Local participation in community-based ecotourism development:

A case study of ~~from~~ Shewula, north-eastern Swaziland

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A research paper submitted to the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, University of Cape Town, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Philosophy degree.

August 1999

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Map 1: Properties included in the Lubombo Conservancy

Acknowledgements

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Segar, C.

Abstract

Ecotourism is often endorsed as an ideal tool sustainable development that can successfully link the dual goals of nature conservation and rural development. However, critics have highlighted that the negative impacts of ecotourism on local communities can undermine the value of ecotourism for community development. The participation of local communities in planning for, and implementing, ecotourism development has, therefore, been recommended. This paper addresses some of the problems facing a local community that has the opportunity to develop its own ecotourism venture. It focuses on the difficulties that have been encountered in securing the necessary local participation in planning for a proposed tourism development. These problems include a lack of local level awareness about the proposed development, lack of support for the development and lack of capacity to plan a marketable, environmentally sustainable tourism product. Some of the ▇▇▇▇▇▇ actions for eliciting greater local participation and equipping local ▇▇▇▇ for and accommodate tourism are presented. The application of these ▇▇dy reveals a need for sensitivity to local conditions on the part of ▇▇▇ of change.

Introduction

Ecotourism has often been heralded as a strategy for sustainable development (Whelan, 1991; Mendelsohn, 1994; Barkin, 1996; Wallace, 1996). Much has been ▇▇▇▇ about the potential for ecotourism to ▇▇▇ the ▇▇▇ biodiversity conservation and environmental protection with the demands of community development in rural areas (Ashley & Garland 1▇▇▇▇▇1995). In particular, significant ▇▇▇▇ been given to the role which ▇▇▇▇ can play in securing socio-economic upliftment of local populations, ▇▇▇ local pride in indigenous cultural ▇▇▇ and offering communities economic incentives to protect natural resources ▇▇▇ 1993; Colvin, 1994; Urquhart, 1995).

However, many ▇▇▇ have also cautioned against uncritical advocation of ecotourism as a solution to the development dilemma of sustaining resources while improving livelihoods (Cater, 1994; Khan, 1996; Goodwin, 1▇▇▇▇▇▇ 1997).

They warn that 'ecotourism is no panacea' (Goodwin, 1996: 287) nor 'some magic hybrid, bringing bountiful returns without adverse impacts' (Cater, 1994: 89). The negative face of ecotourism development that is supposedly 'progressive', or 'appropriate' has prompted critical reviews (Wheeler, 1992; Hall, 1994a; Hall, 19994b; King *et al.*, 1996). Indeed, the skepticism with which ecotourism is regarded by some is evident in their adoption of alternative permutations of the term, including 'ecoterrorism' (Pleumarom, 1995) and 'egotourism' (Munt, 1994).

The extent of the negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism on host communities has led King and Stewart (1996) to suggest that promoting ecotourism as a development strategy that improves the welfare of indigenous people can only be viewed as 'disingenuous, at best' (King *et al.*, 1996: 293). This perspective is similar to that of Hall (1994b), who highlights that ecotourism results in the imposition of western values and, consequently, cultural erosion. Goodwin concurs: 'eco-missionaries can expect to be accused of green imperialism and eco-colonialism' (Goodwin, 1996: 284).

In a seminal work on ecotourism, Whelan (1991:9) comments that 'one of the most egregious shortcomings of most ecotourism projects is that the local people are not given any role in the planning process or implementation...'. De Vletter (1993:8) describes community participation as 'the most critical aspect of sustainable development'. Numerous authors have emphasised that local participation in ecotourism is essential if this form of tourism is to be sustainable and make a positive contribution to the local community. For example, the importance of participation by host communities, in the ecotourism development process, is addressed by Lovel and Feuerstein (1992). They point out that: 'without community involvement in planning tourism and exercising some degree of local control over tourism resources and the revenue generated, tourism will experience difficulty in moving away from a largely community exploitative model which undermines fundamental principles and objectives of community development' (Lovel & Feuerstein, 1992: 350).

This paper focuses on local community involvement in the development of an ecotourism venture. It is based on a case study of a proposed community-based ecotourism development in the rural area of Shewula, north-eastern Swaziland. The

paper explores the factors affecting local participation in the context of community-based ecotourism development. The responses of Shewula community members to the development are examined in the context of conditions conducive to local participation. These include local level awareness, support and capacity as well as engagement with external parties that does not restrict community participation or undermine the process of local level empowerment. Before entering into this discussion, background information is provided about the area, its people and the events leading up to the development of a proposal for ecotourism in Shewula.

Location of the study area and description of the local context

Shewula is located in the north-eastern part of Swaziland, southern Africa. It stretches from the Umbuluzi River in the west to the Mozambican border in the east and is bounded on the south and south-west by two protected areas (see Map 1). Situated along the escarpment of the Lubombo mountain range, this rural area is occupied by an indigenous population of Swazi people. The land on which the Shewula community lives is Swazi Nation Land, and is held in trust for the nation by the King of Swaziland. It is, therefore, a communal area and is administered by the local chief, Chief Sifundza, in consultation with a council of male elders known as the *Libandla*. These traditional leadership structures control the allocation of land and designate land-uses.

The majority of the population in Shewula survive by means of subsistence agriculture although recent droughts and cattle theft have exacerbated already precarious livelihood conditions. The community is a predominantly traditional society, and still practices the age-old customs and ceremonies. There are, however, signs of western influences in processes of acculturation and modernization in Shewula.

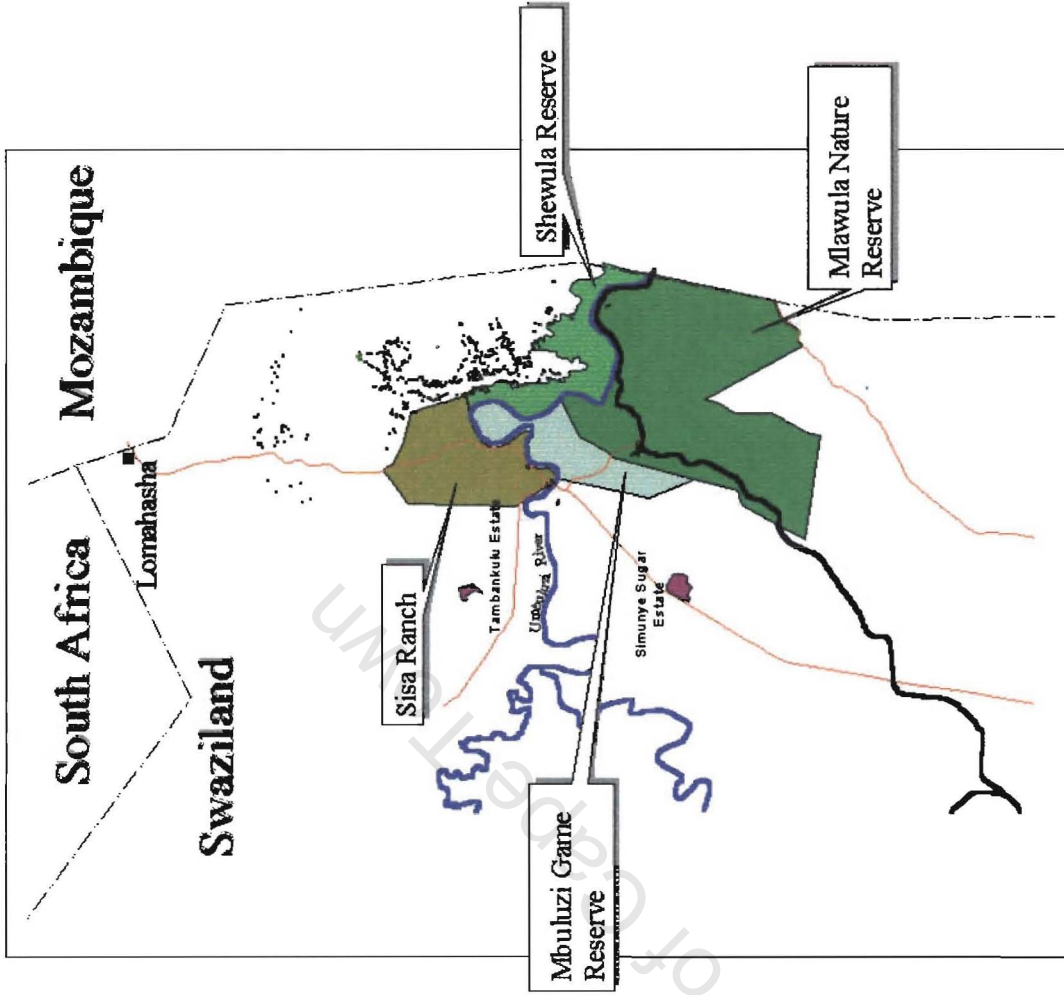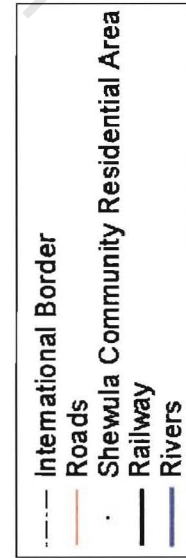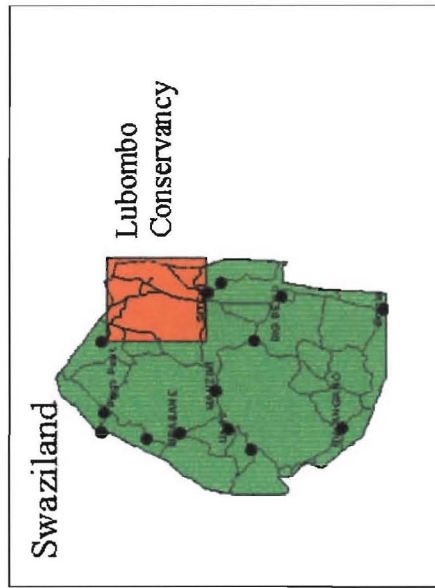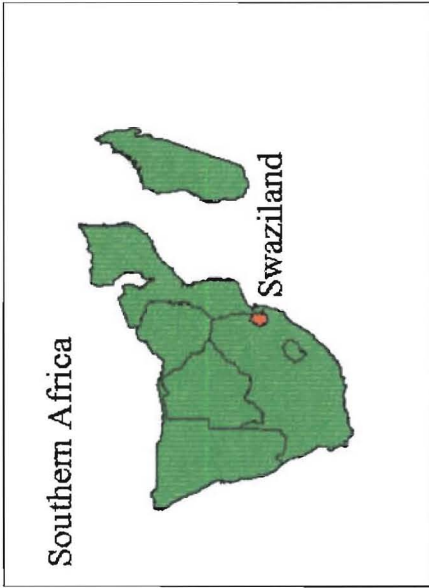### *Background to the proposed development and consequent research*

In late April 1999, representatives from the Shewula community signed an agreement which formalised co-operation between themselves and the neighbouring properties of Mbuluzi Game Reserve, Mlawula Nature Reserve and Sisa Ranch (see Map 1). The signing saw the establishment of the Lubombo Conservancy, a voluntary association that has as its vision:

'the long-term conservation of the ecosystems of north-eastern Swaziland...through a process of co-operative nature conservation management and the development of conservation-based opportunities which create benefits, and contribute to improvement of the quality of life of all the people in the region' (Sandwith, 1999).

Prior to the signing, a portion of unoccupied land under the management and control of Chief Sifundza was designated as the Shewula Game Reserve (see Map 1). The term is something of a misnomer, since there is little evidence of game species in the area, as is illustrated by one Shewula resident's comment that: 'If you want to see an impala, you have to go a long way to see it'. However, the region in which the community's reserve is located has been characterised as a high biodiversity area (de Vletter, 1997) and important habitat types, such as ironwood forests, have been identified in parts of the Shewula Game Reserve (Sandwith, 1999). The formation of the community's reserve is an important part of a larger initiative to consolidate land for conservation purposes, and strengthen conservation efforts in the area.

During the period leading up to the commitment of community land for conservation, a need was identified to provide the Shewula community with incentives to protect the natural landscape of Shewula. It was suggested that tourism development be considered. With the financial support of local stakeholders, the Shewula community's leadership visited examples of other community-based ecotourism development elsewhere. A few months later, the Swaziland branch of the British Council called for proposals for funding from non-governmental organisations interested in implemented poverty alleviation projects.

Representatives from the two protected areas, and other local interests such as Tambankulu Sugar Estate (see Map 1), worked together with members of the community to draft a proposal for tourism accommodation facilities in Shewula. The development was originally conceptualised as a "bushcamp" that would provide visitors with the opportunity to experience traditional Swazi culture in the semi-natural setting of the community's reserve. The idea was to set up a traditional Swazi village in which guests could stay overnight, learn about the local culture, eat traditional food, and appreciate the beauty of the surroundings.

Map 1: Properties included in the Lubombo Conservancy

Southern Africa

Swaziland

Swaziland

Lubombo Conservancy

International Border
Roads
Shewula Community Residential Area
Railway
Rivers

South Africa

Mozambique

Swaziland

Lomahasha

Shewula Reserve

Mlawula Nature Reserve

Sisa Ranch

Tambankulu Estate

Umbuluzi River

Simunye Sugar Estate

Mbuluzi Game Reserve

N

10   0   10   20   30 Km

The design of the facilities was also planned to accommodate western comforts. It was envisaged that the Mbuluzi Game Reserve would provide technical assistance and a route of access to the development, from across the Umbuluzi River.

The immediate goals of the project, as stated in the original proposal (Segar, *et al.*, 1999), include reduction of unemployment, income generation through ecotourism, and self-employment through increased local economic activity. The long-term objectives include conservation of pristine land of great ecological value in Swazi Nation Land, economic empowerment of the community, raising the standard of living of the community, and an increased sense of civic responsibility (*Ibid.*).

Since no recognised non-governmental organisation (NGO) existed in the community itself, the proposal was submitted to the British Council in mid-1998 via a regional NGO, the Umbuluzi Catchment Association (UCA). The Shewula community is an associate member of the UCA. Towards the end of 1998, the tourism development proposal was accepted, and approximately R300 000 was allocated to the project under the British Council's Poverty Alleviation Programme.

The case of the proposed Shewula tourism development is, therefore, relatively unusual, in that communal land has been earmarked for conservation and tourism development by local people, rather than through government decree, protected area management policies or private sector interests. Local initiative, supported by input from regional interests and funding NGOs, has created a situation in which local people have a significant degree of responsibility in the development of an ecotourism venture and they have the necessary capital investment to retain ownership of development. They do not need to be 'given' a role (Whelan, 1991) in the ecotourism development at Shewula. They are in this position already and they are the primary role-players, as well as the primary stakeholders, in the development.

Subsequent to the granting of funds, a feasibility study of the development was commissioned by the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), an NGO which has, as one of its primary objectives, the formation of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs). PPF has an interest in the region within which the development would take place because of its proximity to the proposed Maputaland TFCA. The feasibility study aimed to

assess the environmental impacts and socio-cultural implications of the planned tourism development, and to identify the capacity-building requirements associated with community-based ecotourism development. This paper is based on the research that was undertaken for the feasibility study, which was done by a group of Masters students from the University of Cape Town.

Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was adopted for the research. The research was exploratory in nature and was therefore characterised by flexibility in the research design that would enable the research process to be responsive to initial findings and adapted accordingly. A number of research methods were used to enhance the reliability of the findings. These included document analysis, participant observation, group discussions, and semi-structured, informal interviews.

The fieldwork component of the research was based on a six-week period of extensive consultation with the local community. Fieldwork activities included interactive workshops with the community and other interested parties, site visits to the Shewula Game Reserve and a neighbouring community in Mozambique, informal gatherings with community members and conversations with individual community members. The responses of Shewula community members were documented, often in the form of direct quotes. In addition, some members of the Shewula community assisted the researchers by actively participating in data collection. Their results helped to verify and clarify the attitudes and perceptions that were being documented by other means.

A review of existing case studies and other relevant literature provided the theoretical context for analysis of the documented responses and other research findings. A conceptual framework was developed that identified key elements of sustainable community-based ecotourism, and the findings were then analysed within the context of the currently dominant discourse of sustainable development and, in particular, the notion of sustainable tourism.

Limitations

Aside from the limitations that are inherent in adopting a qualitative research approach (Maxwell, 1996), the research was limited by a number of practical

constraints. These included time constraints and the use of translation between English and seSwati. The former was influenced by funding constraints as well as the availability of Shewula residents to participate in the research activities. The latter was partially mitigated by having more than one bilingual person present during the research activities in order to enhance the reliability of interpretation and provide clarity when confusion arose.

A note on terminology

The term 'community' is useful in defining a group of people, such as the Shewula community, who share a common identity and code for conduct (Bhattacharyya, 1995) and whose place-oriented social interactions (Zekeri *et al.*, 1994: 218) mean that they will all be affected by the proposed development. However, as Boonzaier (1996) points out, a community is not a homogenous entity: 'the local population is not a like-minded 'community' whose members all share the same attitude[s]' (Boonzaier, 1996: 309). Thus, there may be conflicting and divergent points of view. In the pages that follow, the responses of the Shewula community to the proposal for ecotourism development are analysed as trends or patterns of divergence, with specific comments being attributed to 'residents' or 'members' of the Shewula community, and not to the community as a whole.

Community-based ecotourism: a theoretical review

The definition of "ecotourism" has been widely discussed and debated in the literature (see, for example, Roe *et al.*, 1997:8 for some of the more frequently quoted definitions), but there is no universally accepted definition (Goodwin, 1996). Ecotourism as a concept has been used variously to 'describe an activity, set forth a philosophy and espouse a model of development' (Ziffer, 1989, cited in Bottrill *et al.*, 1995). Despite accusations that ecotourism is 'an eco-façade' (Pleumarom, 1995) and 'little more than a worthless cliché' (Hall, 1994b), the application of the term to genuine attempts at sustainable tourism development can prove useful; and several attempts have been made to operationalise such applications (Bottrill *et al.*, 1995, Blamey, 1997).

A common theme in definitions of ecotourism is the emphasis on the importance of a natural, relatively undisturbed setting for the tourism activity (Wallace, 1996;

Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). Although it has been suggested that ecotourism can occur in an urban context (Weaver, 1998) ecotourism is usually, if implicitly, described as a form of nature tourism. Goodwin (1996) distinguishes between nature tourism and ecotourism on the basis that while both allow for enjoyment of nature, ecotourism is additionally characterised by a sense of environmental responsibility.

This responsibility extends, to various degrees in different definitions, to both the biophysical and socio-cultural components of the environment. While some argue that the distinguishing feature of ecotourism should be that it makes a contribution to 'biodiversity conservation' (Brandon and Margoluis, 1996: 35), Hyndman points out that 'cultural diversity and biological diversity are mutually dependent and coterminous' (Hyndman, 1994:300). In fact, Barkin argues that 'biodiversity conservation' is a concept which, 'in its broadest sense, encompasses not only threatened flora and fauna, but also the survivability of...human communities, as stewards of the natural environment and as producers' (Barkin, 1996: 265). Thus, the environmental responsibility of ecotourism extends beyond the purely biophysical domain, to encompass the social aspects of environment as well.

The ambit of ecotourism's social responsibility varies in different conceptualisations of the concept. It can range from sustaining the well-being of local inhabitants (Gakahu, 1993; Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996) and improving their socio-economic standing through community development (MacGregor, 1996) to maintaining and even restoring the culture of an indigenous population (Colvin, 1994; Ashley & Roe, 1998). Some definitions of ecotourism even include references to the role that cultural heritage can play in attracting ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Ziffer 1989 cited in Goodwin, 1996). But few authors stipulate the involvement of the local population in ecotourism as a defining characteristic.

Thus, despite an emphasis on benefits to local populations, and the role which their culture might play in attracting ecotourism, the notion itself does not assume that the responsibility for planning and implementing an ecotourism venture rests with the local people. Hence, in instances where the local community is a primary role-player, as well as the primary stakeholder, the ecotourism development has been characterised as 'community-based' (Sproule, 1996; Gaisford, 1997). Sproule defines

community-based ecotourism as 'ecotourism enterprises that are owned and managed by the community' (Sproule, 1996: 233), where 'community' refers to 'a group of people, often living in the same geographic area, who identify themselves as belonging to the same group' (Sproule, 1996: 235).

Shewula: a community-based ecotourism development?

Although the terms 'ecotourism' and 'community-based' were not used to describe the form of tourism proposed for Shewula (Segar *et al.*, 1999), the envisaged tourism product could arguably be classified as a community-based ecotourism venture, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, with respect to contributing to biodiversity conservation (in its restrictive, biophysical sense), the proposed development is intended to conserve what is believed to be 'pristine land of great ecological value in Swazi Nation Land' (original proposal, Segar, *et al.*, 1999). Input into the planning process has also been received from numerous initiatives concerned with biodiversity conservation, including the Maputaland TFCA, a national biodiversity initiative and the local private and public reserves. This has placed the conservation of species and habitats on a development agenda that is primarily animated by a sense of socio-cultural responsibility.

Secondly, although the Shewula Game Reserve lacks the high-profile species and obvious public appeal of impressive ecosystems, such as rain forests, which attract ecotourists (Mendelsohn, 1994), there is significant potential for ecotourism in the combination of a semi-natural, wilderness area with the cultural assets of the Shewula community. There is also market potential in the interest and commitment shown by a rural community that takes real steps in caring for its environment, such as establishing its own protected area. Indeed, the findings of a study cited by McCool (1995) would seem to indicate that commitment to environmental responsibility is an attractive feature of an ecotourism destination. The study found that when identifying characteristics of a tourism destination that influence destination choice, 65% of travelers felt that 'a place that takes care of its environment' is very important, while 44% rated 'a chance to see wildlife and undisturbed nature' as very important. There is, therefore, significant potential for character of the natural and cultural environment in Shewula to attract ecotourism.

Thirdly, the community-based nature of the project is evident in the business plan for the development. The plan emphasises community ownership of the tourism development and the intention to facilitate a 'build-operate-transfer' process whereby the completed tourism facility would initially be run by an independent operator, but would eventually be taken over by local entrepreneurs. Despite this envisaged delay of community control over the daily operation of the development, the responsibility for overall management of tourism in Shewula, including any ancillary tourism activities and developments, is essentially left in the hands of the Shewula community.

Having established that the envisaged development is an ecotourism development, which is also intended to be community-based, the paper now turns to a discussion of local participation. This is an important feature of any tourism development that aspires to be socio-culturally sustainable and in so doing contribute to community development.

Local participation in community-based ecotourism

Local participation has been defined as 'the ability of local communities to influence the outcome of development projects such as ecotourism that have an impact on them' (Drake, 1991: 132). Cernea (1991) believes that 'giving people more opportunities to participate effectively in development activities' constitutes local participation. Both of these definitions tacitly assume that the locus of control over development lies outside of the community, which is not necessarily the case when the impetus for development has arisen locally. Thus, Bhattacharyya's (1995: 62) point that 'participation does not mean responding to a pre-formulated agenda...' is particularly relevant in the context of community-based development. According to this view, local participation moves beyond mere involvement in the development processes of others, to encompass the ability of local people to own and plan their own development.

In the planning phase, local participation can include activities such as identifying problems, planning activities, formulating alternatives, and allocating resources (Drake, 1991:133). Local participation provides an opportunity for local residents to provide input into the planning process, allowing for local preferences (Brandon,

1993) and indigenous knowledge (Hyndman, 1994) to be incorporated during the development process. The involvement of local people in ecotourism planning can also strengthen the socio-cultural sustainability of the development (Gaisford, 1997). Local participation is especially important for community-based development, since the project cannot be achieved without the involvement of local people, their support and their commitment (Trent, 1996). Sense of ownership is also an important function of local participation in community-based ecotourism development (Brandon, 1993; Urquhart, 1995).

Extent of local participation in Shewula

According to Ashley and Roe (1998) the extent of local participation in a tourism initiative can range from passive individual involvement to full collective participation. To date, the degree of involvement of local residents in the project cycle for the Shewula ecotourism development has varied from full participation to a complete lack of involvement. Some members of the community, most often those in positions of power, have been involved in planning the project. For example, the Chief and members of the *Libandla* have identified a number of alternative sites for the proposed development. Most residents have, however, not been actively involved. Some have been passively involved, in that they have been informed of the project. Others have remained unaware of the proposal for development. The various levels of awareness and involvement are associated with different degrees of support for the project. Some of the factors affecting both levels of local support and local participation are discussed below.

Factors affecting local participation in ecotourism development

There are a diverse range of factors that can affect local participation in planning for ecotourism development. As the above discussion has shown, much has been made of the role that outsiders can play in facilitating local participation, by giving local communities opportunities to participate in planning an ecotourism venture themselves. However, as the following discussion will demonstrate, removing external constraints to local participation does not necessarily result in the desired levels of participation. There may also be intrinsic factors affecting local participation that are influenced by the local socio-political and cultural context. These factors can affect local participation in various ways, both directly and indirectly. In the case of

Shewula, the conditions conducive to participation, such as awareness and support, have been influenced by a number of factors. In addition, even when these conditions have been met, local capacity (or the lack thereof) to participate effectively in planning for ecotourism development has affected local participation. Some of the factors affecting the level of local participation in the proposed Shewula ecotourism development are further discussed below.

Local support for ecotourism development

Although the proposed Shewula tourism development was initiated at a local level, those initially involved constituted a minority of the local population. This is partly the result of selective targeting of local leaders by outsiders who sought to encourage local participation in ecotourism and conservation, by exposing the community's traditional leadership to other examples of community-based ecotourism. Significant obstacles have been encountered in trying to generate a similar awareness among local community members, and gaining their support for the proposal for ecotourism development. The following discussion explores some of the factors affecting local awareness of and support for community-based ecotourism in Shewula which have, in turn, affected local participation.

Power relations, access to information and attendance at meetings

Brandon (1993: 147-148) contends that 'authority structures may inhibit extensive participation in decision-making' and that 'strong leaders and existing power structures may not want a participatory process to be initiated that will challenge the status quo and thus their leadership'. Some responses of Shewula residents would suggest that this is the case. Comments that the planning process was not 'people-centred', that 'the elders should have briefed the people that this was going to happen' and 'the chief didn't tell them all the nitty-gritties. He didn't inform the people' could be interpreted as substantiating the conclusion that local elites are preventing participation.

However, most of the critical comments obtained from residents, regarding the planning process to date, were less concerned with participation in decision-making than with the communication of the intentions of the local leadership, and access to information. For example, when discussions turned to the funds that were available

for construction of tourism facilities, residents wanted to know who had submitted the proposal for funding, and to whom. The importance of effective communication for community-based ecotourism projects was therefore highlighted, as was the need for a reliable source of information. As one individual stated: 'Sometimes, if you don't talk out these things, it results in rumors and creates conflict or confusion. If the concept comes out from nowhere, it will meet with resistance, so rather it should come from reliable sources.'

Those more actively involved in planning the project, countered accusations that Chief Sifundza and his *Libandla* had neglected to inform their constituency about the development. These people have suggested that negative responses, including skepticism and resistance, are the result of local apathy and political rivalry. Active boycotts of some meetings conducted during the research period, which were called in order to discuss the proposed development, would appear to substantiate the argument that lack of awareness about or resistance to the project are the result of politically motivated non-attendance at project meetings. Poor attendance at these meetings has also been associated with a 'wait-and-see' attitude, with some residents characterising local skeptics as 'doubting Thomases'.

There are also other factors that could influence attendance at meetings. These include limited time for engagement in activities other than those absolutely necessary for daily subsistence, and the effect of poor weather, especially rain, which together with the poor conditions of roads and footpaths can preclude attendance at meetings. In addition, gender can also affect participation, especially if the locality in which meetings are held excludes female members of the community. The extent to which local residents perceive themselves as stakeholders in the development is another key factor affecting attendance at meetings. This stakeholder status is the product of a number of factors, including the right to access local resources and the expectation of benefits from development.

Rights of access to local resources
Local rights over resources is often cited as a necessary prerequisite for effective local participation (Ashley & Garland, 1994; Child, 1996). Clearly defined rights and authority over natural resources, including land, are essential for any community-

based initiative that seeks to utilise these resources and exercise the right to manage them in order to secure benefits for the community. In the case of Shewula, the power vested in the chief with respect to land allocation fulfils this requirement. However, the rights of community members to access these resources are just as important for broad-based local participation. This is illustrated by the responses of the people living at Nduma, a sub-region of Shewula.

The residents of Nduma do not have security of land tenure, and are only able to claim temporary residence in the area in which they live. Explanations for this situation revolve around a recent split in an adjacent community living in the nearby border town of Lomahasha (see Map 1). The division saw a number of people changing their allegiance to the chief of Shewula, and coming to live in the previously unoccupied area of Nduma. The situation has placed Chief Sifundza in a politically difficult position, in which the granting of permanent residence is weighed against intensifying rivalry between chiefdoms.

Thus, political tensions and lack of clarity about rights of access to resources have affected the responses of Nduma residents. The prevailing level of support for the project among these residents is tempered by fears that their lack of secure, permanent residence would mean that they would be 'left out' when the time came to allocate benefits from the proposed project. These responses also show the important role that expectations of costs and benefits can have on local residents' support of ecotourism development.

Local cost-benefit analyses

If local people are to support a development such as community-based ecotourism, the potential benefits must be seen, by the beneficiaries, to outweigh the opportunity costs that will be incurred (Ashley & Garland, 1994). This is clearly illustrated by the responses of residents living adjacent to the Shewula Game Reserve. These residents registered a significant level of resistance to the chosen form of land use. Their overtly stated concern is the potential loss of access to resources, in particular grazing land for cattle, as a result of the area being designated for integrated conservation and ecotourism development. The perception is common among these residents that tourism is primarily nature-based, that tourists would only want to see game and not

cattle in the area, and that tourism would therefore require the exclusion of cattle.

This perception is influenced by the current tourism in the area, which is largely nature-based. However, in view of the lack of game in the Shewula Game Reserve, it is unlikely that the presence of wildlife would be the main tourism attraction for the Shewula tourism development, at least not in the short term. In addition, the basis for objections to the designation of the land for tourism and conservation on the grounds that it will exclude cattle appears unwarranted in light of the limited grazing available, and the rugged terrain of this escarpment area which makes it difficult to access.

The explanation, however, is to be found in the need for cattle security. Recent attacks by cattle raiders, who are believed to come from Mozambique, have seen the movement of cattle into the Shewula Game Reserve area, despite its unsuitability for grazing. The inaccessibility of the area and its location, make it well-suited to protecting cattle from cross-border raids which can seriously undermine a significant socio-cultural and economic resource in traditional Swazi culture. The importance of cattle is illustrated by one man's comment:

> 'Swazis are proud of their livestock. For a man to get rid of his livestock is very difficult. You are not rich without cattle in a kraal, even if you have several hundreds of thousands of Rands in the bank.'

Thus, the development of a form of tourism that is believed, by residents, to benefit from exclusionary practices, such as those associated with classical nature conservation (Hyndman, 1994), is perceived as a threat because it would place a key socio-economic resource at risk. The complexity of the situation highlights the context-specific nature of some factors affecting local participation.

Proximity to the area in which the proposed development is to be established is not the only factor affecting local cost-benefit analysis. The trend for gender differential responses of Shewula community members to the proposed development also shows that gender can influence perceptions of the costs and benefits of a particular development. For instance, the previously discussed emphasis on the costs of tourism development and nature conservation to cattle security, was mainly voiced by male members of the society.

In contrast, the responses of women focused mainly on the potential economic benefits of the project. Their support for the project, and indications of intentions for future involvement, were based on expectations regarding possibilities of employment and alternative forms of income. These included the production and sale of traditional goods such as handicrafts and Swazi food, and the provision of cultural services such traditional dancing and dress. The different responses suggest that identifying whether the benefits of a project will outweigh the costs, is an intrinsically subjective evaluation which may be moderated by a variety of factors such as social standing and control over economic resources. They also serve to highlight the importance of grass-roots local participation in planning projects that are intended to benefit the local people, since local preferences and evaluations may differ from those of outsiders, or other members of the community.

Local-level understanding about tourism

Once a community's awareness of and support for ecotourism development has been secured, those who desire to be involved in planning and implementing the development require a degree of understanding of tourism. If communities interested in undertaking ecotourism development are to develop a suitable tourism product, which is marketable and environmentally, socio-culturally and economically sustainable (as genuine ecotourism aims to be), they need to have an understanding of tourism management and how to go about planning a tourism development. They need to know the potential market power of their product (Ashley & Roe, 1998) and how to optimise it. They also need to have an awareness of the value of their assets, so that they do not sign it away 'for a pittance' (Ashley & Roe, 1998) or have unrealistic expectations (Fowkes, 1994). Local knowledge regarding the nature and mechanics of tourism, the psychology of tourism, the demands of the market and the limits of a particular market is, therefore, essential. In short, as Timothy's investigation of participatory planning in tourism concludes, 'action on the part of the local community, by participating in or benefiting from tourism, requires some knowledge about the industry and its impact' (Timothy, 1999:374).

The nature of the tourism industry

Despite earlier comments that some residents are aware of the attraction value that wildlife has for tourism, the level of understanding in the general population with

respect to the tourism industry is low, sometimes non-existent. The majority of residents were unable to respond to questions pertaining to tourism, such as who tourists are or what tourism entails. They responded, instead, with questions of their own such as 'Why would a tourist come here?', 'Is a tourist different to a visitor?' and 'Do you need a qualification to be a tourist?'. This suggests a lack of knowledge about tourism that has also resulted in misunderstandings, confusion and unrealistic expectations. This may be seen, for example, in residents' perceptions regarding the expected behaviour of tourists, such as 'Tourists should invest in Shewula'; 'Tourists should speak our language' and 'Tourists should be happy and try to be with us, try to become one people, have fun together. If a tourist knows the language, they'll stay.'

Limited exposure to tourism has also affected the local planning process. For example, one of the decision-making criteria that was used for site selection included sufficient distance from a nearby river because 'tourists would not like the sound of running water - the noise would mean they wouldn't be able to sleep at night'. Suggestions that a hotel should be built, in order to address the lack of tourism accommodation facilities in Shewula, also point to the limited understanding that exists regarding alternative forms of tourism other than those that currently dominate the main tourism destination in Swaziland, namely the Ezulwini Valley. Thus, in instances where residents have had some exposure to tourism, it has often been limited to mass tourism. Understanding of ecotourism, as an alternative form of tourism, is therefore still lacking. This has resulted in a lack of capacity to plan an appropriate ecotourism development, and has significantly impeded the effective and meaningful participation of those who are currently participating in the project, or are interested in being involved. Clearly, if local participation in planning for ecotourism is to be effective in maximising the market potential of Shewula's assets, the local people need to be better informed about the needs and aspirations of ecotourists (see, for example, Blamey and Braithwaite, 1997).

Tourism impacts
Although there was a sense of inadequacy regarding the community's ability to cater for tourism, there was also a sense of determination that certain negative socio-cultural impacts should be avoided 'at all cost'. Prostitution, in particular, was singled out as a form of commodification resulting from tourism that would not be tolerated.

'Selling bodies,' stated one woman, would result in the men 'going with their knobkerries to the lodge and they will destroy everything'. Her perspective demonstrates how socio-cultural sustainability is essential to the overall sustainability of a tourism development.

Fears about the development of prostitution as a result of tourism are likely to have been influenced by an awareness that this has been the case in other parts of Swaziland (Harrison, 1992). However, there are other tourism-related impacts that could affect the biophysical and socio-cultural sustainability of the project, of which the community appears to be unaware. In view of the current influences that the outside world is already having in the area, cultural erosion and the development of dependency relationships, are potentially significant impacts that could undermine the marketability of the community's ecotourism product and the effectiveness of the empowerment objective of this community-based ecotourism venture.

Opportunities for enhancing local participation

Johnson (1990) observes that 'empowerment starts with access to information' (cited in Brandon, 1993: 140). Certainly, in the case of most Shewula residents, lack of information has impeded local participation, because it has resulted in low levels of awareness about the proposed development and a lack of understanding about tourism. This has, in turn, reduced the capacity of local people to empower themselves by planning an appropriate, marketable ecotourism development that will be sustainable in the long-term and produce significant community benefits.

Various methods and techniques have been suggested as mechanisms for empowering local populations to participate in tourism development. Timothy (1999) suggests that awareness building, as a form of resident education, is essential if there is to be local participation in tourism planning. Skills training and capacity building at the individual level are also important for the empowerment of local people (Child, 1996). At the institutional level, it has been suggested that strengthening the institutional capacity of communities involved in ecotourism projects, or creating new institutitons where this may be necessary, is important in facilitating collective participation (Sproule, 1996). An enabling development framework (Brandon & Wells, 1992; Gaisford, 1997) and a supportive environment that facilitates local

participation and partnership-building (Sproule, 1996) can also help to overcome the obstacles to local participation. Furthermore, political will, higher-level support and commitment are necessary (Gaisford, 1997; Roe et. al., 1998) as is a flexible planning process that allows sufficient time for participation (Torres, 1996; Trent, 1996). Each of these is further discussed with reference to their application to the case of the ecotourism development in Shewula.

Creating grass-roots awareness and skills training

Some of the residents in Shewula are aware of the problems arising from their lack of exposure to tourism. Those with a degree of understanding about tourism believe that creating awareness and understanding is necessary. As one respondent noted: 'people don't appreciate the assets that they have, they need to be educated'. Other advocates of educating the general population focussed on what the community should know in order to accommodate tourism. For example, one woman felt that 'people must be taught how to welcome visitors', and another suggested the importance of knowing how to cater for different tastes.

Others are less self-reflective about the relationship between themselves and visitors to their community. For example, there is evidence of social behaviour, such as begging from visitors, which could undermine the market potential of Shewula's tourism product and/or be exacerbated by the development of tourism in the area. The issue of acceptable behaviour, from the point of view of both the community and the tourist, would therefore need to be addressed to ensure that the tourism development is socio-culturally sustainable from both perspectives, in order to maximise the overall sustainability of the development.

There were many individuals who indicated that they would like to be 'an experienced somebody' who had access to skills training that would equip them for employment in the tourism industry or to undertake entrepreneurial activities. Their suggestions on how to achieve the necessary skills training included training workshops and advice from experts on how to undertake tourism related activities or produce marketable crafts. Personal observation would also suggest that the market potential of certain traditional dishes, especially those that rely extensively on bitter herbs, should also be investigated.

Institution building

The process of institution building has been defined by Midgeley (1986) as: 'the creation of procedures for democratic decision-making at the local level and the involvement of local people in these procedures to the extent that they [come to] regard them as the normal way of conducting community affairs' (cited in Brandon, 1993: 147). However, as is the case in Shewula, such procedures can be contrary to the entrenched socio-cultural protocol of indigenous, traditional societies, where decision-making occurs by means of 'consensus among a group of elders' (King, 1996: 300). Thus, as Steenkamp warns, the use of intervention strategies by exterior agents of change who seek the introduction of western forms of decision-making and the creation of 'hard' structures, should be tempered by the knowledge that they carry with them, 'the "hidden cultural baggage" of Western development intervention that so often contribute [to] or result in the failure of such interventions' (Steenkamp, 1999).

Tourism is, however, an imminently western phenomenon and managing the changes that are required for its introduction into a traditional society, and securing the subsequent sustainability of local resources, does require a degree of organizational capacity. In addition, the case of the Shewula tourism development illustrates the importance of having a recognised and capable institutional body that can represent the interests of the community when dealing with funding organisations.

Child's remark that 'serious problems can arise from donor funding, undermining the sustainability of programmes' (Child, 1996:379) is particularly pertinent to the case of the Shewula development. The drafting of the proposal was characterised by local participation of a few individuals from Shewula, but the subsequent allocation of funds for which there is limited local-level capacity to proceed, has created serious obstacles to local participation. In particular, the looming deadline attached to the project, has meant that exterior agents of change, and those community members initially involved in the project, have been hesitant to conduct a participatory planning process. The lesson to be learnt supports Child's assertion that 'investment funding... should not be rushed...[but] should only be provided once communities have developed sufficient capacity...' (Child, 1996: 380).

On 13 March 1999, the Shewula Community Trust was created as a body that would be responsible for the management and co-ordination of the tourism development activities, as well as for community conservation efforts in the Shewula Game Reserve. It represents an attempt by the community to create the necessary institutional structures referred to above. However, the political tensions evident just prior to the Trust's establishment also highlighted the problems associated with the creation of new institutions that resemble 'hard', western structures for decision-making (Steenkamp, 1999) and which could have the potential to create platforms for dissension. The appointment of female residents to the Trust would, however, seem to suggest that the local community perceives the Trust as a body which, in its mandate to manage tourism, need not be a threat to the socio-political status quo.

The very process whereby the Shewula Community Trust was established reflects an interesting synthesis of existing socio-cultural practices, of appointment and delegation of responsibility by the traditional leadership, with a model for democratic election of trustees by the community. On the other hand, it could also validate Hasler's comment (Hasler 1995, cited in Ashley and Roe, 1997: 11) that 'grassroots decision-making may only be possible if it is sanctioned from the top'. This observation applies equally to the broader development framework within which community-based ecotourism is located, which is further dealt with in the next section.

Partnership-building and higher-level commitment to local participation

Brandon (1993:147) suggests that a combination of local institutions working with agents of change from outside the community can ensure the short- and long-term success of projects. The formation of such local-level partnerships is also advocated by others (Urquhart, 1995; Sproule, 1996). Sproule points out that 'partnerships should be viewed as an integral part of the design and development of community-based ecotourism ventures. They are deemed indispensable for achieving a positive policy and planning framework' (Sproule, 1996: 249).

The co-operation between members of the Lubombo Conservancy represents one of the important local-level partnerships that have underpinned the Shewula ecotourism development. This is especially true of the role that local stakeholders have played in

developing the interest of the local leadership in tourism and conservation. By providing the funding for fact-finding missions to other community-based tourism initiatives and game auctions, they have made local people aware of the potential for Shewula to establish an ecotourism venture as well as exposed them to the value of wildlife for tourism. As an institution, the conservancy provides a useful forum for improved communication between members, greater strategic planning and the pooling of resources. The benefits of membership, for the Shewula community and the Shewula ecotourism development include offers of technical assistance, skills training, infrastructure and equipment.

Urqhuart (1995: 39) emphasises that to maximise the sustainability of developments such as ecotourism, 'partnerships should not be restricted to the local level'. In Swaziland, there are a number of broader strategic planning initiatives that currently provide a supportive framework for developing partnerships beyond the local level. Two such initiatives are the above-mentioned TFCA initiative, and a government led development initiative known as the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative (LSDI).

Both initiatives are characterised by international co-operation between Swaziland, South Africa and Mozambique, and both have been given high-profile support from government representatives and heads of state. However, the impact of the initiatives at grassroots level in north-eastern Swaziland has been characterised by differences in the extent to which local participation has been encouraged.

Local participation has largely been facilitated by the TFCA initiative which has played a significant role in forging local-level partnerships, for example by funding the regional initiative of the Lubombo Conservancy and initiating moves towards transfrontier cooperation between Shewula and communities living in adjacent areas in Mozambique. Such cooperation has proven beneficial for the Shewula community on a number of levels, not least of which has been significant improvements in access to information regarding the source of the cattle rustling problem.

In contrast, the LSDI has been criticised for the top-down, non-consultative approach adopted during its development planning process for north-eastern Swaziland. One of the consequences of this has been a lack of clarity, among the Shewula people

regarding the role of the LSDI, and in particular the extent of its authority over tourism development in the region. Fears were expressed by some Shewula members that the Shewula tourism development is occurring without the necessary sanctioning from this development initiative. This concern is clear in the opinion offered by one resident who believes that: 'we are abusing the King's authority, going there without consulting with the LSDI'. This comment also illustrates the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various parties who are involved in or affected by community-based ecotourism development (Gaisford, 1997) and the importance of communication between the different role-players (Boeren, 1992).

The juxtaposition of the two approaches, and their respective outcomes at the community level, raises the importance of higher-level commitment to local participation, not only in rhetoric, but also in practice. Without it, bureaucratic imperatives may begin to dominate the development agenda, and may thwart local participation even when the conditions of local awareness, support and capacity have been met.

Conclusion

If ecotourism is to be an appropriate form of development, and not an appropriating one, local participation in the development process is necessary. This is especially true when ecotourism is promoted in rural communities adjacent to protected areas, in order to achieve the dual goals of conservation and community development. However, when tourism in general, and ecotourism in particular, are foreign concepts to local residents, their capacity to participate in planning a successful ecotourism development will inevitably be limited.

Giving local people an opportunity to participate in ecotourism development, or assisting local communities to create opportunities for implementing their own ecotourism venture, will not automatically result in local participation, nor will it necessary secure the sustainability of such projects. For local participation to occur, the local population must be aware of the possibilities for ecotourism development, and must support moves to establish such ventures in their own areas. In addition, if local participation in the planning of an ecotourism development is to be effective, the local people must have an understanding of what is required, not only from a

marketing perspective, but also from an environmental sustainability perspective. A community that understands the tourism industry and the possible impacts of tourism is in a better position to achieve an optimal balance between these two perspectives than one that is not.

Outsiders who intend to use ecotourism to provide local people with incentives to protect their natural resources and empower themselves, must ensure that there is sufficient capacity in the local community to accommodate tourism, before undertaking to obtain the necessary funding for development on behalf of the community. Where such capacity does not exist, empowerment is not only a goal of ecotourism development. It is also a pre-requisite.

Agents of change from outside a community can facilitate the empowerment process, for example by generating local awareness about tourism and providing access to information. However, their actions require sensitivity to the cultural context and socio-political organisation of the community. The engagement of external parties in community-based ecotourism needs to be structured in such a way that it does not undermine the capacity of local people to empower themselves. Thus, while partnerships can be useful in that they often provide much needed resources for ecotourism development, potential partners in the development process must be committed to local participation and empowerment if the development is to be truly community-based.

The introduction of an essentially western phenomenon into a traditional society in a manner that is environmentally sensitive and sustainable is fraught with difficulties. It presents numerous challenges, as well as opportunities, to both local communities and those who are involved in, and support, the development of community-based ecotourism.

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