



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:

QUESTION FOR ORAL REPLY:

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Inkosi R B Cebekhulu (IFP) to ask the Minister of Tourism:

What steps has his department taken to market and encourage tourism-related businesses to persons living in areas adjacent to parks, who were previously not allowed to make use of the parks except to fetch firewood? **NO3959E**

REPLY:

The Department of Tourism recognises the value of wildlife and conservation areas to our economy.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute estimates that the biodiversity economy contributes about R73 billion, or 3%, of GDP. The wildlife economy contributes about R9,1 billion annually.

The department is aware of the potential of nature and wildlife conservation areas to play a significant role in economic benefits to local communities. Communities living near parks are no longer simply used as cheap labour for menial jobs. This is reflected in the increasing number of partnerships being created between rural communities, nature reserves and private operators and developers.

Tourism has become an important vehicle for economic growth in the country and an ideal tool to empower disadvantaged communities. Communities living adjacent to nature and wildlife conservation areas are now being exposed to employment opportunities, including some at management level. Some own businesses which provide services to the parks, while other communities have become owners or partners in protected areas.

Examples of this include the Gumbi community in KwaZulu-Natal, who have used 16 000 hectares of land obtained through the land reform process to create their own protected area, Somkhanda Game Reserve. The reserve has the potential to create more than 200 permanent jobs with an annual income of R6,8 million accruing to the community.

Another example is the Balete community in Lekgophung, west of Madikwe in the North West province, who have partnered with a private developer and now boast ownership rights to an exclusive 16-bed luxury lodge called Buffalo Ridge.

The department has previously partnered with the International Labour Organisation's Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises programme, known as SCORE, to help communities living close to parks to develop new business initiatives and enable them to become more sustainable. Between 2012 and 2014 a number of local community organisations providing services to lodges received SCORE training in areas like Madikwe Game Reserve, the Amakhala Game Reserve, Kruger National Park and Maloti-Drakensberg Park. The training helped these organisations to cut costs and increase efficiency, enabling them to participate competitively in tourism supply chains.

One of the success stories is a community owned laundry in Mahlutshini, in the Uthukela district of Kwazulu-Natal. The laundry has a contract to provide laundry services to camps owned by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. After the SCORE training, the laundry won a contract to provide a local hospital with services, resulting in the number of employees increasing from 5 to 14. The laundry has now opened an additional office in Estcourt to service its growing clientele, and is expanding its operations to include a gift shop.

Responsible tourism is about enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and an improved environment, while also providing better holiday experiences for guests and good business opportunities for tourism enterprises.

During Tourism Month, the department encourages industry partners, especially government-owned parks, to provide free access to school children and marginalised communities, so that they can also enjoy the benefits provided by these facilities.

The Department will be working closely with the Department of Environmental Affairs and other partners like the Southern African Wildlife College and the African Safari Lodge to bring together conservation, tourism and the upliftment of rural communities.