

# SECTION 8: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



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## The social impact of tourism

There is no doubt that tourism can boost social development through employment creation, enabling the growth of secondary industries, and raising the profile of an area.

However, these positive spin-offs must not detract from the fact that poorly planned, uncontrolled or insensitive tourism activities can destabilise entire communities.

Negative impacts can range from increased tension as a result of invasion of privacy, threats to local culture, unequal benefits, crime, prostitution, begging, and alcohol and drug abuse. To illustrate this point, nomadic OvaHimba herdsmen in north-western Namibia began complaining in the mid 1980's about tourists violating their personal space, entering their huts and removing clay pots and other domestic implements in their absence.

Today, problems of this nature have increased due to increased tourism pressure. In the interests of best practice, this kind of insensitive behaviour must be discouraged. In addition, best practice demands that operators develop a sense of responsibility for social sustainability and welfare through creating cooperative structures with staff and local communities.

These structures must aim to improve local quality of life (housing, health and safety) and the sharing of benefits.

*Staff must be given decent accommodation—even if it is only basic © N.Maritz*



*Traditional societies in remote areas are vulnerable to disruption from outside influences. Tour operators must be sensitive to the needs and rights of local communities.*

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## Housing and essential services

Whether your establishment is in a town, on your farm, in a conservancy or a concession in a communal area, your staff must have decent living facilities.

The following can be done to improve conditions for staff:

- Construct decent housing – even if the units are small, make sure that there is running water, hygienic washing, cooking and ablution facilities and adequate protection from the elements;

- Provide electricity or install a small solar power unit. To manage utilisation of power and water, low cost metering systems can be installed. These allow staff to manage consumption and (if they are charged for consumption), their budgets;
- Consider dry composting toilets or a flush toilet linked to a septic tank and French drain system;
- Make sure that there is a functional waste removal system to avoid an accumulation of litter

around homesteads;

- If possible, involve your staff in all planning and prioritisation, so that they become part of decision making;
- Help staff to open bank accounts and provide transport (within reasonable limits) so that they can use the bank as required, and
- If your establishment is in a town, encourage your staff to buy their own property. Try to assist them, or help them to apply for accommodation through the National Housing Enterprise.

The goal:

To ensure that tourism enhances the well being and quality of life of all Namibians. No ethnic group must suffer as a result of poorly managed tourism activities.

## Health and safety

A healthy workforce is important for wellbeing and productivity. It is a fact that life expectancy in Namibia is declining and that sickness (especially HIV/ AIDS) is a major concern.

All tourism operations must establish a programme so that their staff and their dependents have access to basic health care.

There are many ways of achieving this:

- Take your staff to the nearest clinic on a regular basis for checkups;
- Arrange for a mobile clinic or a registered nurse/doctor to visit the lodge regularly to provide the service. If possible, get someone who speaks the local language to address staff on health issues;
- Have someone on your staff who can perform basic first aid;
- Distribute free condoms and information about prevention of diseases;
- Ensure that staff who operate machinery (e.g. lawnmowers, welding units, workshop equipment, saws etc.) wear the required protective gear and are properly trained with respect to the use of this equipment;
- Do not expose your staff to harmful chemicals, and
- Provide transport if staff have to go home after dark, especially if their houses are far away and/or there are dangerous animals in the area.

## Partnerships with local communities

Establishments in conservancies or communal areas must remember that they are operating on someone else's land.

Even if these people don't actually own the land, their ancestors have probably lived there for generations and they therefore have traditional use rights. The tourism operator must respect this.

The best way to establish correct "operating rules" is to have some form of agreement with the community. It is important to choose the right method of cooperation – either an informal arrangement or a formal structure with legal standing.

For example, you can set up :

- A management board if you wish to involve local stakeholders in the planning and management of the enterprise;
  - A trust if you want to create a structure to manage the flow of benefits to the community;
  - A forum for agreements if you need to tackle issues of joint concern.
- Support organisations such as the MET's Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Unit, NACSO and various other NGOs can help to broker a deal that is beneficial to both the operator and the community.
- The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) could assist with drawing up of legal contracts. Achieving a "win-win" arrangement is important as it avoids one party feeling they have been cheated. The agreement must define:
- what the operator may and may not do (e.g. where the lodge may be built, nature drive routes, villages that may be visited, resources that may be harvested, hiring and firing of staff, etc.);
  - what fees will be payable, by when and in what form;
  - what other forms of benefit/power sharing exist, and
  - other expectations of the community (e.g. transport, health, education, etc.).
  - communication, management and conflict resolution mechanisms;
  - the period for which the lease or agreement is valid;
  - roles and responsibilities of all parties (and who has what authority);



*A good partnership based on mutual respect and equitable sharing of benefits and powers, is essential for achieving sustainable tourism in remote areas © Wilderness Safaris*

## Supporting community projects

There are two examples of how the tourism establishment could make a positive difference in the community.

**The first** is to help communities develop the capacity to become a service provider for your hotel or lodge (e.g. by supplying crafts, vegetables, meat, laundry services, waste management, etc.).

This will likely result in a business arrangement where one party sells and the other one buys. In this relationship, there could be an unhealthy power balance where the community invests a lot of time, money and other resources to supply the service, only to be left in the lurch by the lodge which prefers to obtain its meat from Windhoek (for example).

In this case, the lodge and the community must identify which opportunities are likely to succeed and which will be acceptable to both parties.

Entering into a binding agreement that stipulates quality of produce, prices, delivery dates, etc. will likely

reduce the potential for conflicts.

**The second** is where the establishment provides support to a charitable project in the community.

This could be assisting the local school or clinic, providing transport for traditional events, bursaries for high school or tertiary education, etc. When selecting these charities, the lodge must ask local staff and the community about their immediate development needs.

In this way, there can be a process of consensus building

on which projects to choose. It is extremely important that the lodge does not adopt a paternalistic attitude towards its social responsibility activities.

Also, it is not healthy for a situation to develop where the community develops a dependency on the lodge. This is disempowering and is likely to result in resentment.

The best way to implement a social responsibility programme is through consultation and negotiation, so that a partnership develops between the community and the lodge.



*In some cases, lodge's have helped communities establish camp sites, which the communities manage themselves. It is important to also help by offering training, so that the local people can develop management and administrative skills.*

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*Where possible, the project that is supported by the lodge should be something that has been identified as a priority by the community itself.*

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