

PARKS, PEACE, AND PARTNERSHIP: GLOBAL INITIATIVES IN TRANSBOUNDARY CONSERVATION

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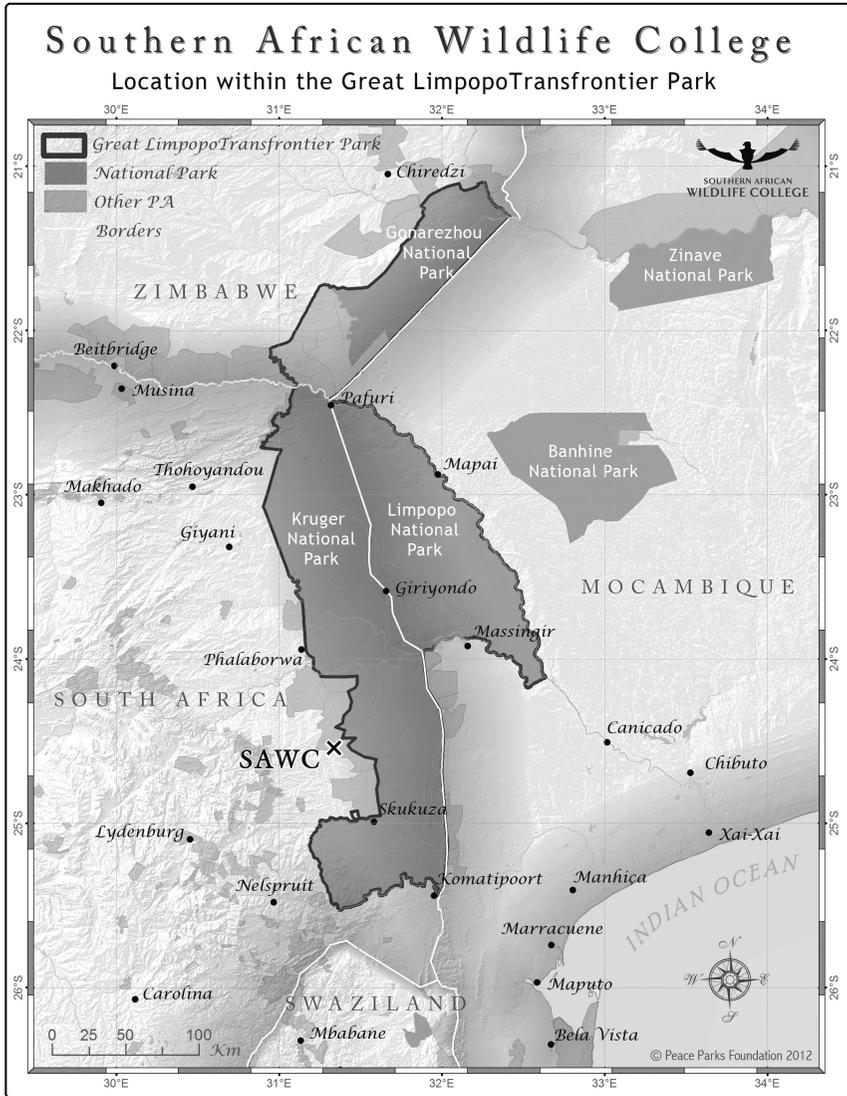
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Successes and Challenges that Face a Peace Park's Training and Education Facility

Theresa Sowry

INTRODUCTION

The Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) was established in 1997 by the World Wide Fund for Nature–South Africa (WWF–SA) with money obtained from the German government, and with the support of major conservation stakeholders both within South Africa and regionally across the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The SAWC is a not-for-profit organization that operated initially with financial support primarily from WWF–SA and other donor agencies. The establishment of the SAWC was due to the ever-increasing need to have an institution dedicated to the training of protected area managers within the SADC region (Map 1). The aim of the SAWC was to meet SADC training needs within the sphere of natural resource management. From its inception, the SAWC offered full-time qualification course programs (certificates



MAP 1. LOCATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE (PEACE PARKS FOUNDATION).

and diplomas). The curriculum covered a broad range of conservation management skills, as well as a range of specialist short courses that included: wildlife management, nature-based tourism, community-based natural resource management, and other environmentally related topics. Custom-made short courses were also developed for those organizations wanting specialist training courses designed to meet specific needs. The SAWC's courses were all designed with input from conservation organizations across the SADC and remain relevant to training needs identified across the region. The establishment of the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) and the realization of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs) across the SADC region, resulted in the SAWC and the Southern African College of Tourism (SACT) becoming training institutions primarily focussed on training staff of these TFCAs. The SAWC is now dedicated to the empowerment, support, and capacity-building of the conservation sector throughout the region, specifically to those communities associated with TFCAs. The SAWC has become a SADC-recognized centre of specialization and continues to work closely with conservation organizations across the region to train according to current needs – both within formal protected areas and in surrounding communities. The Peace Parks Foundation is now the main fundraiser for the SAWC; however, WWF-SA still plays an active role in this important function.

SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE

Training Philosophy

The Southern African Wildlife College understands that the most effective training combines action with reflection. This training perspective encourages mentors and students alike to embrace different ways of learning. The courses offered at SAWC are characterized by a hands-on, practical and highly participatory approach, which is complemented by group discussions and lectures. Unlike other training institutions, the SAWC does not employ a large permanent staff, but contracts practising professionals with relevant experience to ensure that the training is as practical,

relevant, and current as possible. The trainers are selected from a large pool of natural resource management experts within southern African environmental and conservation agencies, as well as from the private sector. The course methodology focusses on outcomes-based instruction, which ensures improved performance when learners implement these skills in the workplace.

The SAWC offers two categories of training programs. The first category consists of qualification courses (diploma and certificate), while the other category focusses on skills development courses.

Qualification Courses

Qualification courses are held on campus and target protected area and natural resource managers from southern Africa who are already in the service of conservation and environmental agencies. The course structure emphasizes practical, hands-on skills, rather than using a strictly academic or theoretical approach. Individuals must be selected by their organization as having the potential to become a junior or mid-level manager within their organization. These individuals may not have the necessary formal qualifications to become protected area or natural resource managers. Thus, the necessary bridging skills are provided so that these individuals may return to their places of work equipped with the means to manage their areas efficiently and effectively. Training interventions generally evolve around the diverse practical field experiences of both trainers and students. This allows students to apply knowledge to their workplaces, thereby not only benefiting themselves but also their individual organizations and their local communities.

The certificate qualification course is aimed at individuals who have been identified as having the necessary skills to develop into junior managers within their reserves. A learner who has achieved this qualification will be able to integrate supervisory knowledge and skills within the operational specifics of a conservation area. Modules covered in this qualification include: Tourism Management, Philosophy and Ethics of Conservation, Legislative Guidelines and Implications for Law Enforcers, Personnel Management, Basic Ecology, Vegetation Management and Monitoring, Animal Management, Integrated Catchment Management,

Infrastructure Management, Management of Cultural Heritage Resources, Introduction to Protected Area Management Plans, Introduction to Community Development and Conservation, Environmental Education, and Ensuring Ecosystem Integrity.

The diploma qualification course is aimed at mid-level protected area managers. Modules covered in this qualification include: Research Skills, Human Resource Management, Protected Area Management, Freshwater Ecology, Environmental Development Plans, Landscape Management, Introduction to Applied Resource Economics, Project Management, Community Development and Conservation, Environmental Education, Tourism Management, and Natural Resource Protection–Strategic Operations.

The course content for both of these qualifications is frequently updated to cover training needs expressed by conservation organizations. For example, a formal training needs analysis (TNA) (Pullen and Petersen 2001) was conducted in 2001 with the aim of identifying conservation training needs within the SADC region for the period from 2001 to 2006. These recommendations were given to the SWAC, and course content was updated accordingly. One need identified from this TNA was the need for off-campus training for staff of conservation organizations across the SADC region. This led to the SAWC delivering high quality skills training, not only on campus, but also off site within protected areas (see Skills Development Courses section). During 2006, course content was updated with funds made available from World Wide Fund for Nature–Southern African Regional Program Office (WWF–SARPO). This update focussed mainly on regional community issues and incorporated relevant case studies from SADC. Since the development of TFCAs, the course content has been aligned to specific TFCA needs, namely community involvement (including educational awareness, conflict resolution, leadership skills, and community participation), animal management (including problem animal control, and disease spread), alien vegetation management, landscape management (as opposed to reserve management), and tourism development. A subsequent evaluation of training needs was conducted in 2009 as part of an extensive conservation outreach field trip to



SAWC STUDENTS BEING INSTRUCTED ON WEAPONS SAFETY (SAWC).

visit program graduates. The lessons learned are being implemented into course offerings.

It is essential that the influence these courses are having on conservation across the region is measured frequently. SAWC management keeps in close contact with the directors of all conservation organizations across the SADC, asking them to comment on the course curriculum when necessary. This is formally conducted by means of a Training Advisory Committee, which has representatives from most SADC countries. Secondly, the SAWC keeps in contact with past students. In this way, SAWC can identify what proportion of students graduating from the qualification courses are promoted into management positions. Thirdly, the students themselves give written feedback after every course module, highlighting the benefits of what they have learned and how it will be implemented in their workplaces.

Since its inception, and with the support of the Peace Parks Foundation, the SAWC has trained over 5,000 people from 26 African countries in natural resource management. SAWC management keeps in contact with past students and monitors their progress when they return to their workplaces. Most of these students have returned to their organizations and been promoted to a higher level of authority within their workplace.

Case Studies of Success and Benefits

On successful completion of the diploma course, Henry Kadauma (a Malawian student in 2005) was promoted to assistant park warden and transferred from Liwonde National Park to Nyika National Park in the northern part of Malawi. Nyika National Park forms part of a transfrontier conservation area with Zambia. The Nyika TFCA is centred on the Nyika plateau. Henry contacted SAWC through a contribution to the student newsletter (the *Mvelaphanda*) and wrote: “In my own view, conservation in Africa can be achieved through the combination of community participation and stringent law enforcement. The knowledge and skills I acquired from my studies at the college have placed me at a better position to handle such enormous tasks in Nyika, the paradise on earth” (Southern African Wildlife College 2007).

Miriam Namushi was the first female recipient of the Southern African Conservation Education Trust (SACET) scholarship and completed her diploma in 2005. She has been promoted to park ranger, based in Mongu in the western part of Zambia. Her duties now include planning and supervising field operations for the protection, conservation, and management of wildlife resources in areas under the Zambia Wildlife Authority. In her contribution to the newsletter she states: “The conservation training that was presented at the Southern African Wildlife College through the support of SACET has empowered me to meet the challenges of conserving wildlife alongside men. I am now applying the knowledge I have acquired from the course to my subordinates to the benefit of my country” (Southern African Wildlife College 2007).

William Soko studied at SAWC towards a Certificate in Natural Resource Management in 2004. He was employed by the Zambian Wildlife Authority as a senior wildlife police officer. He was the top graduate in his

class and was subsequently awarded a SACET scholarship to attend the diploma course. William successfully completed his diploma and upon returning to Zambia was sent to the Eastern Region of the Zambia Wildlife Authority and was subsequently promoted to park ranger. He is presently in charge of Lukusuzi National Park and the Lower Lumimba Game Management Area, where his responsibilities include supervising twenty-nine wildlife police officers, two senior wildlife police officers, and fifteen Community Resource Board village scouts. Two national parks have been identified under the Transfrontier Conservation Areas Programme in the Eastern Region of Zambia due to their proximity to neighbouring Malawi; these are Lukusuzi National Park and Nyika National Park. William wrote to the newsletter to explain the communities' support of the new TFCAs. He wrote:

There has been overwhelming response from the local community members. Over 15 villagers have volunteered free services in three wildlife camps on the eastern end of Lukusuzi. The villagers are supporting anti-poaching operations by accompanying wildlife police officers on patrol. There are also community resource village scouts based in three camps in the buffer zone in Lumimba Game Management Area on the Western end of Lukusuzi National Park. These are paid from community funds generated from safari and resident hunting. The volunteer village scouts in the corridor between Kasungu and Lukusuzi National Parks hope to find permanent employment once the TFCA is fully operational. (Southern African Wildlife College 2007)

Beatrice Zvobara was employed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife, Zimbabwe, in 1999 as a scout II. She completed her certificate course in 2003. She was subsequently appointed warden of operations in Matusadona and was later transferred to Sengwa Research Unit. Beatrice completed her diploma in 2005, and a year later she was transferred to Lake Mcllwaine Recreational Park on the North Bank, where she is presently the officer in charge of the station. Beatrice explains:



SAWC STUDENTS GETTING INSTRUCTION IN PLANT IDENTIFICATION AND TRACKING (SAWC).

I am busy working on the Mcllwaine Recreational Park Management plan of which a draft will be sent to the College for corrections. I currently hold a challenging position and there are very few women with such positions in my organization. For this I would like to thank the trainers, College staff and donors for making all this possible. (Southern African Wildlife College 2007)

Skills Development Courses

The SAWC offers a wide range of skills development courses; however, only the courses of specific interest to TFCAs are discussed in this section. This range of targeted skills development courses are either presented on

campus or in the workplace, depending on the needs of the specific conservation organization, and are aimed at a number of different levels – from workforce to manager. A number of the skills development courses are registered skills programs on the National Qualifications Framework of South Africa. These programs have been designed by sectoral training authorities in consultation with relevant parties (such as conservation organizations) and approved by the South African Qualifications Authority. The development of such skills programs is the result of a need to train according to job competency requirements in the industry. Skills programs that the SAWC is approved to train include field ranger training and general field assistant training. Both these courses are aimed at a very basic level and can be offered in a country's official language. Basic field ranger training is essential for any wildlife area, specifically TFCAs, as law enforcement and conservation guardianship are the fundamental principles that govern protected area management.

Field Ranger

A field ranger within South Africa needs to have been trained to do the following:

- organize;
- understand and apply personal values and ethics;
- demonstrate an understanding of HIV/AIDS and its implications;
- maintain occupational health and safety;
- cooperate as part of a team;
- practice conservation guardianship;
- identify and monitor local wildlife;
- understand nature conservation issues; and
- handle a weapon.

The SAWC trains field rangers from a number of TFCAs to meet the same standards as required in South Africa. It is important to standardize training across a TFCA so that field rangers from different countries have, as much as possible, the same training and will respond to incidents in a similar way. In other words, the TFCA should be seen as one homogenous area as far as law enforcement and conservation guardianship are concerned. It is beneficial to train field rangers within their workplace, as they can become familiar with real-life situations they will face after the training. The trainer is also able to identify potential problems in the workplace and possibly overcome them during the training session.

General Field Assistant

A general field assistant, commonly referred to as a “general worker,” is required to fix a number of infrastructural problems, conduct road and fence maintenance, control veldt fires, remove alien plants, attend to soil erosion, and attend to a number of other day-to-day activities. A skills program has been designed by the relevant sector training authority in South Africa to address all these issues. An individual having completed this skills program will be able to competently perform to his or her job requirements. This skills program should become the standard training for any “general worker” within a TFCA.

Geographic Information Systems

One particularly successful skills development course offered on campus is the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) course. This course deals specifically with spatial data analysis, cartography and mapping, GIS/Global Positioning System (GPS) capturing and remote sensing data, and GIS as a conservation application. This course is therefore high on the priority list for training in any TFCA. The Peace Parks Foundation developed this course and the SAWC uses staff from PPF to present this course at SAWC.



PROUD SAWC GRADUATES (SAWC).

The Inclusion of Buffer Zone Issues

This paper thus far has concentrated on training personnel within conservation or wildlife areas; however, when tackling the issue of training TFCAs, one must not overlook buffer zones and the issue of training people in local communities on aspects of community leadership and management development, tourism, and hospitality. Closely linked with the training of protected area managers is the role that nature-based tourism is set to play in socio-economic development of Southern Africa, especially as a result of these larger protected areas taking on the form of TFCAs. The development of TFCAs allows for potential future economic sustainability, and training local community people will allow optimization of the number of jobs that local community members can access in the area adjacent to the TFCA.

There are a number of training interventions that the SAWC is able to provide to community members, depending on their level of education,

their training needs, and the funds available for training. Some of the most popular training interventions as part of buffer zone development of TFCAs are discussed in the next section.

Community Leadership Development

This program is designed to develop understanding, skills and confidence in community leaders, where they are faced with development options in tourism. This program is an integrated development program and is designed to assist the community leaders to decide which tourism development option would be most beneficial to their situation, to plan and implement tourism development on a project basis, and to efficiently manage the implementation targets, project team performance, and finances. It also provides a range of soft skills that will support them in the management of their working relationships and when dealing with private-sector investors and government officials.

New Venture Creation

This program exposes community members to new ideas and opportunities available to them. They learn about entrepreneurial profiles and are trained how to write in business language. Business management is a major component of this training.

Tourist Guide (Nature and Culture)

A vast number of community members have excellent knowledge of their local indigenous plants, animals, birds, and cultures. Most new venture creations around TFCAs incorporate community-based tourism (CBT), and this would necessitate the training of local people to become nature-based or culture-based guides for interpretation purposes. Some of these guides would possibly be hired by tourism concessions within the protected area itself, while others would form an essential interpretation role for the CBT enterprises in the areas adjacent to the TFCAs.

Hospitality

CBT enterprises would undoubtedly need trained chefs, waiters, room attendants, and reception staff trained from the local community. The Southern African College of Tourism (SACT) trains women from local communities adjacent to TFCAs in courses ranging from three weeks to nine months in length, covering all essential hospitality services. The SACT, funded solely by the Peace Parks Foundation, aims to train women to competently work in concession lodges within protected areas or within CBT initiatives. Students from nine African countries have graduated from SACT.

CHALLENGES

The SAWC is a non-profit organization, relying heavily on donor funds. This is probably the ultimate challenge for this institution. However, the movement of the fiduciary responsibility from WWF-SA to the Peace Parks Foundation has been a positive move, as the Peace Parks Foundation aims to create space and train people to manage that space. Therefore, the SAWC – now strategically placed as the training wing of the Peace Parks Foundation – is in a better situation than ever to overcome this challenge.

Conservation organizations need to budget for training and not rely solely on donor funding for aid. Bursaries granted by the WWF-SA and the Peace Parks Foundation are becoming partial bursaries to motivate organizations to budget for a small contribution towards the training. Unfortunately, when budgets are cut, training budgets are always first in line. Training needs, identified within the organization, must be elevated on the priority list. Capacity-building within an organization cannot happen without training. Perceptions need to change for this challenge to be overcome.

Organizations that fund the development and park planning of TFCAs need to budget for training and capacity-building from the initial planning phase of a project. A training plan and budget must be developed and must incorporate community involvement and possible new venture creation in areas adjacent to the protected areas. The Peace Parks

Foundation and the SAWC are working together on projects to ensure this happens and is not overlooked.

Differences in language, levels of education, expectations, and governmental policies between countries need to be addressed. TFCA training must identify and tackle these differences through the training provider. Presently, SAWC provides basic level training in a number of different languages, as unskilled people are often the very individuals to be targeted for skills development. Training only in English would discriminate against these individuals. Training of more educated people takes place in English.

New trainees usually start their training once negotiations and promises have been made to both employed and unemployed members of a community. It is essential that the trainer and learners discuss these expectations that training outcomes are realistic and that opportunities exist for employment.

A specific challenge that SAWC faces is the issue of accreditation. It is essential that SAWC remains a SADC centre of specialization and continues to keep course content current with a regional perspective. However, SAWC is based in South Africa, and therefore the curriculum needs to comply with South African legislation. This remains an intricate balancing act, as regional case studies need to be used in the training arena to effectively cover country-specific training needs. SAWC strives to be legally compliant within South Africa but simultaneously strives to update course content to cover regional issues.

CONCLUSION

Since the inception of the college, over fifty million South African rands of donor funding has been spent on training to develop skills of conservation staff across the SADC region. It is now time for conservation organizations to raise a proportion of the funds within their own organizations for their staff to attend the SAWC. WWF-SA and the Peace Parks Foundation continue to donate partial bursaries to cover 50% of participants program costs. The SAWC has an evolving strategy to encourage

active participation from organizations in the ever-challenging activity of fundraising. The SAWC is currently placing an emphasis on the development and implementation of training plans for TFCAs. These plans will entail a three- to five-year roll-out strategy for the development of skills within the TFCAs. Training local skills is essential for the success of the TFCA, and it is stressed that if local community skills are ignored, the very basis of what a TFCA should achieve will be in jeopardy.

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