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# Community-based tourism and peace parks benefit local communities through conservation in Southern Africa

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Community-based tourism is regarded as a potential driver of economic development for rural communities in close proximity to peace parks. The long-term success of peace parks in Southern Africa is only possible if local communities that live within or adjacent to peace parks receive significant benefits. Community-based tourism provides the means whereby such local communities may receive these benefits. This article establishes the spatial distribution of community-based tourism ventures in Southern Africa in relation to the proposed peace parks. A high degree of spatial association was found to exist between community-based tourism ventures and the proposed peace parks.

## Gemeenskapsgebaseerde toerisme en vredesparke tot voordeel van plaaslike gemeenskappe deur bewaring in Suider-Afrika

Gemeenskapsgebaseerde toerisme word beskou as 'n potensieële dryfveer vir ekonomiese ontwikkeling van landelike gemeenskappe wat naby vredesparke geleë is. Die langtermyn sukses van vredesparke is alleenlik moontlik as nabygeleë gemeenskappe voordeel daaruit trek. Gemeenskapsgebaseerde toerisme verskaf die potensiaal om hierdie gemeenskappe te bevoordeel. Hierdie artikel doen verslag oor 'n studie wat onderneem is om die ruimtelike verspreiding van Suider-Afrikaanse gemeenskapsgebaseerde toerisme-ondernemings in verhouding met die voorgestelde oorgrensparke vas te stel. 'n Hoë vlak van ruimtelike verband tussen gemeenskapsgebaseerde toerisme-ondernemings en die voorgestelde en huidige oorgrensparke is bevind.

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Ultimately conservation is about people. If you don't have sustainable development around these wildlife parks, then people will have no interest in them, and the parks will not survive - Nelson Mandela.

The natural diversity in Southern Africa serves as an important drawcard for tourists.<sup>1</sup> The long-term conservation of natural diversity occurs mainly within protected areas. The World Conservation Strategy emphasised the importance of linking protected area management with the economic activities of local communities (IUCN 1980). This linkage has resulted in the development of community-based tourism (CBT), an approach to tourism in which often poor and marginalised local residents are active participants as land-managers/land-users, entrepreneurs, employees, decision-makers and conservators. The aim is for residents to have a say in decisions over tourism development in their area and to work with other stakeholders to develop opportunities for employment, enterprise, skills development, and other improvements in local livelihoods (Ashley 1999). CBT implies that community members have a high degree of control over the activities taking place, and that a significant proportion of the benefits accrue to them (Schevyens 1999, Epler Wood 2002).

Economic opportunities and benefits must accrue to those people who share geographic proximity with protected areas, that is, those who represent local interests rather than purely national and international interests (Whelan 1991). These opportunities and benefits are especially important in Southern Africa, where communities on the boundaries of protected areas are often hampered by high poverty rates, high levels of illiteracy, unemployment and distorted patterns of resource use. Poor people increasingly view conservation and protected areas as areas kept for wealthy foreign visitors and the elite. Poor local inhabitants in close proximity to these areas feel excluded and alienated from access to resources on which they have been dependent for their survival (Grossman & Holden 2003). A solution is needed in order to satisfy the needs of the poor communities and to ensure the protection of the natural resources. The introduction of tourism is regarded as a potential solution to

1 Financial support from the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) Thuthuka Fund (Research Project: TTK2007052100025) is gratefully acknowledged.

ensure both the long-term protection of natural resources and a means of satisfying the needs of the poor communities in close proximity to protected areas (Magakgala 2003, Magome 2003). Tourism is based on some form of resource. In the case of nature-based tourism, the resource is often vulnerable and the conservation of the resource itself is dependent on the wise development and implementation of the tourism initiative. Tourism can be viewed as the key to the survival of protected areas. It follows that nature-based tourism is therefore regarded as a legitimate tool for conserving biological diversity and promoting sustainable development (Boo 1993).

CBT initiatives have several advantages, including the promise of employment and income to local communities, as well as much-needed foreign exchange to national governments, while allowing the continued existence of the natural resource base. CBT can empower local communities, giving them a sense of pride in their natural resources and control over their communities' development. CBT should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a means towards empowering poor communities to take control over their land and resources, to tap their potential, and to acquire the skills necessary for their own development. CBT provides the impetus to ensure a peaceful, mutually beneficial coexistence between the poor rural communities and conservation areas.

Poverty and ecologically sensitive and diverse areas are not confined to national, man-made boundaries. Transfrontier parks provide the scope for CBT and conservation across national boundaries. Southern Africa has introduced a unique initiative, namely the peace parks initiative, which has led to linking the prosperity of rural communities through tourism with the goals of biodiversity conservation. This article reports on research aimed at establishing the spatial distribution of existing CBT ventures and the possibility of linking these ventures to the peace parks initiative in Southern Africa.

## 1. Peace parks and transfrontier conservation areas

Peace parks (PPs) and transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs) are areas spanning the borders between countries and comprising a range of different conservation locations, from communal lands to wildlife management areas. Such areas focus more on multiple resource use, in

particular by local communities, than on strict wildlife conservation. The overall aim of PPs is to conserve biodiversity while promoting tourism, local economic opportunities and regional collaboration (World Bank 1996, cited in Griffin *et al* 1999, Wynberg 2002, Spenceley 2007).

The PPs concept is part of a group of conservation area types that link biodiversity conservation across borders. Other similar concepts are transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs), transfrontier parks (TFPs) and transfrontier protected areas (TBPAs). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement of 1999 defines a TFCA as “the area or component of a large ecological region that straddles the boundaries of two or more countries, encompassing one or more protected areas as well as multiple resource use areas” (PPF 2010: 1). The Protocol commits the SADC member states to promoting the conservation of shared wildlife resources through the establishment of TFCAs. The difference between a ‘park’ and an ‘area’ is that a ‘park’ adheres to one land-use option (usually strictly conservation), while an ‘area’ combines multiple land-use options at one site (Wolmer 2003). According to Van Amerom and Buscher (2005), the origin of the term ‘peace parks’ can be traced to the 1980s, when the World Conservation Union (IUCN) actively started promoting ‘parks for peace’ or ‘peace parks’ across international boundaries. In Southern Africa the notion of PPs rapidly gained momentum after the improvement in the relations between South Africa and neighbouring countries following the demise of apartheid in 1994.

While the establishment of protected areas in Southern Africa was regarded in conservation circles as a success story, the relationship between parks and neighbouring communities was characterised by law enforcement by ‘insiders’ of ‘outsiders’. According to Metcalfe (2003), later insights from conservation biology emphasised the need for ecological connectivity since it was found that many protected areas were not sufficiently large to conserve biodiversity. Protected area authorities realised that they needed to collaborate with their neighbours whom they had previously alienated. This led to a new discourse in conservation circles to devolve the management of natural resources to communities (Ostrom 1990, Metcalfe 2003).

The objective of PPs is to generate sustainable economic development by way of tourism, which is the fastest growing industry in the world. The underlying aim of PPs is thus to address poverty. People living in and around PPs often have few alternatives but to exhaust the resource base on which their survival depends. The economic potential of PPs lies therein that tourism is a way to utilise the existing natural resources to the benefit of the people living in these areas, without depleting these resources. The natural assets will thus be protected because of their value (Ferreira 2004, PPF 2010). PPs are not only intended to be economically self-sustaining, but to provide revenue to the state and its conservation agencies as well as to the communities living within or adjacent to these transfrontier schemes (Duffy 2006). An additional motivation for the establishment of PPs is the “fact that so many African borders are artificial creations that cut across ethnic groupings, it is not surprising that many of the continent’s inhabitants have often expressed dissatisfaction with them” (Nkiwane 1997: 19). The establishment of PPs is regarded as a potential means of reuniting communities through closer co-operation.

PPs also serve important conservation functions which are justified by conservation biologists who advocate the expansion of conservation to include entire ecosystems rather than small parts of a single national park (Wolmer 2003). According to Duffy (2006), increasing isolation of habitats in national protected areas has reduced the genetic diversity of key species in certain ecosystems. TFCAs or PPs are intended to restore connectivity between parts of an ecosystem through migration corridors for wildlife. This view is supported by Van Aarde and Jackson (2007) who indicate that the establishment of a network of conservation areas such as PPs is a possible solution to solving the problems associated with the management of large populations of mammals, such as elephants, in Southern Africa.

One particular NGO, the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), has been influential in the establishment, implementation and promotion of the concept of PPs in Southern Africa. The PPF has proposed that 14 PPs be established in the Southern African region, as illustrated in Figure 1.

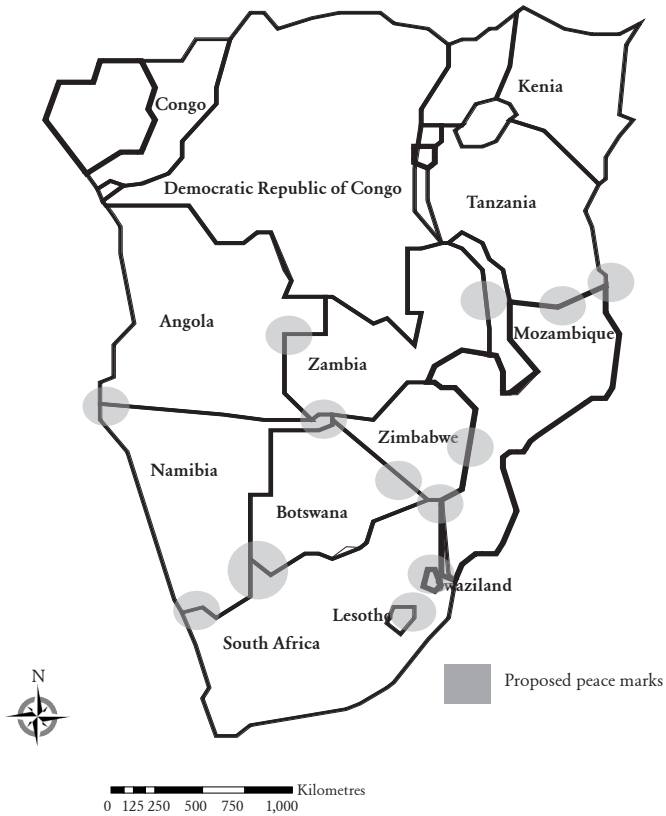


Figure 1: The location of the proposed PPs in Southern Africa as indicated by the PPF (circles and ovals indicate general vicinity)

The PPF believes that the philosophy underpinning the establishment of PPs is that tourism will provide an economically sustainable livelihood to the people living in and adjacent to these parks (PPF 2010). The next section provides a brief discussion of the tourism trends in Southern Africa to ensure that tourism remains a viable option whereby communities in close proximity to a PP can receive benefits.

## 2. Tourism trends in Southern Africa

Siegfried (2002: 130) points out that

[t]ourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world and in southern Africa. Tourism motivated by a desire to visit places of natural beauty is growing the fastest of all. Of this only a small percentage comes to sub-Saharan Africa and most of what does ends up in South Africa. Millions of people of the developed world are in search of recreational experiences in 'natural' environments. Today, by good fortune, sub-Saharan Africa has an abundance of the product that these people are seeking, and are prepared to pay for.

Nature-based tourism (NBT) includes a wide variety of activities with a common factor: a dependence on ecosystem services such as clean air and water, unspoilt scenery and attractive biodiversity. Scholes and Biggs (2004) estimate that in 2000 the aggregate value of NBT in Southern Africa was US\$ 3.6 billion. This is based on direct tourism expenditures (what tourists spend in the country rather than what they are willing to pay for this experience) and represents approximately half the total tourism income in the region, the other half being contributed mostly by business travel and visits to family and friends. Tourism revenue is not evenly distributed around the region, nor is the proportion of nature-based tourism. In 1999, the travel and tourism economy contributed 9% of the total GDP in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)<sup>2</sup> (Krug *et al* 2002), varying from 5% in large, highly industrialised economies such as South Africa to 30% in less industrialised countries such as Tanzania. In countries without large mineral resources, tourism is often the major source of foreign income (WTTC 1999).

Scholes and Biggs (2004) compare income from NBT to the income generated from other main sectors based on ecosystem services: agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Assuming that NBT is half of all tourism, and excluding the manufacturing sector knock-on effects of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, the contribution by NBT is nearly equal to the other natural resource sectors combined. It is important to note that those sectors are growing slowly (1-3% per annum) while

2 The Southern African Development Community (SADC) comprises the following countries: Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

tourism is growing rapidly (5-15% per annum). Scholes and Biggs (2004) further state that these factors may cause a policy shift in respect of natural resources – from being strongly influenced by the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing, to being more influenced by considerations of conservation and aesthetics. The dominance of industries based on non-renewable resources, such as mining and oil extraction, may also decline in the long term.

A major portion of the NBT in South Africa is based on the domestic market, whereas the foreign market (African and non-African) dominates in other countries in the region. While a substantial and growing portion of NBT, particularly in South Africa, is coupled to private conservation areas, there remains a crucial role for state-owned protected areas. National parks generally provide the nucleus around which private and community-based nature-tourism activities cluster (Scholes & Biggs 2004). Communities living in close proximity to national parks or other areas of significant conservation value are therefore presented with unique opportunities to develop CBT in these areas. All the fundamentals for a long and sustained growth in the Southern African tourism industry are in place. What now remains is to investigate the spatial distribution of CBT ventures in Southern Africa and their proximity to the proposed PPs. This article will, however, focus on the SADC countries of Africa, namely Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### 3. Methodology

The study on which this article is based was conducted in three parts, namely the compilation of an inventory of CBT ventures in Southern Africa; the verification of the inventory and the plotting of the spatial distribution of the resultant CBT ventures, and the investigation comparing the resultant spatial distribution of the CBT ventures to the spatial location of the proposed PPs in Southern Africa.



### 3.1 Compiling an inventory of community-based tourism ventures in Southern Africa

The first part of the investigation involved the compilation of an inventory of CBT ventures in Southern Africa. The following four sets of data were collected:

- RETOSA Directory (2001). This directory was published by the Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa (RETOSA) in 2001. The directory lists 116 CBT ventures in 10 Southern African countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe).
- RETOSA Database (2006). This directory added 152 new CBT ventures to the 2001 directory.
- Trade shows and exhibitions (2006 & 2007). Four Southern African trade shows and exhibitions were visited in an attempt to create a more comprehensive inventory. During these four trade events, 41 CBT ventures were identified through informal discussions, brochures and exhibits.
- Internet searches (2007). These were undertaken as a final measure to compile an up-to-date inventory (August 2007). Google searches were conducted using the search items 'community tourism', 'community-based tourism' and 'community ecotourism'. The results of these internet searches yielded 58 CBT ventures of which 35 had not been obtained by any of the three previous data collection exercises.

### 3.2 Data verification and plotting of the spatial location of the resultant CBT ventures

The contact details and the spatial co-ordinates for all 344 CBT ventures were collected in an attempt to verify the resultant list of CBT ventures. Spatial co-ordinates were assigned to each of the 344 identified ventures using information obtained from the directory, database, brochures and internet searches. The co-ordinates were plotted using Mapsource 6.10.2 software in conjunction with three base map layers (African Maps, Southern African Street Maps and the South African Topo Rec series). The co-ordinates were plotted using the method described in the Mapsource user manual (Garmin

International 2005). All 344 ventures were assigned spatial co-ordinates. On using the collected contact details and the spatial co-ordinates for each venture, it became evident that some of the ventures had changed names over the listing periods, from the initial lists in 2001 until the final collection of ventures in 2007. Consequently, 21 CBT ventures were removed from the inventory list because they were listed under two names with the same contact details and/or spatial co-ordinates. In cases where ventures had changed their names, the newer or most recent name was used for the final inventory, for example, Mier Community Lodge was changed to !Xaus Lodge.

### 3.3 Spatial comparison

In order to compare the spatial distribution of the CBT and the proposed PPs, the Mapsource spatial co-ordinates needed to be converted to ArcGIS shape file format to facilitate further GIS processing. The location of the proposed PPs was obtained from the PPF, GIS section in ArcGIS format.

## 4. The spatial distribution of community-based tourism ventures and PPs

The results of the investigation showed a total of 323 community-based tourism ventures in the Southern African region. The distribution and the source of the listing of the CBT are given in Figure 2. The results indicate a cumulative list starting with the 2001 directory and adding only new CBT ventures added in each case.

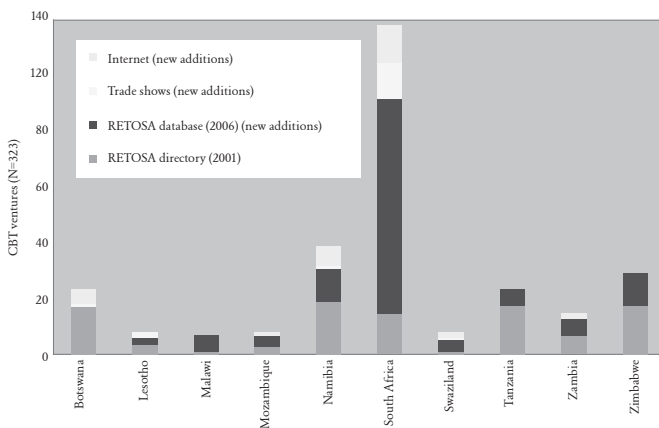


Figure 2: Identified CBT ventures in Southern Africa

South Africa is clearly dominant in terms of the number of CBT ventures, with 138 (42.72%) of the CBT ventures being identified as falling within South Africa. Other prominent countries in decreasing order are Namibia with 45 (13.93%), Zimbabwe 34 (10.53%), Botswana 27 (8.36%), Tanzania 27 (8.36%), and Zambia 17 (5.23%). Countries with significantly fewer identified CBT ventures are Lesotho 9 (2.79%), Swaziland 9 (2.79%), Mozambique 9 (2.79%), and Malawi 8 (2.48%). No CBT ventures were identified in the SADC countries of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The decade-long political instability and warfare in Angola and the DRC could be the reason for no CBT ventures in those countries.

The comparison of the spatial distribution of CBT ventures with the proposed PPs indicates that only four of the proposed PPs have a significant presence of CBT ventures in their close proximity. These are Lubombo TFCA, Great Limpopo TFP, Maloti-Drakensberg TFCA and the Kavango-Zambezi TFCA (Figure 3).

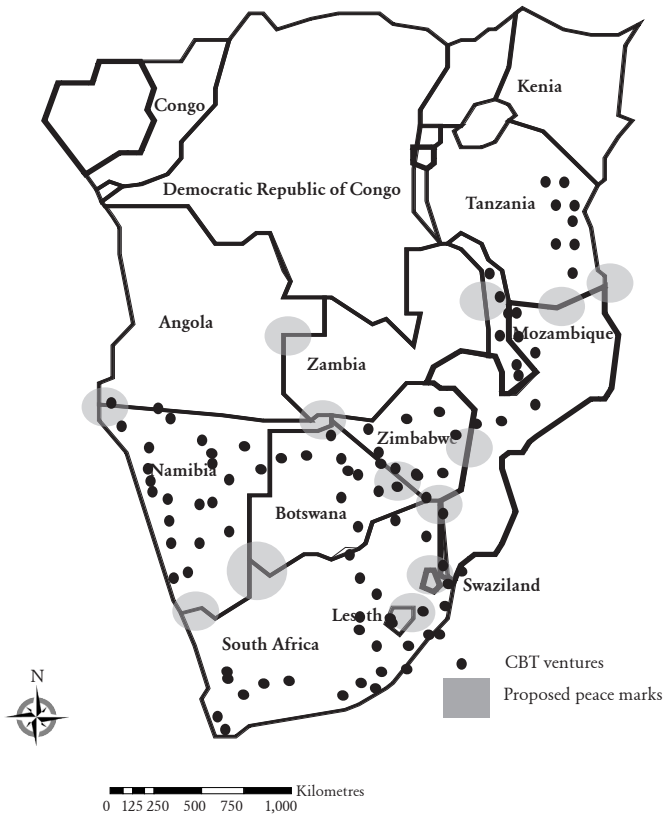


Figure 3: Spatial distribution of CBT ventures and proposed PPs in Southern Africa

A high degree of spatial association exists between the identified clusters of CBT ventures and the proposed PPs, as illustrated in Figure 3. This relationship between PPs and CBT ventures is further explored in Figure 4, which illustrates the distance between CBT ventures and conservation areas in Southern Africa.

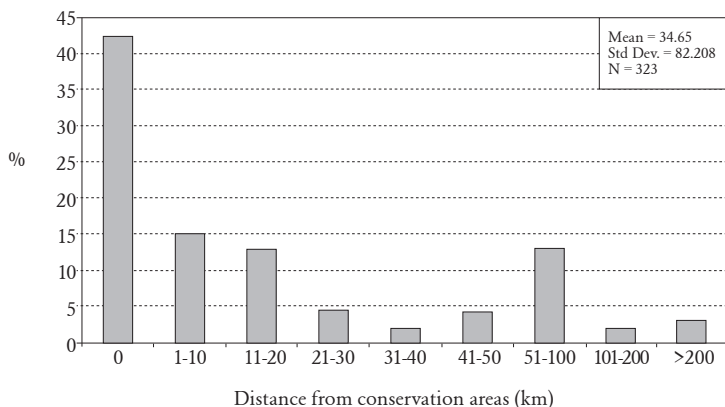


Figure 4: The distance between CBT ventures and conservation areas

Figure 4 reveals that a large portion (42.4%) of CBT ventures in Southern Africa are located within conservation areas, whereas an additional 15.2% is found in close proximity (between 1 and 10 kilometers). Only 18.6 % of the CBT ventures are located more than 50 kilometers away from conservation areas. The converse therefore indicates that 81.4% of CBT ventures are located in close proximity (within 50 km) to conservation areas. A local community is defined by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) (2002) as being within a 50 km distance from a tourist attraction. It may therefore be deduced that PPs and other conservation areas form an important drawcard for tourists. The attraction of tourists, in turn, creates tourism opportunities from which local communities can benefit.

It may therefore be concluded that the existing CBT ventures may, in turn, act as a catalyst for the development of PPs and the promotion of tourism by providing tourist infrastructure in relatively close proximity to the proposed PPs. The CBT ventures are also an important means of generating significant benefits for local communities within or adjacent to the proposed PPs. The development of the PPs may have the potential to attract large numbers of tourists to these cross-border

conservation areas and this, in turn, may lead to significant benefits for communities in these areas.

Developing successful CBT ventures based on the three cornerstones of environmental protection and conservation, providing benefits to communities and sustainable, responsible tourism through effective management and facilitation, can contribute significantly to providing a possible solution to some of the most pressing problems in the Southern African region. Southern Africa is uniquely attractive as a tourism destination due to its biological, ecological and cultural diversity, but the region also faces some monumental societal challenges: 70% of sub-Saharan Africans live on less than US\$2 a day (Parker & Khare 2005); 30 million people are infected with the HIV virus, and 200 million go hungry every day.

The success of tourism in any destination is dependent on the tourism product that is available to attract and cater for the tourist at that specific destination. The need for co-operation and collaboration between the various role players in a destination region is of utmost importance. Community-based tourism ventures, PPs, governments and the other role players in the tourism industry, such as marketers and tour operators, need to collaborate in order to create successful tourism destinations (Bennett & Strydom 2005). Community-based tourism ventures may be regarded as an important ingredient needed to provide significant benefits to local communities in order to make the proposed PPs successful. A mutually beneficial symbiosis therefore exists between community-based tourism and PPs.

## 5. Conclusion

This research resulted in the compilation of an inventory of 323 community-based tourism (CBT) ventures in Southern Africa, of which the majority are found in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. The spatial distribution provides clear evidence that the majority of the CBT ventures are located around the most important tourism attractions in the region, such as the Okavango Delta, Kilimanjaro, Lake Malawi, Lesotho and the Wild Coast, north-western Namibia, the periphery of Zimbabwe and the Kruger National Park, Swaziland and the northern KwaZulu-Natal coastline.

In an alignment comparison of the spatial distribution of CBT ventures and the proposed PPs, it was found that a strong spatial association exists, which creates a mutually beneficial situation for both CBT and the proposed PPs. Community-based tourism ventures may benefit from the increase in tourism to these proposed PPs. The proposed PPs may, in turn, benefit from the existing CBT ventures which provide both the mechanisms for local communities to benefit from tourism and the tourism infrastructure on which future tourism developments can be based.

The long-term success of PPs as tourism destinations depends on the co-ordinated efforts of the various role players within the destination regions. This partnership needs to be closely monitored to ensure that it remains mutually beneficial to all the parties involved. Community-based tourism and PPs may therefore be viewed as important mechanisms for providing benefits to local communities through conservation.

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