

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK AND MUYEXE COMMUNITY AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the background and context to the study is highlighted. This is done by giving a brief synopsis of the Kruger National Park and the historical context of the Muyexe community. The conservation intervention used by Kruger National Parks Board is then described by detailing its operations and the stakeholders involved. In the same vein, some of the key responses from the respondents are explained from the interviews conducted.

#### 4.2 BACKGROUND

Many communities that are located along the Kruger National Park are largely characterized by illiteracy and poverty. Many of those communities were inhabitants of the land currently known as the Kruger National Game Reserve. These communities are also characterized by high levels of unemployment. The previous floods that affected South Africa and Mozambique during February 2000 had disastrous effects on many of these communities, especially those located along the park.

#### 4.3 THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Kruger National Park of South Africa was first established by the then President Paul Kruger in 1898 as the Sabie Game Reserve, before suffering a heavy blow from the Anglo-Boer War. It was then re-established in 1902 by Lord Milner who instructed Sir James Stevenson Hamilton to clean the park of the indigenous black people. This was done over a period of over 45 years. It was in 1969 when the last group indigenous black people of the Makuleke community,

were dispossessed of their rights of land.

The park is the second oldest park in the world, after Yellowstone National Park (founded in 1872) in the United States. The park is the first National Park to be established in Africa, Jackson (1971:74). Kruger National Park is the 14<sup>th</sup> biggest National Park in the world and it is considered a world leader in biodiversity conservation and ecotourism. The park is approximately 19 485 square kilometers in size, which is larger than the State of Israel or the principality of Wales in the United Kingdom.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1913 an Act of parliament was passed with the aim of dispossessing black people of their rights in land. Such rights included the right to settle, collect firewood, catch fish, hunt, graze, plough, access to ancestral graves, collection of water from water sources, and gathering the fruits of the forest. Up to 1951 the park was managed without formal scientific research (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998:202). Restriction to access to basic sources of livelihood has been one of the problems experienced by local people when the Kruger National Park was established. Furse (1997:179) notes that in many cases, local people, or indigenous people, were arbitrarily barred from certain areas, with little recognition of ethics, legitimacy or consequences of such actions, but on the presumption that protection of land from local or indigenous people was necessary for conservation.

The Kruger National Park of South Africa, just like many traditional parks, totally excluded the people who inhabited the park when it was established. The management of the park could not consider the needs and interests of the dispossessed people, and was enforcement oriented. The community members who were once the inhabitants of the park were either removed forcefully or could be allowed to remain in designated areas but excluded from the park through legal means (Wells, et al. 1992:08.)

The inhabitants of the park were not only denied their rights in land, but were also physically removed from the land and were excluded from managerial control or decision making pertaining to the use of the park (MacDonald, 2002:131). During the dispossession of communities of their land rights and the establishment of the

Kruger National Park, people lost access to graves, ritual sites, emotional attachment to the place, and breakdown of family ties. Such loss of rights can be regarded as direct costs since there is no amount of money that can compensate that.

The Kruger National Park has since developed into a very big park with its merging with Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe and Coutada 16 in Mozambique. The park is today known as Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park, and wildlife will be able to roam freely within the three merged parks once capacity to manage the region is in position, since it will allow Kruger National Park to drop its Eastern fence by about 200 kilometres.

#### **4.4 BACKGROUND OF THE MUYEXE COMMUNITY**

According to oral history gathered from the Muyexe community, the history of Muyexe community dates back to the 1890s during the reign of Chief Nahleki when they moved from Mozambique towards the west to an area then known as Transvaal. During that time, they came to settle around the Lebombo Mountains. The community trekked further to the west in search for greener pastures and resided in an area today known as Shingwedzi Camp of the Kruger National Park.

The Muyexe community resided at Tshange Mountains and Shangoni Camp in the park before they were forcefully removed during the establishment of the Kruger National Park. That was the beginning of their poverty when they were separated from sources of their livelihood. In the park, they used to communally and freely enjoy access to firewood, thatching grass, water sources, and fruits from the forest, timber, fish, birds, wild animals, large ploughing fields, ancestral graves and other resources the park presented.

##### **4.4.1 Historical effects of the forced relocations**

During the establishment of the park, the communities were not duly informed of their forced removal. This impromptu seizure of their land led to an abrupt erosion of their livelihoods. Some of their domesticated animals were left behind whilst

some of them just strayed, and got eaten by lions. Their belongings were damaged in the process and huts destroyed. On arrival at an area called Mahlamba-Ndlopfu (The Dawn of the New Era), all their cattle were killed by officials of the park. The cattle would be killed whilst grazing in the open veld. During their removal, the community lost access to settlement, grazing fields, ploughing in large fields, fish, hunting wild animals and birds, water sources, firewood, thatching grass, “vucema” plants for brewing traditional beer and access to medicinal plants and herbs.

Decades ago, locality of the Kruger National Park had dense forests and vegetation, which harboured different species of animals, insects, microbes, birds, and fauna and flora species in general. Currently, natural environments along the Kruger National Park, bordered by the Muyexe community are almost barren with sparse vegetation and hardly any forests, and with many of known locusts and insects disappearing.

Generally, the resource base that was supposed to be a means of survival for communities is diminishing at greater speed. Future availability of animal and plant species in the above-mentioned areas is threatened, if communities' dependence on these natural resources for survival is left unabated. This dependence on natural resources has negative implications on the quality of life for all living creatures, particularly for communities trapped in this unfortunate situation.

#### **4.4.2 Location**

The Muyexe community lies about 30 kilometres East of Giyani Town, in the Limpopo province. After dispossession in the 1900 to mid 1920s, the community was relocated out of the park and is presently located just outside the Kruger National Park, with only a park fence making a line of demarcation between their homesteads and the park.

Since most of the communities are left with few of the above-mentioned resources around them, they now forage through the Park illegally to acquire such resources.

This is the very same situation that manifests itself within Muyexe Community, in that the natural resources are hunted and gathered in a desperate quest for daily survival. This is a case of efforts to bring about protection of natural resources, pushing a community into abject poverty with no sustainable means of survival.

#### **4.4.3 Population**

During the gathering of oral history in February 2005, the community comprised approximately 5385 adults of which only 218 were employed. Of the 218 working adults, only 80 had permanent employment.

#### **4.4.4 Livelihood Patterns**

The community largely depends on social grants which are never enough for the large and unemployed families. This community still relies on subsistence hunting and gathering today. The community lacks most basic needs facilities. Dependency on crop farming is also another form of livelihood in the stony and dry Muyexe village. During the year 2000 floods, Muyexe village was also hard hit to such an extent that many families lost their huts and goods, deepening the effects of poverty. The community has to walk for about 13 kilometres to the nearest clinic. The community has got a primary school and a high school within reach of the pupils. The primary school is right in the middle of the village and the high school just on the outskirts of the village.

The community is supplied with electricity. There is however a serious shortage of water. The community has to go the nearest village to fetch water or buy from people who sell water in 25 litre containers.

The Park has formed Hlanganani Forum which consists of about 29 communities which are neighbouring the Park. The communities are located between Mhinga and Mbawula Ranch Villages, of which most of them were residents of the Park before they were forcefully removed when the Park was initiated. Muyexe community falls within this category of communities that were removed from the park.

The Muyexe community lodged a restitution of land rights claim with the Land Claims Commission on 3 November 1998, claiming land rights lost within the Kruger National Park. The land claim is currently under investigation by the Office of the Regional Land Claims Commission-Limpopo to establish compliance with The Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act No. 22 of 1994) as amended, and as amplified by the Rules Regarding the Procedure of the Land Claims Commission.

#### **4.5 THE CONSERVATION STRATEGIES USED BY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PARK**

##### **4.5.1 Stakeholders in the Muyexe area**

The main stakeholders operating in the park entail the South African National Parks; The Hlanganani Forum [which is the central forum where all the village, governmental and NGOs are represented and meet to map out plans for the community]; Department of Labour; Department of Public Works; Department of Land Affairs; Department of Economic and Tourism and NGOs in the area.

##### **4.5.2 Strategies employed**

Through the Hlanganani Forum which is the collective partnership, the activities to enhance the livelihoods of the Muyexe community and conserve the park, entail the following:-

- (i) Identifying economic opportunities in the park and linking them with the communities. These opportunities are not linked to a specific community, but focus on all villages that are in the vicinity of the park.
- (ii) A market has been created for people who do Art and Craft. The market is right in the park and everyone who has some Art or Crafted items comes to the park to market and sell.

- (iii) There are also skills development projects in which community members are trained in Field Ranging. The park also trains community members in the building industry and in contract owning. Twenty seven people have already been trained and some have been issued with their own contracts. The Department of Public Works and Department of labour are jointly training these communities.
- (iv) The Social Ecology of the Kruger National Park has a Memorandum of Understanding with Non-Governmental Organisations and CPPP (Community, Private, and Public Partnership) which is aimed at creating economic opportunities through which resources and skills such as car washing, soap making, gardening, linen sewing, laundry services, et cetera, can be tapped from the communities residing along the park. The authorities of the park have however established that community projects are not viable, and have never worked, therefore the park intends turning the above-mentioned services into businesses for viability.
- (v) Other communities have come forward offering a piece of land for incorporation with the park for economic development. The communities are Mahlathi, Ndindani, and Magona, and Marieta Buffer Zone. These initiatives even though well supported by the park, are rife with intra-tribal conflicts. The initiatives are aimed at creating game lodges, game hunting with the hindsight of conserving natural resources. Due to conflict the Department of Land Affairs have withdrawn land ownership deeds.
- (vi) Through its conservation programmes like Ranger patrols the park's workforce now comprises of people who reside along the park and contribute about 80 percent of the overall park workforce. When there are some employment opportunities, the park involves communities residing along the park. The Hlanganani Forum is used for recruitment purposes but there are some community conflicts which resulted in some communities pulling out of the forum. The park has however initiated a process of providing a workshop to those communities for alerting them

about the importance and role of the forum, and some communities are coming back to the forum.

- (vii) Department of Environment and Tourism has commenced an initiative to open the Shangoni gate which is at Altein village in the Mtititi settlement by 2007. The initiative is aimed at linking the outside world with communities and the park. Opening of the gate will generate income for the benefit of the communities, of which Muyexe, as one of the closest neighbouring communities to Shangoni gate, will benefit. A tarred road is being constructed from Mbaula Ranch to Altein (Shangoni gate), and another one from Mhinga settlement to Shangoni gate, and the last one from Matsakali village to Shangoni gate. All these are endeavours to build the economy of the communities for their own benefit in order to address their basic needs and enhance livelihoods.
- (viii) Through this process, individual chiefs are able to develop the land within their jurisdiction. There are also bursaries that are offered by the park to applying communities who want to create a green zone belt and use it as sources of income for eco-tourism purposes.

## **4.6 FINDINGS FROM MUYEXE COMMUNITY**

### **4.6.1 Research findings**

From the research conducted different perspectives were presented by the main role players in Muyexe. These stretched from positive to negative inputs. As earlier on indicated these responses were achieved through a variety of data collection techniques, depending on the audience.

#### **4.6.1.1 Views from the community's perspective with regards conservation**

- (a) Interviews from many of the households of the Muyexe community highlighted a current serious water shortage since their place is dry as

compared to their areas in the park with flowing rivers and deep wells. The establishment of the park reduced their grazing and ploughing areas to such an extent that the community finds it difficult to find firewood.

- (b) Livestock strays due long distances in search for grass, as grazing land is limited and overgrazed. The lions from the park usually stray away from the park and maul their cattle. The community alleges that they are not compensated for loss of their livestock and the lions are taken back to the park. This becomes a sad story since the inverse is not true, when cattle are found in the park, instead of being taken away from the area; they are killed by the officials of the park. This takes their main asset as they use the cattle as draught animals and also as an income in case of vulnerability. Due to restrictions to enter the park, poverty is worsening because they can no longer get more fish, mopani worms, timber for building, thatching grass, which were in abundance in the park. When some of the community members are found illegally fishing inside the park, they are sent to far away prisons and fined about R1 000.00 per person.
- (c) The community indicated that they can no longer have access to the rare medicinal plants that used to cure diseases. The community also complains of heavy payments for getting into the park to see “their” animals. There are some crocodiles that relocated from the park towards the village. The crocodiles are endangering the lives of the community of Muyexe. The crocodiles have already taken lives of two people, of which one was never found to date.
- (d) The Muyexe community indicated that they are not getting any form of help from the South African National Park. The community indicated that should there be any employment opportunities, the park officials hire people who are far away from the park. The community further indicated that park officials rely mostly on people from Mozambique for their labour since the Mozambican people are easy to exploit, especially since they are very poor and have no school going children.

- (e) Members of the Muyexe community however agree that there are some people from the community who are under the employ of the park, but argue that the number is very insignificant and comprises of people who were hired from time immemorial.
- (f) The community was asked if they knew anything about the Hlanganani Forum. Members of Muyexe community indicated that the forum was aimed at dealing with compensation issues for cattle mauled by lions. The community indicated that they were part of the forum but pulled out because the forum was not achieving its goals and objectives. They saw the Hlanganani Forum as useless since a person could not be compensated if the lion that killed cattle was not killed itself. There was however one classical case in which one cattle owner had his three cattle mauled by a lion, and was given the lion skin to sell and get his money back. It was a disturbing situation to the Muyexe community and for the cattle owner to discover that the skin was badly damaged and was not marketable at all.
- (g) As indicated in the previous arguments, the community feels that the employment generated by SANParks together with the Hlanganani forum does not yield any positive results, hence their withdrawal from the Hlanganani Forum and the illegal entry into the park to make a living.
- (h) Social grants are the main source of livelihood according to the community. The active formal working population by February 2005 was 218 out of 5 385 adults. Out of these 218, only 80 are gainfully (permanently) employed and the rest on short term contracts.

**Suggestions from the community with regards to conservation initiatives:**

- (i) The Muyexe community members believe that SANParks has a bigger role to play towards their development. They believe that projects that are initiated by the park, like that of dealing with alien plants (gwanda), can generate some employment should they also be included in such projects.

Bursaries can also be provided by the park to children who passed matric, but who are currently seated at home, so that they study nature conservation courses.

- (ii) The community indicated that they can also form partnerships with the park in eco-tourism since they have a land adjacent to the park that they can offer for partnership. The Muyexe community also indicated that if the park can give them their land back, through restitution, they can build their own economy.
- (iii) The community made several proposals which they think can alleviate the problems that they are currently facing. With regards the overpopulation of elephants in the park, whereby some are being relocated to Mozambique, their proposal is that the elephants can be slaughtered and tinned and, subsequently, the tinned meat can be distributed to communities staying along the park.
- (iv) Meaningful compensation for cattle killed by marauding lions was also suggested as one of the resolutions. The community also indicated that hiring of locals instead of foreigners from Mozambique can do more good than harm. The community also proposed the establishment of a butchery for wild animals, to which people, if they desire wild meat, will go and buy instead of killing illegally.
- (v) The community would like to see the park subsidizing them or reducing the prices when getting into the park, even during weekends or busy holidays, and school going children may be allowed free access to the park. During the season for mopani worms and thatching grass, the community proposes that the park should allow them to come and harvest the products, but with control measures in place.
- (vi) Members of Muyexe community also proposed for special permits to fish inside with specified control measures employed by the park. This special

proposal comes in the light of that fish from the park is said to be more delicious than fish from dams or rivers outside the park which are muddy.

- (vii) The community indicated that the park can also empower them economically by buying farm produce from them instead of going elsewhere. If there are any other services that the park would like to contract, it is proposed that the park should give priority to communities located along the park. Should a particular service not be found within the suggested communities, then the park can go elsewhere to outsource such services.
- (viii) The members of Muyexe community also proposed that the park should have correct channels of communicating with members of communities that are staying along the park. The community proposed that the park should have a sequential or alternating and consultative manner of hiring staff in the park, and move away from selective hiring.
- (ix) Members of the community feel that they have a meaningful role to play in their own development. As indicated in the previous paragraphs, the community indicated that they have land to offer for eco-tourism, and are prepared to enter into joint ventures with the park for further development. Should the community get its land in the Kruger National Park back through land restitution, they will be prepared to enter into further joint ventures with South African National Parks. Safaris and lodges can be created to generate money for further conservation and community development.

#### **4.6.1.2 Views from non-community stakeholders**

The following findings were from members of SANParks including the Kruger National Park, from both their Social Ecology section and Law Enforcement (Game Ranger section); Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism; Department of Labour and Department of Public Works.

- (i) The Social Ecology section and Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) stated that they are not experiencing any problems from communities that are located along the park, but indicated that problems might be experienced by the law enforcement section (Game Rangers). The Game Ranger section indeed indicated that they are experiencing poaching from community members located along the park. The major problem comes when some community members get into the park unlawfully to hunt small game and fish. Some people, especially women, get into the park to collect firewood. There are villagers who have dogs up to twenty a person and use the dogs for hunting small game.
- (ii) Fishermen who use nets in the Luvuvhu River are also a major problem. When they are chased they just swim across the river and once they are out of the park they cannot be arrested. Along the Mphongola River, women with nets are a serious problem since they catch even the smallest fish. The fish species is threatened within these rivers.
- (iii) Both the Social Ecology section of the Kruger National Park and DEAT concur that the problem is not the communities, but their approach to conservation. The above-mentioned two institutions indicated that the Damage Causing Animals are a problem and a burden to the communities that are currently residing along the park, which triggers the community to use any methods at their disposal for survival.
- (iv) The prevalence of stray animals, like buffalos, cause the foot and mouth disease that contaminate domesticated animals resulting in household herds dwindling. Moreover, there are lions that usually attack cattle. DEAT indicated that the problem began when the lions would get out of the park and kill cattle and the previous government would not compensate the owners for the loss suffered. Escaping animals from the park pose a serious threat to the communities outside the park. There are, however, some forums initiated to deal with compensation. There are some discrepancies on the issue of compensation. There is the Mahlathi case in which some community cattle were found inside the park and killed. After

there were some disagreements with the compensation, members of the community armed with spears and other sharp objects, invaded the wilderness of the park to hunt wild animals.

- (v) The Social Ecology section indicated that the laws of the country advocate for multi-stakeholder responsibility. The above-mentioned section of the park deals with issues pertaining to the park, once the animal is out of the park, it is no longer the responsibility of the park, but of DEAT.
- (vi) The Social Ecology section indicated that they are currently busy with a pilot project for elephant proof fence. Adults are motivated to get into the park and see the beauty of nature, a Wild Card which is very cheap was introduced so that community adults would find it cheaper to access the park, there is poor responses from adults though. The Social Ecology section of the park believes that the community can have a meaningful role to play in resolving problematic issues faced. The communities can act as co-managers (on-lookers of the fence). The park is also training communities to be fence menders in order to alleviate the effects and empower them economically.
- (vii) Communities are involved in the re-planting of endangered plants. This approach to Community Based Natural Resource Management is envisioned to enhance the livelihoods of the community. For example, there is a project initiated with the traditional healers around Makuya area in which healers are taught to plant their own plants and herbs.

#### **4.7 PROJECTS INITIATED TO DEVELOP MUYEXE COMMUNITY**

- (i) SANParks indicated that there are positive results produced by the projects. There are already women contractors who are direct products of the park's projects. There is one project initiated for Mtititi community women for beaded work. The project produces name tags and those name tags generated about R60 000.00. The Kruger National Park was rated the best

black empowerment effort company as a result of the projects mentioned above and others.

- (ii) The Game Ranger section also indicated that there is another project called Taking Kruger to Kasies, which was sponsored by Shell South Africa. Shell South Africa donated two buses with TVs and slide projectors inside. Children who visit the parks through their schools learn through these facilities whilst viewing animals and nature in general. People who are caught poaching are also advised of the importance of nature and through that, the youth is withdrawing from poaching, the major problem is with the adults who are too used to venison. An example of such an endeavour is The Makuleke community which was allowed to get into the park and visit their ancestral graves and perform some other rituals long before they lodged a claim. Such relationships still exist today, visible through joint management of the Pafuri area of the park with the South African National Parks.

- (iii) The park is also promoting the culture of learning in which BOOKSMART has donated books which will be distributed to circuit offices of communities residing along the park. DEAT indicated that there is a potential problem emanating from communities who destroy unique and endangered species within their areas of jurisdiction. Community members need land for grazing and farming. Through the process of farming and grazing, such unique and endangered species may sink to oblivion. DEAT is however in the process of identifying areas with such species in order to workshop and seek some ways of protecting the species.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSION**

A synopsis of the views expressed by both the community and the external stakeholders pertaining to conservation interventions was used depict a polarized situation. The benefits of the conservation initiatives do not seem in general to be meeting the needs of the community. The perception mostly prevalent is that flora

and fauna of the Kruger National Park has taken precedence over the betterment of livelihoods of the Muyexe community. In the following chapter these general research findings will be analysed from the livelihood attributes as discussed in the conceptualization. These will categorically fall into the human capital, social, financial, physical and natural capital.

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