



Indigenous Stakeholder Conflicts as a Barrier to Potential Ecotourism Development: The Case of Lake Fundudzi and its Environs in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

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A view of lake Fundudzi, South Africa

In the post-apartheid South Africa, comparatively limited tourism development has taken place in the geographical realm of the former 'Bantustans' or homelands of South Africa's Black populations. This is in spite of visionary Government policies, which recognize the need to uplift these Historically Disadvantaged Communities in tourism and ecotourism development.

Lake Fundudzi, the only natural lake in South Africa, is located in the northern Limpopo Province. It represents a unique asset with significance to a variety of stakeholders. Lake Fundudzi is literally the unexplored 'Loch Ness' in South Africa, steeped in deep Venda cultural mythology, complete with a mythical giant White Crocodile, a submerged village, zombies that walk from the Lake at certain time of the year and rites that a visitor must perform if they are to return from the Lake in one piece!

Lake Fundudzi embodies the prospects for ecotourism developments in this remote part of the Limpopo Province. However, the lake's potential for planned development has been held back by conflicts among its numerous stakeholders. This special report attempts to put these conflicts into perspective.

Lake Fundudzi and its immediate environs, draws a wide range of interest groups which range from the local to the national levels. Stakeholders include Venda traditionalists, who perform age old rites and for whom the lake is sacred. They represent a conservative force to be reckoned with. The valley's youth view the lake as a source for recreation; rural women view its environs as a source of drinking water and wood fuel, men for grazing and subsistence farming, landless families as a potential area for re-settlement. An assortment of environmentalists, researchers and a few tour operators also hold a diversity of views and interests. There are varied levels in the stakeholder articulation of their specific interests and therefore stakeholder concerns vary from the more practical and highly visible, to those which are more or less 'peripheral' and 'silent'.

In order to begin to realise the ecotourism development potential of the lake and its environs, I maintain that the current bottlenecks that has held back significant changes can only be conclusively deciphered in their entirety and their interrelationships successfully investigated when the stakeholders concede and realize that they must come together to discuss and resolve the issues that they hold dearly. In other words the private and public interests must be laid open to scrutiny, discussed and resolved. This is not happening in any systematic manner.

Whilst some of the impediments to the development of Lake Fundudzi are clear-cut to the author, many are hidden, uncertain and remain unresolved. Nevertheless Table 1 is an articulation the more readily recognizable range of local stakeholders and their positive and negative influences.

Table1. Local Level Stakeholder Interests.

Stakeholders / Actors	Range of Activities	Positive Needs & Interests	Negative Needs & Interests
Traditional Leaders	Hold apartheid era jurisdiction which are in conflict with the national plans for constitutional developments	Traditional leaders have significant political influence. Power sharing between the centre and periphery has not been resolved	There is a under current of power struggle between the following power centres; (i) Traditional (conservative) (ii) Community (iii) Municipality
Men	Carry out traditional and religious rituals. Enterprising men harvest sand as a building material	Men have an overbearing cultural influence as through exclusivity of rites, dominance of the informal business enterprises and in opinion setting	Senior men represent an 'Anti-modernization' and 'Male-ego world view', which is not complimentary to 'development transformations'
	Men and the youth also graze domestic animals	Domestic livestock provides for food (milk, meat) and hides & skins	Cattle pollute drinking water through dung deposits
	Subsistence farming is carried out by both men and women	This provides for a poor food crop	Soil erosion and gully formation is evident
Women	Women hold the social responsibility for wood fuel and water harvesting	This meets crucial energy and hygiene needs	Extensive deforestation is manifest in the lake's environs
Youth	Despite inhibiting traditions, the youth swim in the lake	This youth activity is viewed as a social control as it keeps the youth busy from anti-social activities	Conservative forces view youth activities on the lake as anti-cultural
	The youth also hook fish in the lake	This is a source of alternative protein	This activity is 'classified' as anti-social viz. the outdated 'Venda Act'
	A range of general recreation takes place along the lake's environs	This also keeps the youth busy from anti-social activities.	There is some litter (mainly paper & plastics) on the routes leading to the lake and its shoreline
Thohoyandou-Malamulele Municipality	LDO (Local Development Objectives) / IDP (Integrated Development Plan), which are statutory local development plans are supposed to be in place.	LDOs and IDPs as Government policy have good intentions, but lack the human and financial resources locally to transform them into reality	Local Development Objectives do not feature in any plans. Integrated Development Plans have not been prepared.
The Scientific Community	Tertiary research institutions, both local and from afar, undertake pure and applied researches.	These institutions have determined Fundudzi's (i) Water quality (ii) Ideal fish harvesting techniques (iii) Catchment conservation	However, there are limited demonstrated gains to the local communities.

Source: Author.

From Table 1, it may be note four issues. The first is that there are several actors, both minor and major. Secondly, there are a large variety of primary activities or interests each group of actors would undertake or embark on if the opportunity was clearly availed, in the vicinity or on Lake Fundudzi. Third, for each activity or interest there are both positive and negative impacts related to the development planning of the locality. Last but not least, there are ranges of ' planning strategy or strategies' that need to be negotiated upon and carried out to resolve the present impasse.

It has been noted above that being 'an outsider', I only have a partial grasp of the intertwined issues that have held back the development of the lake up to this point in time. Nevertheless, here are two tentative observations, which I can draw from the forgoing.

The first is that from the above variety of perspectives, the range of strongly held cultural beliefs and customs and the needs and activities related to the lake are collectively responsible for generating the underlying conflicts, which have impeded movement in the development of the lake and its environs. At the 2001 World Environmental Day at the Green Hall, Thohoyandou, the strength of the conservative and exclusivist views of the traditional leaders was

presented. It was a 'no compromise' attitude, which sought to control all events related to the lake, in a manner only understood by the traditional leadership.

Secondly, alternative viewpoints which include scientists and the local government have their respective spokes persons. However, traditional leaders would appear to be keeping the views of their constituents at bay. For example the views of the communities are never really articulated at any fora. Outsiders in fact have no or very limited ideas on what the men, women or youth think regarding the crucial range of issues connected to the lake.

Third, the scientists, who include researchers and formal sector environmentalists, are very articulate on the possibilities of development for the lake and its environs, but they appear to be on their own. Local and Provincial Governments and specialized development agencies have the 'right and encouraging' policy documents in place, but the problems appear to revolve around human, financial capacities and delivery issues.

The bottom line here emerges as a conflict entangled in different stakeholders who (refuse?) do not necessarily recognize the existence or the legitimacy of other stakeholder interests on the lake. And until these issues are amicably solved the eco-tourism potential and gains from this unique lake will not be realised.

About the Author

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