Research 3

NURTURING THROUGH NATURE

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF UMZI WETHU ON RURAL EASTERN CAPE COMMUNITIES

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STUDENTS POSITIVE TEAM RESEARCH INCOME ACADEMY
GRADUATES TRAINING YOUTH WELLNESS HOLISTIC STUDY
RURAL REWARDING SKILLS PROGRAMME OXFAM
DEVELOPMENT SELF-WORTH IMPACT NURTURING
RECRUITMENT UMZI
EDUCATION HEALTH SOCIO-ECONOMIC WETHU
NATURE VULNERABLE
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LUTHANDO SITHOLE
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND COMMIS CHEF AT SPIER
Umzi Wethu, a programme conceptualised, managed and implemented by the Wilderness Foundation, is actively using biodiversity conservation as a basis for educating and nurturing young people. The programme seeks “to fulfil the employability potential of resilient, motivated youth displaced by HIV and AIDS and poverty by using the power of the wilderness, promoting personal wellness in a nurturing home context, providing credible training, and securing sustainable job placements in hospitality and eco-tourism environments – while extending the programme’s social outreach to others”.¹

The implicit impact of the programme is evident: Young people have graduated from the programme with increased skills and knowledge, as well as with increased levels of self-worth and appreciation for nature.

This study seeks to determine and document the socio-economic impact of the Umzi Wethu programme, which uses nature as a basis to nurture, educate and prepare for the employment of young, vulnerable people.

¹ www.umziwethu.org
CONTEXT
The Umzi Wethu programme operates in the Eastern Cape, which is South Africa’s third largest province in terms of population and second largest in terms of geographic cover.\(^2\)

| **POPULATION** | About 6.7 million people  
12.6% of the population of South Africa |
|---|---|
| **LANGUAGES** | isiXhosa (spoken by 79% of the population)  
Afrikaans (11%)  
English (6%) |
| **HIV STATUS** | Slightly fewer people infected with HIV in the Eastern Cape than the proportion of the South African population that is infected.  
The national proportion of people infected with HIV is beginning to decline slowly, but the proportion in the Eastern Cape is slowly increasing.  
Estimated deaths as a result of HIV and AIDS have increased slowly in the Eastern Cape and South Africa. |
| **EDUCATION** | 30% of the population had a matric-level or higher education in 2013, compared to the national norm of 39%. |
| **POVERTY** | The rate of poverty in the Eastern Cape and South Africa is declining.  
More than half of the population in the Eastern Cape lives below the poverty line.\(^3\) |
| **INCOME** | The average annual income per person in the Eastern Cape in 2013 was just less than R30,000.  
This is significantly lower than the national average of approximately R44,800. |

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2. Statistics in this section were calculated by Strategic EDGE Solutions based on information obtained from IHS Global Insight’s Regional eXplorer database. For more information see www.ihsglobalinsight.co.za.

3. The poverty line in South Africa has been defined by National Treasury as the line “below which people can afford an adequate diet but would have to sacrifice food to purchase non-food items.”
There has been a significant increase in the unemployment rate in the Eastern Cape; more than the increase experienced nationally. In the Eastern Cape about 70% of the economically active population earn an income. This results in a high percentage of people with limited or no income-earning potential who are dependent on the economically active population.

The tourism industry is important to the Eastern Cape, with approximately 19.9 million tourists visiting the province in 2013. Of these, 2.6 million were international tourists.

Tourism makes a meaningful, albeit small, contribution to the gross domestic product in the Eastern Cape. The average spend per tourist per resident capita in the province in 2013 was R1,979. This translates into R13.2 billion injected into the Eastern Cape economy as a result of tourism.4

The 17 state-owned nature reserves and parks and at least as many private game reserves in the province are a drawcard for tourists, with almost half visiting game reserves while visiting the Eastern Cape.

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MISELWA NOGQALA
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE, 2011, PORT ELIZABETH
STUDENTS:
RECRUITMENT, SELECTION AND PLACEMENT
Umzi Wethu recruits students from about a dozen townships located around Port Elizabeth and Somerset East. These are regarded as the urban and rural informal settlements that are the most poor and vulnerable to the spread of HIV and AIDS. Areas are targeted due to their close proximity to tourism and hospitality establishments, game reserves and parks, with the aim being to increase the likelihood of student employment after graduation.

Umzi Wethu strives to achieve a balance of female and male students.

The Umzi Wethu approach to selection is youth-centred, while also recognising the needs of the employer, and involves partnerships with community-based organisations and local government agencies.

Selection criteria include:
• Socio-economic vulnerability
• Personal references from key role-players in applicants’ lives
• Numeracy and literacy skills test battery scores demonstrating competency and learning potential (aptitude) and completion of Grade 12
• English language proficiency
• Test results showing drug-free
• Motivation, attitude and coping style ascertained through interviews
• Acceptable school attendance and achievement records
• Commitment to conservation values, as demonstrated on three-day, pre-selection wilderness trails.

The age for selection for the hospitality programme is from 18 to 25 years, and 21 to 26 years for the field ranging programme. The latter age bracket is higher because of the minimum age of 21 years for obtaining the drivers’ licence required by field guides.

Prior to joining the programme, Umzi Wethu students typically live with a single mother or grandparent, or have been adopted. At least half are AIDS orphans and many have lost parents or other family members. They are all from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and are socially vulnerable due to the impact of HIV and AIDS through death and illness. There is some degree of exposure to poverty, crime, gangs, substance abuse or other social problems, which puts them at risk.

Since the project’s inception in 2005, there have been 13 intakes comprising of a total of 210 students who have graduated through the Umzi Wethu programme. Many of the graduates were the first members of their families to achieve a post-matric education.
The qualifications of Umzi Wethu students are marketed to potential employers by Wilderness Foundation staff. The programme strives to remain responsive to the needs of employers and to be adaptable to the Eastern Cape job market. As a result, some Umzi Wethu graduates have been hired as paid interns, rather than as full-time employees. The employment rate of students has been between 80% and 90%.

About 10% of graduates have advanced to junior and middle management positions in eco-tourism industries, and seven were granted opportunities to pursue tertiary education.

The success of the Umzi Wethu model is evident in its replication by the Sustainability Institute in Cape Town. This saw nine chefs graduate in Stellenbosch in September 2012, and all gain employment.

**POST-GRADUATE SUPPORT**

After the Umzi Wethu students graduate, the Wilderness Foundation staff continue to provide assistance. With the conservation graduates, the official assistance includes:

- Their registration with the Department of Environmental Affairs
- Preparation of their curriculum vitae
- Active employment recruitment and placement with industry partners and other potential employers
- Active working internship recruitment and placement with industry partners and other potential employers.

In reality, the post-graduation assistance provided by the Wilderness Foundation far exceeds the defined parameters of aftercare and support. Some graduates continue to be provided with a home, and others seek guidance for personal or professional issues, including career development, personal and professional relationships and health-related issues.

The majority of graduates interviewed stated that they continued to share their successes and trials with Wilderness Foundation staff and took comfort in knowing that they had an outlet for discussing personal and professional issues.
KHAYISWA WEM
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND COMMIS CHEF AT SPIER
Socio-economic impact study of the Umzi Wethu training academy
This study considered the socio-economic impact of the Umzi Wethu Training Academy on graduates and rural communities in the Eastern Cape. In carrying out the research, a series of personal structured interviews were conducted with a selected sample of Umzi Wethu hospitality and conservation graduates spanning over the years since the inception of the programme. The interviews with graduates were supplemented with personal structured interviews with representatives of the Wilderness Foundation.

Three socio-economic indicators were selected to assess the impact of Umzi Wethu:

1. **EDUCATION**:  
The study sought to determine:  
a. Whether further education and training was undertaken and/or completed by Umzi Wethu graduates and the degree to which Umzi Wethu was pivotal in encouraging and/or enabling further education and training; and  
b. The extent to which family and/or community members were dependent on a portion of income (past or current) earned by graduates to fund basic and/or further education and training.  
c. Whether graduates undertook further education in hospitality or field ranging, or if they opted for alternate education and training.

2. **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**:  
The study sought to:  
a. Identify aspects of the programme, related to health and wellness, which were shared with members of the graduate’s family and/or community; and  
b. Determine the opinion of the graduate of this knowledge on a general improvement in health and wellness of the family and/or community members.

Emphasis was placed on issues related to increasing productivity as a result of decreased absenteeism from work and/or education.

3. **INCOME**:  
The study considered the extent of the graduates’ income spent in the local economy from which the graduate emanates. In addition, it sought to determine the indirect economic impact of this spending on the local economy and the resultant increase in disposable income circulating in the local economy.
**THE GRADUATES**

The majority of the graduates (71.4%) who were interviewed for this study had completed training in conservation. This was as a result of the availability of graduates for interviews.

The graduates were of an average age of 26 years old and had been working for three years on average. The largest population of students originated from settlements located within the Sarah Baartman (previously Cacadu) District Municipality, with the exception of Cradock and Queenstown.

All graduates originated from areas within close proximity to major national or provincial parks or nature reserves. However, many of them had not interacted with nature or wildlife prior to their training with Umzi Wethu.

**LEARNING ABOUT CONSERVATION**

Graduates described initially being fearful of the “wild”, lacking knowledge about “this thing called conservation” or the importance thereof, and regarding eco-tourism establishments as something “white people went to”.

After completing their training graduates were passionate about conservation and shared simple conservation techniques with members of their families and communities. One had approached a local high school and was sharing about the importance of conservation with learners.
SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS: EDUCATION

It was evident from this study that Umzi Wethu assists graduates to prepare for further education and training, following the completion of the Umzi Wethu training, which otherwise may not have been accessible or achievable. Just less than half the graduates interviewed had concluded or enrolled for further education and training, in addition to that provided by Umzi Wethu. More than half of the graduates paid the cost of the further education and training themselves, while the remainder had secured sponsorship, generally by employers.

The type of education and training undertaken by these graduates was not directly related to conservation or hospitality. The graduates who had enrolled in further study stated that Umzi Wethu had played a pivotal role in them meeting the entry requirements for further education and training or the psychological preparation for further education and training.

Most graduates who had not embarked on further education and training cited the lack of available finance as the reason, but expressed a desire to engage in further education and training.

“It is always on my mind that I need to get a degree. It is important to me. Next year I hope to study nature conservation through Unisa.”

NTOBÉKO NGCALA, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE

Many of the graduates interviewed had supported, or were in the process of supporting, family members – often younger siblings – by paying for their education. About two-thirds of the support to family members was for one or more younger siblings to attend primary school.

This trend may be extrapolated to conclude that, on average, for every two graduates that completed Umzi Wethu training, at least one primary school-going child is supported in terms of having finance available for school fees and related costs.
SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS: HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The study considered the impact of Umzi Wethu on graduates and their families in terms of their understanding and treatment of specific health and wellness-related issues, and their behaviour in terms of these issues. At Umzi Wethu, health and wellness focuses on physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects.

“Wellness allows the students to release stress, their anger, their frustrations, so that they can focus on their studies. We are able to talk to them, we have that love, that understanding, that is so important to break down their defences. We discuss vulnerability, the fact that they are at risk of such social evils as drugs, alcohol, transactional sex, domestic violence, abuse.”

HEINRICH TERBLANCHE, UMZI WETHU WELLNESS AND LIVELIHOODS COORDINATOR

The issues considered for this study were:

- HIV and AIDS
- Tuberculosis
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy.

All graduates reported having a better understanding of pregnancy and of the causes and treatment relating to HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases as a result of the Umzi Wethu training. All graduates, except one, noted a better understanding of causes and treatment relating to tuberculosis as a result of Umzi Wethu.

All graduates had shared their insights into the health and wellness issues with members of their immediate families, and, in limited cases, with the broader community. One graduate emotionally related being “better able” to care for a family member infected with HIV as a result of health-related education provided by Umzi Wethu.

Almost all graduates noted that as a result of the training their personal hygiene had improved, or they were introduced to the importance of personal hygiene for the first time. The lack of personal hygiene was attributed to: graduates not having been taught personal hygiene practices, or having observed them in the home; not having the financial means to practice basic personal hygiene; or not having access to basic sanitation infrastructure, such as running water and flushing toilets.
Graduates also described having learned first aid, as well as being exposed to an increased tolerance of peers of a different sexual orientation to their own, particularly within a residential context. Many noted that they had never been exposed to someone with a sexual orientation other than their own. The information provided by Umzi Wethu had assisted them to understand and appreciate sexual diversity among peers.

One of the most significant findings in terms of health and wellness is the relatively low rate of absenteeism amongst graduates. On average, graduates indicated they were absent from work for 0.5 days a year owing to sickness. This is significantly less than the general national average of 3.1 days absent per year and 5.1 days absent per year in the hospitality industry.⁵

“We are dealing with youth who are facing serious social issues. Most have lost one parent, if not both, and have therefore been through tremendous trauma. How can you train for a job until you have worked through some of the trauma, had a chance to heal some of the pain? We can’t just give them job training; we need to care for the whole individual if there is to be any real hope of them holding down a job for an extended period of time.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WETHU FOUNDER

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS: INCOME

Graduates entered employment mostly in entry or junior level occupations, notably as interns. The average starting salary was R2,260.

At the time of the research for this report, graduates were employed in more senior positions, with shifts from interns to field guides and field rangers, or from waiter or host to chef.

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ENTRY OCCUPATIONS OF GRADUATES

Source: Personal interviews with Umzi Wethu graduates (May - June 2014)

CURRENT OCCUPATIONS OF GRADUATES

Source: Personal interviews with Umzi Wethu graduates (May - June 2014)
The pace at which Umzi Wethu graduates were promoted within and between institutions is noteworthy. Employers confirmed this phenomenon and stated that Umzi Wethu graduates progressed to senior and/or supervisory roles faster than other employees. They attributed this to the graduates’ vocational knowledge and skills, confidence and leadership abilities.

“I never thought that students with the level of vulnerability we were dealing with could become managers. It is the emotional and financial gains of long-term employment which ultimately reverse their vulnerability. At the Holiday Inn there is an Umzi student who did the hard graft and he was able to rise up through the kitchen to be second chef. He is an incredible chef. We can’t afford to employ him! That’s not Umzi, that’s him. We just gave the hand up.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WEThU FOUNDER

At the time of this research, the average salary of the graduates was R4,785, which translates into an average real increase (that is, adjusted for inflation) of 38% per annum. This is significantly higher than the average annual salary increase in South Africa of approximately 7.2% per annum.6

It is unrealistic to expect this rate of average annual increase to continue for all graduates throughout their careers, but it is important to note that in the short to medium term, Umzi Wethu has played a pivotal role in assisting to improve the income parity of previously disadvantaged individuals. The income levels of the graduates have accelerated exponentially enabling them to reach a salary scale that may have been possible if they were not previously disadvantaged.

The income earned by the graduates is often injected into rural communities, with approximately 45% of the graduates’ income being spent in the rural communities from which they originate. Graduates who choose or are able to reside in the area from which they originate when employed typically spend about 73% in that area. Graduates not living in the area from which they originate when employed send an average of 17% of their income back to family members who still reside in those areas.

6. Statistics calculated by Strategic EDGE Solutions based on information obtained from IHS Global Insight’s Regional eXplorer database. For more information see www.ihsglobalinsight.co.za.
MANTHO SEHAPI
[LEFT] UMZI WETHU GRADUATE, 2010, PORT ELIZABETH
PONTSO TSATSI
MANTHO’S MOTHER
The expenditure in rural areas results in two main socio-economic impacts:

1. On average, graduates support an estimated six family members. This is higher than the average dependency rate of the Eastern Cape (3.8) and the country (3.1).
2. Increased income in rural communities typically has an increased multiplier effect of 0.4. This means that every R100 spent in a rural community will create secondary spending of R40.

About 74% of the graduates indicated that they saved a portion of their income. This amounted to an average of 7.4% of their total income, which is significantly higher than the national average of 16.5% of young people (between the ages of 18 and 30 years) who actively save less than 5% of their total income.³

“I had a dream to come home at Christmas pushing three trolleys of goodies. I worked and saved towards this, and I was able to buy a washing machine, a microwave, crockery and a wardrobe for my mother.”

MANTHO SEHAPI, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE

With regard to expenditure, approximately 70% of graduates were financing education for themselves or family members. Health-related expenditure was generally for medical expenses, usually over-the-counter medication, for family members.

All graduates indicated that Umzi Wethu had assisted them to better understand finance and the importance of financial management. Many attributed the weekly allowance received in residences as the mechanism that had the most impact in teaching them to manage their money.

“My family is very grateful to Umzi Wethu. I am doing something very different, and they have been impressed with how professional my job is. I have been able to buy my own car, and now I hope to buy a house. Umzi taught me not to live in debt, so I am saving every day.”

NTOBeko ngCala, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE

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7. Statistics calculated by Strategic EDGE Solutions based on information obtained from IHS Global Insight’s Regional eXplorer database. For more information see www.ihsglobalinsight.co.za.
8. National average statistics calculated by Strategic EDGE Solutions based on information obtained from IHS Global Insight’s Regional eXplorer database. For more information see www.ihsglobalinsight.co.za.
Recommendations
FURTHER RESEARCH

Valuable information would be gained from further research into two aspects of the Umzi Wethu programme. Firstly, the post-graduation assistance provided to graduates. The Wilderness Foundation fills a family void for many of the graduates who generally do not have role models to look up to or family leaders with whom to discuss major decisions as these graduates often assume the role of head of the family.

Secondly, research into the positive psychosocial impacts of the residential component of the Umzi Wethu programme would be useful. The residential component differentiates Umzi Wethu from most further education and training opportunities for young people, and vulnerable young people, in particular. It is an aspect that may be undervalued in terms of its impact on personal growth and development.

When conducting any further research, it must be mentioned that consideration should be given to the graduates selected for inclusion in future studies. Some graduates’ managers noted the same graduates were selected and that this created disruptions to their work. Graduates may also experience ‘study fatigue’ as a result of being posed the same or similar questions.

THE IMPACT OF THE RESIDENTIAL COMPONENT

Speaking about senior housemother, Ntombi Kungwayo, 2011 graduate, Miselwa Nogqala said: “Mama Ntombi gave us the warmth and care we needed. I love her as my mother. She taught me to take a stand. Because of her, in part... I am a manager. She taught me to be tough... Living in a residence, eighteen of us in one house, with different personalities, different backgrounds, it was tough. But we learnt how to compromise. It taught me to understand and connect with other people because in this country many of us don’t trust each other.”

Ntombi Kungwayo believes the role of housemother is fundamental in the transformation of the students. “Some have no parents, or parents who abandoned them. Some have to look after their younger sisters and brothers, and others are looking after their own children. Most had to be adults before they could be children. For us to give them motherly love is a huge thing. It is how they can grow again. They now have somebody taking care of them, listening to them, believing in them. This is so important, and it is what makes Umzi Wethu so genuine and wholesome.”
CONTINUED MONITORING OF GRADUATES

The continued monitoring of graduates over five years (or more) would be valuable. It would require additional resources, but the insights that would be obtained through this monitoring would speak to the solid foundation of the programme and the calibre of graduates.

In addition to demonstrating the value of the Umzi Wethu programme to potential funders, through this monitoring, Umzi Wethu would be able to gauge the long-term socio-economic impact of the programme on graduates, their families and their communities. The continued socio-economic impact of the programme would be reiterated by extended monitoring.

REPLICATION OF THE UMZI WETHU MODEL

The Umzi Wethu model, with the residential component as a crucial element, warrants replication. It should be considered a benchmark in hospitality and field-guiding vocational training. As such, government and the private sector should work together to increase the footprint and related impact of the programme. Government should provide funding and other related support, such as the provision of facilities and equipment. The private sector should provide increased work opportunities for graduates.

From a national government perspective, the replication of the Umzi Wethu model should be considered in all provinces, and, in particular, in provinces such as Limpopo and the North West, where facilities and opportunities related to nature-based tourism are prevalent.

The replication of the Umzi Wethu model is in alignment with the national government’s Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy and Strategy for Growth in International Tourism to South Africa, both of which project growth in nature-based tourism.

Failing this, relevant provincial government departments, such as Economic Development, should consider the replication of the model in provinces where Umzi Wethu currently does not operate. In the provinces where Umzi Wethu does currently operate provincial government should consider the expansion of the programme.

At a very simple level, the project transforms young people from among the most impoverished and disadvantaged sector of society into effective, independent citizens. These individuals will serve as examples of opportunity and hope to their own families and to the communities from which they came. By proving that highly vulnerable and disadvantaged youth of today can become leaders of tomorrow. Umzi Wethu sends a powerful message.

ROLEX AWARDS FOR ENTERPRISE
CONCLUSION
Youth training schemes exist in South Africa, but these are generally limited to the transfer of technical skills or life skills development. Few programmes provide a holistic approach that augments relevant skills training with life skills and wellness support, which is especially beneficial for youth who have been made vulnerable by an inherited disparity, poverty and the HIV and AIDS crisis.

The significant socio-economic impact of the Umzi Wethu model is beyond doubt. The programme has brought about positive socio-economic development within rural communities in the Eastern Cape. It has resulted in increased levels of education and training and circulation of income within rural regions, youth employment and the general improvement of the socio-economic status of rural communities.

The programme warrants further research, but, most importantly, replication to ensure that other communities in the Eastern Cape and other provinces can also benefit.

In conclusion, the words of Wilderness Foundation programme manager Tania Plakonouris provide a fitting summary of the philosophy behind Umzi Wethu’s holistic approach:

*The team at the Wilderness Foundation want the youth of today to get the best possible outlook they possibly can – personally, financially and in their career. Our key purpose is to improve the quality of human life. We want to create awareness and advocacy of nature and the environment rather than just being another skills training programme. Members of the Wilderness Foundation’s youth development team see the positive change the students go through while they are on the course. It gives us hope that the young people of South Africa have bright futures.*
RAZ-LEE HECTOR
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND COMMIS CHEF AT SPIER