

# Makuleke CPA success: Why conservation and restituted land development are not mutually exclusive

According to chairperson of the Makuleke Communal Property Association (CPA), Mavis Hatlane, the community lived through a painful history when members who formerly inhabited the Kruger National Park were forcefully removed from the land in 1969. As a result, community members initially opposed the notion of conservation because of the racist approach that saw their removal.



Source: Supplied

Today, however, the Makuleke community is at the forefront of cutting-edge, socially conscious conservation. The Makuleke region of the Kruger National Park is firmly on a mission to harmonise the protection of biological diversity with the interests of the community.

## Fine balance required

“Maintaining the conservation of protected lands and heritage sites in land reform requires a fine balance as land remains a highly emotive issue,” says Peter Setou, chief executive of the Vumelana Advisory Fund, a non-profit organisation that works with land reform beneficiaries to make their land productive by facilitating partnerships between communities and investors.

“Conservation of restituted land and the need to develop the land for communities should not be mutually exclusive, but should complement each other,” argues Setou. “Communities should be able to reap the economic benefits from their ancestral land while maintaining the integrity of the land and the value of heritage sites,” he adds.

The Makuleke CPA's land claim was finalised in 1998 and the CPA now owns 24,000ha in the Kruger National Park.

Since the finalisation of its claim, the community has benefitted from tourism projects in the Kruger National Park, Hatlane says.

With better understanding of conservation requirements, the community has been able to use the proceeds from tourism to develop community projects. The youth have also benefited from the land as they are involved in various capacity-building and skills-development programmes within and around the Kruger National Park.



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## Photographic tourism

When the land was returned to the community, the CPA sought advice from a number of organisations. Several suggestions were made based on the land's biodiversity status with options varying from hunting to farming to mining. "After thorough consideration, we resolved to get involved in photographic tourism," Hatlane says.

The decision was not a seamless one, Hatlane notes, as there were a number of niggling issues to deal with including differences in interests with some community members wanting to pursue hunting and others farming.

However, she explains, the community came to a consensus and now has a co-management agreement with SANParks. As part of the agreement, the CPA and SANParks have a joint management board, with three members from each organisation. The board deals with strategic decisions with a focus on both conservation and business opportunities on the land.



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## Private-sector partners

"The community has also established partnerships with private partners," Hatlane says. "This came after the joint management board had looked into the matter, taking into consideration that the private partners would retain the conservation status of the land while at the same time contributing towards improving the livelihoods of community members."

SANParks' role is to ensure the conservation of the land, and the community can use the land for commercial purposes while taking care to maintain conservation measures, Hatlane explains.

“The community has come a long way in this process, and it has been crucial for the Makuleke Traditional Council to find a balance in meeting the needs of the community members while at the same time ensuring the protection of a biodiverse zone – bearing in mind that the land the community owns is a central part of the greater ecosystem of the Kruger National Park.”



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### Benefits for generations to come

It is important that the Makuleke land is considered an ecozone and part of a transfrontier park, because that would be an acknowledgement that they have done the right thing by choosing tourism and that this will yield benefits for generations, Hatlane says.

The Makuleke CPA currently has two lodges, Return Africa and The Outpost, and a training institution, Makuleke Eco-Training. Some 70% of the workers at these three facilities come from the local community.

The CPA has also established partnerships with training institutions that focus on conservation and hospitality. These include the South African College for Tourism which offers hospitality training; the Southern African Wildlife College which provides field ranger and conservation-related studies like community-based natural resource management and responsible resource use; and the Tracker Academy which focuses on field guiding.

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