

SOUTH AFRICA: ENSURING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE MADIKWE INITIATIVE

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This case study examines the development of a community-owned lodge near a game park and the tools used to involve the local community in the environmental impact assessment process associated with that development.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The Madikwe Game Reserve (MGR) is a 75,000-hectare “Big Five” game reserve. It was designed to act as an engine for economic growth and development in the North West Province. Its creation was based on feasibility studies indicating that conservation and tourism would create 150 times more jobs than cattle farming in the area, at much higher wage rates.

There is a vibrant tourism node in the reserve, comprising three major game lodges, two middle market bush-camps, and a number of corporate lodges. Another 12 new game lodges are currently under development. Two of these new lodges include community-owned lodges, one on the western side of the park and another on the eastern side.

The North West Parks and Tourism Board, with support from the British Government’s Department for International Development (DFID), has initiated a community development program to maximize the economic impacts of the Game Reserve on the surrounding economy. This development program is called the Madikwe Initiative.

The Mafisa Research and Planning Agency has been appointed by the British Government and the local residents to implement the Madikwe Initiative. This initiative is carrying out various activities (outlined below) in three villages around the Game Reserve: Supingstad and Lekgophung on its western border and Molatedi on its eastern side.

The primary aim of the Madikwe Initiative is to promote and enhance rural development in the three villages surrounding the Madikwe Game Reserve in order to maximize the economic impact that the MGR will have on the surrounding village economies.

The Madikwe Initiative is managed by a steering committee that is made up of representatives from the Rustenburg District Council, the Central District Council, the North West Parks Board (NWPB), the Department of Local Government and Housing, and members of village-based organisations set up to manage development programmes

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at the local level. Lekgophung has set up a trust to manage the villages' development and business activities, including equity holdings in a community-based lodge in the game reserve. The Molatedi tribal authority is currently setting up a similar legal entity. Mafisa and the DFID are observers on the steering committee.

Before the Lekgophung Lodge could be built, North West Parks and Tourism Board's policy required compliance with South Africa's environmental legislation, in particular the environmental impact assessment process of the Environmental Conservation Act.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS

Community representatives and the tribal authority participated in the following processes necessary for the project:

- development concept and the design of the lodge;
- the formulation of the business plan;
- the capacity building programmes for the formation and registration of the Balete Ba Lekgophung Development Trust; and
- review of an environmental impact assessment for the project.

GOAL OF ADVOCACY

The goal was to ensure community involvement and participation in the environmental impact assessment processes.

The community appointed two specialists, Phillipa Holden and Dr. Dave Grossman, to develop, submit, and advise them on any matter relating to the environmental aspects of the project. The two, together with the Field Manager for the Madikwe Initiative, Pogiso Monchusi, held meetings with the community; local, provincial and national government officials; the North West Parks and Tourism Board; the Tourism Enterprises Programme; the Development Bank of Southern Africa; Industrial Development Corporation; Ford Foundation; the Department of International Development of Southern Africa (British Government), and members of businesses.

USE OF ADVOCACY TOOLS

Advocacy tools were used in a number of ways, as set forth below.

- Stakeholder liaison

A number of committees were set up. For example, there was a water committee, a development committee, a poverty relief committee, etc. Each committee addressed a

specific issue. When an issue arose, the relevant committees were called in to discuss the issue and to find solutions.

- Establishment of a task team

A task team was appointed from representatives of each group with an interest in the project. The task team included the traditional leader, a member of the tribal council, a member of the Reconstruction and Development Programme Forum, representatives of youth and women, and members of the other committees mentioned above.

- Community/tribal meetings

When major decisions about the project had to be made, this was done by way of tribal meetings and tribal resolutions. This helped to ensure transparency, consultation, and democracy, values enshrined in South Africa's Constitution.

- Meetings with government officials, funders, developers and politicians

Meetings were held with government officials, funders, developers, and politicians when necessary.

- Gathering and collating information

Information necessary for the environmental impact study, for project management, and to answer questions of the community on various issues was gathered and collated. Books, legislation, government annual reports, and articles written about specific issues were available at the Ferdinand Postma Library at Potchefstroom University. These sources were used to address some of the issues raised, to solve certain problems encountered, and to assist in the development of training materials.

The lesson here is to use the available information resources efficiently and to avoid reinventing the wheel. The development process was also enhanced through the use of expertise and practical knowledge in the community. Some of the community members at Lekgophung are graduates, some are still studying in certain fields, some are retired professionals, and others have incredible life experiences developed over the years. Knowledge from all these people was contributed and adapted to enrich the process of developing the lodge.

- Dispute resolution mechanisms

Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms were used. These included investigation, fact-finding, and mediation. In some instances the *kgotla* (tribal court) was also used. The tribal courts function like Western-type courts of law, where the aim is to adjudicate a matter or achieve justice at the end of the day. It is an informal court system presided over by elders in the community. To achieve justice, these courts applied African customary law.

- Networking

Advocates should be resourceful people able to approach certain institutions to resolve a problem. They should establish proper networks to ensure this. One way to ensure this is by keeping a list and contact details of institutions relevant to the field of operation, through personal contacts and some directories, telephones, and newspapers.

- Use of public notices

Announcements were made in churches, at funerals, and at other social events. Notices were posted at tribal offices, schools, churches, and shops. A newsletter, the *Madikwe Voice*, was also distributed. The *Madikwe Voice* published notices of meetings and announcements of events or activities that were to take place. Mafisa funded community notices while advertisers funded business notices.

- Information sessions

When people asked for information about the environment, government, the Constitution, and project management, training materials were developed and information sessions were held with interested parties.

- Expert advice

When necessary, experts were called in. Experts also addressed the community to explain certain matters.

- Influencing policies through personal contact with ward representatives of local government and by taking part in integrated development planning processes

Supporters of the project worked with members of local government to develop an integrated development planning process. It was important to create strong ties with local government that would remain in place once the funders had left. Because one of the legislative and constitutional functions of local government is to promote socio-economic development, funding for such projects is temporary. Thus to sustain it, one needs to maintain ongoing support. The one avenue available under legislative mandate is for the local municipality to support such efforts. The Municipal Systems Act (1999) compels municipalities to formulate and submit the Integrated Development Plans. These plans should be submitted to the Provincial Government for approval. After approval, the plans become legally binding documents of the municipality. Thus, it would be easy for municipalities, among others, to support local development initiatives.

- Lobbying for further project funding

Councilors from these municipalities consulted and briefed a number of organisations about this initiative. The provincial government also played a role by garnering additional funding for these projects. Thus there were coordinated lobbying efforts to obtain further funding.

- Presentations at conferences to gain foreign funding

For example, an international investors' conference covered these projects with the sanctioning of the provincial government. The possibility of further funding for the projects was discussed.

- Environmental awareness and education

The National Parks Board distributed pamphlets on environmental awareness. Also, the people who would be involved in the projects in the park received training from experts to build their capacity on issues. For example, they visited schools in the area to teach pupils about nature conservation.

- Poverty relief programme

Activities included bush clearing, eradication of alien plants, and reduction of numbers of game. In this manner, jobs were created and people took ownership of the development programme, as they could see its benefits.

- Capacity building

The Centre for Community Law and Development of the Potchefstroom University has developed a capacity building programme, which seeks to enhance the ability of organizations to manage projects and themselves. The purpose was to ensure that the development programmes would be managed by communities themselves after the withdrawal of the professionals.

- Evaluation and monitoring systems

Every second month the progress of the development projects was evaluated to determine whether a project was meeting its objectives. Corrective action was taken where necessary. Monitoring took place on a continuous basis.

OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

A number of obstacles to community involvement were encountered:

- A lack of regional, provincial, and national media coverage of these developments;

- A lack of commitment from officials to attend meetings, which meant that meetings had to be postponed several times, frustrating the community;
- Language barriers. It is essential that the field coordinator understand the locally spoken language, or at least make use of an interpreter from the community; and
- Strangers are not easily accepted. To overcome this, local people would introduce strangers to the community in order to build acceptance and trust.

CURRENT STATUS

The following was in place by July 2002:

- contracts between professional service providers and the Legkophung Trust;
- a 45-year lease agreement between North West Parks Board and the Trust;
- infrastructure development;
- appointment of the lodge operating company;
- appointment of lodge employees from the community; and
- training and skills development for employees.

LESSONS LEARNED

Community advocates should consider the following points when participating in an environmental impact assessment process:

- Appoint a field coordinator who is able to assess problems and have good relationships with the community, developers, government officials, and private funders.
- A field coordinator must be able to assess and analyse problems – he or she must be able to distinguish the underlying message from the discussion. When a problem emerges, a field coordinator should be able to read the underlying issues within the problem. The problems discussed are not necessarily the issue at hand. A field coordinator must be able “to read between the lines.” The community may, for example, be angry at something their traditional leader did, or with delays in the government fulfilling promises to provide water. The meeting is then used to vent their anger by fighting the issue at hand and not the real issues.

- The field coordinator must have insight about issues in the community in order to resolve developmental issues. Otherwise, these internal issues can hamper the development process.
- Proper planning and consultation is necessary.
- Keep the community aware of progress, as well as problems and possible solutions.
- Address questions of the community.
- Environmental education programmes are very important.
- A community should not think in terms of problems, but should see the problems as their own challenge. Communities are prepared to face challenges but not necessarily problems.
- The community must be able to take over the project.
- Put evaluation and monitoring systems in place.
- Building trust in the community greatly benefits the project.
- Always be prepared to learn new things, as each project has its unique dynamics.