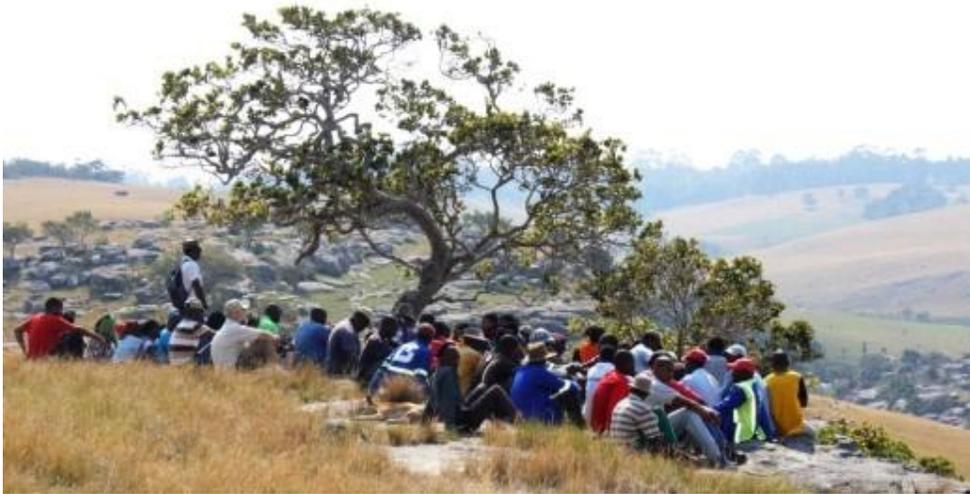


[Building community resilience on the land under our feet](#)

September 17, 2013 | [News](#), [Pondoland](#), [SAFCEI news](#), [Sustainability](#)

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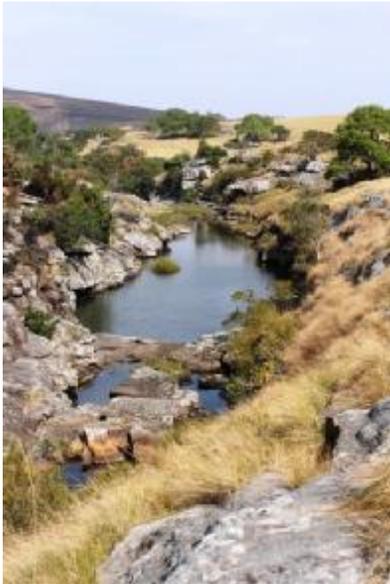


“How can you say you starve when you walk on food, how can you say you have no money when food is everywhere?”

High up in the grasslands on the lip of the Mtentu gorge the community of Gobodweni meet under a tree in the heart of Pondoland. They have come to discuss how they can develop viable livelihoods and safeguard their land and cultural heritage from the ravages of inappropriate ‘development’. As they search for a different way of life, a life that will not destroy the bio-diverse landscape that has sustained their ancestors for generations, they listen to each other and the wisdom of the elders.

The people of the Pondoland Wild Coast have lived with uncertainty for years. They ask what benefits the proposed N2 toll road and titanium mining in the coastal dunes will bring to their communities. So far, the promise of jobs, money and kick-backs has only divided loyalties and left people troubled about their future. The lack of community consultation and accountability from outside decision makers fuels their outrage.

“The region is a biodiversity hotspot and home to a storehouse of countless unnamed endemic species”



The region is a biodiversity hotspot and home to a storehouse of countless unnamed endemic species. Visiting scientists confirm this knowledge that is in their blood – it is the second richest floristic region in southern Africa. The people understand this and do not require outsiders to dictate their needs. But how can the community ‘make a living of sufficiency’ from preserving their heritage in a world that has a different value system? It is an inheritance beyond monetary value.

At a decision making crossroads about moving into the future, the community embraces the support of partners. SANBI (South African National Biodiversity Institute) is present under that tree. They understand the value of the biological treasure house in this inaccessible and so-called ‘un-developed’ part of the sub-continent. They know that this can only be safeguarded if there is community consensus. SWC (Sustaining the Wild Coast), a small NGO with a big heart, is also present. Committed to supporting community capacity building and local decision making, they have come to hear the aspirations of communities whose voices are not being heard in the grand scheme of things.



The community share a vision of enticing visitors to encounter nature in the gorge and grasslands and to experience Pondo cultural heritage and hospitality. They talk of attracting scientists and researchers to their corner of God’s garden in Pondoland and creating a learning centre that will open a window on a way of life that views and values the world differently. They are searching for opportunities that build community resilience and create meaningful work, not short term ‘jobs’.

The discussions are not about power and wealth that come with contemporary ‘development’. This envisioning process is about a search for cooperative community wellbeing and resilience. God created a world of plenitude and abundance and the elder knows this when he asks: “How

can you say you starve when you walk on food, how can you say you have no money when food is everywhere?"

