

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2015.015.144](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2015.015.144)

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## **INTEGRATED CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES IN SOUTH AFRICA: LESSONS, BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES**

### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the role of a protected area in promoting human well-being by drawing upon a case study from rural South Africa. The paper highlights the benefits of a community outreach biodiversity conservation programme in the eastern Free State of South Africa, and concludes by pointing at some of the programme's challenges and the lessons learned from these and similar integrated conservation and development approaches in South Africa.

The official conservation policy of South African National Parks (SANParks) is entrenched in the conviction that biodiversity conservation should be directly linked with the socio-economic needs of neighboring communities. Within this policy framework, the thatch harvesting programme at the Golden Gate Highlands National Park (GGHNP) is aimed at transferring social and economic benefits accruing from biodiversity protection to the impoverished surrounding communities by means of commercial access permits and park-assisted entrepreneurial endeavours.

Grasslands constitute the second largest ecosystem in South Africa and are collectively protected by three World Heritage Sites as well as several provincial reserves and national parks. Grassland can support vast herds of game and at the same time serve as protection for all-important wetlands in the park, which in turn are of paramount importance for water catchment and water security in South Africa. This paper reflects on an outcome analysis that was conducted to ascertain the contribution of the thatch harvesting programme at GGHNP to human well-being within the neighbouring communities of the park. Specific questions that are addressed in the paper include the following:

- To what extent has the thatch harvesting programme of the park impacted the park's conservation mission and its neighbouring communities?
- What are the multiplier effects (if any) stemming from the programme?
- What evidence is there to indicate that the thatch harvesting programme has improved the community's experience of well-being?

In general, the paper argues that the benefits embedded in the thatch harvesting programme strongly further the improvement of certain constituents of well-being as stated by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Criteria, such as access to basic material for a good life, security in the form of resource access, health, and improved social relations through the act of being able to help others. The paper concludes by pointing at some challenges emanating from the programme - both for conservation and sustainable development.

### **Keywords:**

integrated conservation and development, protected areas, human well-being, community outreach programme