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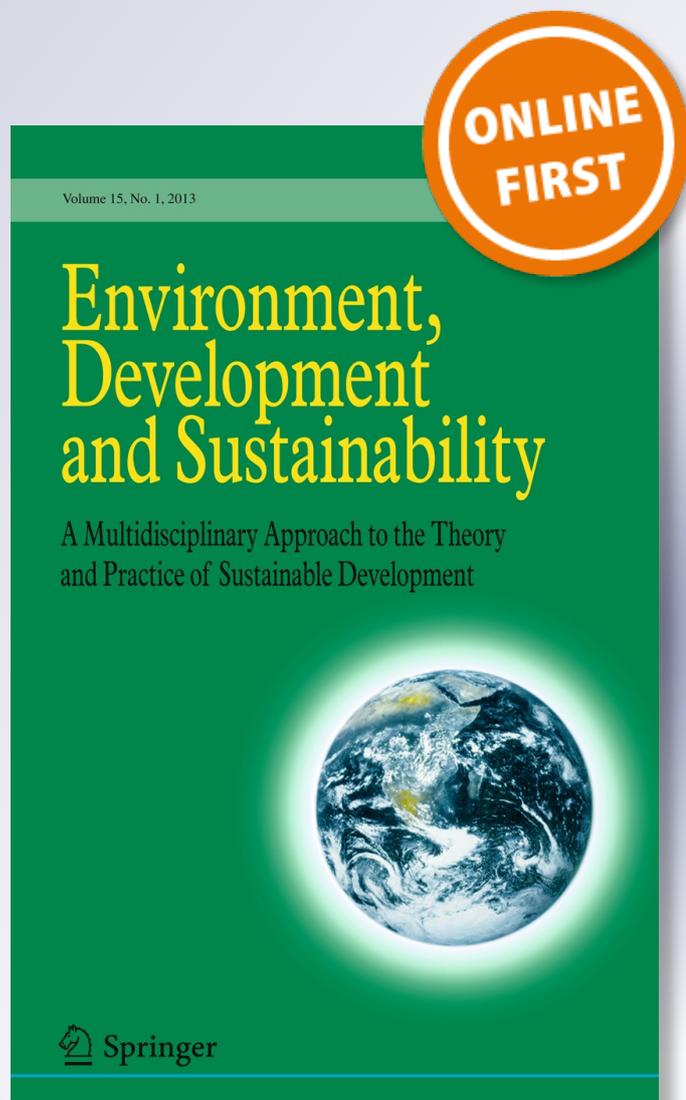
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Protected areas as vehicles in population development: lessons from rural South Africa

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Abstract Protected areas in developing countries are increasingly expected to move beyond biodiversity protection so as also to contribute to poverty reduction and the economic development of their surrounding communities. The purpose of this article is to report on the key findings that emerged from the assessment of a poverty alleviation programme at the Golden Gate Highlands National Park in South Africa and the lessons learned from that particular programme. Designed around outcomes analysis as an analytical framework for programme evaluation, a mixed-method approach of semi-structured interviews and focus-group sessions was used to collect data from amongst programme beneficiaries, the park management and members of the park's advisory board. The findings indicate that although programmes of this kind can indeed impact positively on poverty levels, their direct impacts do however remain limited to a relatively small proportion of households in neighbouring communities. The article concludes that by conceptualising poverty as a multidimensional state of well-being, this allows for the exploration of a much broader range of potential social, cultural and economic benefits available from protected areas.

Keywords Protected areas · Poverty alleviation · Community-based conservation · Population development · Conservation benefits

1 Introduction

Since the early 1970s, the linkages between population, environment and development have been intensely debated—a debate that has, in recent times, grown in momentum (Andam et al. 2010; De Sherbinin 2008; Dudley et al. 2008; Upton et al. 2008; Wells and McShane 2004). Scrutinising the social role of protected areas and the impact of these on rural livelihoods and human development, more specifically, the relationship between conservation and poverty has become a central component in this debate (Berkes 2007;

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Brockington et al. 2008; Naughton-Treves et al. 2005; Roe and Walpole 2010; Simpson 2009). One specific outcome of the environment–development discourse has been a growing recognition in conservation circles that national parks and other protected areas—particularly those in developing countries—cannot be managed successfully without considering the subsistence and economic requirements of their often poverty-stricken neighbouring communities (Hulme and Murphree 2001; Kothari et al. 1998; Naughton-Treves et al. 2005; World Parks Congress 2003). Protected areas in the developing world are increasingly expected to cross the boundaries of conventional biodiversity protection and to take their place on the national development agenda by contributing to poverty alleviation amongst the rural communities adjacent to parks and reserves. The World Parks Congress, through the Durban Accord of 2003, emphatically emphasised the role of protected areas as ‘... contributors to poverty reduction and economic development and as creators and sustainers of livelihoods’ (World Parks Congress 2003:2) and, moreover, continued to urge commitment to protected areas that strive to alleviate poverty amongst their neighbouring communities. Echoing this sentiment, many conservation policies and practices—often backed by conservation organisations and development agencies such as the World Bank, World Wide Fund for Nature, The World Conservation Union, Fauna and Flora International, BirdLife International and the United Nations—strongly emphasise the linkages between rural poverty and environmental degradation and, more specifically, the importance of reconciling the socio-economic needs and expectations of local communities with the objectives of biodiversity conservation and protected areas management (Roe and Walpole 2010).

The shift towards poverty alleviation as a priority in conservation policy is increasingly being challenged by an appeal from the ranks of ‘protectionist conservationists’ for a return to the core mission of biodiversity conservation, and to do so without being burdened by efforts to accommodate social challenges and to address social ills, such as poverty and inequality (Brechin et al. 2007; Brockington et al. 2008; Roe and Walpole 2010). In recent times, there has been, as Brechin et al. (2007:39) articulate it, ‘... a renewed rhetoric advocating both (1) an abandonment of the social agenda related to conservation efforts ... and (2) a greater emphasis on, or return to strict preservationist practices’. A common thread running through this appeal is that conservation is not responsible for social inequalities and thus poverty reduction, but for habitat and biodiversity protection. The conservation community should thus not change their core values and mission to try and become responsible for addressing poverty and other social ills (Brockington et al. 2008). In fact, development and poverty reduction should be recognised as complex and specialised tasks for which conservationists are not equipped. The objectives of development and conservation should thus be ‘decoupled’ and pursued in two separate policy realms without the integration of and alignment with each other’s agendas (Roe and Walpole 2010). Yet, one finds that both the current conservation philosophy and conservation practice in most developing countries are still firmly embedded in a people-sensitive approach. Despite the fact that the focus, strategy and emphasis of such approaches and practices may differ from one another, they all share a common denominator, namely that programmes for environmental conservation and biodiversity protection must become integral parts of overall population and development programmes. These approaches have become known under many different collective names—community wildlife management, integrated conservation and development projects, collaborative management models and community-based natural resource management—but the broad concept of ‘community-based conservation’ is perhaps the best descriptive, collective term for conservation initiatives with socio-economic development goals (Berkes 2007; Kothari et al. 1998).

As, internationally, the debates around sustainable development and the need for conservation approaches to consider not only environmental but also socio-economic aspects gained momentum (Brockington 2002; Spenceley 2008), management approaches in Southern Africa started to shift towards a conservation paradigm that included local communities in the sharing of conservation benefits and, in some cases, also in the management of the natural resources in such protected areas (Algotsson 2006; Balint 2007; Fabricius et al. 2001). In most African countries, rural communities adjacent to protected areas are likely to experience poverty rates well above those of the national average (Hulme and Murphree 2001), and the poorest countries in Africa usually have a larger protected area estate than do richer countries (Brockington et al. 2008). Adding to this the fact that Millennium Development Goal One specifically aims significantly to eradicate poverty and hunger by 2015, then it becomes even more important to understand and assess the role that protected areas may potentially play in addressing the socio-economic needs of their local populations. This also applies to South Africa, where the People and Parks Programme of the post-1994 political dispensation is seen as a vehicle with which to address some of the socio-economic ills that became associated with conservation during apartheid rule.

Stemming from the above context, the purpose of this article is to explore how a specific national park in South Africa is currently integrating and reconciling its core mission of biodiversity conservation and wetland rehabilitation with the socio-economic development of the park's poverty-stricken neighbouring communities. More specifically, the article reports on the key findings that emerged from a programme evaluation approach that was used to assess the impact of a poverty alleviation programme at the Golden Gate Highlands National Park in the Free State Province of South Africa and it concludes by highlighting some of the lessons learned from the programme. The said poverty alleviation programme operates under the banner of the People and Parks Programme of South African National Parks (SANParks) and attempts to involve neighbouring communities in the conservation of biodiversity in a mutually beneficial fashion. The People and Parks Programme embodies the relatively new policy framework of official conservation authorities in South Africa—a policy that reflects a significant shift in management philosophy away from the conventional protectionist and fortress approach to one of integrated conservation and development.

2 The integration of conservation and development in South Africa

In pursuit of the international practice current at the time, the conventional approach to conservation in South Africa also traditionally reflected a protectionist ideology, that is, one of the removing of local people from protected areas and either prohibiting or restricting their utilisation of biodiversity (Algotsson 2006). Having originated in the late 1930s, this management approach was to form the basis for the conservation policy of the National Parks Board (the official government conservation agency in South Africa) for several decades to follow. Being firmly embedded in the broader philosophy of apartheid that demonstrated disrespect for basic human rights, the said conservation approach often resulted in social conflict, hostility towards conservation, socio-economic deprivation, increased levels of poverty and even further environmental degradation (Pelser and Sempe 2003).

With the advent of the new political dispensation in South Africa, the National Parks Board gradually transformed from an agent of protectionist conservation to one embracing

a community-oriented model that would attempt to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with the need for socio-economic development. Following the first democratic political elections in 1994, SANParks (the restructured and renamed successor to the National Parks Board) initially inherited 17 national parks—a pool that was gradually expanded both in size and in number. Today, there are 22 officially proclaimed national parks in South Africa, and although the world-renowned Kruger National Park is unrivalled in terms of both size and biodiversity of plants and animals, the remaining 21 parks constitute important and representative examples of the country's many diverse ecological systems (Pelsler et al. 2011).

As pointed out above, the post-1994 approach to conservation followed by SANParks hinges on linking conservation of biodiversity with socio-economic development and an enhanced quality of human life. In 1995, SANParks created a Social Ecology Unit so as to facilitate positive relationships with the communities neighbouring on national parks. The Unit was the forerunner of the People and Conservation Directorate established in 2003 to facilitate the people–parks interface by instilling values of stewardship of the environment and raising awareness about conservation issues amongst local people (South African National Parks 2011b).

Unlike the pre-1994 paradigm, the current approach to conservation in South Africa is imbedded in a philosophy that embraces the principle of a harmonious relationship between protected areas and their neighbouring communities. It is rooted in the belief that the protection of biodiversity should be linked to socio-economic benefits for neighbouring communities. Fundamentally, this approach strives to improve the quality of life of neighbouring communities through a range of initiatives such as environmental education, recreational and cultural opportunities, health programmes, performing arts and craft projects, the interpretation of medicinal plant use and the unlocking of economic opportunities (South African National Parks 2011b). This change in South African conservation philosophy has been supported and enabled by, amongst others, the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (Act No. 57 of 2003 as amended in 2006) that provides the legal framework for the SANParks People and Parks Programme.

Several outreach initiatives serve as examples of how the new conservation approach of SANParks embraces the philosophy of integrated conservation and development: every year, more than 170,000 school children from mainly disadvantaged communities enjoy free access to national parks across South Africa as part of an environmental education programme; cultural heritage repatriation and historical sites are promoted and managed in most national parks; more than 5,000 people per year are employed in a conservation-related extended public works programme (EPWP); and sustainable resource-use projects are run that enable and assist communities in the harvesting of resources from national parks in ways that are both sustainable and economically beneficial (Department of Environmental Affairs 2009). The primary objectives of these environment-oriented programmes are enhanced biodiversity by means of the clearing of alien plant species and the rehabilitation of infiltrated wetlands, the construction of conservation-related infrastructure inside protected areas (roads, rest camps, fences, etc.) and the development of small and medium economic enterprises within neighbouring communities. Depending on circumstances, nationwide, between 2,000 and 8,000 people are annually employed by the EPWP (Department of Environmental Affairs 2009). The EPWP—a government initiative to mitigate poverty—promotes labour-intensive activities and provides temporary employment opportunities, particularly by targeting deprived communities and vulnerable population segments within such communities. The EPWP facilitates and supports four programmes that are specifically dedicated to job creation opportunities in the

environmental sector, that is, People and Parks (focusing on infrastructure), Working for Wetlands (wetland rehabilitation), Working for Water (alien vegetation removal) and Working on Fire (fire control and prevention). As indicated in the next paragraphs, these programmes exemplify Golden Gate Highlands National Park's initiatives towards the alleviation of poverty in communities adjacent to the park.

3 Case study: integrating conservation and development in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park

3.1 About the park

The Golden Gate Highlands National Park (Golden Gate)—initially proclaimed in 1963—is nestled in the foothills of the Maloti Mountains in the north-eastern part of the Free State Province in South Africa (see Fig. 1, park number 8 on the map) and is located in one of the most important water catchment areas in the country. Following several expansions over the past 40 years, the park now covers more than 30,000 hectares and serves as habitat to a large variety of mammals, including 10 antelope species and almost 900 bird species. Apart from archaeological findings, particularly tools and rock paintings of the Stone Age Khoisan people (Bushmen group), equally important paleontological discoveries were made in 1973 when the first ever fossilised dinosaur eggs of the Upper Triassic Age (between 200 and 230 million years ago) were discovered in the park (Pelser et al. 2011). This 1973 discovery has since been followed by the discovery of several examples of fossilised dinosaur bones and footprints, thus confirming the status of the larger Golden Gate area as one of the most important dinosaur fossil sites in the world (Tucker 2010).

Golden Gate is currently the only national park in the country that protects the neglected Afromontane Grassland biome, and, with more than 60 grassland species within its boundaries, the park offers one of the best places to appreciate grassland conservation in South Africa (South African National Parks 2011a). Grasslands constitute the second largest ecosystem in South Africa and are collectively protected by three World Heritage Sites and also several provincial reserves and national parks. Grassland can support vast herds of game while at the same time serving as protection for all-important wetlands.

Conservation management in the park is challenged by alien plant control, erosion control and fire management. Invasive alien plant species cover up to 10 % of South Africa's land area and are increasing to such an extent that they are considered to constitute the single most serious threat to biological diversity in the country (Department of Water Affairs 2011). Alien plant species furthermore pose a direct threat to water security and the optimal functioning of ecological systems in South Africa. Though the wetlands at Golden Gate are particularly diverse and moreover of the utmost importance to biodiversity conservation and water catchment, they are degraded as a result of alien plant invasion and the overgrazing practices of earlier landowners who commercially farmed in the area before the park was proclaimed. The rehabilitation of these wetlands therefore is an attempt both to stabilise soil erosion and the silt that is washed into the wetlands. At least six vegetation types can be distinguished in the wetland area, and the rehabilitation intervention is mainly in the form of gabion structures and earthworks (Working for Wetlands 2010). With more than 50 % of the country's water supply coming from this area (South African National Parks 2011a), the rehabilitation and conservation of the Golden Gate wetlands—in which the neighbouring community members play an active role—are of paramount importance regarding water catchment and water security in South Africa.



Fig. 1 Location of the Golden Gate Highlands National Park. *Source:* South Africa Tours and Travel 2005 (adjusted and updated by authors)

3.2 The communities neighbouring on the park

Given the broad objectives of the People and Parks Programme, and taking into consideration the South African historical context, the concept *neighbouring communities* usually refers either to predominantly black and ‘coloured’ (i.e. people of mixed racial origin) communities residing in rural or semi-urban settlements in close proximity to a park, or, alternatively, to communities who may be living some distance from a park, but who may nevertheless have reasonable expectations in respect of benefitting from opportunities created by the protected area (Pelsler et al. 2011). As in the rest of Africa, several challenges confront rural areas in South Africa and thus also the communities in such areas. Amongst these count overconsumption and/or unsustainable use of natural resources, poor quality of socio-economic infrastructure and services, low levels of literacy and skills development, socially disruptive migratory labour practices, high rates of unemployment and high levels of poverty with a subsequently high dependency on social grants and other forms of social security. The communities surrounding Golden Gate are certainly no exception to this profile (South African Institute of Race Relations 2010; Statistics South Africa 2007).

Golden Gate and its surrounding areas form part of the Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality (TMDM)—one of five district municipalities in the Free State Province. Totalling 694,319 people (2007)—93.7 % of whom are blacks—TMDM is the provincial district with the second largest population in the Free State (South African Institute of Race Relations 2010). The demographics of migrant labour result in a somewhat skewed gender distribution, with almost 54 % of the population being females. In 2007, the district registered the highest poverty rate of all the districts in the Free State, and almost two in every three members of the population (64.2 % or 445,753 persons) were living in poverty—one of the highest poverty rates for district municipalities in *all* of South Africa

(South African Institute of Race Relations 2009). In short, the overall socio-economic profile for TMDM reveals a district in which the majority of the people—particularly those on the north-eastern boundaries of the park—are hamstrung by low literacy and/or education levels, a high unemployment rate and low levels of human development. The park management nevertheless believes that Golden Gate can be an important vehicle to transfer economic benefits from the more affluent western sections to the impoverished eastern section of the park through opportunities offered by the park in terms of job creation, training and support of local small, micro and medium enterprises.

3.3 The Working for Water and Working for Wetlands Poverty Relief Programme at the park

The People and Parks Programme of SANParks is the umbrella covering all outreach initiatives that contain a human or social element and includes projects—such as Working for Water, Working for Wetlands and Working on Fire—and also infrastructure development. The Working for Water Programme—an initiative from the National Department of Water Affairs—is leading the fight against invasive plant species, not only at Golden Gate but also in the rest of South Africa. The programme enjoys international recognition as a prime example of environmental conservation in Africa, and more particularly for the way it approaches the socio-economic empowerment and development of local populations as an integral part of environmental conservation (Department of Environmental Affairs 2009). This approach also allows for initiatives, such as skills training and HIV/AIDS projects, as important objectives of Working for Water (Department of Water Affairs 2011).

The Working for Water and Working for Wetlands Poverty Relief Programme at Golden Gate was launched in 2002 and is informed by the EPWP in terms of the recruitment of workers and the duration of their contracts. The SANParks' Department of People and Conservation at Golden Gate, through an advisory committee, assists in identifying and recruiting workers from neighbouring villages and farms. Members of these communities also serve on the park's advisory committee and help to identify previously disadvantaged people who might be considered for employment. In line with targets set by the EPWP, the programme aims to recruit 60 % women, 25 % youth and 2 % people with disabilities, and it has employed close on 770 people since its inception (Pelser et al. 2011). At the time of the study, a total of 112 beneficiaries were employed on the programme (Nthangeni 2011: personal communication). The Working for Water Project has recently transitioned from Phase One—in which beneficiaries exited the programme after 500 days once their contracts had expired—to Phase Two, in which beneficiaries are no longer required to exit the project. Although beneficiaries are no longer compelled to exit the programme once their contracts have expired, this does not imply that they are guaranteed permanent employment in that the programme is entirely dependent on external funding from the EPWP.

Those employed in the project are empowered by means of project- and task-related training such as gabion building, and courses in health and safety, personal finance, business management, fire awareness, first aid and general environmental awareness. This training not only enables workers to accomplish the tasks associated with wetland rehabilitation and the clearing of alien plants, but also serves as a foundation for further capacity building when the beneficiaries exit the project (Nthangeni 2011: personal communication). The programme's benefits to the park mainly entail the provisioning of labour for the eradication of alien plant species and the rehabilitation of wetlands, thereby

ultimately contributing to the conservation objective of the park. The sustainable impact of the said benefits to the community and the park, however, has not been assessed since the inception of the programme.

4 Research design and methodology

In order to assess the impact of a poverty relief programme on neighbouring communities at Golden Gate, the study was designed around outcomes analysis as an analytical framework for programme evaluation. Some key questions underpinning the outcomes analysis included the following: How successful is the programme? What impediments have prevented the optimal outcomes of the programme? How do the beneficiaries perceive the programme? Does the programme reach its target community effectively? How can the programme be strengthened? The literature review entailed not only an interpretation and analysis of existing secondary sources on the people and parks interface but also institutional arrangements and barriers to community benefits. The field study was designed around a hybrid of primary and secondary data to constitute a sequential mixed-method approach with a predominantly qualitative component. Primary data were collected during the period May–July 2011 by means of semi-structured interviews with the Golden Gate management team and focus-group sessions with the park's advisory board, current programme beneficiaries and with ex-beneficiaries of the programme. Representing the park's management team were the Park Manager, the senior People and Parks Conservation Officer, the Working for Water and Working for Wetlands Project Manager and the Working on Fire Project Manager. One focus group was conducted with the Advisory Board, consisting of nine representatives of the local communities surrounding the park. Two additional focus-group sessions were held with ex-beneficiaries of the programme and a further two with current beneficiaries. The details of those who exited the programme served as a sampling frame for the ex-beneficiaries, while the 112 beneficiaries who were employed on the programme at the time of data gathering constituted the sampling frame for the current beneficiaries. In total, 42 current and ex-programme beneficiaries participated in the four focus-group sessions—29 (69 %) of whom were women and 13 (31 %) men. All of the participants were randomly selected and representative of the demographic profile of the programme participants.

Effective assessment of the programme required a clear understanding of concepts such as *poverty*, *poverty alleviation* and *well-being*. While the narrow definition of poverty is associated with income in terms of the one- or two-dollar-per-day definition used by various international agencies, the essence of poverty can possibly best be summarised as being a lack of opportunity or an inability to achieve one's potential (Dudley et al. 2008). In support of the latter conception of poverty, the World Health Organization (1997:69) argues that poverty exists '... when individuals or groups are not able to satisfy their basic needs adequately', with 'basic needs' comprising food, health, primary education, social and cultural life, and favourable living and environmental conditions (shelter, water, air, clothing, etc.). In similar vein and with reference to the concept of well-being, the United Nations Environment Programme (2004:2) states that, '... [T]here is widespread agreement that well-being and poverty are the two extremes of a multi-dimensional continuum'. This implies that if we broaden the concept of *poverty* so as also to encompass a multi-dimensional state of human development rather than simply a matter of income, then protected areas have a better chance of contributing to poverty alleviation (Dudley et al.

2008). This, in fact, was also the operational definition and methodological approach to the measurement of poverty alleviation adopted for the Golden Gate programme evaluation.

On the analogy of the typology suggested by the World Wide Fund for Nature (Dudley et al. 2008), five fundamental dimensions of well-being were recognised for the purposes of the field study. Thus, any improvement in the following dimensions of well-being—as verified by the outcomes analysis of the programme evaluation—should be considered to constitute a contribution towards poverty alleviation:

1. *The economic dimension*: the programme benefits that provide participants with the opportunity to earn an income, to possess assets and to consume resources
2. *The subsistence dimension*: the non-monetary benefits of the programme that contribute to human well-being, that is, clean water, health, shelter and nutrition
3. *The environmental services dimension*: the contribution, if any, made by the programme towards environmental stability and the provision of natural resources
4. *The cultural and spiritual dimension*: the programme-related activities that both instil self-confidence and a pride in community, and promote living culture and spiritual freedom
5. *The political dimension*: the programme objectives and/or activities that relate to the issues of governance and decision-making, particularly those in respect of the neighbouring community

The ability of the Golden Gate outreach programme to contribute to poverty alleviation and human well-being in the park's neighbouring communities was assessed by drawing on the views and opinions of park management, the park advisory board and also programme beneficiaries with regard to the above five dimensions. Some of the questions that were put to the beneficiaries to inform the above dimensions included, amongst others, the following: How did your life change since you began working on the programme?; Do you think the programme help some people of this area to make a better living, or not? Tell me about it; What do you think about the programme—is it a good thing or not?; What have you learned while being part of the programme?; What do you like most about the programme?; Is there anything that you dislike about the programme or something that is not working so well on the programme?; What would you do to improve the programme so that more people can benefit from it? Some of the questions put to park management included (but were not restricted to) the following: Do the benefits reach the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the community, and how do you verify this?; Is there any evidence that the outreach initiative is alleviating poverty and increasing human well-being amongst the target population?; Does the programme link up with other local or provincial initiatives to reduce poverty?; What would you list as the biggest problems or challenges that the programme is facing?; How can the programme be strengthened to maximise a positive impact on the community?

5 Findings

5.1 The economic dimension

As explained earlier, the economic dimension refers to programme benefits that offer community members opportunities to earn an income, consume resources and possess assets. Local people employed on the programme were earning their wages directly from the project, and therefore, it came as no surprise that all stakeholders ascribed the

programme's success to its ability to create employment for the poor—a benefit that participants considered the most important advantage of the programme. Beneficiaries also expressed their pride in and gratitude towards the park management because of its efforts to alleviate poverty in the area, or as one respondent put it: *'It [the park] took us out of poverty by giving us an opportunity to work here'*.

The beneficiaries pointed out that they were compensated well for their labour and that the income they were receiving had contributed significantly to improving the quality of life and the well-being of their families. Based on an average household size of 3.7 in the TMDM (Statistics South Africa 2007), the remuneration earned by the 112 community members employed on the programme indirectly benefitted 414 individuals at the household level (as only one person in any household could be employed on the programme). Although this is a minute proportion (0.06 %) of the total number of black households (172,955) in the neighbouring communities, beneficiaries were persistent that the income derived from the programme had put them in a better position to provide for their families' basic needs. The phrase 'able to provide', voiced by several beneficiaries, underscored the link between the increased economic means of the programme participants and their ability to meet the basic subsistence needs of their families. In this regard, an important element of the programme is related to its 'trustworthiness' or the economic security that it provided to the beneficiaries. Employment on the programme further meant that beneficiaries could now be registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund—an important additional form of economic security in case they were no longer able to continue working on the programme.

In spite of some misperceptions regarding employment benefits amongst some programme participants, the programme still contributed significantly to the financial well-being of beneficiaries. The programme enabled beneficiaries to buy household items and commodities such as food, children's clothing (notably school uniforms) and furniture that they had not previously been able to afford. Money earned while working on the programme further enabled beneficiaries to build proper houses for their families, while others were able to expand the dwellings in which they were living. One female beneficiary explained that because of her employment on the programme, she *'was able to buy building material and now my children are no longer sleeping in a shack. I have built a house with two rooms'*. All of the programme beneficiaries were, in fact, intensely aware of their advantageous economic position in relation to that of others in their community. This perception was borne out by the words of one beneficiary: *'We could see the difference between us and people who were still unemployed'*.

Yet, given the (relatively small) scale of the park's outreach programme, the prevailing magnitude of poverty amongst the park's neighbouring communities makes it difficult for any single initiative to make a significant impact in respect of poverty alleviation. Bearing this in mind, participants rightfully pointed out that there were simply not enough employment opportunities available in their home communities. Participants emphasised the fact that it was *'very difficult for us to find jobs in this area'*, or desperately asked: *'[N]ow tell me how it is possible to find employment in this area?!'* It was also repeatedly emphasised in the focus-group sessions that *'there are so many people who want this job'*—a clear indication of the extent of the desperate levels of socio-economic destitution in the areas adjacent to the park. For many households in the TMDM, a social grant received by a sibling, parent or child was the only source of income that the family depended on for their economic survival, but these grants were often inadequate to meet the financial needs of the entire family. In 2010, approximately 32 % of South Africans were beneficiaries of social grants (South African Institute of Race Relations 2010), and

therefore, it is significant and encouraging that a number of participants indicated that, as a result of their working on the programme, their reliance on social grants had decreased.

In the face of the overwhelming economic needs in the area, one should not expect a programme such as this to be the only answer to alleviating the plight of the neighbouring communities—an observation that is reflected in the small proportions of individuals and households who were fortunate enough to reap the economic benefits of the programme. On the other hand, it would be imprudent to deny the definite impact that this specific programme had on improving the well-being of at least a small number of families through providing them with the economic means necessary to improve their quality of life.

5.2 The subsistence dimension

Analysing the data in terms of the subsistence dimension suggested that definite intangible effects resulted from the primary economic input of the programme. All of the focus-group participants agreed that the programme had in many ways significantly and visibly improved their lives and also the lives of their families, and that there had been a definite improvement in their overall standard of living since their involvement in the programme. Beneficiaries recurrently used the phrase *'improved a lot'* to express the changes in their overall standard of living after they had started working on the programme and expressed the view that they were *'being taken out of poverty'* by working on the programme and were now *'able to live better lives'*. The reasons given for this perceived improved quality of life relate, amongst others, to their increased financial ability to provide for basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. Through the Working for Water and Working for Wetlands projects, the park—more specifically the programme beneficiaries—contributes to the cleaning of rivers from which neighbouring communities obtain their water. This has a positive impact on the health and well-being of the community.

Beneficiaries indicated that, through working on the programme, their health had improved markedly. Some of the beneficiaries on the programme experienced healthy weight loss directly linked to the physically demanding nature of the work on the programme, which included walking long distances in the mountainous terrain of the park. Better health also resulted from the improvement in the financial position of beneficiaries, as earning an income had since enabled them regularly to purchase sufficient and better quality food. Being able to afford better health care further raised beneficiaries' health status and quality of life. Another dimension of health to be impacted positively was the increased psychological and mental well-being that participants experienced as a result of their involvement in the programme. As one participant in the study stated: *'I was constantly diagnosed with stress [before I started working on the programme] because I could not provide for my children, but now I no longer have stress. I am able to provide for my family'*.

Beneficiaries were also able to improve their personal living conditions by switching to cleaner energy for domestic purposes such as cooking and heating. Therefore, they were better able to insulate themselves and their families from the effects of diseases commonly associated with poverty and poor living environments. Because of their participation in the programme, beneficiaries also became knowledgeable about the importance of eradicating alien plant species—knowledge that in many cases translated into participants being able to improve their immediate environment and their food security through removing these plants from their own yards and gardens.

5.3 The environmental services dimension

The environmental services dimension of the programme evaluation refers to the contribution that the programme makes towards the provision of natural resources and environmental sustainability. The provision of resources is an important environmental objective of the Working for Water/Working for Wetlands Programme. Beneficiaries were asked about their awareness regarding the role of the poverty relief programme in the provision of water to both their own communities and to other parts of South Africa.

Although beneficiaries were, to a limited extent, aware of the environmental justification for the conservation of Golden Gate, only a few individuals were able to link the conservation of the park and the rehabilitation of the wetlands in the park with an issue such as national water security in South Africa. Some beneficiaries stated outright that they did not know why the park had to be protected and that no one had explained the reasons to them. A few others, however, nevertheless acknowledged that the programme had instilled a greater understanding of ecosystems and the environment, specifically within the context of the work they were doing on the programme: *'I did not know that some of the trees in my yard consume lots of water. I did not even know that we have a shortage of water in our country, but I now know all about this and I am grateful for what I have learned'*. Another beneficiary emphasised: *'The programme has opened my eyes, because I never knew about [the important role of] wetlands'*. Before they had joined the programme, almost all of the beneficiaries had been unaware of the threats that alien trees posed to water and soil. They pointed out that they were now aware that some (alien) trees were a threat to both the local environment and to human development and in that these trees consume large quantities of water, contribute to soil erosion and, because of their strong root systems, could cause serious damage to their houses.

Overall, the data suggest that, through the programme, beneficiaries were able to develop a better understanding of the dynamic relationship between a healthy environment and their own quality of life. For example, the knowledge and first-hand experience that beneficiaries gained about pest control enabled them to improve the quality of their domestic vegetable crops and thereby increase the food security of their households. Ultimately, this knowledge and awareness again contributed to their own well-being and quality of life. Some participants indicated that they were sharing their new knowledge, particularly about alien plants, with other (non-programme) members of the community as part of their endeavour to *'do the same things we are doing in the programme in [our] communities'*.

5.4 The cultural and spiritual dimension

The cultural and spiritual dimension of programme evaluation assesses the way in which a programme instils a sense of pride in community membership and identification by promoting the living culture of the community, contributing to the psychological well-being of community members, and furthering education and training amongst community members.

5.4.1 Sense of community pride

The programme beneficiaries displayed a strong sense of community solidarity and, in fact, expressed the wish that the programme would do more to mitigate poverty in their communities by allowing others in their community also to experience the quality of life that they (i.e. the programme beneficiaries) were experiencing through their employment on the programme. Some of the beneficiaries indicated that they attempted to share the knowledge

and skills that they had learned on the programme with other community members—either formally through awareness campaigns or informally in their day-to-day interactions with their fellow community members. The beneficiaries specifically mentioned an increased awareness of social issues like HIV/AIDS and putting into practice what they had learned through their participation in social and environmental awareness courses offered by the park. Apart from the said initiatives, the park management also initiated and facilitated several spiritual and cultural events of importance to the neighbouring communities, often involving community members in celebrations linked to public holidays, like Women's Day (9 August) and Heritage Day (24 September). The park was further involved in other outreach programmes, such as the sponsoring and arranging of soccer days in the community and the Kids in Parks Programme, which brings learners to the park to learn about conservation. Park officials moreover visited schools in neighbouring communities on a rotational basis, notably on environmental days such as World Wetlands Day and National Arbour Day. One respondent captured the general sentiment amongst the beneficiaries in this regard: *'It makes me feel very proud of myself when school children visit the park because they have an opportunity to see the hard work that we put into conserving this environment'*.

5.4.2 Enhanced feelings of self-confidence and dignity

The demoralising effect that poverty has on individuals and families often causes its victims to display a sense of fatalism and a lack of self-worth, and the Golden Gate communities are certainly no exception to this reality. Many heads of household, now employed on the programme, explained the feelings of desperation that they had previously felt in the face of poverty and unemployment. These people were emphatic that the programme had contributed to their sense of accomplishment, self-esteem and self-confidence. The programme thus contributed to restoring people's sense of dignity and, as one beneficiary observed, to making them *'feel like humans again'*. In this process, the dignity of the entire family was restored, since employment on the programme eradicated *'the painful aspect of unemployment, of seeing our children suffer and being undermined by other members of the community'*.

The loss of dignity because of the high poverty rates in the neighbouring community was most acutely felt by male beneficiaries. Some male beneficiaries explained this loss of dignity by emphasising that *'there is nothing that is more demoralising than a woman providing for her husband'* and *'the fact that my wife was providing for me made me feel as if I have failed my family as a man'*. Through the programme, these men were able to achieve a sense of accomplishment in providing for their families, particularly within the context of an African rural patriarchal culture in which economic provision is still widely regarded as a predominantly male function within the family. By being able to find employment on the programme, these beneficiaries experienced that their dignity and self-respect had been restored.

The increased financial independence that resulted from their working on the programme further contributed to the beneficiaries' higher sense of self-worth and confidence. Those employed on the programme were much less reliant on their extended families—notably elderly parents—for financial assistance than had previously been the case. Not only did beneficiaries stop feeling that they were a financial burden to their parents and to their extended families, they were now, in their turn, able to assist their aged parents financially. Particularly, the female workers on the programme expressed appreciation and gratitude for the newly acquired ability to care for their children without having to rely on their husbands to provide them with money for food and clothes.

5.4.3 Improved future prospects of a sustained quality of life

Beneficiaries believed that, because of their involvement in the programme, their future prospects in terms of employment and sustained quality of life had improved significantly and that they were now able to plan for the future. Some beneficiaries felt that, as a result of the training they had received, they would be in a position to start their own businesses once they exited from the programme, while others, in addition to working on the programme, were already involved in entrepreneurial pursuits. People who are beneficiaries on the programme can also apply for vacancies in the park and, if they meet the requirements of the position, they can be appointed. In this way, some beneficiaries have found permanent employment as staff members in the park: Three people who were on the Working on Fire Programme are currently permanently employed as park rangers, while another is now permanently employed as a secretary in the park. At present (2012), Golden Gate employs 250 people, a figure that has doubled since 2002.

Anecdotal evidence supplied by both the park management and the advisory board supports the beneficiaries' view of the programme's sustained impact on their quality of life. Two women who used to work on the programme started tendering for government contracts once they had exited the programme and one of these women is now a supplier to hospitals. The builders who were contracted for the construction of offices in the park were ex-beneficiaries under the poverty relief programme. Some of the people who were trained in carpentry and sandstone bricklaying through poverty-outreach initiatives in the park were subsequently in such demand that even though they had initially been beneficiaries of poverty relief initiatives, the park now also had to wait in line to make use of their services. One beneficiary specifically mentioned having received art training while on the programme. He proudly reported the result: *'I displayed my art craft. The feedback that I received was very positive. Even now, people are still interested in my craft, I have more orders and people buy my things'*.

In addition to providing both immediate relief from poverty and a marked improvement in the quality of life of participants, the programme thus also enabled participants to branch out into other ventures that would steadily improve their future prospects and those of their families. The park however had no official monitoring system in place to track people who had exited the programme and who had been able successfully to explore other economic opportunities as a result of having benefitted from the park's poverty relief initiative.

5.4.4 The promotion of living culture and gender equity

Although this has not been a main objective of the programme as such, it has, since its inception, made a prominent contribution to the promotion of living culture in the neighbouring communities. As was earlier mentioned, the park runs outreach initiatives in neighbouring communities to enable community members to visit the park. Staff from the park likewise visit local community institutions such as schools. Community members are also given access to ancestral graveyards in the park and are allowed to utilise the park for traditional ceremonial activities and cultural initiation procedures.

Of particular importance within the broader cultural dimension was the impact that the programme had on the empowerment of women in the neighbouring communities. Given the large number of female-headed households in these communities and the abject poverty experienced by many such households, recruiting, employing and training women constituted a significant contribution of the programme towards improving the quality of life of some of the people in the area. Through improving the economic position of women in

the communities, the programme thus not only raised their confidence and sense of self-worth, but also actively promoted gender equity by enabling these women to support not only their own families, but also, in some cases, other members of their extended families. At the same time, the programme also served to sensitise male beneficiaries to the issues of gender and gender equality. One male participant expressed the insight that many of the men had gained in this regard: *'Sometimes men tend to abuse their authority and powers within their families and through this training I was taught, as a man, that I should consider and treat my wife as an equal, and that has helped me a lot in my family. I practise that in my family and now I have a happy family'*. The programme thus had an indirect impact on conventional cultural practices and gender stereotyping by improving the functioning of families in the target communities. In the same way, the programme also contributed to improving domestic life by collaborating with the Department of Social Development on domestic violence campaigns run in local communities.

Raising awareness about HIV/AIDS amongst workers and the community at large is another important contribution to the promotion of living culture. Some of the beneficiaries indicated that before they had started working on the programme, they had limited knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Similar views were expressed by other beneficiaries who indicated that they used to associate HIV/AIDS with witchcraft: they had thought that it was a lie, that it was not real, they had discriminated against people who had the virus and had been scared of being infected. Others indicated that they now better understood how the virus was transmitted and that, in consequence of the training they had received, they had a better understanding of the disease. Much of the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS had also been removed.

Beneficiaries also indicated that there were many people in their communities who did not know anything about the virus and that they (the beneficiaries) were now able to use this knowledge to educate other community and family members about the disease. The park is also involved in World AIDS Day celebrations and beneficiaries attested to the importance of such events to show solidarity with those infected and affected by the disease. A beneficiary remarked: *'I think it is important to celebrate World Aids Day, to acknowledge those who are fighting the virus'*. Another beneficiary stated that, *'it is important for us to celebrate World Aids Day, to let those who are infected know that we care for them and they are not alone'*. Through its involvement in such celebrations, the park indirectly contributes to promoting the living culture of the neighbouring communities by strengthening social cohesion, playing a part in removing discrimination and stigmatisation within communities, and by providing opportunities for people to engage with others on the basis of respect and dignity.

5.4.5 Further education

While employed on the programme, local people also receive training in specific skills such as personal finance management, business management, first aid, health and safety training, contractor development, computer training, fire fighting, and herbicide and pesticide application. Beneficiaries receive certificates for all training sessions attended. The decision with regard to the type of training is taken at the national government level and is based on the skills required by the particular poverty relief initiatives. The training takes into consideration the specific skills required in the park and also life orientation skills and environmental awareness. Training courses are further aligned with the requirements of the South African Qualifications Authority, which improves trainees' chances of finding employment after exiting the programme.

Beneficiaries appreciated the wide range of skills that they had acquired on the programme and believed that they would, at a later stage, be able to use their certificates to apply for other employment opportunities, for example in hospitals. Others emphasised the leadership skills and ability to work with people from different backgrounds that they had learned through participating in the programme.

Apart from providing skills training, the programme also enables participants to further their education. Some beneficiaries had been able to settle outstanding college debts (and as a result to receive their college diplomas), while the income received enabled others to pay for the further education of their children, and in some cases, that of their family members. One beneficiary recounted in this regard: *'Before I started working on this programme, my parents died and my sister had to drop out of college. However, after being employed on this programme, I made arrangements with the college to pay for my sister's studies and now she has completed her studies'*. By providing beneficiaries with an opportunity to receive both basic education and training, the programme thus considerably raised the future prospects of the beneficiaries and of their dependants for employment, thereby making a measurable contribution towards improving the quality of life and the general well-being of the people in the communities in question.

5.5 The political dimension

The political dimension of programme evaluation relates to whether and how the programme objectives tie in with the issues of governance and decision-making in the affected communities. At least two sublevels of decision-making may be distinguished and considered here. The first, or macro level, entails policy making and liaison between the protected area management and external authority structures, such as national or regional government authorities. A second sublevel of the political dimension involves the neighbouring community and specifically the management structures and frameworks that facilitate both the recruitment and the involvement of community members in the programme.

The Golden Gate management team functions as a representative of the South African government in respect of the EPWP and in fulfilling the conservation mandate of the park. Issues of governance and decision-making with regard to coordinating activities between the park and government departments are dealt with at the national level, with the park implementing such decisions at the local level. The park has a community forum (comprising 45 people with nine portfolios) that serves as a facilitating mechanism for promoting relationships between the community and the park. This forum deals with a wide range of issues that include tourism activities in the park, but it also functions as a platform for addressing community grievances. An advisory board also assists in decisions related to community participation and is one of the stakeholders when it comes to the appointment of workers in the various programmes. This board is composed of delegates from the local community and community leaders, that is, political councillors.

In our study, community members felt that they would have preferred to have had more influence regarding the programme-beneficiary selection process. Current policy determines that general workers who qualify for the programme are identified by the politically elected ward councillors in the community. The ward councillors are presumably best placed and best able to identify the most vulnerable and poorest in their particular wards. Once potential beneficiaries have been identified, the latter are selected using the inputs of a larger advisory committee consisting of the councillors, community members and the park representatives. Although the beneficiaries were reasonably satisfied with the fairness of the selection

process, concern was nevertheless raised that some councillors were perhaps not fully aware of the socio-economic status of the people in their wards and had moreover used outdated data to select people. This would result in councillors selecting people who were less needy, while there were other families who were experiencing more severe conditions of poverty and who would therefore benefit more from working on the programme. It also transpired that, in isolated cases, councillors would sometimes show favouritism and only select people who were politically loyal to them or select more than one person from the same household. The advisory board nevertheless has authority to prevent such discrepancies and nepotism by removing an unfairly selected worker from the programme.

Despite the screening and supervisory role of the advisory board, there still always remains the risk of political favouritism and economic opportunism where employment opportunities are at stake in a poverty-stricken environment such as the one surrounding Golden Gate. The advisory board therefore has an important gate-keeping function of ensuring that only the most needy and deprived are indeed selected for the programme. Yet, the selection process could still benefit from better communication between the community, the councillors and programme management.

6 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations

The impact of protected areas on the livelihoods of poor rural communities, particularly in developing countries, is arguably one of the most controversial debates in conservation circles. Although some sectors within the latter are increasingly sceptical and because they strongly contest both the notion and the feasibility of a holistic and integrated development and conservation approach (Brechin et al. 2007; Brockington et al. 2008; Upton et al. 2008), the stark realities in most developing countries confirm that the future of biodiversity conservation and the socio-economic needs of rural communities adjacent to protected areas are inextricably intertwined.

This case study has confirmed that conditions of abject poverty, combined with a high unemployment rate, remain major problems for large sectors of communities that border on protected areas. Collaboration with local communities and the transfer of economic benefits to the most deprived sectors in these communities will therefore remain essential if protected areas are to survive (Brockington 2002), particularly in developing countries in which a significant proportion of protected areas are surrounded by impoverished communities. The poverty alleviation outreach initiative at Golden Gate has proved that programmes of this kind can indeed have a positive effect on poverty levels and the quality of life—even if only for a relatively small proportion of households—in neighbouring communities. This having been said, the following conclusions summarise the lessons learned from the programme assessment and suggest some recommendations to strengthen the impact of this particular outreach initiative and that of other, similar outreach initiatives.

6.1 Lesson 1: Although programme benefits are limited to a very small sector of the community, these benefits still make a significant and tangible difference to those households living on the edge of subsistence

This case study revealed that a well-planned and strategically targeted intervention programme could make a notable difference to the livelihoods of poverty-stricken households, albeit on a relatively small scale. While the Golden Gate Programme does certainly help to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of some households in communities

bordering on the park, the impact of the project remains largely limited to the programme beneficiaries and their (extended) families. This 'limitation' should nevertheless not be seen as a defect or an impediment of the programme, but should serve as a constant reminder of what is realistically achievable with a programme of this nature. The stark reality is that it falls way beyond the ability, the core mission and the statutory mandate of any protected area significantly to reduce poverty amongst the majority of households in the communities bordering on such an area. The main strength of the Golden Gate Programme lies in its ability to enable a few workers and their dependants to experience relief from the direst impacts of abject poverty and thus to cultivate positive perceptions regarding conservation in general and the park in particular. Although only a tiny fraction of the community benefits from direct employment, training and skills development, the programme's impact on such individuals and their dependants in terms of improved quality of life is no doubt tangible and significant. In the face of large communities, high poverty rates and numerous households that need to share the limited revenues on offer, the financial benefits accrued from an outreach project might seem either negligible or limited to only those few members of the community directly involved in employment (Fabricius et al. 2001). Notwithstanding such limitations, however, very large segments of rural communities in the developing world live in appalling conditions of poverty with otherwise very limited options from which to derive an income. A case in point is the African continent: 61 % of the population live in rural areas; 63 % have to subsist on less than US\$2 per day; and only 52 % of the rural population have access to improved water supplies (Population Reference Bureau 2011). Under such conditions, any potential *additional* income that some households may earn from opportunities offered in a protected area, no matter how marginal these may be, could make a significant difference to their quality of life.

6.2 Lesson 2: To maximise impact, the lasting and multiplier effects of a poverty relief programme should extend beyond mere job creation and immediate financial relief

The training and skills development gained by beneficiaries while working on the programme are recognised as important benefits and should therefore be seen as a vital first step towards improving the educational status and the prospects of employability of members of poor communities. The transfer of skills to and the capacity building of community members may facilitate the development of small enterprises that are able to provide more sustainable livelihoods options to the poor—particularly in cases where such enterprises require little financial input. Another indirect and longer-term effect relates to the significant contribution that the programme makes towards bettering the educational status of the beneficiaries' children and family members, thereby helping to improve their own prospects for future employment. What this means is that, particularly within the context of integrated conservation and development approaches, poverty should be conceptualised as a multidimensional state of well-being, that is, in much broader terms than merely the monetary dimension. Once adopted, such an understanding of poverty allows for the exploration of the entire range of potential social, cultural and economic benefits available from protected areas.

6.3 Lesson 3: Programme efficiency and impact should be strengthened by a network of institutional stakeholder partnerships

The Golden Gate Programme reaffirms the importance of networking with and feeding into a multi-institutional partnership involving not only conservation and development

agencies, but also democratically elected representatives of the target population. Such a holistic and multistakeholder approach to poverty alleviation is imperative towards maximising the impact of any programme of this kind. This type of approach should have two important focal points: first, to ensure that programme participation is aimed at the most vulnerable and deprived segments of the community; and second, to respond to the overall developmental and social needs of the community as an integrated component of environmental conservation and management.

Conservation outreach programmes such as the one at Golden Gate should not be viewed as the cornerstone of a comprehensive poverty alleviation programme, but as complementary to an existing network of development initiatives—particularly initiatives aimed at job creation, income generation and poverty alleviation. The Golden Gate study has made it evident that integrated conservation and development programmes can only succeed when stakeholders pool resources, which means that conservation authorities need to engage with local and regional government authorities and with non-governmental organisations that share the same goals in respect of human development. No protected area outreach programme should be seen as a *substitute* for any other initiative to mitigate poverty (whether an official initiative or otherwise); it can and should at best *supplement* such an initiative.

6.4 Lesson 4: There is a direct correlation between, on the one hand, the capacity of a protected area to act as a meaningful vehicle for poverty alleviation and, on the other, the size of the neighbouring population

As pointed out by Dudley et al. (2008) and confirmed by the Golden Gate study, the size of the population bordering on a protected area is an important factor in the ability of any conservation outreach initiative to contribute meaningfully to the well-being of the neighbouring community. In cases where a relatively small population depends on the opportunities offered by a protected area, such opportunities could indeed have a tangible impact on poverty alleviation in the community. This means that the ability of a protected area to serve as a vehicle for poverty alleviation correlates strongly with the size of the target population that stands to benefit from such an initiative, that is, the smaller the target population, the greater the impact of the protected area's outreach initiative is likely to be, and vice versa. However, the significant population pressure experienced on the outskirts of most protected areas in developing countries thus erodes most attempts to promote such areas as feasible vehicles for poverty alleviation. Job creation initiatives that are initially successful may soon run into problems if, for instance, rising expectations fuel increased human migration to the protected area. In other words, even seemingly successful cases of people-centred conservation approaches—particularly those attempting to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation—have their limitations in the face of demographic realities and can thus not necessarily be duplicated as blueprint models. Exactly how the impact of such programmes can be maximised and sustained in the face of large populations and their equally huge expectations still needs to be adequately researched and documented.

6.5 Lesson 5: Unrealistic expectations and demands from community members should be avoided

An important condition for the success of community-outreach initiatives—especially in cases where such initiatives are accompanied by substantial economic benefits—is that the

target population should not entertain overinflated expectations regarding the economic opportunities offered by the protected area, particularly opportunities that concern job creation. Experience of protected area outreach initiatives in South Africa and elsewhere in the developing world has shown that community expectations are raised from the moment that a project activity is undertaken—even more so when it involves employment opportunities, no matter how limited these may be. As long as any programme, such as the Golden Gate Poverty Relief Programme, remains dependent on external—thus ‘non-guaranteed’—funding, there will also be a danger of potentially unmet community expectations and disillusionment, factors with which the park might have to cope in the event of financial constraints that result in the unexpected yet compulsory termination of the programme. It is therefore imperative for communities, and for community leaders in particular, to have realistic expectations in respect of the type of developmental and social benefits that may potentially be derived from their partnership with conservation authorities. This means that both the type and scale of expected opportunities to be unlocked by the programme should be explicitly communicated to all of the stakeholders and affected parties even before the programme is initiated.

6.6 Lesson 6: Protected areas, and specifically biodiversity conservation, can benefit directly from poverty alleviation

Regardless of whether or not protected areas should officially be mandated with poverty alleviation and the social development of neighbouring communities, the Golden Gate case study has demonstrated that biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation (or in the broader context—human development) do not need to be mutually exclusive as prerequisite for pursuing their respective objectives. Both conservation and development are inherently aimed at improving the quality of life, and this case study has shown that a mutually beneficial relationship can indeed exist when the two initiatives enter into a coherent programme. In the case of Golden Gate, not only does the neighbouring community economically and culturally benefit from the national park, the park itself is benefitting from this reciprocal relationship in a number of ways: The poverty relief programme provides financial assistance to the park (via the EPWP) which otherwise would have been difficult to unlock on its own, as well as labour power that enables the park to execute its mandate to eradicate alien plant species and rehabilitate wetlands. By integrating human development with environmental management, the park not only meets its objective of biodiversity protection, but the community also meaningfully contributes in sustaining the flow of ecosystem services. By giving people the opportunity to interact with nature in a way that they normally lack in their daily lives, the park also cultivates an understanding of the need for conservation and mobilises support for conservation amongst a sympathetic population—something that is of crucial importance for conservation management in developing countries.

6.7 Lesson 7: Regular socio-economic analyses and programme evaluations are important requirements in the monitoring of an outreach programme

Regular socio-economic segmentation and analysis of the neighbouring community—in terms of variables such as household size, household income, poverty rates, gender distribution, female-headed households, age dependency ratios, employment rates and educational status—are necessary to identify the most marginalised and needy groups within the community. Doing so is essential with a view to optimising the distribution and impact

of the potential programme benefits. This requires that a demographic profile be compiled and that an analysis be done of the socio-economic dynamics of the community, so as to ensure that the (limited) benefits that would emanate from the protected area's outreach initiative would indeed be targeting the poorest sectors of the community. A community profile of this kind should form an integral component of the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the programme by independent assessors and would ensure that programme weaknesses are timeously identified and addressed. In this way, new opportunities can also be unlocked and potential threats overcome. By as widely as possible disseminating the successes and failures of such initiatives, one could facilitate a learning environment that may contribute to an inventory of best-practice policies in the broader context of integrated conservation and development practices.

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