

# The socio-economic impacts of ecotourism in rural areas: a case study of Nompondo and the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP)

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## Abstract

Community involvement is increasing in importance in relation to nature conservation and ecotourism which includes public participation in decision-making, access to biological resources and communities' receipt of benefits from ecotourism. South Africa is well known for biodiversity conservation. Yet, research indicates that neighbouring historically disadvantaged communities remain impoverished and have limited access to resources and benefits from conservation areas. Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP) is a key conservation area and ecotourism destination in South Africa. This study examines the socio-economic impacts of ecotourism in rural areas adjacent to HiP with specific reference to the Nompondo community to assess whether the historical trends of marginalisation remain. One hundred and thirty households (from a total of 435 households that comprise the Nompondo community) were interviewed using the systematic sampling approach. The results indicate that the Nompondo community benefits in various ways but not to their level of satisfaction. Members of the community are allowed access to resources such as meat, thatching grass, firewood and water. Additionally, a range of opportunities for positive interactions with the Park's management/ staff include job opportunities, good working relations and joint problem solving. Key tourism related benefits include interaction with the tourists, sale of crafts and opportunities to profile cultural activities. However, there remains the need to improve beneficiation given the high poverty and unemployment rates in Nompondo.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic impacts, Nompondo community, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Resources

## Introduction

There is increasing attention on community involvement in relation to nature conservation and ecotourism in developing contexts, especially in South Africa where historical racially discriminatory practices resulted in local rural communities being dispossessed from areas to make way for conservation areas. The dispossession was also associated with local people being denied or having limited access to natural/ biological resources in these designated natural conservation areas or Parks and beneficiation from income-generating activities such as ecotourism. Post-apartheid, research indicates that many neighbouring historically disadvantaged communities to national Parks in South Africa remain impoverished and have limited access to resources and benefits from conservation areas. A number of key tourist attractions are located in rural areas and yet local communities are not receiving the benefits stemming from the tourism industry (Chaminuka, Groeneveld, Selomane & Van Ierland, 2012).

Giampiccoli and Kalis (2012) state that ecotourism is one of the newest opportunities for income generation from natural resources without destroying the environment. Furthermore, Wearing (2011) indicates that the fundamental principles of ecotourism refer to minimising negative impacts on the environment, representing local cultures and actively contributing to the economic well-being of host/ local communities as well as the stakeholders involved. Although many studies show how destination areas benefit significantly from the tourism industry, less has been shown on how poor rural communities benefit since there is limited involvement of local communities and previously neglected groups in tourism (Dondeyne, Kaarhus & Allison, 2012). There is limited research on the socio-economic impacts of ecotourism in KwaZulu-Natal which is a key tourism destination in South Africa. This study examines the socio-economic impacts of ecotourism in rural areas adjacent to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP) which is a key conservation area and ecotourism destination in KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa more generally with specific reference to the Nompondo community to assess whether the historical trends of marginalisation remain.

The rest of the article provides, firstly, a brief literature review that highlights key issues pertaining to ecotourism and local economic development with a specific focus on South Africa. The next section provides a background of the case study used in this research and the questionnaire survey approach adopted to collect primary data. The results from the questionnaire are then discussed. Finally, a conclusion is provided.

### **Literature review**

Bob, Swart, Maharaj and Louw (2008) state that ecotourism promotes an enhanced appreciation of natural environments and environmental education by exposing visitors and locals to nature and conservation. Closely linked to ecotourism is the concept of sustainability which Morelli (2013) indicates focuses on development in such a manner that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development.

There is an increased focus on community development and tourism (including ecotourism specifically in rural areas) with several researchers indicating potential benefits. Kala (2013) states that ecotourism increase local ownership of businesses and control over resources in the locality, and enhances local participation in development. Stronza and Gordillo (2008) indicate that tourism bring other benefits to rural areas such as economic growth, diversification, stabilisation, job creation, expansion of local services, scope for integration of regional development strategies, decrease in emigration and depopulation, maintenance and improvement of public services and infrastructure, renaissance of local culture and identity, community empowerment, protection and improvement of the natural and built environment, increased local sense of pride, increased awareness of rural primacy and increased development capacity by policy-makers and economic planners.

Aguila and Ragot (2014) argue that ecotourism industry has a significant impact on regional economic development, especially in developing countries and regions. While it is acknowledged that ecotourism in protected areas have positive economic development, such as direct employment, both on and off site, the diversification of the local economy, the earning of foreign exchange, and the improvement to transportation and communication systems, there are also related negatives in relation to community aspects. For example, Sebele (2010) raises four pertinent questions:

- How do financial benefits reach the community in the form of rent, gate fees and profit sharing?
- To what extent are earnings, wages or shared community income distributed across the rural community?
- How successful have these projects been in creating employment?
- To what extent has tourism development encouraged the creation of secondary income generating activities such as laundry services, charcoal making, butcher facilities or taxi services?

Seetanah (2011) also refers to the over-dependence on tourism for economic growth and welfare just as depending on any other single product can make some countries defenseless to economic stability. Additionally, Nzama (2010) asserts that there is a danger of tourists being seasonal, unreliable income as well as stress brought about in the process of tourism promotion especially if not well planned and properly understood. Furthermore, Brockington (2007) maintains that wildlife conservation imposes significant costs on rural people living in, adjacent to or in close proximity to the Parks through crop damage, livestock predation and human deaths, and restriction of access to natural resources. Additionally, Chilli and Mabaso (2016) indicate that while there is substantial potential for the development of small tourism enterprises in South Africa, several challenges remain.

In terms of social impacts of ecotourism numerous positive and negative impacts have been highlighted in the literature. Narayan, Narayan, Prasad and Prasad (2010) state that the social impacts of tourism refer to the changes in the quality of life of the host communities. The demonstration effect is a key focus which concentrates on the disruptive role of tourism on the cultures and values of local communities. Snyman (2012), for instance, indicates that local people, mainly the youth, tend to copy the behaviours and spending patterns of tourists. Ringer (2013) asserts that most evidence shows social disbenefits as locals strive for the marks of affluence staged by tourists, thus living beyond their means. Studies also look at the relationship between tourism, security and crime (George, 2010; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008), alcohol, drug abuse and gambling (George, 2010) and tourism and prostitution (Sinclair & Sinclair, 2013). Although tourism can promote the provision of improved health care in the destination areas since it has to meet the high standards of tourists, it can act as a vehicle to spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) which can also be transmitted through sex tourism (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Mccarthy, Quiñones, Lushin, Skinner-Day, Padilla & Meisterlin, 2013).

In relation to rural development, Raymond, Fazey, Reed, Stringer, Robinson and Evely (2010) advise that African rural development has resulted in the identifying of three aspects: firstly, to recognise that centrally-driven, top-down, dictatorial and economically biased approaches have not been a great success; secondly, the need to re-assess the potential and inherent capacity within communities to help themselves; and thirdly, the recognition of the sustainability and appropriateness of 'indigenous' skills and expertise in the form of 'appropriate technology'. Rogerson (2011) states that ecotourism in rural areas offers communities in rural areas an alternate avenue to sustain their livelihoods. Furthermore, Groom and Palmer (2010) refer to ecotourism as being a viable option in the search for sustainable production activities in local rural communities that confront a deterioration of their natural resources and a reduction in activities that focus on self-subsistence. Links with rural tourism activities in local communities in particular can result in local services and infrastructure being supported and improved with increased income generating opportunities. However, in the South Africa context, a range of challenges remain in rural areas which include lack of infrastructure and services (including roads, energy supply and water provision) as well as a low skills base and levels.

Issues around local community benefits associated with ecotourism have also been raised in the literature. There is almost no research which previously states that ecotourism can be developed successfully without local community support (Okazaki, 2008). However, conservation management practices remain focused on prohibiting, controlling and/ or restricting access to the natural resource base in the designated Park area which in South Africa is often fenced off; often marginalising rural communities. Vedeld, Jumane, Wapalila and Songorwa (2012) support this assertion and state that local communities living adjacent to protected areas have traditionally been fenced out from such protected areas and have, in some occurrences, even been forcibly removed for the sake of conservation. Büscher and Dressler (2012) indicate that the strategy of marginalising protected area communities to the extent of exclusion is connected with a renewed emphasis on traditional protectionist approaches to conservation and protected area management.

Many protected areas in Africa are surrounded by low income communities and challenges, trade-offs and potential synergies exist between optimising for income from visitors and delivering benefits and building and maintaining a healthy relationship with neighbouring communities (Biggs, Turpie, Fabricius & Spenceley, 2011). From an environmental perspective, for example, protecting and improving the integrity of the natural resource base is a main concern. Additionally, Vedeld *et al.* (2012) state that the foremost attention of protected areas fall on the conservation of biological biodiversity, the demarcation of borders and the establishment of tourist facilities; with slight contemplation for the impacts of these areas on the livelihoods of (often poor) local communities. The concept of carrying capacity is crucial in this regard. From a sociological perspective carrying capacity applies to the maximum number of people who can utilise a location without an unacceptable decline in the quality of the experience gained by tourists (Zhong, Deng, Song & Ding, 2011) or the destination's ability to absorb tourism before the community feels the negative effects (Kim, Uysal & Sirgy, 2013). Without significant involvement in and benefits from protected area tourism, protected area communities struggle to meet subsistence needs to the extent that resettlement may be the only option to sustain livelihoods (Harihar, Ghosh-Harihar & Macmillan, 2014).

According to van der Merwe and Wocke (2007), communities need to be empowered to be able to participate in the management of areas so that they can have a say in the distribution of the benefits and the sustainable use of their environment. This is extremely important since, as Van Wijk, Van Der Duim, Lamers and Sumba (2015) state, despite the limitations of ecotourism, it should be emphasised that large segments of the rural communities live in conditions of extreme poverty, high unemployment levels and with otherwise very limited options from which to derive an income. Thus, when compared with other sources of income, the potential additional income that some households may expect to derive from opportunities in the protected area, no matter how marginal these may be, can make a substantial difference to people living in poverty and surviving on a subsistence basis (Van Wijk *et al.*, 2015).

In recent years promising developments have been realised in various parts of South Africa where poor rural communities are being offered the opportunities to become partners in an economic venture within a protected area (Gardner, Nicoll, Mbohoahy, Oleson, Ratsifandrihamanana, Ratsirarson, René De Roland, Virah-Sawmy, Zafindrasilivonona & Davies, 2013). In fact, Ndlovu (2005) asserts that the issue is not just offering employment opportunities or meaningful participation but ownership with decision-making powers. The Pilanesberg National Park in the Northwest Province, for example, is an illustrative example where community development and protected area conservation has been integrated where neighbouring communities are part of the decision-making process and this has been achieved

through a joint liaison forum (Manavhela & Spencer, 2012). In the Pilanesberg National Park, local communities were fully consulted prior to the introduction of lions in the Park and the communities decide on the allocation and distribution of money obtained from the Park which has been used to develop a community owned and managed game reserve, to improve water supplies and to build school classrooms (Saayman, Rossouw & Saayman, 2012). In addition to participation in decision-making, local communities have the opportunity to share the benefits received as a result of the Park's existence. For example, Carruthers (2011) indicates that 10% of gate entry fees go to the local communities, the local people hold some of the senior Park positions, and small local firms receive contracts for road construction and maintenance.

The Richtersveld National Park in Northern Cape, which is based upon a contract between the local people and the National Parks Board, is yet another example where local people are allowed to live inside the Park and they co-manage the Park with the National Parks Board (Naughton-Treves, Holland & Brandon, 2005). In addition, a local goods industry has been created on the boundaries of the Park, technical training programmes have been designed to increase the capacity of local residents as well as the expansion of environmental programmes and bursary schemes to enable the local people to participate in sustainable development schemes (Connolly, 2010). Another example is the Somkhanda community in a remote rural area in northern KwaZulu-Natal who has already found a measure of prosperity by accepting ecotourism where the average income per household had trebled from R450 a year to approximately R1 300 in 2010 as a result of ecotourism (Hansen, 2013). This is a good example of how successful ecotourism can combine environmental conservation with the development of depressed rural economies.

Nzama (2010) highlights examples of tourism-related activities within neighbouring communities bordering the HiP. Mchunu Bed and Breakfast is community based and was established near the iMfolozi section entrance. It is locally owned by one family and consists of traditional Zulu huts which can accommodate about thirty people. The guests have an opportunity of being served traditional Zulu food and entertained through Zulu songs and dances. Guests normally spend one or two nights and often combine it with a visit to the Park. This facility is the major source of income for the family. Another example presented by Nzama (2010) was a piece of land that was put aside to establish a Community Conservation Reserve for conservation/ecotourism opportunities in one of the communities living adjacent to the western boundary of the Hluhluwe section.

The community has recognised the potential for cultural tourism which involve Zulu dancing and singing, visits to traditional healers and the tribal court, and the sale of handicrafts as an entrepreneurial activity. Nzama (2010) notes that the community has developed a high level of trust with Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW) and regards it as a reliable partner in community development and upliftment. The author also indicates that craft outlets have also been established near Nyalazi and Memorial entrance gates in HiP. The two curio shops are a source of income to those involved, mainly women without any formal education, as well as accessibility to formal employment. Though the business is not very promising, there is potential to increase the income of the local people.

The discussion indicates that ecotourism and socio-economic community aspects are complex with several interconnected influences as well as positive and negative impacts. The next section focuses on the case study used in this research.

## **Methods**

### **Background to case study**

The province of KwaZulu-Natal has 66 provincial parks under the jurisdiction of EKZNW with 19 Stewardship Sites (private land) and 27 community-based conservation areas and some of these conservation areas are not yet fully proclaimed as community conservation areas (EKZNW, 2009). The former Hluhluwe and Umfolozi Game Reserves (which combined forms the HiP) were proclaimed as protected areas in 1895 because some conservationists were concerned about the reduction of game animals in Zululand due to hunting (Adeleke & Nzama, 2013). The HiP is located in South Africa in the north-eastern part of KwaZulu-Natal between 28° 00' S 31 ° 42' E and 28° 26' S 32° 09'. It is approximately 60 km from the sea and 270 km from Durban. It can be accessed from the north via the Hluhluwe town, from the south via Mtubatuba and from the west through Ulundi. It is surrounded by ten Tribal Authorities and covers an area of approximately 96 453 hectares with a perimeter fence enclosing the entire complex as a unit and a tar road which links the Hluhluwe and iMfolozi Sections through the corridor section (EKZNW, 2009). Nompondo falls under the Mdletsheni tribal area in the Hlabisa Local Municipality. To the east of the HiP, the land use is characterised by extensive agricultural, commercial, industrial and infrastructural development. However, as you move closer to the HiP and to its west, land use practices are more traditional consisting of rural residential and subsistence agriculture on communal land.

The HiP and the neighbouring Nompondo community were chosen for study because the community is typical of many rural communities adjacent to HiP which are characterised by a relatively high population density, poverty, unemployment and also by increasing degraded subsistence agricultural land around the Park (Knight, Driver, Cowling, Maze, Desmet, Lombard, Rouget, Botha, Boshoff & Castley, 2006). These communities desire access to land and other natural resources from within the Park. Secondly, there has been a long history of difficult relations and conflict between poor communities residing adjacent to the HiP, posing conservation management challenges to protect the unique biodiversity resources of the Park while at the same time ensuring the provision of tangible benefits to the various stakeholders such as tourists, conservationists and the local communities in particular. The HiP is also a popular tourist destination and is regarded as the foremost wildlife attraction in KwaZulu-Natal (Adeleke & Nzama, 2013) which is linked to favourable weather conditions and climate as well as its high diversity in terms of landscapes, fauna and flora.

### **Survey methodology**

One hundred and thirty households (from a total of 435 households that comprise the Nompondo community) were interviewed using the systematic sampling approach. Thus, 31% of the households in Nompondo were interviewed. Every third household was interviewed until the required number (130) of households was completed. The first case was selected randomly. Respondents were selected from each of the 6 sub-wards (Ngqumela, Dakaneni, Mgodla, Ncemane, kwaNtshangase and Dulikhulu) that make up the Nompondo community. The criterion used was that the respondent had to be an adult member (>18 years) from each household. A structured survey was the primary method of data collection for this study. The survey was complemented by key informant interviews with Nompondo community members and EKZNW (HiP and Community Conservation Section) officials. The choice of respondents from the HiP management was purposive. Two officials from the Community Conservation Section were selected because they are directly involved with the communities.

## Results

In terms of the demographic profile of the respondents, the results indicate that 63.8% were female as compared to 36.2% who were male. The average age of the respondents was 38.1 years and ranged from 18 years to 65 years. The majority of respondents were in the 26-35 years (33.1%) and 36-45 years (29.2%) categories. In terms of racial classification, the majority of respondents in the Nompondo community were Africans (99.2%) and one White was interviewed. Furthermore, in terms of home language, a significant portion of respondents in the community speak isiZulu (88.5%), followed by English (6.2%) and isiXhosa (5.4%). Thirty percent of the respondents from the Nompondo community had no formal education and only 17.7% of the respondents had matriculated. In addition to this, only 6.9% had a formal qualification in the form of a diploma or a degree. The majority of respondents in the Nompondo community (43.1%) were single, followed by currently married (35.4%). The average number in the household was 9 and ranged from 3 to 15. Larger household sizes reflect demands that are likely to be placed on the natural resource base. The larger the family, the greater the demand for food and other amenities.

The majority of the respondents (77.7%) are unemployed. Linked to this is the high reliance on remittances (38.5%) and grants/ pensions (26.2%) as the main source of income in the household as shown in the Table below. Some of the households indicated wages/ formal income (16.1%). It is important to note that only 11.5% indicated farm harvest which reflects the decline on the reliance of agriculture as a main source of income in poor rural areas. The discussions with the respondents and the key informants showed that many households have multiple sources of income and often more than one grant/ pension. Multiple livelihood/ survival strategies is also indicative of higher levels of poverty. Furthermore, although some of the respondents sell crop and animal products to earn a living, they mainly practice subsistence farming. This is a typical practice in a poor rural set-up where there is not enough resources such as capital, land, markets and skilled human power to engage in commercial farming.

Table 1: Main source of monthly income

Income	Frequency (n=130)	Percentage
Pensions/ old age grant	10	7.7
Remittances	50	38.5
Wages/ formal income	21	16.1
Informal income	10	7.7
Farm harvest	15	11.5
Disability grant	3	2.3
Child support grant	21	16.2

The households in this study in part reflect the situation described by Vedeld *et al.* (2012), especially in relation to high unemployment rates and lack of basic infrastructure and services. However, some improvements post-apartheid (1994) have been noted. For example, before 1994, almost all the households (96.2%) were residing in traditional huts while post-1994, 92.3% were residing in formal homes. The few who lived in traditional huts were over 60 years old and did so because of their strong cultural beliefs. However, similar patterns do not exist for other amenities. For example, before 1994, 93.8% of respondents stated that they had pit latrines as the form of sanitation. The same percentage had pit latrines during the time of the interviews. When the researcher asked the respondents about this, they indicated that they cannot afford to have flush toilets in their households due to the nature of water supply that is not reliable in the area. This was confirmed by the ward counsellor as a key informant who indicated that pit latrines seem to be the most efficient and reliable form of sanitation for the Nompondo community given the economic plight of the households (including high levels of

unemployment) and current water supply in the community. While most households had public taps (69.3%) or tap water on household site (23.8%), most indicated that they use a variety of sources including streams, wells, dams and rainwater because of reliability and affordability concerns. Furthermore, the households have a variety of energy sources which include fuelwood, candles, paraffin and gas with only 7.7% of the households accessing electricity from public supply.

The majority of the respondents (83%) indicated that they did not experience any tourism related problems due to living next to the HiP. However, 17% of the respondents indicated that they experienced problems as a result of tourism due to residing next to HiP. As highlighted in the literature review, wildlife management has been based on the adoption of punitive measures designed to maintain barriers between wildlife resources in protected areas and local residents living in or around such areas (Büscher & Dressler, 2012; Van Wijk *et al.*, 2015; Vedeld *et al.*, 2012). This case study shows that the majority of the respondents do not feel that they experience problems as a result of residing close to HiP. Among those who experienced problems, crop damage by wild animals that escape from the HiP (10.8%), human-wildlife conflicts, limited job opportunities (3%), wildlife crime (1.5%), conflict (0.8%) and livestock loss (0.8%) were identified. The responses indicate that the problems were associated with wild animals which is similar to other studies such as Brockington (2007). The main suggestions to address the problems experienced were to ensure that the damage caused is compensated and to introduce greater security and control measures.

Perceived and potential conflicts between rural communities and protected areas were also discussed with the respondents and key informants. These include poor conditions of rural communities, the danger posed by wild animals and general breakdown in communication among various affected stakeholders, especially local communities and HiP. Stakeholders of protected areas have acknowledged the integral and essential links among adjacent communities to protected areas, interested and affected parties and the wider natural environment beyond boundaries of protected areas (Hansen, 2013). Proponents of ecotourism have realised that the involvement of local communities is essential for sustainable tourism development (Connolly, 2010; Gardner *et al.*, 2013; Groom & Palmer, 2010; Morelli, 2013).

The respondents were asked about their relationship with the management or staff of the HiP. The overwhelming majority of respondents (99.2%) indicated that they have relationships with HiP management or staff and only one respondent indicated no relationship with HiP management. The literature review highlights the importance of positive people and parks relationships and interactions (Biggs *et al.*, 2011; Nzama, 2010). There is a need to build relationships between staff, community and management since no Parks or reserves can exist without viable and constructive community participation. Furthermore, Strickland-Munro *et al.* (2010) argue that improving relations between Parks and the neighbouring communities has been underscored as one of the highest priorities on the conservation agenda in South Africa. This is attributed to the fact that since economic costs incurred by some of the local residents bordering protected areas far exceed the benefits, there is a need to provide incentives for local people to support, rather than oppose protected area conservation ventures.

The results from Nompondo community reveal that most of the respondents perceived their quality of interaction with the Park management and staff as excellent (2.3%), very good (2.3%), good (74.6%) and average (12.3%). Only 3.1% rated the interaction as bad and 5.4% indicated very bad, forwarding reasons which included problematic animals and absence of assistance of any form from the Park. The reasons the respondents gave for their positive perceptions were availability of environmental education (20%), good relationships (20%), accessibility to natural

resources (15.4%), job opportunities (12.3%), opportunities for interaction with tourists (7.8%), joint problem solving (5.4%) and receive assistance when needed (1.5%). This positive interaction is further supported by the information obtained through personal communications with the various affected and interested parties. For example, one of the general assistants who is both a Park employee and a resident in one of the neighbouring communities perceived the interaction as good. The general assistant further stated that with the exception of a few residents, who still claim the ownership of the animals in the Park, there were no more serious conflicts such as land claims. At the same time, the park ecologist perceived the interaction as fair according to the information supplied by the HiP staff residing within the neighbouring communities.

The Conservator and the Regional Community Conservation Coordinator also perceived the quality of interaction as generally good, although the latter cautioned that the land ownership issue and the illegal use of natural resources cause some of the local people to have poor to very poor relationships. The reasons the Conservator gave for his perception are the existence of easy and free communication, interdependence, joint problem solving, good personal relationships with the Tribal Authorities and the role played by the HiP in community development and upliftment. For instance, the local communities are assisted in developing funding proposals to establish vegetable gardens and craft centres, when they hold functions the Park provides transport and tents, and in cases of emergency sicknesses or accidents they are taken to hospitals.

Additionally, according to the Conservation Manager and the Community Conservation Coordinator, the Park also offers nature conservation education though on a small-scale and, in collaboration with the communities, it is in a process of building an education centre. The main target will be the school groups where the primary school learners will be catered for during the day and high school learners will stay overnight. The Community Conservation Coordinator further clarified that nature conservation education as well as biodiversity education programmes, which are varied and diverse, are in operation. Each programme is developed in response to the educational needs of the instructors and learners. The programmes, which are undertaken at schools and in the Park include a study project, which looks at the investigation of diverse environmental issues. Environmental education camps are also available where the focus is on people and parks as well as day visits which focus on animal wildlife population dynamics. In joint problem solving, the problems addressed include problematic animals and alien plant control. This is achieved through either direct discussions or via the Tribal Authorities who then pass on the information to their subordinates.

Respondents from the Nompondo community were asked whether they require access to HiP for social and cultural reasons and all of the respondents indicated that they do require access to the Park. They were further asked whether they are given access to HiP for desired reasons and the majority of the respondents (88.5%) indicated that they are given access. Some of the respondents (11.5%) indicated that they are not given access to the Park. The community Conservation Coordinator in the HiP indicated that communities are not allowed to practice cultural rituals in the Park but they are allowed access for social reasons.

Some of the respondents and key informants identified a range of community projects and activities that are supported by HiP. For example, HiP is running the Sifundimvelo programme around local schools where they are taking learners from local schools into the Park for a week to offer them environmental education. Furthermore, HiP supports small business ventures. The Park over the past years has built craft markets (Vukuzame and Vulamehlo) at the gate entrances of the Park where communities are benefiting and those craft markets are owned by

local communities, including Nompondo. Additionally, respondents also indicated that HiP has invested in sport facilities in communities. Specifically, every year EKZNW in partnership with AmaZulu Football Club sponsors a day event in communities bordering the Park as part of investment in sport facilities.

The Table below presents respondents' perceptions of the social impacts of ecotourism. The Nompondo community generally did not support that ecotourism has negative impacts on local communities with only one respondent each stating more sex workers in the area and more casinos in the area as well as 16.9% indicating feeling negative about one's culture and 13.1% stating restricted access to natural resources. Furthermore, 96.9% stated that they enjoy tourism coming to HiP, 90% indicated job opportunities and 80.8% felt that ecotourism provides opportunities to meet tourists that visit HiP. Thus, there is generally positive attitudes towards ecotourism as identified by Nzama (2010). However, 71.5% did indicate lowering of traditional values which resonates with concerns raised by Ringer (2013) and Snyman (2012). The key informants also highlighted negative impacts which were generally associated with social disruption and restricted access to resources while positive impacts were associated with development in the community, specifically economic opportunities and tourist interactions. In terms of tourists, all respondents stated that they would like to have tourists visit their community. The Community Conservation Coordinator and the Conservation Manager revealed that EKZNW has already implemented the plan of taking tourists to the neighbouring communities. The tourists are already visiting the community though not in large numbers probably because there are limited attractions.

Table 2: Respondents' perception of social impacts of ecotourism (n=130)

<b>Impacts of ecotourism</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Meet the tourists that visit HiP	80.8	19.2
Enjoy tourists coming to HiP	96.9	3.1
Job opportunities (especially seasonal)	90	10
More sex workers in the area	0.8	99.2
Lowering of traditional values	71.5	28.5
More casinos in the area	0.8	99.2
Feeling negative about your culture	16.9	83.1
Restricted access to natural resources	13.1	86.9

Despite the desire for job opportunities, it is important to note that only 2% of the respondents stated a household member works in HiP. The respondents attributed this to a very high unemployment rate and very few job opportunities within the area, which is a clear indication that HiP cannot meet the job demands of the unemployed. This was supported by the key informants. The results from the interviews with HiP management suggested that the best way forward would be to establish more curio markets and maintain good relations with the management of privately owned tourist related facilities within close proximity, which have proved to be a source of additional jobs to the neighbouring communities.

The Table below indicates resources that most of the respondents (90%) indicated households directly access resources from HiP. The main resources households accessed were thatching grass (55.4%) and firewood (48.5%). Some indicated community levy trust fund (15.4%) and water (10.8%) with a few respondents also stating medicinal plants (6.25), animal by-products (5.4%) and meat donation for ceremonies (2.3%). The community levy trust fund is income generated by the Park through a community levy paid by visitors. These funds are administered through the Community Trust Fund and provided to communities for development needs as prescribed by EKZNW Board policies. Through this fund EKZNW authority has been able to build the Nselweni Bush Lodge for 10 traditional authorities that border the HiP. Furthermore, a

4x4 game viewing vehicle was purchased through the profit that is generated by this lodge that is 100% owned by communities that borders the HiP, including the Nompondo community under the Mdletshe Tribal Authority.

The resources accessed are usually typical demands of rural communities. For example, all the homes visited for the interviews had at least one traditional item made from grass materials. This proves that there is a large demand for the grass materials, especially thatching grass and reeds which have to be replaced periodically. Grass is also in high demand for handicraft work, which was cited as an important source of income for most of the female respondents. Harvesting of thatch is not completely for free. For every four bundles of grass cut one belongs to the Park and it is used to roof some of the accommodation facilities within the Park. The HiP key informants explained that this kind of arrangement was put in place in order to promote sustainable utilisation of the resources. However, some community respondents indicated that this was exploitative since the community had rights to access resources in the Park. Firewood was also harvested from the Park. However, there were increased restrictions and some of the respondents complained that they could not access firewood because of distance being a limiting factor. Medicinal plants and animal by-products were generally used by traditional healers and key informants raised concerns that current harvesting practices are unsustainable.

Table 3: Resources within the HiP that households' access: Multiple responses

<b>Resources</b>	<b>Frequency (n=130)</b>	<b>Percentage (100)</b>
Community levy trust fund	20	15.4
Thatching grass	72	55.4
Water	14	10.8
Firewood	63	48.5
Animal by-products	7	5.4
Medical plants	8	6.2
Meat donation for ceremonies	3	2.3
None	13	10

## Conclusion

The results indicate that the Nompondo community benefits in various ways from ecotourism and being in close proximity to HiP. Members of the community are allowed access to resources such as meat, thatching grass, firewood and water. Additionally, a range of opportunities for positive interactions with the Park's management/ staff include job opportunities, community projects and activities, good working relations and joint problem solving. Key tourism related benefits include interaction with the tourists, sale of crafts and opportunities to profile cultural activities. Additionally, indications are that most of the households in Nompondo have access to at least one of the natural resources, namely, thatching grass, firewood, meat and water. However, there remains the need to involve communities residing adjacent to protected areas to a greater extent. Thus, this study indicates that there are positive changes in relation to Park and community relations and benefits in South Africa. This refutes assertions in much of the research that local communities remain marginalised. The findings support Nzama's (2010) examples of positive community-Park relations. However, there are challenges and it is imperative that more direct economic benefits materialise that address the poverty and unemployment rates in local communities such as Nompondo.

HiP management as well as local communities should collaborate and work in partnership with both government and non-government organisations in increasing the expenditures of tourists to the communities within the respective regions. Possible ventures may include motivating and assisting the local communities to develop more tourist accommodation facilities outside the

Park in suitable areas close to the boundary. This could be advantageous in that further disruption of the Park's ecology will be minimised and the communities will benefit economically from catering for tourists' requirements provided there is proper and careful planning.

The organisation of more attractions (such as traditional dancing and singing, storytelling, traditional healing and other related activities) as well as tours to persuade tourists to stay longer than they had originally planned are recommended. Since in most cases the lack of alternatives forces rural people to use natural resources in an unsustainable manner, the major focus should be to reduce pressure on the Park and this can be best achieved through activities that generate benefits to the adjacent rural communities. Future projects should at least include one or more activities (such as craft making/ selling, agricultural production and job creation opportunities) designed to uplift the social and economic needs of communities residing adjacent to HiP, thus treating biodiversity conservation and economic development as integral aspects of the same process of sustainable development.

The findings suggest that HiP management has moved a step ahead in order to reduce the tensions that exist between communities and HiP. In fact, this is relevant in contexts where there have been historically adversarial relationships between local communities and conservation areas as is the case in South Africa. The issue of involving different stakeholders, especially local communities, and their contribution to ecotourism in South Africa remains a difficult task. However, ecotourism has the potential to provide many opportunities for rural local communities in the post-apartheid period, enhancing their economic base with an alternative income and improving livelihood options linked to accessing natural resources and tourism activities. This case study indicates that community perceptions are changing positively. This provides an ideal platform to strengthen positive socio-economic impacts and benefits.

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