such as:

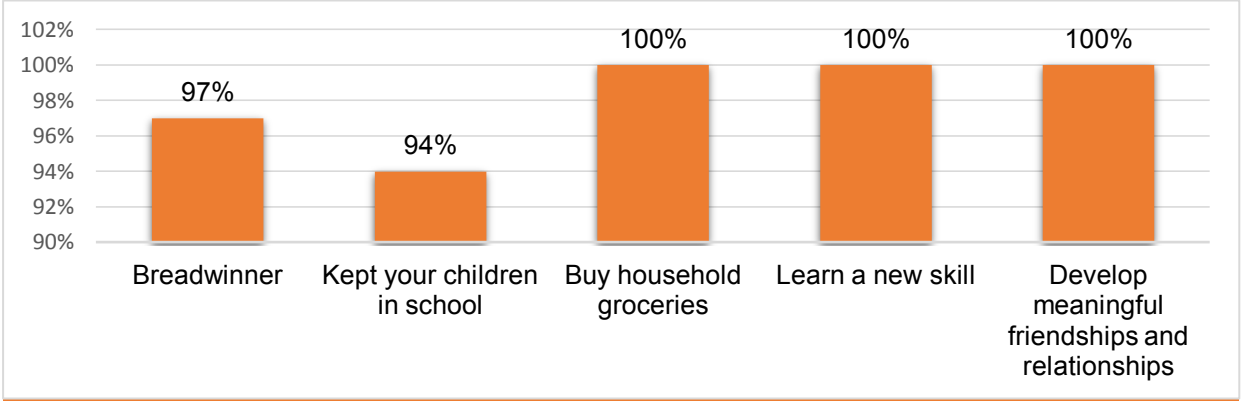
- High turnover in some teams, e.g. Kgalagadi and Richtersveld, where participants often did not return to work after a weekend. This abandonment of a job, here and elsewhere, could also in some instances be ascribed to the workers discovering they were expected to sleep out in the remote parks and thus be away from their homes for a week at a time. (They slept out in order to avoid having to travel the sometimes long distances between home and the work site).
- The lockdown from 26 March 2020 to June 2020 also had an impact – some participants did not return to work after this period.
- There was a higher turnover experienced in teams where one or more of the contractors did not perform, and had to be replaced, such as at Golden Gate and Wilderness.

Teams worked for between 29 and 37 months, depending on the workload in each park, but also the impact delays and stoppages, such as having to replace workers who departed.

As noted earlier, 953 temporary jobs were created, many of them in some of the poorest and most remote areas of the country. Thirty people with disabilities were employed, also 345 women and 519 youth. In total, 1,476 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs were created and 339,495 person days worked. That the project achieved 54% youth and 36% women employment, lower than the planned targets, can probably be ascribed to some of the teams having to sleep over in parks.

The project created and supported 67 small contractors for an average period of 30 months and 89% of the project funds were paid to them. They provided mostly labour, with limited supervision capacity, while SANParks provided the materials and quality control – also coordinating the teams and scheduling their work.

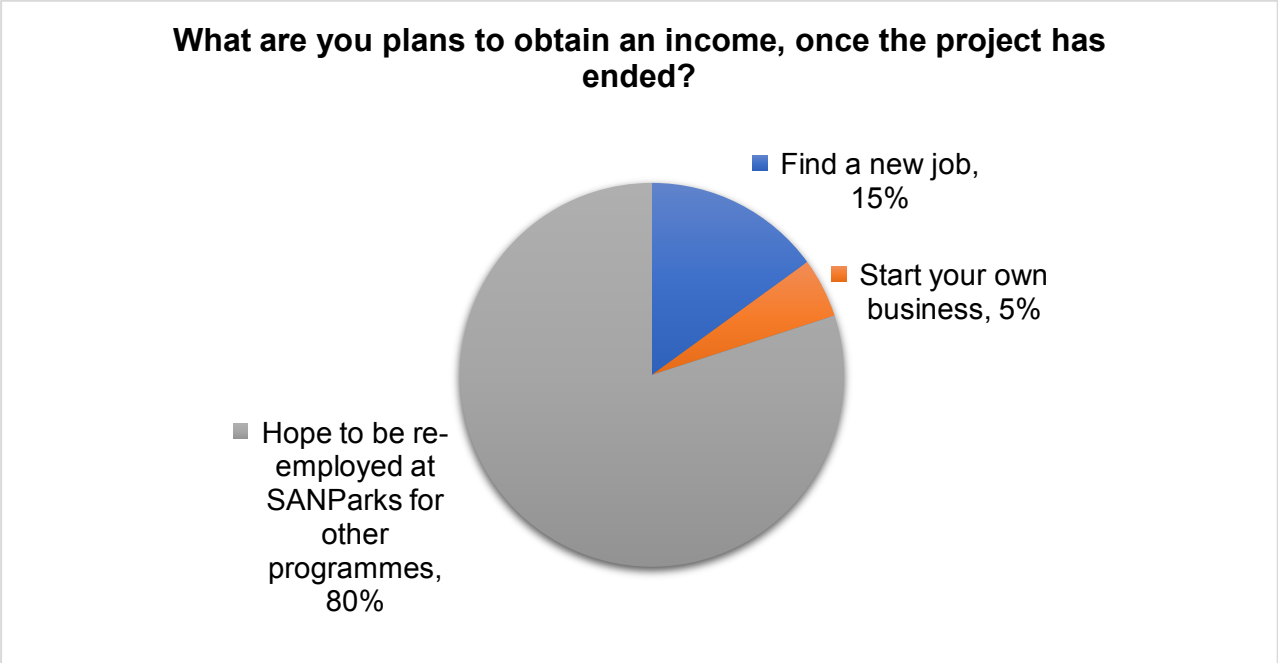
A post-completion “exit interview” survey of participants revealed that the project had a huge impact on the lives of the local communities, especially because 97% of those employed were their household breadwinners. Many indicated that they learned a new skill and were able to keep their children in school. Figure 4 refers.



Source: Department of Tourism, 2023

Figure 4: Socio economic impact

When asked what their plans were after the project had ended, many simply stated that they wished that the project would continue. Disappointingly few indicated they would start their own businesses (Figure 5 refers). Starting a new business requires capital to ensure that the business is compliant and many did not have access to start their own enterprise or the required business acumen. Therefore, to continue with working at SANParks as a direct employee was perceived to be a more likely way to earn a salary. The national parks are also more accessible and provide employment closer to the local settlements and villages, without any need to travel further to a contract, or even to have to relocate.



Source: Department of Tourism, 2023

Figure 5: Post-project prospects

6.2 Training Provided for the Local Communities

The project offered both South African Qualification Authority (SAQA)[4] accredited and non-accredited training implemented under the Department of Tourism Business Incubator Project. A total of 5,509 training days were recorded, despite the "on the job" training not being fully recorded by all the parks. The non-accredited training included Occupational Health and Safety, OHS Representative, first aider, EPWP basics, working in a national park (as opposed to working in an area which is not a conservation area), life skills, HIV/AIDS, practical skills training (such as tiling, painting, plumbing, electrical), incident investigation, personal mastery and business etiquette, and project management (project initiation, project planning, project execution, project monitoring and closing).

In some of the parks, particularly in Kruger National Park, this training was provided in-house by SANParks personnel. In other cases, training tasks were outsourced to service providers.

Some of the SMMEs in Kruger National Park were also included in a mentorship programme for enterprise development and were exposed to strategic planning, compliance, financial planning, implementation of records management, business management principles, project management, strategic marketing, procurement management, role clarity and work allocation, training and development of employees, employee health and safety, UIF/COIDA, salaries and rewards, financial management, and bookkeeping.

Some of the training was accredited, including courses to address the specific needs of business incubation in infrastructure maintenance. Examples include the National Certificate: New Venture Creation for SMMEs, Entrepreneurial Development (NQF Level 2), and Education and Training Certificate: Supervision of Construction Processes (NQF Level 4).

6.3 Lessons Learnt

The project provided ample evidence, if further evidence was needed, of the suitability of the repair and routine maintenance of low-technology infrastructure, a task which for the most part does not need entrants who have completed basic education much beyond primary school level, as a means to employ this group, the group that suffers the highest levels of unemployment in the country. The need for much more maintenance of fixed infrastructure in the ownership of the public sector has been shown over and over again. So often, the "missing ingredient" is budget. Which is why the funding provided for this project was such a godsend, particularly in that it enabled employment of members of some of the poorest people in the country, i.e. those living in deep rural communities – moreover, that it was available during the pandemic, a time when alternative opportunities to earn were particularly few and far between.

The project, an element of the response to the Economy Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (ERRP) [5]and that part of the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan which aims to improve and protect the Core Tourism Infrastructure and Assets, addressed maintenance needs of existing tourism infrastructure, and in this case, the maintenance needs at national parks. However, maintenance should be conducted on a continual basis as it is important that the

[4] www.saqa.org.za
[5] https://www.thedtic.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/ERRP-Progress.pdf

public sector provide much needed assistance and restoration of the nation's core tourism infrastructure and assets.

An aspect that the project did not sufficiently take into account was the cost of transporting workers to the parks and within the parks. The national parks are outside of the local communities so reaching them takes time and requires a lot of driving, sometimes every day, fetching and carrying workers. Future budgets for similar projects would need to make larger allowances for the cost of transporting workers.

Availability of tools and material are important for the continuity of work. There were times when it was difficult to procure material, especially during the COVID-19 period, and work-plans had to be adjusted until relevant tools and material were available. ("Difficult" for two reasons: (i) the parks are for the most part quite distant from suppliers and, even after tools and materials had been ordered, it took a while for them to reach the workplace; and (ii) public sector procurement processes can be protracted, because of bureaucracy and other reasons. These problems contributed to workers sometimes having to be switched from one task to another and, later, back again, or even having to stand idle for a while).

6.4 Follow-up Project

Subsequent to the maintenance project that ended in 2023, SANParks conducted an assessment of the maintenance needs of frequent use roads in Kruger National Park, including identifying infrastructure facilities which require refurbishment.

Towards the end of 2023, SANParks announced that an additional R700 million for infrastructure investment would be allocated over the three years (2024-2026). This allocation, this time by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE), will continue to improve visitor experience at national parks. Moreover, as noted earlier, much of the existing infrastructure is close to the end of its life – the argument for re-capitalisation is strong. Thus this new project has laid more emphasis on refurbishment and new construction, as opposed to the previous project with its emphasis on maintenance and repair (SANParks, 2023).

The new project, now well underway, with likely completion in 2026, has created over one thousand new jobs. Like its predecessor, it offers job and training opportunities, and opportunities for SMMEs to transact with the parks, contributing to the development of adjacent mostly rural economies (SANParks, 2024b online).

Quite a number of roads projects are to be undertaken. or example:

- Rhodes Memorial bulk services and roads (Table Mountain National Park), to revive an earlier public private partnership that ran the restaurant here.[6]
- Paved road maintenance in the Cape Point Reserve (Table Mountain National Park).
- Shangoni Entrance Gate development in the north of Kruger National Park, including the construction of river crossings and the upgrading of the main gravel road.
- Upgrade of roads in Addo Elephant National Park.
- Upgrade of roads in Kgalagadi Transfrontier National Park.

[6] The restaurant had been destroyed in a major fire that raged in the area, April 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Table_Mountain_fire#

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has described the now complete 2019-2023 national parks Infrastructure Maintenance Project, which was funded with EPWP funding, and implemented by the Department of Tourism, South Africa and the South African National Parks, and its impact, demonstrated in terms of infrastructure work completed, job creation, SMME development and skills transferred.

It underlined the importance of SANParks and its partners continuing, through maintenance and repair of infrastructure, to ensure the quality of tourism facilities, enhancing the visitor experience and improving South Africa's tourism destination competitiveness.

8. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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