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The Socio-Economic Impacts of Nature-based Tourism: The case study of Bakgatla ba-ga Kgafela in the Pilanesberg National Park

Motlhanke, Simon Goitsimodimo

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Abstract

This research explores the socio-economic impact of nature-based tourism on surrounding communities in the Pilanesberg National Park (PNP). The study pays particular attention to the Bakgatla community. The study looks at issues of employment creation, and the participation of the community in the management of the park. Of particular importance here is whether, PNP generates employment and income making opportunities for neighbouring communities, most notably, the Bakgatla. The level at which the Bakgatla are involved in decision-making processes of the park is closely scrutinised. Notwithstanding the obvious limitations with regard to the kinds and number of jobs that PNP, as an attraction is able to generate in the area, the study reveals a significant contribution that the park makes in this regard. Lodges serve as the major sources of employment recruitment in the PNP. The bulk of the recruits are mainly people from surrounding communities except in cases where required skills are not available locally. Concerning the question of participation, the study shows that more still need to be done in terms of broadening the concept to include and reflect diverse interests groups within the community. The concept of community participation also needs to be defined beyond mere 'trickling down' of benefits to the community, to imply real empowerment. The latter relates to the question of sustainability, which could effectively be realised through meaningful involvement of the community groups and individuals in the making of decisions, and policies affecting their lives.