

**Brief:** GKEPF talks about the practical cases/examples of operating in a broader landscape, the role and contribution of different stakeholders and how the biodiversity economy can be used as a catalyst to fight wildlife crimes and provide an alternative livelihood.

The Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Foundation represent a conservation area of ~250 000ha privately owned land, which is part of the Greater Kruger landscape, and an open system conservation partner on the Western Boundary of the Kruger National Park. These privately owned nature reserves including the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, the Timbavati, Klaserie, Thornybush, Umbabat, Sabie Game Reserve and MalaMala have become internationally renowned tourism destinations, pioneering the luxury and ultra-luxury tourism market in South Africa.

While I recognise that these are historically privileged land owners, exemplary initiatives and some valuable lessons have been learnt in the landscape which I would like to share.

Some of these are:

- Formalising the relationships in the landscape through the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area Cooperative Agreement (GLTFCA), which is a formal agreement involving National, Provincial and privately owned properties. While this agreement underpins unified management for the open conservation area, it is also testimony to the willingness of private and state entities to cooperate in the landscape for the greater good. Today a tangible level of cooperation and collaboration exists. Unity is a critical resilience factor and this complex landscape *actively strives* to achieve unity.
- The development of The Greater Kruger Strategic Development Plan: The plan promotes partnerships between government, communities, and the private sector to respond to the needs of the Greater Kruger area finding a balance between conservation and sustainable development to support surrounding communities. It has set clear objectives, some of which are: Securing the natural capital base of the Greater Kruger landscape, Socio-Economic Transformation and Job Creation and Strengthening partnerships and governance structures.
- The unified and cohesive response to mitigate wildlife crime, not only in terms of operational response but also in terms of strategy and addressing driving factors of wildlife crime in this region.

The formalisation of the Greater Kruger conservation area, the resultant cohesiveness and the willingness to support the development of a sustainable biodiversity economy lays a firm and strong foundation for a multitude of possibilities to achieve the objectives set out in the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy.

Before I highlight some of the landscape opportunities allow me to share a few facts from the region:

The private sector reserves comprise portions of land owned by private individuals varying significantly in size from 15ha to 10 000ha and with over 4 000 private individuals holding some stake in it. Historically these were predominantly marginal agricultural property plots/farms and consumptive use hunting farms. These individual landowners "*relinquished*" private control of their properties to incorporate them into a large landscape conservation

area which expanded the western boundary of the Kruger National Park. This expansion, critically to the west, ensured more land for wildlife to move freely, thus ensuring a larger sustainable biodiverse area, it formed critical band of protection supported by private funding and created a world-renowned high-end tourism market. This high-end tourism market brought the following benefits to the region:

Significant job creation (20 000 direct tourism jobs and ~ 150 000 industry related jobs).

- Skills development
- Community needs and livelihood support and investment.
- Influx of foreign currency, both in development and tourism cash expenditure.
- Not only did this development have a positive effect in the region, but the taxes generated from the high-end tourism economy is significant.

However, not all private landowners benefit from tourism development and the income models vary in these reserves.

*Substantial private landowner levies underpin the financial sustainability of the region.*

The conservation costs are high, with safety and security costs (~ ZAR200 million/annum) escalated by the rhino onslaught, and ecological monitoring and management being the primary cost items.

The land ownership in the region is underpinned by a love for nature and dedication to conservation, and economic models developed over time to sustain these properties. This in itself shows innovation, resilience, and progress, *and from this, we need to expand and leverage opportunities to benefit not only conservation but also the people living alongside this conservation area.*

The private reserves and NGOs in the landscape acknowledge and respect the fragile relationship between people and nature, and a willingness to manage and mitigate this challenge is evident from the ~400 community projects in the landscape.

However, large-scale socio-economic development is key to the sustainability of this conservation area.

The opportunities for this include:

- \* Leadership transformation in the sector in the region  
(Eg: Oscar Mthimkhulu, my friend, colleague and leader, we need many "Oscars".
- \* More skilled employment opportunities and SMME development  
(Eg: Vincent Matonsi who was once a driver and now owns his own transfer company with multiple vehicles and employing drivers from his community. We need 100s of Vincents.)
- \* Industries that support the conservation and tourism industry  
(supply chain development)
- \* Entrepreneurial development and small business development
- \* Communal land incorporation and expansion of conservation land
- \* Mobilise effective transformation (unblock hurdles), ownership and inclusivity
- \* Pursue green bond conservation initiatives.

\* We need opportunities for school leavers and matriculants.

Public-private partnerships will be critical in driving growth and economic development in this region.

*Why is transformational socio-economic growth not yet evident?*

Barriers:

Large-scale industry development (lack of investment)

Opportunities for youth (opportunities for matriculants?)

Prohibitive Legislation (Disease control - redline fence for cloven-hoofed animals)

*Sometimes processes designed to protect the environment can harm the environment. There is a constant need for review.*

**Threats to socio-economic development in the Greater Kruger:**

**Corruption & Crime – threatening the industry, and people's livelihoods and social cohesion.**

**Crime:** The single biggest threat to the people and the development of a biodiversity economy in the region.

- Corruption (Ref Julian Rademeyer's Crime, Corruption & Fear paper)
- Organised crime (Rhino poaching. Exploiting local vulnerable people! Consequences of rhino poaching – embedded organised crime in the region, illegal mining etc)
- Murders and violent crimes. (2023: more than 200 murders, 500+ sexual offences, 150+ illegal firearms confiscated, 150+ car jackings)
- General crime is rife, affecting ALL.
- Illegal Bushmeat harvesting in the GK is supplying the ever-increasing demand for protein. The illegal bushmeat market and supply chain is meeting a fast growing illegal economy in the region, further embedding criminal activities and social instability.
- Lack of law enforcement, lack of capacity in the judicial system.
- Protests and Unrest: Blocking tourists to their destinations in the Kruger National Park and the Private Reserves. Local people affected.

- Extreme activism and lobbyists. Often Westernised emotional agendas are driven at the cost of what is important to the people in the landscape.

The Greater Kruger area is iconic and holds immense opportunities for global biodiversity value, as a national asset AND as a catalyst to a biodiversity economy for the benefit of all people in South Africa.

*In order to achieve this we will need to be courageous and bold and the private reserves in the Greater Kruger are ready.*

While the conservation in the GK cannot address all the challenges and cannot offer solutions to all the socio-economic challenges, it certainly can be the catalyst.

Together we need to:

- Eradicate corruption.
- Address the crime and lack of capacity for law enforcement in the area.
  - For the people and for investors.
- Promote a healthy society through fostering relationships in the landscape, development of sport and tangible investment in sustainable business to create a healthy, independent socio-economic environment.
- More importantly we need to understand and mitigate the driving factors of the crimes by offering sustainable alternatives.
  - Eg. The Illegal bushmeat market needs to be replaced with a sustainable legal economy. An economy that can create significant opportunities and supply chain benefits, AND supply *safe* meat to people. Currently the biggest prohibitive factor is that of the archaic veterinary control fence.
  - Supply chain development for the tourism industry.
  - Opportunities for youth: Education opportunities incl Trade and craftsmanship, (electricians, plumbers etc) to service the tourism industry.

In closing I would like to quote from Dr Bram Busher's paper: The new Green Apartheid.

With reference to a source article it says: " Central in the article is how the prioritisation of capital investment over social economic and racial equality perpetuates and intensifies older forms of apartheid geographies and segregation. This situation is so ingrained that it has *de facto* resulted in a New Green Apartheid. "

Through the NBES we need to counter this and change this through leverage of opportunities that exist here for the greater good of ALL.