Mdumbi Backpackers
Wild Coast
Background

1) Who am I
2) Why Mdumbi
3) The process All legalities and paperwork
4) The challenge and were it all changed for us

– a) We knew we could not live in this rural community without sharing valuable recourses, for example the first thing we shared was our old beat up 4X4 Hilux
– b) We where challenged with allot of people not understanding what we where trying to achieve because the concept was new to the area
– c) We realised that making money in a rural area, even if its just a little , and not sharing is just not a option.
Transcape NPO

The first thing we did was start a NPO called Transcape. I do realise that not all NPO’s are always as good as they claim to be or do as good a job as they claim.

We started the NPO with the sheer drive to improve the area but over time we realised the mistakes in our approach.
This is where I want to put the emphases: it is easy to think what a rural community needs but much more difficult to realise what the community wants.

• Firstly we started listening much more.
• Then we changed the whole structure of the NPO and let the staff become board members and be involved with planning.
• Transparency in all finances
At present the organisation has three legs:

- **Health** (mostly health education and awareness and infrastructural support at hospitals)
  - 100 000 people from different communities visited our HIV awareness days
  - 15 000 school children educated through workshops
  - 23 support groups formed since 2006 consisting of 400 members.
  - 220 malnourished children brought back to health
  - Clinics, Tb wards etc
• **Education**  
  - 150 scholars, 100 toddlers and 100 adults are educated per year through our educational program.

• **Social economic development**  
  - 300 Micro-financed businesses formed since 2006  
  - 8 Families owning VBA’s (village based accommodation)

The one thing we realised is that it is easier to make poor people **step up** and earn a bit more than it is to make more well of people take a **step back**.
This is where Mdumbi Backpackers changed our outlook at business as well.

Firstly we did what I believe is one of the strongest examples of how rural development can be sustainable. We gave 50% of the business away but in a bit alternative way than the norm where a community becomes the shareholder.
I have seen this **systems fail** way to many times. We approached the **5 original** staff members and asked them if they wanted to become shareholders. We explained all the pro”s and cons of this arrangement and gave them **30% of the business**. The other **20%** we gave to the greater **community**.

The result of this was that we had a **few champions** to drive the business, and see it as their own. And the effects of this over the years have been amazing to witness.
Breaking the norms

• All the staff members was allowed to have a **business within the business** in order for people to realise how to manage your own business....shuttle service, bread baking, to ice-cream making and laundry and wood selling...

• We take a small cut of every bed night sold and put it in a communal pot to make all the staff directly aware of the benefits of more guests
• We gave all **activities away 100%** to the operators. This includes cave hikes, cultural tours, Mdumbi and Mthatha river kayaking, barge trips, massages in our little spa, surf lessons ect...

• We also don’t run a **bar** and decided to let the community sell the alcohol and our guests is encouraged to go into the village.

• We took our NPO **volunteers** and placed them in the community where they pay local families for their stay and there is at present 4 families that benefit from this income.

• Other small project is:
  - 24 hour emergency medical transport vehicle,
  - Community selling produce
  - Small veterinary service for sick animals.
Advantages

• We don’t have security guards or fences
• Our community regards Mdumbi as an extension of the village
• We see an increase in conscious travellers so a increase in guests
• We just feel better 😊
Mdumbi backpackers employs:

- 14 permanent staff
- 8 non permanent
- 10 through activities
- 12 through home stays
- 12 in our NPO
- 40 people selling local produce and seafood.
- 35 through events we host few times through the year
- Local builders building for example our new school and clinic
- That makes over **150 people benefiting** in some or other way from Mdumbi.
• Mdumbi Backpackers has won various awards over time with this approach like runner up at **WTM London for best poverty reduction business in the world**
“The results of this research show what could quite possibly be South Africa’s most responsible pro poor tourism enterprise.”

“I have carried out similar assessments throughout the continent for various organizations, including UNWTO, so I don’t speak lightly. “

“I personally do not know any other small scale tourism enterprise that has raised the bar to this level – hence our paper soon to be released internationally.”

Tim Foggin
UKZN M.A. London (Development Sociology)
“So many backpackers and tourist establishments sell themselves as ecologically and community orientated, but very few succeed to the extent that Mdumbi Backpackers has. It is genuinely from and of the people, and its influence on the community in terms of local economic development and ecological sustainability is legendary.”

Professor Monty J. Roodt
Department of Sociology
Rhodes University
“The existing partnership between recognised community structures and the supporting NGO Transcape is, to my mind, one of the most genuine bottom-up projects in South Africa aiming to contribute to poverty alleviation while at the same time trying to achieve ecological and social sustainability. “

Serge Raemaekers, PhD
Small-scale Fisheries Research & Governance Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences University of Cape
The future:

• We do have a dream to duplicate this kind of development and for the last 12 years we have been busy with two very specific projects....

• **Mngcibe eco lodge**: that at present has all the necessary documentations needed

• **Mdumbi green destination**: is still awaiting DEDEAT’s final response because we had to move site.

Both these will be 75% community owned projects. Mdumbi will stay a small shareholder for as long as it takes to make these successful and sustainable.