

Shangoni Gate Development

Submission in support of the development of the Shangoni Gate where it presently stands

Introduction

This submission seeks to provide an argument to sustain the development of the Shangoni Gate in the present location where it currently stands. The gate has been used as a management entry and egression facility by the Kruger National Park (KNP) for performance of their duties with convenience. It is presently located on the northern banks of the Shingwedzi river, in Altein village, Mtititi community.

The Mtititi community is bordered and neighbours with the communities of Muyexe in the south, Mninginisi Blocks II and III in the west, Jilongo and Mabayeni in the northwest as well as Magona in the North. These communities, like any other neighbouring communities, have always resided in harmony and assisted the KNP in extended programs of the management and conservation of wildlife and nature. This submission will raise historic, local economic development, present business initiatives as well as envisaged road infrastructure development issues.

Historic matters

The Shangoni Gate has since time immemorial been located on the northern side of the Shingwedzi river, that is, in Altein village in the Mtititi community, for

purposes of performing management activities by the KNP. The gate has at times been used to allow access to the KNP by neighbouring communities, whenever there were meetings or sport activities in the form of soccer matches between workers of the KNP and the neighbouring communities. There is resonance among the neighbouring communities that the gate has served them well. To move it from the current position, would tend to undermine the historic context within which gate has existed for such a long time.

Discussions and engagements between the KNP, the neighbouring communities and other stakeholders have been going on for a period of about two decades. These discussions have, until recently, suggested and indicated that the gate would be open where it presently stands, that is, in the Altein village, on the northern side of Shingwedzi river. Such discussions, at all times, occurred within the ensuing historical context.

Local Economic Development

Local economic development (LED) is a multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral process that provides an economic injection to sub-national local area economies. It seeks to respond innovatively to changes in the national and global economic environment to attain job creation, poverty alleviation and the redistribution of wealth. LED therefore has a double-prong approach of creating economic activity in local areas while it provides opportunities for control, management and ownership of local economies. This can be done through combining skills development, resources and ideas of local stakeholders to stimulate local economic growth and competitiveness. This in turn results in the creation of new employment opportunities and increased income levels, thus, enabling people to

pay for services, broadening the tax and revenue base of municipalities and creating a conducive environment for the establishment of new institutions for sustainable development. In the end, it sets underdeveloped areas on the path to a competitive edge towards sustainable development.

The local communities that are neighbouring the KNP, like any other rural communities in South Africa, deserve an opportunity in LED initiatives. While LED seeks to develop an entire local neighbourhood, it is common knowledge that it revolves around a nucleus or centre, and it is through such a centre that vertical and horizontal LED co-ordination can prevail to lead to sustainable development. In the nature of LED and rural development in South Africa, we cannot seek to develop other areas by taking away from others. Such a move will be remiss of rural development within the context of LED. It is therefore, on basis of these reasons, imperative that the development of the Shangoni Gate where presently stands would dictate to the notion of equality of rural communities in pursuit of equitable rural development.

Present Business Initiatives

The neighbouring communities to the KNP, both from Malamulele and Giyani, have been establishing local businesses in anticipation of the opening of the Shangoni Gate where it is as of present moment. The established businesses of Madzahisi Lodge and Malati Lodge as well as the envisaged and Phatsameri Lodge, as approved by the Thulamela Municipality, among others, stand as testimony in Altein village that the Shangoni Gate was expected to be opened when it currently stands. At the present moment, a tar road is being constructed to access these lodges with ease.

Over a period of two decades, and with the advent of an inclusive local government system in South Africa, these rural communities have waited with hope the opening of the gate at its present location. So is the Mtititi community, and inherently the Altein village. Any move otherwise would water down the notion of hope in the eyes of the rural people who have waited too long for democracy to touch their lives.

Envisaged Road Infrastructural Development

All along, when arguments for keeping the Shangoni Gate where it is at present were being made, by the KNP and other stakeholders, the issues of cost effectiveness was raised. It was maintained that it would require the construction of one bridge from the present position of the Shangoni Gate to Shingwedzi Rest Camp, whereas it would require the construction of two bridges if the gate were to be move to the southern side of the Shingwedzi river. Austerity and prudent financial resource deployment remain critical issues at all times, especially during a difficult economic climate like the present one. It would cost a lot more to build two bridges than one. A change of the Shangoni Gate from the present location would cost more in terms of road infrastructure development inside and outside the KNP. Such a move would defeat the arguments that had been raised previously, including technical landscape and physical infrastructure developmental issues.

Conclusion

South Africa has, since the dawn of democracy, committed to bring a better life for all, especially for those rural and remote villages that have waited for too long to

have a taste of meaningful life. It would defeat the purpose of inclusive development if the South African National Parks, and inherently the KNP, would seek to pursue LED by taking from one community what has historically been their heritage and hope for a better life. A volte-face approach would not be desirable. It is therefore recommended that the Shangoni Gate development be maintained and sustained where the gate stands at the present moment.

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