

Survey of Community Development Impact of Somkhanda Game Reserve

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## **Introduction**

The Wildlands Conservation Trust (WCT) with the support of various partners aims to establish the remaining necessary infrastructure to adequately equip the Somkhanda Game Reserve, develop sustainable business enterprises and both train and mentor community members into their respective roles necessary to sustain and effectively manage the reserve. In doing so, WCT has partnered with the University of California Davis (USA) and the Durban University of Technology to conduct a survey and a series of interviews in order to assess the economic, social, and educational impact that the operation of the Somkhanda Game Reserve is having on the people directly employed by the reserve, their households and the surrounding communities in which they live. Also, to contextualize the benefit of employment at Somkhanda, the survey shows the impacts of the Somkhanda Game Reserve on non-employee households in the local communities. For current employees, and other community residents, data was gathered in order to acquire the following information: 1) demographic characteristics 2) household size and employment history 3) educational opportunities and educational attainment of school aged youth in the household and 4) general understanding and attitude towards conservation activities and impact of the reserve.

Overall, our research found that employees and their families are receiving significant benefits from Somkhanda Game Reserve, with each employee of the reserve supporting on average a household of 7 people. However, non-employees and their families who live in the surrounding communities feel that they do not receive any benefits from Somkhanda Game Reserve, and there is significant tension around the expectations associated with the community-owned reserve.

In what follows, we first review the methodology we employed in this research. We then outline the demographics within the quantitative data. Next, we explore income and analyze the employee vs non-employee source of their income. After, we explain the significance of educational attainment between employee and non-employee. Next, we comment on the of Somkhanda Game Reserve. Lastly, we state recommendations for staff improvement and community development from our research.

## **Methods**

Students from The University of California Davis (USA) paired with students of the Durban University of Technology (DUT) conducted a series of surveys and interviews with standardized questions that were then posed to 38 out of 47 current employees as well as a random selection of 49 non-employee community members in the surrounding communities of the Somkhanda Game Reserve. Those communities include: Cottlands, Hlambinyathi, Candover, Sovana and Zonyama. Out of the 38 current employees that were interviewed, positions varied from field rangers, anti-poaching game rangers, trainees and tourism staff.

## **Demographics Characteristics**

The average household size for employees from Somkhanda Game Reserve is 7.3. For non-employees the average household size is 7.0. The average household size indicates an average of how people one employee is support with in its source of income.

51 percent of employee household adults are females. 49 percent of the employee household adults are males. 54 percent of non-employee household adults are females. 46 percent of non-employee household adults are males. The age composition of employee households are that 41 percent of individuals are under 18, 55 percent are age 18-59, and 4 percent are above age 60. The age composition of non-employee households are that 46 percent are under 18, 48 percent are age 18-59, and 6 percent are over age 60.

56 percent of the interviewees of employee households have more than 1 adult employed. 1 percent of the interviewees have only 1 adult employed in employee households. 20 percent of the interviewees have 2 or more adults employed in non-employee households. 1 percent of the interviewees have only 1 adult employed in employee households. 20 percent of the non-employee interviewees have 2 or adults employed in their households. 47 percent of the interviewees have only 1 adult employed in non-employee households. 20 percent of the interviewees have two or more adults employed in non-employee households. 47 percent of the interviewees have only 1 adult non-employed in employee households. 33 percent of the interviewees have 0 employed adults in the non-employee households. Because their mostly women in the unemployed household, we can infer that men and working age have left to go to the urban centers to find work.

0.4 percent of employee households receive pensions per household. 2.2 percent of employee households receive child grants per household. 0.6 percent of non-employee households receive pensions per household. 2.5 percent of non-employee households receive child grants per household. This data shows that all households solely rely on social grants as a source of income.

Of the employee households, adult educational attainment of 12 years or more is 34 percent, 8 to 11 years of education is 28 percent, and less than 8 years of education is 38 percent. Of the non-employee households, adult educational attainment is with 12 years or more is 34 percent, 8 to 11 years is 31 percent, and less than 8 years is 35 percent. In the employee household they have economic income to pay for school.

## **Economic Characteristics**

### **Employee**

Most of the employees claimed to support many individuals in their household, with themselves as the primary income earner. Since there is rampant unemployment, the other sources of income for the household besides Somkhanda and social grants were usually informal, inconsistent and minimal. Although the income from Somkhanda may be significantly more than previous jobs and may be the only source of income for many families, it is often not enough to

cover all of their needs. Many have to sacrifice basic needs like education, health, or decent food, simply because there is not enough money from one salary for all in the household. There were a many examples of transportation issues. Since most employees cannot afford transportation, if there is an emergency the head of the household needs to pay for the transport upfront, which means they are either in debt or the family goes without food for a week or a month.

It was widely found that many of the employees in the surrounding communities were not able to or needed to rely on additional incomes. Support from outside sources was rarely observed. When there was any additional income it came from a small amount of the employees through crafts, temporary jobs, traditional healing services, or spaza or tuck shops. Some mentioned volunteer or very low wage employment in the past, which did not have much economic impact on the families.

When we asked the employees about their household's assets including livestock and crops, most noted that any they had were mostly for their own consumption or used as a sort of savings/inheritance. Most had some sort of livestock or crops, which helped supplement their need to purchase food, allowing them to sometimes allocate money for other necessities. It was rare that cattle were used for or received from Lobola. Many indicated that they would like to plant more crops and raise more livestock but there is such limited water available that they were unable to expand. Additionally, most expressed a desire to use animals for more than their personal use, like milk and meat, but said that they could not afford to sell the animals. Many only sold the animals if they were in very dire straits. Although we found that employees tended to have fewer animals than non-employees we found that the job at Somkhanda allowed them to purchase bigger animals like cattle so the wealth is concentrated in more valuable animals.

Any income the households have come from the employed individuals from the immediate household, grants, or the informal assets mentioned prior. The amount of distribution of wealth within a family differs from employee to employee. Overall the employees tend to earn most of the income in their household. However, this income is not sufficient to cover all of their basic needs so the household must find other ways to survive, if they can.

### Non-Employee

Finding employment proves challenging for many of interviewed families, which often leads to financial instability. A vast majority of individuals not employed in Somkhanda have no sources of income, and solely rely on social grants for survival. Generally, most of the non-employees interviewed expressed the need of natural resources in order to plant crops and start gardens in which they could grow seasonal vegetables for family consumption, and in rare occasions, as a second source of income. A garden in turn would allow the family to reduce the cost of food and allocate more funds for other necessary expenses. A challenge arises with the ability to plant a garden not only due to a lack of space, but also due to the inaccessibility to

water. Many individuals expressed sentiment in wanting to plant gardens, but the lack of water ceases them from achieving this. In addition, many of the non-employed individuals had some kind of financial security in livestock. Their ability to own cattle and goats allowed them to utilize the animals for food and milk, and in the case of an emergency they could be sold.

### Analysis

Although those who are employed do not feel that their salaries cover all their basic needs, they are sufficiently more economically privileged than their unemployed counterparts who are living off temporary jobs and social grants.

## **Educational Circumstances**

### Employee

There is a consensus among the employees that there were not many problems with completing primary school. However, attending high school was challenging because of financial reasons, distances, and transportation to schools. Regarding the quality of schools, there are not very many complaints. There also seems to be a lack of parental support regarding education. Several parents, and other mentors, passed away and many individuals were unable to attend because in the absence of adults, they had to care for siblings and livestock. For most, the lack of education affects their ability to find employment, because very few jobs hire without a complete high school education.

The majority of employees have only had training from Somkhanda and nothing outside of their job requirements, though several employees have mentioned a great desire for more training. There have been many promises for more training, but employees state they have yet to see more opportunities offered.

### Non-Employee

From the non-employee interviews we found that many of their children attended primary school regularly. However, secondary school was found to be a challenge for many of the households because distance and transportation were an issue. Because of this distance from secondary school, many students' education ends at the primary level. If they do choose to pursue secondary school, students are required to walk long distances, stay with relatives in another area, or have their parents pay rent for another house during the academic year. Many families explained that a lack of funds is a challenge for their children's level of success or continuation in school. Similarly to those employed, many adults stopped their education because of other responsibilities, like their families or livestock. Another common trend between employed and unemployed was the inability for community members to continue their

education due to a death in the family that affected their ability to receive funds for schooling. Similarly, they were not able to pursue opportunities for any type of training either.

### Analysis

Both employees and non-employees face similar challenges in receiving an education. However, even though it is more difficult to attend high school in these communities, those who are employed can afford the extra costs more easily than those who are unemployed and surviving mostly off government grants. Moreover, those who are employed receive supplemental training and job experience that will assist in employment in the future.

## **Perceptions of Conservation and Development Efforts**

### Employee

The majority of the interviewees agreed that employment at Somkhanda provides significant benefits. Although most employees believe their salaries are insufficient, it does cover some basic needs for both the employees, and the household they support. One main grievance the employees illustrated was the requirement to buy food while staying on the game reserve. Many object to this because they not only have to pay for their own food, but also that of the household they support. The income may be significantly larger than previous ones and something that the household relies on, but all of their needs are not necessarily met by it.

When asked about the best use of the land the reserve is located on, we received mixed answers. Some believed that the land could better be used for farming or for cattle grazing, while others believed the game reserve is the best use. Of the interviewees who believed farming and grazing would be a good use, however, they did not believe that the land should be repurposed now that it is being used for a game reserve.

We also received mixed answers about how much the employees learn from the game reserve. Most of the staff working in the bush gathered knowledge on the importance of conservation and sustaining a balanced ecosystem. Others (mostly in hospitality) knew very little about the game reserve or its purpose. These employees would probably benefit from being able to participate in game drives and educational tours.

Many employees recommended investing in marketing and adding animals to achieve the big five to increase high paying tourism. Additionally, the surrounding game parks that have the big five economically outside Somkhanda, further suggesting schemes to increase revenue and continue to employ the community.

A challenge that many believe impedes benefiting the community is the lack of communication. Many employees conveyed conflicts over control of the municipality and the

transparency of the Gumbi royal family. Many agreed that if you are not closely related to the Gumbi royal family, job opportunities are limited because only those who are closely related hear about job openings.

The vast majority of individuals have not had any other their family members visit Somkhanda due to financial reasons (could not pay for transport or entrance fee) although they believe that their families would like to if given the chance.

### Non-Employee

An overwhelming majority of non-employees did not see any economic or community benefit from Somkhanda. Many of the interviewees did not know much about the reserve and if they did it was something that was told to them briefly with no decision making process. This, however, does not mean that they did not see the benefits in having a reserve but rather that they did not feel the benefits from this reserve. Many of the older/longer residents of the area had a unique perspective on the various forms of leadership of this land. They indicated that there are other reserves that have provided more jobs, and community impact than this reserve has in less amount of time. Unless one is employed by or has a family member who is part of the royal family, the impact may reach the point of not even knowing about Somkhanda.

Given that many simply do not know about the land, the trust, or the purpose of Somkhanda or the rest of the Gumbi reclaimed land, many focused their opinions to the reserve itself rather than the entire property. When asked what they would use the land for many did see the value in a reserve since it could bring in tourism money. However, many thought that the big five were a necessary investment so that this reserve could compete with the others, which are very nearby. Some suggested that a portion of the land be used for agriculture and grazing so that more jobs could open up. However, they acknowledged that in order for this to happen the water issue must be resolved. Additionally, some suggested that the initial stipend from the land reclamation settlement should have been used to provide basic sanitation to the surrounding community, like toilets, and that any overhead from the reserve should be used for community improvement efforts like this. None thought that settlements were a good use of land since it is too mountainous. Some suggested having a high scale lodge so that high paying trophy hunters and tourists would come. Generally, non-employee households wanted a more lucrative use of the land where more people are employed and the benefits are seen outside the current hiring pool.

Some of the main challenges to running a successful community beneficial reserve that non-employees raised revolve around the communication and participation lines between the NGOs at Somkhanda, the Gumbi royal family, the surrounding community, and the Gumbi extended family. There is a perception that Somkhanda only hires from within the immediate and extended family, that anyone with a surname that is not Gumbi does not have much access to employment opportunities on the reserve, despite their need, qualification, or proximity to the

reserve. Since the Gumbi tribal council is mostly open to those with the Gumbi surname and who are men, the surrounding community, which it governs, does not have equal representation. Many do not know how to voice their concerns and if they do voice their concerns, nothing is done unless you are part of the Gumbi royal family. This means that any effort Somkhanda does to communicate with or encourage participation of the local community cannot be effectively done through the tribal council.

As far as interaction with the reserve itself, non-employee households see the reserve as a place that you can only go to if you are an employee. Interviewees noted that it is expensive to travel there and to stay there. Some school children did mention that they were able to go to the reserve after they reached grade five or six. All would like to go and see the benefit in having a reserve to educate the community about the animals that live here.

### Analysis

The general perception of the game reserve differed in the amount of benefit an individual gained from it. The employees thought more positively of their overall perception, whereas the unemployed did not receive any benefit. Most who were unemployed had very little contact with the reserve at all. Other than the benefits received, the employed and unemployed both answered with mixed results for the general challenges and use of the game reserve land. Moreover, most agree that investing further into tourism will benefit the entire community. Furthermore, there is a general understanding of a lack of transparency within the hierarchical structure of the community that effects the perception of Somkhanda.

### **Feedback to the Management**

The following is general feedback that the employed and non-employed individuals have communicated that would improve Somkhanda's relationship with its staff and the community.

Improve relations with staff with:

1. Greater communication and participation with all staff
2. Greater accountability for the recommendations employees have to the management
3. Revisit hiring practices by making them more readily available to the community when jobs are available
4. Create more realistic expectations clearly i.e. receiving certifications
5. Create a more structured work environment
6. Improvements to salary and job safety

Improve community relations with:

1. Create community spaces and/or meetings to improve communications and encourage engagement with the entire community

2. Revisit hiring practices and make them more readily available to the community when jobs are available
3. Create more clear expectations about game reserve ownership
4. Products (i.e. meat) from the reserve should be more available to the wider community
5. Increase the number of community trainings

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the interview process questions were posed toward employees of the Somkhanda Game Reserve and non-employees of the surrounding communities. We found benefits for the employed individuals versus the non-employed. The employed individuals not only gained economic maneuverability but also trainings and knowledge towards conservation and sustainability. These benefits allowed the employed to support not only themselves but also afford most of the necessities of their households. Although there are many benefits and general appreciations for the jobs provided by the reserve, employees generally feel that their salaries do not cover all the basic needs of their households. However, they are much better off than their unemployed counterparts who typically rely solely on social grants and temporary jobs. Because of the economic advantage of the employed, they are more able to send their children to schools further away. Both unemployed and employed have mixed perceptions about the purpose of the game reserve. Moreover, they both expressed concerns about the lack of transparency with in the hierarchy of their local government and the relationship the community has with Somkhanda. Through our interviews we were able to deduce that Somkhanda has a positive affect on its employees and the employees' households, however there are very little positive affects to the unemployed local communities.