



1 COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Since the 2008 People and Parks Conference in Mafikeng, community representatives have utilised the development of a National Steering Committee to discuss community concerns relating to people and parks projects around the country. In preparation for the fourth People and Parks Conference, each province compiled a list of community concerns to be presented to the conference.

In the absence of the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, communities felt the need to raise their concerns formally. There was an overwhelming concern that the Minister's absence indicated a lack of concern for community interests and the proceedings of the conference were interrupted to present community concerns to the Minister and Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs on Day 2. This platform allowed communities to clearly outline their concerns to those officials present, including their unhappiness at the absence of the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform. The communities resolved to present the list of persistent problems and challenges they faced throughout the country, province by province, before the Minister's presentation and seek answers and concrete proposals on the way forward.

Following a detailed presentation by the National Steering Committee Chairperson, Mr Mhlaba, representatives from provincial protected area management authorities provided responses to the concerns raised.

This section summarises the points raised by community representatives and the responses offered by provincial management authorities. Detailed notes regarding the concerns raised by each province can be found in Appendix 3.

1.1 Overarching Community Concerns

Mr Mhlaba presented concerns specific to the People and Parks Programmes in each province. The concerns varied according to regional governance and funding trends, as well as the individual experiences of different communities. The following, however, emerged as being the most pressing concerns affecting all provinces:

- **Funding:** There is an overall lack of funding to support People and Parks Programmes, economic development initiatives, settlement grants and leases. This is affecting the ability of communities to participate meaningfully in People and Parks Programmes and the ability of government agencies to uphold land reform agreements.
- **Land Reform:** Land reform processes, including the settlement of claims, the transfer of title deeds and the handing over of land are very slow. Such delays are making it difficult for communities to understand and assert their rights. They are also leading to increasing frustrations and are seen as a lack of commitment by the government to keep their promises.



- **Co-management:** Co-management arrangements are not being implemented in a way that allows communities to participate as much as they would like to in local, regional and national decision making processes. Co-management arrangements have been further delayed in some areas by land reform failures. Most communities feel that the government is failing to involve them adequately in the management of protected areas.
- **Job Creation:** Not enough employment or economic development opportunities are being created in the current People and Parks Programmes.
- **Beneficiation:** Communities were also concerned about protected areas continuing to utilise service providers from outside local communities, despite available skills in areas such as security and maintenance. More opportunities are needed for communities to develop small businesses able to benefit from the eco-tourism economy.
- **Transparency:** Communities expressed concern over the degree of transparency from government, particular with regard to the allocation of resources and decisions regarding protected area management. Communities would like to be more informed about government processes, and receive clear feedback on issues relating to People and Parks Programmes.
- **Commitment:** Communities are concerned that delays in all areas of People and Parks Programmes indicate a lack of commitment from the Government to the success of People and Parks Programmes. Communities expressed their ongoing commitment to the programmes, but also their increasing frustration.
- **Capacity Building:** Communities expressed frustration at a lack of capacity building to support their engagement in People and Parks Programmes. This concern was raised in relation to co-management arrangements, business development initiatives, environmental education, financial management and engagement with legislation.

1.2 Provincial Management Authority Responses

Representatives from each provincial management authority responded to the concerns raised in the community presentations. These responses referred to specific issues raised by each province, as well as some general remarks regarding the process of working together with communities on People and Parks Programmes. Each province expressed their concern regarding the issues raised by the communities, and agreed that there are many problems that both communities and government structures need to address. Some examples were given of instances in which concerns have been successfully dealt with, but overall there was a commitment to continue to work towards improving the People and Parks Programmes.



The following areas of work emerged as being of general concern:

- **Dialogue:** Provincial representatives noted the importance of good communication between management authorities and communities. The need for continued dialogue was recognised by management authorities.
- **Support for community structures:** Provincial representatives agreed with communities that additional support is needed for community co-management structures, volunteers and the national steering committee. It was noted that provincial financial resources are inadequate to address all of the needs of community structures, and it was agreed that collaboration with the national department is needed to ensure sufficient resources are made available to support communities. The need for resources to ensure communities are able to pursue funding opportunities outside of government was also noted.
- **Job creation:** It was noted that more economic opportunities are needed in People and Parks Programmes. However, it was also noted that many jobs have already been created (e.g. 1000 in the Western Cape, 600 in Mpumalanga), and this achievement must not be undervalued.
- **Intergovernmental co-ordination:** In response to issues regarding land reform processes and a lack of transparency, provincial authorities noted the need for more effective inter-government co-ordination. Several examples were given of areas in which provincial management authorities are not able to finalise agreements with communities when they are waiting for processes to be completed in other departments.
- **Post settlement support:** Provincial management authorities acknowledge the problems associated with post settlement support and raised concerns regarding where to find the necessary resources to ensure post settlement agreements are implemented.
- **Strategic interventions:** It was noted that strategic interventions are needed to ensure success of People and Parks Programmes. In particular, the need for programmes to be driven by a clear vision, accompanied by an action plan and sufficient resource allocation was noted.
- **Leadership and accountability:** It was agreed that more leadership and accountability is needed, both within government structures and within community structures. In this regard, management authorities felt that cohesion within community structures was very important.