



Assessment of the socio-economic impacts of Tourism on three rural communities neighbouring Addo Elephant National Park, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which three local communities neighbouring Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) have benefitted from the tourism development and business activities in the park in terms of women and youth empowerment, business and job opportunities, skills development and other people and community development. The paper further examines the relationship between communities and AENP with its concessionaires, and the pros and cons of private sector involvement in a public park. Data for the study was gathered from 42 participants through observation, document review, key informant interviews with AENP officials, Municipal officials and Community Trust personnel; and focus group discussions with members of three participating communities, namely: Colchester, Valentia and Nomathamsanqa. Participants were selected purposively. Local beneficiation was generally found to be minimal characterised by exclusion of black Africans from concessionary agreements; marginalisation of women in business contracts which are in any case typically low income and short term; inequalities in entrepreneurship and other local community development support (and funding); lack of consultation and communication with communities, particularly regarding their own development; inconsistencies in and misguided funding of development projects, including skills development not tailored towards people's needs; low wage employment opportunities; and undemocratic rather than humanist approaches to people development, among others. This defies Sustainable ethical tourism development principles.

Keywords: Ecotourism; socio-economic impacts; Addo Elephant National Park; local community beneficiation; sustainable rural development.

Introduction

The year 1994, the dawn of democracy in South Africa ushered in a promise of positive change for all South Africans, particularly the historically disadvantaged black Africans. Although significant gains towards social equity and extreme poverty alleviation are undeniable, these challenges coupled with high levels of unemployment remain the country's most pressing challenges (United Development Program, 2014). Some of the major socio-economic programs introduced by the post-apartheid government since 1994 aimed at redressing these and other injustices of the apartheid system have included the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA) aimed at halving unemployment by 2014 from 28% in 2004 to 14% by 2022, the New Growth Path (NGP) to accelerate growth in the economy and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, a long-term socio-economic development roadmap (South Africa's key economic policies changes, 2014). However, the South African society has remained unequal as unemployment caused by lack of job creation due to low economic growth and poverty levels continue to escalate. Current unemployment levels are estimated at 29% from 27.6% in the previous year (STATSSA, 2019), the highest since 2003.

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide (Nicolaidis, 2020: 1). In 2018, tourism supported over 319 million jobs resulting in 10.4% of global GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019: 14) with international tourist arrivals growing by 5% in 2018 to reach



the 1.4 billion mark (UN World Tourism Organization, 2019: 2). Globally, 671 million international tourists were received between January and June 2019, almost 30 million more in the same period in 2018, a perpetuation of the growth noted in the previous year (Business Standard, 2019: 1). Tourism has been identified in South Africa (one of the largest tourist destinations in the world) as one of the sectors with great potential to grow the economy of the country and create the desperately needed job opportunities being a labour intensive sector. It contributes 2.9% of the GDP of the country and more people work in tourism than in mining (South African Tourism: Tourism Performance, 2017). Rural tourism specifically, is in general considered the “harbinger of economic and social benefits for a rural community, through especially the income and infrastructural development it brings to marginal, impoverished and less economically developed countryside” (Nicolaidis, 2020: 3). However, tourism is also one of the sectors in need of transformation as it has historically been a monopoly of the white minority population. Accordingly, in line with the government’s transformation agenda, South African National Park’s (SANPark’s) Strategic Plan for Commercialisation (2013: 12) outlined its transformation mission aimed at ensuring “effective transformation both within SANParks, the broader society and the economy through the implementation of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment in support of the Constitution of South Africa”.

The Tourism White Paper (1996) stipulates that for tourism to be sustainable it has to be private sector driven, with an enabling environment created by government, and be community based (Tourism White Paper, 1996: 21). It further states that tourism must be used as a tool for the empowerment of the previously neglected communities and should particularly focus on the empowerment of women in such communities (Tourism White Paper, 1996: 21). This mandate was allocated to all spheres of government; National, Provincial and Local (Tourism White Paper, 1996: 40-44). Accordingly, various protected areas - nature reserves or parks - are managed by South African National Parks (SANParks), various Provincial Tourism Agencies and Municipalities mandated to develop and promote tourism.

Due to the declining government fiscal ability, and for purposes of sustainability, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism urged SANParks to effect a weaning shift from state funding to new sustainable revenue generation models aimed at future financial self-reliance (The commercialisation strategy of SANParks, 2013: 61). As a result, most government entities, including SANParks, embarked on a drive to encourage the private sector to invest in development and social programs. For example, the National Department of Tourism through the National Tourism Sector Strategy set itself targets that for 2020 included “increasing investment in the tourism economy by attracting R35 billion more in public sector investment and R1 billion more in foreign direct investment (FDI), and private sector capital formation for tourism related products” (National Tourism Sector Strategy, 2011: 29).

This paper aimed to assess the extent to which Addo Elephant National Park in the Eastern Cape Province (a major tourist destination in the province) together with its partner concessionaires have embraced the principle of local community participation; beneficiation and good relations with communities; whether the objective of women and youth empowerment is respected; and what the pros and cons of private sector involvement in the park are.

Rationale

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2014: 6) stresses that reduction of inequality is vital in order to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable poverty reduction. Many protected areas in South Africa are situated near rural communities that are poverty stricken, with limited economic and job opportunities. Historically, due to the apartheid system of racial discrimination, indigenous communities were not only dispossessed from their land for purposes of conservation, but were also denied access to and beneficiation from protected areas. From the onset, the post-apartheid government in its Tourism White Paper (1996: 34)



encouraged foreign direct investment that would advance a transformation agenda to meet the following criteria: “investors and companies that will develop, promote and implement responsible tourism; and investments that will result in the transfer of skills and technology to locals”. In support of the Tourism White Paper, the Eastern Cape Vision (2030) states that the Provincial Development Plan (2014: 14) should “intensify the quest for social justice by a capable state, a responsible private sector, and a citizenry aware of its role and responsibilities in building a working, sustainable and accountable democracy”. Furthermore, goal 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals states that there is a need to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). Sustainable development comprises, not only social and environmental sustainability, but also “suggests economic growth across all strata of a society..., deference to basic human rights and respect...as well as equal opportunity provision for all people” (Nicolaidis, 2020: 2). Although some research has been conducted on the topic, different researchers have focused on different aspects, particularly on macro-economic benefits rather than local community beneficiation. Empirical research shows that “... many neighbouring historically disadvantaged communities close to National Parks in South Africa remain impoverished and have limited access to resources and benefits from conservation” (Nsukwini, 2016: 1). Earlier research had made similar observations (Chaminuka, Groeneveld, Selomane & Van Ierland, 2012). This calls for further research in this area. One specific gap in knowledge on the topic is the examination of the pros and cons of the private sector involvement in state owned parks, specifically to test the notion that the private sector is more efficient than the public one in the management of tourism businesses (Public Services and the European Union, 2014: 4).

This paper makes a contribution towards current discourses on local community participation and beneficiation, including women, in tourism-related development initiatives occurring in their locality. Part of this contribution is to influence policy direction and implementation to ensure that marginalised communities, including women and youth, benefit from tourism development initiatives. The specific areas examined in which the park in collaboration with the private sector has positively impacted the socio-economic development of local communities include: business, jobs, skills development opportunities, women empowerment, and social development programs.

Literature

South African National Parks (SANParks) was established in terms of the National Environmental Management Protected Areas Act, 2003 (Act No 57 of 2003). According to the Act, the core mandate of SANParks is management through the national parks system and people-focused ecotourism management. SANParks has twenty-two national parks throughout the country with AENP among them. It is one of the government institutions tasked to alleviate poverty in communities surrounding the parks (South African National Parks, 2013: 20). However, the South African government’s fiscal has been declining over the years alongside a growing need to enhance service delivery and create employment opportunities for the citizenry. Therefore, in order to increase revenue, SANParks and other government agencies opted for Private Public Partnerships (PPPs) through concession agreements with different models and varying benefits for the parks and communities. “PPPs allow government to extend services without increasing the number of public employees and without making large capital investments in facilities and equipment” (Rondinelli, 2003: 4).

The advantages of PPPs to government would be: maximising tourism development efforts, limited capital to develop tourism services and attractions, improving efficiencies and transfer of risk, while the private sector (referred to as concessionaires) primarily benefits through profit making. A PPP is “a contract between a public sector institution and a private party, in which the private party assumes substantial financial, technical and operational risk in the design, financing, building and operation of a project” (PPP Manual Module 1: South African Regulations for PPPs, 2004: 10). One of the challenges with PPPs in South Africa is that the private partners have been predominantly white, with very few, if any, black South Africans



involved, hence the drive for transformation. Moreover, although “it is often assumed that privatisation or PPPs will result in greater levels of technical efficiency, i.e., the private sector can always deliver a given level of service with less input costs than the public sector” (Public services and the European Union, 2014: 4), there is no empirical evidence that the private sector is more efficient (Hall, 2015), save to state that efficiencies play a huge role in terms of profits, dividends and other benefits that are ultimately shared with communities.

Tourism is defined as “the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” (United Nations Environment Program and World Tourism Organisation (UNEP and UNWTO), 2005). It is “one of the main economic sectors in the world generating important social benefits, and accounts for 9% of GDP, 6% of the world's exports, and one in 11 jobs” (World Tourism Organisation, 2005). It also contributes immensely to people’s livelihood. It contributes 2.9% to South Africa’s GDP, with more employees than in mining (South African Tourism: Tourism Performance, 2017). There were 10.5 million international tourist arrivals in 2018, an increase of 1.8% from 2017 figure (Wesgrow, 2019: 3). The Eastern Cape received 0.4 million a 6.1% increase from 2017 (South African Tourism, 2019: 31). Domestic tourists to the province were 2 322 600 (South African Tourism, 2019: 46). Being one of the poorest provinces of the country, it is hoped that tourism, if well managed, would boost the economy of the province. The Tourism White Paper recognises the lack of involvement of local communities and previously neglected groups in the industry (Tourism White Paper, 1996: 28). It recommends that in order to succeed in transforming the industry, any development policy, “as a priority, seek the meaningful involvement of the previously neglected communities, not only in the supply of their labour services, but also in entrepreneurial activities” (Tourism White Paper, 1996: 11). The Eastern Cape, according to STATSSA (2019), had the highest unemployment rate in the country with an increase from 32% in 2018 to 45.8% in 2019. This ever-increasing unemployment rate and its resultant high poverty levels in townships and rural areas exist despite various economic opportunities in several sectors including tourism. Of the 16,061 population in Sundays River Valley Municipality (the home of AENP), only 6.8% have tertiary education and only 15% have Matric. Many (27.5%) had an average household income of R19,601-R38.200, 25% had R9.601-R19.600 and only 32% had 38.201-R2.457.601 (STATS SA, 2018).

Through the eco-tourism model for South African national parks, tourism is recognised as having potential to grow the economy of the country, and to protect the natural environment, the local culture, and to empower local communities sustainably. Eco-tourism is understood as “forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas” (World Tourism Organisation, 2008: 43), or as “environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present), that promote conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2001: 3).

The significance of tourism and eco-tourism dominates policy, legal, other development discourses, and empirical research (Irandu & Shah, 2014: 245; Aguila & Ragot, 2014; Kala, 2013, etc.), followed by macro level perspectives on improvements in the economy at national, regional or provincial levels (Saayman, Saayman & Ferreira, 2009). Other research has focused on different aspects of the topic including: the relationship between National Parks and communities (Simelane, Kerley & Knight, 2006); the role of tourism on disruption of local culture and values (Snyman, 2012); tourism and crime (Frey & George, 2010); divergent views of domestic and international visitors on services in the park (Kepe, 2001); tourism and prostitution (Sinclair & Sinclair, 2013), etc. As pointed out earlier, not enough research exists, especially in the Eastern Cape, which targets local community beneficiation, including women and youth.



Regarding women empowerment, it is argued that “the creation of income-generating activities through eco-tourism would help improve the status of women, and promote sustainable development of the local communities” (Irandu & Shah, 2014: 245). However, the same authors warn that “there is a wrong perception among ecotourism researchers that gender issues will be addressed if ecotourism is approached through a participatory planning in which community development is targeted”. They believe that it will take deeper appreciation of the complex nature of communities before ecotourism ventures are implemented to achieve this goal. In their words, “direct effort must be made to support poorer, less powerful groups, which often include women, if ecotourism is to be effective in meeting conservation and development goals” (2014: 245). “Women are overrepresented in low-status jobs, often treated unequally or placed in stereotypical occupations, and vulnerable to sexual discrimination and exploitation” (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2011: 19).

Similar marginalisations are highlighted among other local community members in the industry, even internationally. In New Zealand, Wouters (2010: 9) assessed the direct and secondary socio-economic effects of concession-based tourism in national parks on adjacent communities and regional economies. They found that the ways in which communities benefited influenced negative attitudes towards tourism, for example, new businesses were often operated by migrants from outside the district, causing resentment among indigenous residents. The latter felt marginalised and left out of many economic opportunities. Similar findings were reported in the Chitwan District in Nepal where migrants monopolised tourism opportunities in the park more than the locals (Keezhara, 2012; Pandit, 2011).

Closer to home, in the Karoo National Park in the Western Cape, South Africa, Saayman, Saayman and Ferreira (2009) built on the work by Saayman and Saayman (2006) in AENP. They found that community members only went to the park to learn about wildlife, and were mostly satisfied with the services offered in the park. They noted improvements in the regional economy, improved ambience of the town (Fort Beaufort), and improved local knowledge about wildlife and job creation. However, there was little information and nuance about other key socio-economic impacts on the locals. Saayman and Saayman (2004: 3-13) had made similar observations in AENP, but without much detail on local beneficiation and women in particular. Simelane et al (2006: 1), on the other hand, evaluated the relationship between communities around AENP and many others. They found that people within these communities rate relationships with their neighbouring parks as relatively poor. Nsukwini and Bob (2016: 1) studied Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP) in Kwazulu Natal examining its socio-economic impact on local communities. They concluded that the Nompondo community benefitted from the park but not to their satisfaction. They were allowed access to meat, thatching grass, firewood and water; had interactions with the park's management/ staff for job opportunities; interacted with the tourists; sold crafts and profiled their cultural activities. On these grounds they, on average, described their relations with the park as good, with only a small percentage rating their relations as bad. However, they stress there is still need to improve “beneficiation given the high poverty and unemployment rates in Nompondo” (Nsukwini & Bob, 2016: 1). It can thus be concluded that research so far targets diverse aspects and findings are inconsistent so local beneficiation, including women and youth, and their relations with the parks still need investigation.

AENP's mission shows its commitment to responsible tourism development and community empowerment (Addo Elephant National Park Management Plan, 2015: 54). It is important to assess the level of progress on these deliverables, bearing in mind the historical negative impacts of conservation on indigenous peoples. The Tourism White Paper (1996: 11) stress the poor involvement of local communities and previously neglected groups in the industry which does not bode well for sustainability. It is not clear to what extent this has changed today. Back in the 1990s, Keezhara (1998: 5) noted that indigenous people “have been deprived of their land, water and access to public places”, which disadvantaged more women



than men as they had to travel long distances to collect water and contend with the scarcity of resources that used to be abundantly available in the public place converted into a park. This was the case in South Africa.

Theoretical underpinnings

Progressive governments through policies encourage developments that are informed by the people's needs and a move away from top down approaches which typically impose programmes from above (national/provincial or even local offices) with no alignment to people's needs or aspirations. One significant approach adopted for this purpose is humanism. Two forms of humanism are identified: a historic one (meant to reconcile tradition with modernity and individual rights with emerging citizenry duties); and a new humanism stressing social inclusion and transformation through education, culture and communication (D'Orville, 2015: 1). "Therefore, humanism today is perceived as a collective effort that holds governments, civil society, the private sector and human individuals equally responsible to realize its values and to design creatively and implement a humanist approach to a sustainable society, based on economic, social and environmental development" (D'Orville, 2015: 1). It encourages cooperation and collaboration amongst various stakeholders, including communities and the private and public sectors, in order to realise sustainable development. This leaves no room for individualistic approaches (capitalism) to life and development by people, government and business. Thus, current approaches to development advocate for the involvement of communities in development initiatives that affect them through the use of the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach developed in the 1990s to improve on other participatory methods such as Rapid Rural Appraisal (Cavestro, 1995: 23), a paradigm shift from the top-down approaches of modernisation used throughout the years to bottom-up approaches. PRA creates an enabling environment for communities to make their own assessment of their situation, needs and potential, make their action plans and take action (Chambers, 1992: 5). Accordingly, responsible tourism practices amongst other things means that there is a responsibility of government and the private sector to involve local communities that are in close proximity to the tourism product and attractions through the development of meaningful economic linkages (Tourism White Paper, 1996: 19). Community participation in tourism is vital for sustainability given its distinctive objective to empower communities, preserve their culture and improve their material welfare (World Bank, 2011). Community participation is also aimed at shifting power from elitist decision-making government representatives and wealthy developers to the poor landowners (Nicolaidis, 2020).

Linked to responsible tourism is sustainable tourism development. According to Richards and Hall, sustainable tourism development is about the "assurance of renewable economic, social and cultural benefits to the community and its environment" (2003: 1). The authors further state that "without community sustainability, tourism development cannot be expected to be sustainable" (2003: 1). Additionally, for eco-tourism to work, the promotion of local culture becomes crucial as it is not only central in job creation, but it also assists in restoring people's dignity. Through selling local artefacts to tourists, locals generally get to appreciate their culture more and start to become part of the tourism value chain (Pyrkosz, 2009: 55). This is the theoretical argument guiding the interpretation of the findings of the paper.

Data and methods

Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) 60 km from Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province is one of the country's 19 National Parks, the third largest in the country, and one of the three in the Eastern Cape Province. It is renowned for its exceptional elephant viewing hence the name Addo Elephant National Park, proclaimed in 1931 (AENP - Park Management Plan, 2015-2025: 22). Although it is located in the Sunday's River Local Municipality, it straddles five other municipalities: Ndlambe Local Municipality, Ikhwezi Local Municipality, Blue Crane Local Municipality, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan; and Cacadu District Municipality. It covers approximately 178, 918 hectares (AENP - Park Management Plan, 2015-2025: 22). There are



a number of concessionaires managing different facilities and services, e.g., recreational and accommodation facilities, while AENP offers a variety of others of its own including: birding, hiking, guided 4x4 tours, spa, camping, accommodation, etc. Eight communities neighbour the park: Colchester, Patterson, Enon, Barsheba, Moses Mabida, Joe Slovo, Valentia and Nomathamsanqa. Three of these, namely: Colchester (located in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality (NMMM), Valentia and Nomathamsanqa (within Sunday's River Municipality) participated in the study.

The study population consisted of: AENP, Municipal personnel, Mayibuyindlovu Development Trust (MDT) and residents of Colchester, Valentia and Nomathamsanqa. A qualitative methodological approach was chosen as the most suitable for the study in order to gather in-depth information. Participants were selected using a purposive/judgmental sampling method so as to target the people with quality information and valuable insights into the topic. Accordingly, only people involved in the park either as beneficiaries, workers, managers, private contractors, MDT representatives and executives, and Municipal Councillors were selected. The total sample was 42 participants comprising of six community trust representatives, three current and former trust executives, four AENP officials, 26 beneficiaries of the development programs, one councillor and two municipal officials (Community Development Services section).

Key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observation and documentary review were used to gather data. Key informant interviews were conducted with MDT executives and representatives, AENP officials, and Sundays River Municipality officials. The concessionaires were unavailable to participate as explained later. Three focus group discussions (FDGs) (of at least six participants) were facilitated with the 26 beneficiaries of the development programs. Annual plans, strategic reports, budgets and journals were reviewed for information sought and to corroborate information gathered from in-depth interviews and FDGs, and relevant areas and projects visited. Interviews were tape recorded and field notes compiled. Data was analysed through the thematic analysis system comprising of processes of organising, summarising and reconstructing data to capture the main ideas. Ethics clearance was sought before field work from the university's ethics committee, permission from relevant stakeholders obtained and all ethical standards observed including assigning pseudo names to participants for anonymity.

Findings and discussion

Population and sample socio-biographic description

The educational levels in these communities generally were low, especially Colchester - the only township amongst the three without a high school. Parents who could afford boarding schools took their children to a neighbouring town called Paterson approximately 50km away whilst others had to travel about 65km daily to reach a high school, hence the low educational level. Only one person was a graduate in the entire Colchester Township - the principal of the primary school from outside Colchester. Only a few community members had matric. Valentia and Nomathamsanqa were reported to have several graduates and matriculants also evident in the sample. A high level of alcohol and substance abuse was blamed for a high rate of school dropout. All the representatives of MDT for the three communities were Xhosa speakers with only one non-Xhosa speaker (coloured) from Colchester. This was despite both Valentia and Colchester being predominantly coloured communities.

Among government officials from AENP and Sundays River Municipality, both males and females had tertiary education in line with their senior roles and responsibilities. They were predominantly of Xhosa speaking origin with the exception of three people of colour and three Whites, not surprising since the area is predominantly Xhosa speaking. Although the concessionaires were initially planned to participate in the study, they were unavailable. The



managers were reluctant to participate on behalf of the owners (who were white) who are not local residents. All the information regarding concessionaires was provided by the officials of AENP.

MDT is a community structure established in 1993 as a forum due to numerous conflicts between the park and the communities who felt excluded from all the activities of the park and barred from using it for hunting, food collection and use of medicinal plants. In 2005, it registered as a trust representing the eight neighbouring communities. The trust is currently composed of nine male and seven female members (two per community). In terms of gender, the representation per community was skewed. For example, in all the three communities, only one was female. Both Colchester and Nomathamsanqa had 100% male representation. A number of black African trust representatives (60%) had tertiary education which qualified them for executive positions in the trust. However, for once both the current chairperson and deputy were female, a good sign for gender empowerment. The former chairperson “forced” to participate in the study because his colleagues could not provide the important information sought, was white and male. The dependence on him for information might perhaps signal a belief in white efficiency as he is still active in the trust’s business. The much higher levels of education among the majority of the male representatives (60%), compared to the females, was an advantage over their female colleagues reflecting the patriarchal history of the country where men were typically more educated with the implication that women’s voices remained unheard even when represented. This male superiority played out in various ways, e.g., in the gender imbalance in the type of programs and businesses supported by the trust where majority of the beneficiaries of business support were men as outlined later. Only one of the six trust representatives was female while Nomathamsanqa and Colchester had 100% male representation. Moreover, both Valentia’s representatives were black African despite the area being predominantly coloured.

Beneficiation in job opportunities by AENP and concessionaires

The park is the biggest employer in the area with a total number of 402 employees, 197 of whom were direct employees of AENP and 205 employed by the concessionaires. The latter offered more tourism facilities and services than AENP hence the higher number of employees. Of the 197 AENP employees, 171 were permanent leaving only 26 temporary (interns, students and temporal workers). 67 were from participating communities. However, these local people were only employed as administration clerks, drivers, gate guards, receptionists, room attendants, trade workers, general workers, horse guides, handy men, people and conservation officers, fuel pump attendants and switchboard attendants. None of them had a managerial position. The low level of education among other things may have played a role.

Compared to the AENP, the concessionaires’ employees were all fixed-term, 88 of whom were from the selected communities.

Gender based inequality still prevailed in the employment practices of both parties. Being a service sector, most of its employees worked in the accommodation facilities as room attendants, waitresses and cleaners, jobs mostly held by women. Indeed, there were more female employees than males for both the AENP and concessionaires because of the abundance of jobs historically viewed as the domain of women. Game drives and horse rides were the only jobs dominated by men. This does not imply, however, that men had higher level jobs. All employees regardless of gender occupied lower-level jobs. Again, education could have played a role, although one might ask, isn’t this one of the social ills development programs are supposed to reverse? Education and skills development are some of the ways through which locals could be capacitated and empowered to occupy better positions. However, meaningful implementation on the ground is minimal. Instead they permanently sit in these low paying jobs without much growth or improvement in their quality of life. This finding agrees with Nicolaidis (2020: 2) observation that women and the youth were appointed into



part time and low-income work due to gender biases and lack of formal education and skills, typical bases for their exploitation. Even among the contracted services there was gender discrimination. One contractor in the EPWP said:

I do not usually employ women. We also feel sorry for them. The park employs them a lot in the restaurant and for the cleaning of the rooms that are used by tourists (Themba, EPWP contractor).

A municipal officer observed:

Some jobs are male-oriented, and women cannot sleep in the bush for many days, there are no ablution facilities. They stay far from the park, there is no public transport, and if they have to come home daily they have to arrange their transport, and they do not have money for that (Monwabisi, Sundays River Municipality employee).

Age based inequality was also observed in the employment practices of the park. The youth are here defined as belonging to the 18-34 age category. Among the participants there were more workers between the ages 35-60 than younger. One explanation was the high illiteracy levels which limited people's mobility in career paths. Generally, illiterate people grow old in one position as they do not qualify for many job opportunities. This stagnation in career growth was viewed as blocking the entry of youth into employment in AENP. Additionally, women tend to settle in one place more than men as they take the lead role in caring for their families. So the high numbers of female employees is a disadvantage to the youth. Lastly, the area being rural, with the only employment opportunities being AENP, nearby lodges and citrus farms where employment is mostly seasonal, the potential for brain drain, particularly among the youth, is high.

Community level inequality also characterised the employment trends in the park. The largest proportion of employees came from Nomathamsanqa due to its proximity to the park, and the demographic profiles of the communities and the area generally. Nomathamsanqa is predominantly a black African community with the largest number of Africans, considered the most marginalised historically, so prioritizing them is law. Their majority employment therefore could be seen as proportional to the demographics of the total population of Addo. However, the distribution should be fair to other black communities. Additionally, because posts were advertised internally, first giving priority to staff, who happened to be mainly Nomathamsanqa residents (and who could also spread the word verbally), those outside this community did not stand much chance. Poor transport network was another cited factor coupled with non-provision of transport or accommodation by the park for its employees. This gave Nomathamsanqa residents an added advantage being closest to the park. In conclusion, beneficiation levels for Nomathamsanqa across the spectrum were unfairly higher considering that the major factor for the trend is simply proximity to the park.

Beneficiation in business contract allocation

The only business contracts reserved for local businesses were in the form of Extended Public Works Programs (EPWP) referred to as Biodiversity Social Projects (BSP). They included: alien vegetation removal, fencing and construction, and laundry services. Three of the participants held such contracts among the participants. Compared to concessions (all of which except one were white owned), contracts are worth much less in Rand value, but are the type reserved for locals. This lack of transformation is not unique to AENP; it is a general challenge in the entire tourism sector in the country (Irandu & Shah, 2014). Moreover, although MDT trust representatives agreed that all communities were given equal opportunities to apply, most contractors came from Nomathamsanqa followed by Valentia, while the other six communities had almost none. Again, the distribution of opportunity at community level is skewed. Colchester for one received none. The inequality was yet again blamed on proximity to the park. Nomathamsanqa followed by Valentia being the closest, got the major share of



the contracts. This excuse sounds too convenient. Indeed, some participants from within Nomathamsanqa and Valentia made inferences of favouritism and nepotism involving appointment of contractors that had connections to the park officials. One such verbatim report was that: “It is those who have recognised surnames that get tenders; if you are from a poor family or your surname is not known you do not get anything” (Thandi, Pre-school principal).

This is in direct contradiction to what one AENP employee had to say:

There are processes in place for awarding contracts in the park which include a request for quotations if the services are below R30 000, but above that, there are bids and tenders which get advertised in the newspapers and our website. The park has a preferential policy for provision of some services such as EPWP and laundry to locals through circulating adverts to their emails. Local contractors are in the database of Sundays River Valley municipality (Lulamile, AENP employee).

Such practices lead to resentment among locals towards the park and to community conflicts with negative implications as Wouters (2010: 17) observed. Furthermore, the contracts were short-term, which was viewed as unfair as it limited investment in the business and created uncertainty for the future. For example, the laundry service had only a one-year contract which had already been renewed once. This was in essence seen as a hindrance to business growth and people development which are fundamental for sustainable development and job creation highly needed in these impoverished communities.

Beneficiation in concession agreements

99% of the concessions in the park belonged to white owners from outside the area. They included: guided game drives, guided horse rides, a restaurant, a craft shop, and lodge. Only the mobile spa (1%) was owned by a local woman of colour. No other local person had a concession. The Management Plan on Local Economic Development 2015-2025 states that the park “will play a significant, targeted and effective role in contributing to local economic development, economic empowerment and social development in the surrounding communities” (Addo Elephant National Park, Park Management Plan, 2015). Little has been achieved thus far in this regard through concession allocation. Concessions generated approximately R87 million in the 2017/18 financial year, but because the concessionaires are not local there is an obvious economic leakage that could otherwise change the socio-economic landscape of the local people. This finding concurs with Wouters’ (2010) and Keezhara’s (2012) observation that outsiders and foreigners benefit more from opportunities created by protected areas than the locals. Another objective of the park is to transform through black empowerment and inclusivity. Again, there is no evidence of this on the ground.

The above practices deviate from Goal 8 of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals which refers to sustained, inclusive and sustained economic growth, full productive employment and decent work for all (United Nations, 2016). However, achieving such goals is difficult for as long as wealthy tourism developers remain in control of this project in poor communities while local stakeholders benefit the least financially (Musavengane & Simatele, 2016).

Local community development support through MDT

There were several interventions towards community development by the park through MDT. MDT acted as both a funder and as a facilitator of support from other institutions including AENP with its concessionaires. Of the proceeds MDT receives every year from AENP, R30 000 is set aside to support development projects and businesses for each community. However, there is unequal distribution of these funds. While some communities received R10 000 or less others got R30 000 or more depending on the effectiveness of their trust



representatives. Communities with representatives who acted proactively received more funding than the others. Some trust representatives cared little about the activities of the trust and the communities they represented. They were busy with personal matters. Colchester was one of the affected communities in this regard but not without good reason. They had not received their share of this benefit for many years because of their disillusionment with exclusion from the opportunities brought by the park on the grounds of belonging to Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality which has no direct dealings with the park.

MDT officials claimed that support varied according to the needs of the communities or projects after prospective beneficiaries approached them in writing. However, the beneficiaries had a different story as shown below. The trust provided support for: pre-schools, elderly service centres, sports tournaments, sports individuals, skills development (discussed below), business support, early childhood development, etc. They also sourced funds from overseas donors.

On the distribution of the fund, one official of MDT reported:

The funding is spent according to what communities need. We inform communities of available support. We also make examples of projects supported in other communities. We buy everything for the pre-schools, elderly service centres and sports people. They submit a list, and we buy. Most preschools in the area used to operate illegally, and... we registered them with the Department of Social Development. Now they are known and get grants from Social Development. We try our best. We trained about 30 teachers in these pre-schools in driving so that they can help with emergencies and take children to clinics. Some of the parents do not work and to try and make children happy we buy them party packs during the end year functions. We want them to be like other children and feel loved. Our efforts are about building this area (Unathi, MDT).

Surprisingly, of all the projects mentioned none was tourism-related despite funding from the sector. While the bottom-up approach claimed to be used in allocation of support (refuted by beneficiaries) would be best as it curbs community conflicts, it is also crucial for the leadership to assist communities in identifying gaps in opportunities such as promoting cultural activities for visitors to the park. This lack of community tourism was seen as a missed opportunity that could be implemented by, for example, developing cultural dancers, local craft makers and places of entertainment in the townships offering traditional cuisine and showcasing local lifestyles.

Emerging local businesses as members of MDT also received various support from their trust including business plan development, funding for business registration and the registration process. They were also assisted with equipment and material for their businesses. There was a level of sustainability for these businesses as most of them had existed for the past four to six years although this was no guarantee for permanency because of the nature of their short-term contracts. Experience gained through provision of services qualified business owners for expansion to service the municipalities and other government departments around them. Collaboration and information sharing with the Sundays River Municipality through the trust was beneficial to business owners as their profiles were in the supplier database of the municipality from which the park recruits contractors. However, while most of them benefit through this shared database because they belong to Sundays River Municipality, others like Colchester are excluded as they don't belong to this Municipality. This unequal treatment and beneficiation of local businesses despite their membership in MDT was forcing Colchester for one to contemplate withdrawal from the trust, establish its own trust and deal directly with the park to receive its share of the dividends. All participants from Colchester showed dissatisfaction with MDT and the park because of this exclusion. It was surprising that training (as tour guides) was offered to at least three male youth from this community only to be



excluded from employment particularly as hop-on guides. This is a typical example of uncalculated support given for its own sake without practical positive outcomes.

There was a great deal of unhappiness among even the supported communities regarding support award processes. Some beneficiaries claimed that as a norm they discussed their needs with a trust representative while others insisted that the only way to get support from MDT was to write a letter. In one case, the beneficiary interacted with his trust representative only. He was not even sure whether the funds he received came from the trust representative himself or MDT because he never wrote any letter of request to MDT apart from a series of conversations with the representative who one day turned up with the requested equipment. One would expect a standard procedure for all to follow. It was further revealed that funds for 2018 Christmas parties for pre-schools and elderly service centres had been reduced from the amount received in previous years with promises to pay the balance by January 2019, but this did not materialise. Such irregularities had the potential to stir conflicts between the park, MDT and communities and should not be happening at all.

MDT further invested in skills development for the local communities. In line with the National Development Plan (2030: 300), and the Youth Employment Accord (2013: 1-17), empowerment programs for youth and women were contemplated. In this regard, Siyaya, a non-profit training organisation, was engaged and had at the time trained more than 200 youth in computer literacy and provided internship programs. However, some of the training programs were either imposed on the people or were not planned adequately, ending up in failure. For example, the training of pre-school teachers for driver's licences (imposed on them) instead of their own prioritized training needs submitted to MDT had resulted in the failure of all of them. Their own request for training had been totally ignored. Training was also provided in craft making although their products were not allowed to be sold in the park – again evidence of misguided development programs. Support provided for soccer and netball in the form of sports kits and tournaments in Colchester was also heavily criticized. Over the years communities have received the same kind of support which might not necessarily match the needs on the ground, let alone being minimal. Although the trust claims to follow a bottom-up approach, communities see it rather as a top-down, blanket system that negates their unique challenges as communities and individuals.

While it is fair to acknowledge that the park is not a panacea for all the challenges they face, it is, however, reasonable to expect that, given their economic muscle, they could easily resolve some of the challenges through consistent engagement with the beneficiaries and prioritizing their needs per community instead of the current blanket approach. In their defence, trust representatives had not been adequately capacitated to deal with community challenges. Firstly, they are not development practitioners, yet they are mandated to decide on what is best for their communities. There are no processes for them to engage through meetings with the broader community to discuss their needs or review progress, although one would argue that they could do this through community representatives. Accordingly, it is concluded that the trust is interested more in ticking the boxes than dealing with real and impactful issues. The top-down approach they use results in the homogenous support they provide with little or no impact. Whilst the key programs that have been identified are essential, the actual support provided is not really helpful and sustainable, both in terms of cost-effectiveness and in terms of expected outcomes. The bottom-up approach if adequately applied in people development is vital to the success of related projects as advocated in the humanist model. It is understood to yield buy-in from the beneficiaries and mostly responds to the real needs of the people.

Another concerning factor for community development highlighted was the rotation system in which SANParks rotates park managers every five years. The system was introduced due to widespread corruption levelled against park managers. The senior leadership of SANParks felt that, after a long period of service in the park, managers got used to the systems and the locals to the extent that they started to engage in corrupt activities such as poaching of the



game and irregular expenditure. The introduction of a rotation system became essential to curb this corruption. However, participants felt that the system meant the park had limited opportunity to be managed by a local person as SANParks had already employed park managers throughout the country for the next five years and none of them was from the Addo region. This was a concern because external people did not understand local people's challenges and aspirations. At the time the park manager was a white male from another park within SANParks. The communities felt that he was far removed from the real challenges facing communities. In this regard a trust representative commented that:

For us, in MDT it is tiring to explain ourselves all the time and it delays progress in community development. Some of these managers are just here to work in the park. They do not care about us or developing the area. White Managers are not interested in transformation and Black empowerment. Nothing will change until management understands the needs and aspirations of the people. Stealing is wrong but to bring people who have no knowledge about our history is problematic (Unathi, MDT).

Unlike other communities neighbouring parks, such as Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park in KwaZulu-Natal where communities have access to sell craft in the park and own a game drive vehicle that generates revenue for communities (Nsukwini and Bob, 2016), the community projects examined here are not income generating. There is little community involvement, the tourism offerings in the area have not been diversified to include cultural activities including township tours, provision of traditional cuisine, etc. which would result in local economic development.

Apart from funding channelled through MDT, the park also provides direct support to communities. For example, annually during tourism month (September) the park is opened up to communities for free tours. This is a huge break from many years of ordinary locals being excluded from such visits due either to non-affordability or discriminatory reasons. Some of the community members said the following regarding access and exposure to the park:

I went to the park for the first time when I was 23 years to visit a friend working there. I was interested to get a job there. I now go there when it is free because I had never gone there to enjoy myself and be on tour. The tours are empowering as we do not know much about animals and tourism (Morgan, Fashion designer).

Most of us only started to go there after they introduced free week. I cannot afford to pay there even though I am a principal. We are struggling with basic things so paying to visit the park is not a priority (Thandi, Pre-school principal).

Literature also shows deprivation of people of the natural assets in their localities. Communities do not get involved while their resources are converted for tourism development (Keezhara, 1998). The park also directly initiated environmental awareness workshops for pre-school children. One AENP official stressed that teaching children about biodiversity was fundamental for the broader understanding of the environment by the communities. Pre-schools and elderly service centres in the townships were encouraged to have vegetable gardens.

Part of the explanation for the above challenges was lack of meaningful relations and communication between the communities and other stakeholders of the park, namely: the concessionaires, MDT, AENP, and the municipality. Although there were forums meant to bring together the latter three with options to co-opt other government departments, there were no such forums with the concessionaires. Even the ones in place were reported to be dysfunctional.

The main causal factor for the lukewarm relationship between the municipality, AENP and MDT and the total lack of relationship between the concessionaires and the municipality or the trust as conceded by the MDT and the municipality was the lack of tourism personnel



within the municipality who would give guidance on tourism matters. This had a negative effect on tourism development and was evidenced by the lack of tourism projects supported by MDT. This was also observed by Nicolaides (2020), who reported that some local authorities had no experienced employees in tourism management and development issues.

The lack of involvement of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality in the park's business automatically excluded communities like Colchester. Concessionaires had no platform for interaction with local communities, the municipality or MDT. They were only concerned about their businesses. This was exacerbated by the absence of the owners of the concessions who do not reside in the area. They were in head offices elsewhere, including outside the province, leaving only their employees in the park. This is said to stir conflicts between communities and AENP.

The pros and cons of private sector involvement in public parks

The park management indicated that they were satisfied and happy to have appointed concessionaires for some of their businesses. However, it was not without challenges, as explained later. Below are some of their positive views:

The concessionaires are more efficient in terms of business processes. They enhance the tourism experience... their franchise brands enhance the customer's experience once they identify brands that elevate SANParks. ... some people are loyal to brands... that brings customers. Concessionaires are innovative; they bring wi-fi to the park for connectivity of the visitors for example, in Kettle Baron Restaurant there is wi-fi. Today's visitors ... also want to stay connected to the world. The concessionaires increase infrastructure because whatever they build, which is immovable becomes the park's. They bring in new revenue streams and reduce reliance on government funding. The government only provides about 20% of funding; ...the investors make it possible for the park to conserve biodiversity effectively. They contribute about 60% and the park 40%, ...for the sustainability of the park, they are crucial. They enhance monitoring in the park as they are hands-on and assist in identifying other risk issues as they are also at an operational level. They also reduce risks on SANParks as they have insurances and take full responsibility for their services. They.... facilitate Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment because all the contracts have a B-BBEE component that forces the concessionaires to contribute towards transformation. In the last financial year they spent about 8% of gross revenue procuring from local suppliers, thus boosting the local economy.... contribute towards job creation as they have employed over 200 employees. In our organogram, we have posts that we have not filled because of budget constraints, thus reducing our contribution towards employment. They make and implement decisions quicker than us. Sometimes we do not get right service providers, but because we have to comply with the Public Finance Management Act, we end up appointing service providers because of lower prices but poor quality. They, on the other hand are free to procure based on their policy which is not as rigid as ours (Lulamile, AENP employee).

The concessionaires diversify the tourism offering.; they design products to suit different niche markets. Their accommodation and meals are of a high standard. They are more efficient because they are chasing profits. They assist in marketing AENP (Laurine, an employee of AENP).

Rigid government processes such as the Public Finance Management Act, have been a problem for many years and for all government institutions, so indeed the PPPs have helped. Budget constraints have historically negatively affected the parks. Capacity challenges with some vacancies remaining unfilled due to funding constraints have been eased by the PPPs who have also employed locals even though at lower levels.



On the negative side, however, some challenges created by the concessionaires were highlighted including late or non-payment of concession fees, poor service by some of them as well as strike actions by their employees which negatively affected productivity. Some AENP participants gave the following comments:

We sometimes inherit the ills of the concessionaires. We get blamed for their faults. .. complaints about food poisoning in the restaurant andthe park although it is a concessionaire that is at fault. Visitors do not distinguish the park from its concessionaires... they complain about poor service in the game drives. If you go to social media or Hello Peter, they post complaints about the park yet they were serviced by a concessionaire. Sometimes these concessionaires do not pay the fees that are due to SANParks which affects our budget and plans (Lulamile, AENP).

Their employees have been on strikes several times because they are on fixed-term contracts linked to the ...agreement between the park and the concessionaires. They want to be like us and be permanent and concessionaires cannot do that because they cannot leave a burden for the park or the new concessions once the contract ends. They also complain about better salaries and the businesses cannot afford to pay like SANParks because they need profit. The strike actions by their employees disturb operations, and it is not conducive for tourism. We have never been involved in a strike as the staff of Addo Elephant National Park (Laurine, AENP).

The communities and MDT added their voices to the complaints. The issue of poor relations was thorny. Communities and trust representatives could not even identify concessionaires that were operating businesses in the park. Trustees knew that they received some funds from the privately operated businesses, but they were not part of any negotiations or meetings with the concessionaires. Some of the responses regarding their relations with the park and the pros and cons are indicated in the quotes below:

I know some of the concessionaires in the park by hearing about them or seeing their branded cars. I have never met them formally. There are no platforms for the trust to meet with them. Also, the people that are here are just employees, not the owners, and they are not keen to discuss anything with MDT. If we ask them anything, they refer us to the park or their head offices. They create jobs, which is good, but they do not know about the social responsibility part they should play for these communities. As Mayibuyindlovu, we only get our share based on the agreement that we have with the park (Glen, MDT).

They are far away from communities, doing their own thing and making money from our land. They do not transfer skills or partner with communities, and the park just let them do what they want. They are all white; there are not even black game drivers (Fundile, MDT).

As expressed by trust representatives above, the managers of concessions were reluctant to participate in this study and referred the researcher to head offices. As such, all the information contained here regarding concessionaires was provided by the AENP, the trust and community members.

It is clear that similar to other areas, local communities and their structures felt marginalised as they did not participate in decision making and had no platforms to engage the concessionaires. Community beneficiation was minimal and not practically geared towards local economic development, critical for the poverty-stricken communities such as those in Addo. The challenge with white owners of concessions from outside the area is similar to the case in Chitwan District in Nepal where migrants monopolised tourism opportunities more than the locals (Keezhara, 2012).



Conclusion

Although there are some strides achieved towards beneficiation of local communities neighbouring AENP, there remains a wide gap between the benefits accrued to the park and its concessionaires and the communities around them. Local communities are still heavily marginalized in terms of participation in the business activities of the park, including the awarding of concessions, business contracts, entrepreneurship opportunities, skills development, job opportunities and consultation in decisions regarding projects aimed at their own development. Information sharing with communities is very limited in the park, where local communities and their trust representatives are ignorant of the activities of the park. Inequalities abound in the distribution of benefits based on gender, race, community and municipality. Males enjoy more benefits than females even among the youth.

There are neither black nor Indian concessionaires, all are white, male and foreign to Addo except one coloured local female which is indicative of the levels of inequality that is mainly benefiting white businesses. Black businesses are relegated to cheaper service provision contracts, e.g., alien vegetation removal, fencing, construction and laundry services. Moreover, these are short-term contracts. Job offerings are in the low wage category. Most of the funding support for skills development, entrepreneurships and social welfare initiatives funded by the trust from the park fall far short of expectation as they are not in line with the needs of the people, are of poor quality (when in kind as with the sports kit) have no formula on who receives them, who doesn't, how and whether in cash or kind, etc.

Accusations of nepotism and favouritism by trust representatives exist among community members and disappointment is harboured by many. There is great need for consistent consultations with communities in relation to available opportunities for support and business as well as prioritizing their unique needs. Monitoring and evaluation of support provided by MDT and all the donors together with its impact are desperately needed. Structures such as MDT entrusted with community development should be capacitated to execute their mandate effectively and efficiently. Efforts at community empowerment should aim to position communities' developmental future into their own very hands, taking advantage of the current concessionaires as well as the expertise available in all the relevant institutions such as the municipalities and the park.

Although concessions play an important role in additional revenue generation as government funding of public entities declines, and boost the tourism experience in the park, they should take their social responsibility mandate to empower local communities including women and youth more seriously rather than shutting them out as shown by the findings. Other municipalities like Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan need to be brought on board to participate actively in the activities of the park. If effectively implemented, the suggested strategies should enhance community beneficiation from the parks and resolve the challenges faced particularly by SMMEs and women in South Africa.

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