

The Role of Local Government in Tourism: Local Government Perspective

Minister of Tourism, Hon. Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk,

Executive Member: House of Traditional Leaders, Inkosi Joseph Vusi Nhlapo

MECs Responsible for Tourism

All Mayors and Executive Mayors

Councillors

Directors General

Senior Officials from the Department and from Municipalities

Distinguished delegates

Introduction

No one knows the beauty of our areas better than locals. Local government, as the elected representatives of the people is well placed to access the knowledge and resources of local people and in doing so can provide access to our country's lesser known, but truly memorable tourism assets.

We cannot as local government afford to ignore tourism as an economic sector, as many of you know, South Africa's growth in tourism visitors has outperformed global averages. The focus of our nation on tourism, as outlined in the National Tourism Sector

Strategy, is in part about creating jobs and relieving poverty because more than other sectors, tourism has the ability to spread its benefits to remote and impoverished areas.

But is our current tourism growth path achieving this? How has your municipality benefited, or has it perhaps suffered from tourism development? Have opportunities been created for the local people, or can more be done? These are the questions we as developmental local government need to ask and we may best be able to answer.

What has the country done to recognize local government's role in tourism

So, understanding that local government has a unique and critical role in the tourism sector, what have we as a nation done about it?

The Constitution lists Local Tourism as a local government competence. We have enabled municipalities to create Regional Tourism Offices to provide marketing and information services through the Municipal Systems Act.

We have outlined the tourism mandate of Local municipalities in the Tourism Act of 1993 and of District municipalities in the Municipal Structures Act. We have discussed local government's role in tourism in a range of strategy and policy documents.

Within this regulatory environment local governments have undertaken many different projects and actions, some of which have had a sustained impact, others which have cost plenty and amounted to little.

All of these initiatives provide us with important lessons and we look forward to hearing about some of the lessons learned during this conference.

Our goal is to have local government implementing initiatives with a sustained and multiplying impact. Initiatives that take municipalities closer to their goals of reducing poverty and unemployment and delivering a safe and healthy environment for communities.

What are the challenges?

There are many challenges we face in reaching this goal.

With the many responsibilities of local government in service delivery, tourism often falls low on the list of priorities with little funding allocated. There is also limited understanding of the tourism sector and the factors affecting it.

Within government there is debate as to where one sphere's responsibilities end and another's begins. All spheres of government have a constitutional mandate to address tourism. It is therefore vital that the different levels of government work together. As in any relationship, this comes with its difficulties. Aligning the tourism plans of government has proved an immense challenge.

What are we doing about the challenges?

So how do we better clarify the role of local government in tourism and address some of the challenges mentioned?

Local government has the primary role of ensuring that the environment that both our locals and visitors encounter is clean, safe, healthy, accessible and stimulating.

Succeeding as a tourism destination requires mobilizing the social, financial and natural capital of a place towards the common vision, goals and objectives of the local

community. The Integrated Development Plan is our key tool in aligning these common vision and goals. Through the IDP the economic development, land use management, tourism and other sector plans should come together.

How can stakeholders assist local government deliver on their tourism mandate

Partnerships are essential to the development of any economic sector, including tourism. The collective wisdom of local operators far exceeds that of a single municipal official. The municipality needs to tap into this knowledge, at the same time facilitating new partnerships and investments and ensuring that growth benefits the poor and is accepted by the wider community. This is no small task, but this facilitation role of Local Government is imperative. In co-ordinating the marketing, promotion and information provision for tourism. Local government should again look to the local community for direction. Understanding the competitive advantage of your location, what makes it unique and what will make people come to visit requires the benefit of collective wisdom. What works for one area may not work for another.

Capacitating municipalities to be able to facilitate the development of their local tourism sector and support the national tourism strategy will require a concerted effort and partnerships from all levels of government and other stakeholders.

These efforts need to be focused and consolidated, yet at the same time, flexible enough to accommodate the differences in municipalities.

We need to expand our ability to show our tourism priorities spatially and allocate resources accordingly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Provincial and national government need to take time to understand the conditions in municipalities, especially budgeting and planning cycles. In addition, mechanisms for accessing funding and support must be shared with all municipalities.

We would like to position SALGA as a key stakeholder in tourism development. In the “Consolidated Local Government Tourism Intervention, Support and Capacitation Programme Reader” SALGA has outlined in detail the areas where local government can intervene, expand and improve on their tourism development capacity and how National government can support this role. Capacitating local government to respond effectively to the tourism sector needs to be a key priority of all levels of government.

Holding this Local Government Tourism Conference is a great step forward and a show of commitment to working together from all stakeholders. We hope the engagements will be fruitful and that we will have new ideas and plans to implement going forward.

We at SALGA are committed to the ideal that by working together, we can make local tourism work and share our country’s many treasures with each other and with the world.

Thank You