

eNkovukeni baseline

1.1 OVERVIEW

eNkovukeni is the northern most village in the iSimangaliso MPA nestled between three lakes on the one side and the sea on the other. There are presently 35 households in this community.

Access to the area is severely limited, as the road to the village became impassable some years ago. Access is by crossing the lake either on foot, or on a small boat (8 people), which is in very bad shape. Larger items can be brought across by tractor and trailer around the north end of the 3rd lake. There is a larger motorised boat which is used for transporting learners across the lake to the high school and for paying passengers. The price of a trip is however exorbitant at around R600- R900/ trip.

Fishing and coastal marine harvesting in the area is extensive, with all households undertaking this activity; some for food and some for sale. Selling is done through arrangements with buyers outside the village. There is recognition in the community that over harvesting is happening, but locals have few alternative livelihood options and maintain their ancestral rights to the fish kraals – roughly 15 families. Line fishing and reef harvesting are also common.

Land holding as understood by the community is still according to the traditional allocations. The visible homesteads are not the full extent of these holdings as each family was provided roughly 1ha sized plots (100mx85m). In addition, families still claim the plots of their family members who chose to relocate when the reserve was formed. The traditional practise of extending homesteads for adult sons and offspring to set up their own homesteads is still practised.

There is no electricity in the community and all households harvest firewood locally. Most of the households have small solar panels, but for the majority charging systems could not be maintained (i.e. batteries and inverters) and thus the panels can be used during the day only to charge phones and the like. Fridges and stoves are gas powered, but due to cost and access, this is a luxury affordable only by a few of the households. Porters charge around R60 to carry the bottles up from the lake.

Water access is extremely limited. The majority of households have a number of rainwater storage facilities – mostly 2200L Jo-Jo tanks and 200l drums and rely heavily on these for daily access. A communal borehole has been equipped with a petrol pump and two header tanks (10000l capacity) through support from the Local Municipality and Wildtrust. Although water is now closer to the households- it is still a significant walk for households. Their arrangement is that if a household want water, they buy fuel and pump and collect from the header tanks, thus meaning only those who can afford to pay can have access. Wildtrust is providing limited access to the community at the hub. Due to the very spread-out nature of the homesteads, provision of access to water within the defined limits of around 200m from a homestead will be extremely difficult to achieve. Water is available only at lower elevations, closer to the lake, meaning the expensive pumping arrangements are the only options for bringing water closer to the households.

Irrigation for intensive vegetable production is not presently an option in the village. The majority of households undertake a small amount of dryland cropping at their homesteads; primarily

cassava, traditional gourds and pumpkins and peanuts – as these crops are generally able to survive predation by monkeys and Hippos'. A proportion of the households have attempted homemade fencing to protect their crops- but in all cases this has been inadequate. A communal garden (~1ha) in a fenced area inside a large wetland abutting lake 2 has provided generational access for households to vegetable production plots. Shifting cultivation is used for this garden, which is moved every decade or so. The area under cultivation, is a small portion of the overall wetland area. Presently around 15 households are active. The fencing is done by the community themselves. The practise is one of raised beds between water channels, fertilized with manure brought down to the garden and organic matter from cleared reeds and vegetation. Each person has access to around 2-3 x 100m² plots. The walk to this garden is roughly 1km for most households. Some households do not access this garden as it is too far for them to walk. Commonly grown crops are sweet potatoes, green peppers and onions, primarily for household consumption and sharing only. Participants grow their own seedlings from the limited range of seed they can access in Manguzi.

Livestock husbandry is practiced by a limited number of households, 3 according to a focus group discussion comment. Herds are joined for 2-3 households who employ a herder together. This herds have roughly 60-80 heads of cattle. Cattle are walked down to lake 1, every day to drink water – which has led to numerous footpaths going down through the forested area, some of them quite eroded. Families also keep goats in herds of between 10-30, which are left to roam freely. Poultry is not common (14% of households), although present, flocks are small (Ave=5 chickens) and heavily predated.

Craft in the form mostly of mats, baskets and beadwork is still common in the village. Local resources are used and reed and palm fronds are also harvested and sold outside of the area. Incomes here are very small.

Only around 15-20% of the community have toilets (VIPs). Around 25% of the households visited are in the process of erecting further small dwellings in their homesteads. A further 25% of the households have severely inadequate and crumbling housing and little to no fencing around their homesteads.

Health facilities need to be accessed across the lake in Amazambane. There is a small primary school in the village with around 40 learners. One household runs a spaza shop and tavern in the village. Unemployment is extremely high with 100% unemployment, where households rely primarily on grants, short term job creation programmes and use of local resources to survive. The latter is for both physical and mental disabilities and is accessed sporadically by around 15% of the households. Employment is provided through short term contracts primarily for youth by both iSimangaliso (EPWP and internships) and the Wildtrust (internships and youth employment programmes) and has provided some financial support to roughly 20 households in the village. The 'missing middle' of adults between the ages of 38-60 years, who do not receive any grants makes up a significant proportion of this village.

Tourism could provide a significant boon to this community as the location and natural beauty in the area is exceptional. Such efforts however are severely hampered by the need to be registered by and managed through iSimangaliso and none have been set up since the formation of the park.

Community members are presently extremely resentful of the management in the park and feel that all their attempts to create livelihoods and lives for themselves are thwarted through restrictive rules.

From the survey people clearly outlined that they are unhappy with the restrictions imposed, although they also recognise that their impact on natural resources is quite high and that there is a need for protection.

All voiced clearly that they need to be consulted before decisions are made that affect them, that they need a sit down with iSimangaliso and clarity on the rules and regulations and that they would like iSimangaliso to visit the people more and provide interventions that can improve their lives in the park, so that they can reduce the pressure on the natural resources.

1.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS

In the baselines survey undertaken by MDF and the Wildtrust hub staff and interns, 19 of the 35 households in the community were interviewed in March 2024. There was considerable reluctance from households to partake in these interviews, as they believe that use of this information by iSimangaliso management and external role players will be to their detriment. Experience in interviewing and facilitation is also required, given that much of the information requested is of a sensitive nature. Most sensitive to these households is the size of their land holdings and the extent of their use of natural resources.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Male and female headed households are reasonably evenly balanced at 53% and 47% respectively. This is similar to the national average for 2022 of 45,7% female headed households in rural KZN. (StatsSA, 2022).

The average household size for the village is 5.5, compared to the national average of 3.4, with households ranging from between 3-9 individuals. All the households have more adults than children, something that is quite unusual in rural KZN settings.

In terms of age, the population in ENkovukeni is skewed significantly towards the age group of 35-59 years – which is also the population group with the least social grant support.

Age group in years	StasSA %	eNkovukeni %
0 -14	28,8	21
15-34	35,1	32
35-59	27,1	41
>60	9	6

The population of ENkovukeni is roughly 200 individuals living in 35 households. Of these only around 15 individuals are between the ages of 0-6 years and around 13 individuals are over the age of 60 years. This is likely due to the inaccessibility of the area, linked to the need for physical fitness to survive there and the lack of health services in the area. The much larger proportion of mature adults is also indicative of this fact.

From the interviews it was reasonably apparent that the households left in ENkovukeni are in fact sub-family groups of larger households – meaning that households did not relocate on the

inception of the national park, but some members of households moved, and some remained. It was also reasonably apparent that youth within the broader family are being brought into the area to take advantage of the job opportunities being provided to their age group.

There is also a small, but significant group of individuals in the village suffering from either physical or mental disability (around 10 individuals). All such households live well below the poverty line and are extremely vulnerable. Extra costs in terms of care and transport have to be internalised by the households themselves.

1.3 INCOMES AND LIVELIHOODS

Of the 19 households interviewed 18 households (95%) fall below the national poverty line (R1558/month/capita income). Per capita incomes range from R406 – R2 260 per month.

Per capita income	Percentage of households
<R1 558/month	95%
<R800/month	37%
R800-R1000/ month	21%
R1175-R2260/month	42%
Female headed household average	R970
Male headed household average	R1061

For the 6 households in the green category above interviewed, 5 households have between 2 and 4 members under contract employment either with iSimangaliso or Wild Oceans and 1 household consists of two pensioners with state grants. Households in the red and most vulnerable category have only one or zero members employed in these programmes. In addition, through community meetings there is a strong sentiment that youth job creation doesn't help the families as a whole as much as employment for the age group between 34 and 59 years would.

These contract positions provide significant support to the livelihoods of households in the village, but are short term and do not presently contribute much to longer term livelihood sustainability.

Sources of income are the following:

Source of income in order of frequency	Source of income in order of importance
Child grants	Pensions
Contract iSimangaliso	Contract Wild Oceans
Remittances	Contract iSimangaliso
Pensions	Child grants
Contract Wild Oceans	Small businesses
Fishing	Fishing
Small businesses	Remittances
Local farm produce	Selling reeds
Selling reeds	Local farm produce
Food aid	Food aid.

Income generation from use of natural resources such as fishing (47%), fish kraals (35%) and coastal harvesting (65%) is common in the village. Only 18% of households do not engage in

these activities. Incomes however are low and use is primarily for food. In addition, fishing is primarily an activity of the men in the village and coastal harvesting (mussels and red bait) is undertaken by women. Harvesting of reeds and grass and making of craft is undertaken by around 35% of the households. Sales are local and incomes are low, averaging around R500/month.

Food shortages are reasonably common in the community, with 21% of households suffering from seasonal shortages for 2-4 months of the year and 26% suffering from too little access to food on an ongoing basis.

1.4 AGRICULTURE

A reasonably restricted range of agricultural activities are undertaken, including a low level of dryland cropping within the household boundaries, vegetable production in the communal garden, some poultry and goat husbandry and cattle.

Activity	% of HH	Units	Comments
Household cropping	35%	188m ² /household	Crops include mainly cassava, peanuts and sweet potatoes – invaded by hippos, monkeys and livestock
Vegetable production (community garden)	59%	200m ² /per person	Crops include sweet potato, green pepper, onion, butternut, tomatoes, beetroot and spinach
Fruit production	53%	1-4 trees per household	Trees include guava, lemons, avocados, mangoes, oranges and some indigenous fruit including marula and water berry – heavily predated by monkeys and birds. Yields often zero.
Poultry	24%	4 chickens	Small number due to heavy predation by wild animals and household use
Goats	41%	10 goats	Goats roam freely, some homesteads have kraals but not all
Livestock	16%	10 cattle	Cattle roam freely. Herders are employed. Cattle need to be taken down to the 3 rd lake to drink. Extensive erosion on cattle paths was noticed.

The only viable vegetable production option is the communal garden in the wetland, which has been in existence for at least 3 generations. This is an area, fenced by the community themselves of around 1,5ha, which is used for roughly 10 years, before moving to a different patch of wetland to allow the present patch to regenerate. It is situated in an extensive wetland system. Women have plots of 100m², usually between 1-2 plots per household. Beds are raised and irrigated straight from the furrows. Reeds, and organic matter are worked into the soil along with small quantities of manure carried down from the homesteads. The garden is a considerable hike from most of the homesteads (500m-3km). A further cropping area for the northern part of the village is situated close to the 1st lake.



Figure 1: Above left: A view of the communal garden with fencing and demarcated plot, situated as a patch within a much greater wetland. Above right; the furrows and raised beds, showing a pile of organic matter from reeds removed 9top left corner0 to be incorporated into the soil and a water welling up in the furrows and used for irrigation in the foreground.

Dryland cropping within the household boundaries is presently extremely limited and low yielding. Soils are sandy and infertile, fencing is usually makeshift and only a few crops can withstand the heat and lack of water.



Figure 2: Left to Right: Infertile soil, with small patches cultivated inside the homestead boundary. Makeshift fencing and a garden with typical crops of cassava, peanuts and sweet potatoes.

Cattle ownership appears minimal from the interviews, but quite large herds were seen during the visits. It is likely that interviewees have under-reported on ownership and numbers.



Figure 3: Above: A group of cattle being herder down the forest paths towards the lake to drink water.

1.5 INFRASTRUCTURE

The table below summarises infrastructural considerations in eNkovukeni village.

Infrastructure type	Description	% HH	Comment
Fencing	Self-constructed, makeshift	42%	Fencing for household boundaries generally in better condition than for gardens, but not common. Fenced garden are even less so - roughly 16% of households
Dwellings	Brick and cement	76%	Usually between 1 and 3 times 2-4 room structures per homestead
	Reed	35%	Usually 1-3 times 1-2 room structures per homestead. Some homesteads only have reed dwellings. Poorer households are more likely to have the reed structures.
Energy	Solar	42%	Households have 1-2 small panels. Generally, batteries have not survived, so small quantities of electricity available only during daytime, mainly for charging phones.
	Gas	37%	Many of these households have gas bottles, that have been empty for some time -being unable to afford to buy and transport re-fills to their homes
	Candles	32%	This is surprisingly low, given there is no other source of light in the community. A number of households said they have fires only and no means of lighting.
	Firewood	100%	Collected from forest patches nearest to each homestead. There are no restrictions imposed by the community.
Sanitation	None	68%	The majority of households do not have any sanitation and still practice open defecation.
	Pit latrines	22%	Pit latrines have been constructed by the households themselves.
Water	RWH-200l drums	100%	Households generally have 200l drums and basins for RWH, - some rooves are thatched and not easily conducive to rainwater harvesting
	RWH 2400l Jo-Jos	94%	Most households have at least on JoJo tank. 35% of households have between 2-3 JoJo tanks. Those too far away from the communal borehole rely ENTIRELY on RWH for household water access
	Communal borehole	68%	This is a new system of water pumped from a borehole to two header tanks about midway up the incline. Distances to this tank can be large. Each household pumps for themselves, collect what they can and leave leftover water for other people
	Spring	5%	This spring is likely to have been used a lot more frequently before the borehole was set up in 2021. It is not protected and shared with livestock
Access	Roads		No road access to the community. It is possible for a tractor and trailer to enter from the northern end of the 1 st lake, at low tide only.
	Lake		There is one very small, very old boat that the community can use to cross the lake, but generally they need to walk across. A larger motorized boat is available for transport of the high school children but is too expensive for community members to use.

Basic infrastructure and services in the village are severely underdeveloped, with 68% of the village having no sanitation options or options for provision of light in their homesteads. Although 42% of the community have tried self-supply solar options for electricity, most of the households can not afford the installation and maintenance costs to keep such systems operational. Presently none of these households are able to use their solar for lighting, as they do not have functional batteries. Gas for cooking is similar in that only a very few households can afford the extra R120 for transport of a gas bottle across the lake and up the hill via porters to their homesteads.

Housing consists of both brick and reed dwellings, with the latter dominating in the poorer homesteads. For these dwellings provision of gutters for rainwater harvesting would require structural support.

Figure 4: Above: A homestead constructed with reed, where gutters and rainwater harvesting would need structural support .

And Below: A homestead with a JoJo tank, 200l drum and a gas bottle. The latter hasn't been re-filled for over a year, due to logistical and financial difficulties in the homestead.

Due to the area being in a protected area, there has been little to no support from the Local Municipality or the line function departments. The onus from the community's perspective is on iSimangaliso management to fill this gap – which has soured relationships substantially, as the MPA is primarily focused on conservation and not community development.



Water provision through a system of pumping to two header tanks from a borehole was provided to the community through the support of the Ward councillor and the Wild Trust around 2 years ago. This system also provides water to the Hub. This has provided some relief to the community and is used sporadically by 68% of the community. Some households are situated to far away from this site to make it viable for them. For households to access this water, they need to pay individually for pumping themselves and then transport the water to their homes. Whatever is left in the tanks can then be accessed by other community members. This is an awkward system that strongly favours those with expendable cash and greater access to resources. Getting the fuel to this site for pumping is logistically and financially intensive.



Figure 5: Left: The header tanks where water is pumped from the borehole and where community members fetch water. Right: A view of one of the forest paths community members walk along to get to the tanks and collect their water.

1.6 SOCIAL ORGANISATION

There is a local church group which provides social safety net support to its members to which around 32% of the community belongs and a local funeral insurance group (58%). A few individuals have funeral policies with more formal institutions in Manguzi. One household runs a spaza shop and local 'shebeen'. Community members shop and do banking in their nearest town, Manguzi, which cost R60 for a return taxi trip. As with most taxis extra payment is required for goods transported. Health services are accessed across the lake via a mobile clinic in a neighbouring village, where the high school children also attend school.

1.7 NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Due to the small population in the area and low level of use of land-based natural resources, environmental degradation in the area is limited. All households use firewood from their local forest patches extensively. There is some erosion of pathways due to heavy livestock traffic. A further assessment of stocking rates and livestock management would need to be undertaken. The habit of burning to clear land is still common but can be managed through information sharing and discussions.

Figure 6: A view of the surrounding veld and bush from one of the homesteads in Nkovokeni.



The marine and lake resources are however overused, through extensive fishing by the community, commercial fishing concerns and the tourist industry.

Community members are aware of the reduction in fish stock as well as the reduction in size of fish being caught.



Figure 7: Above left: the daily catch from one of the fish kraals and Right: A view of the kraals in the 1st and 2nd lakes to which ENkovukenihas access.

Community members have an understanding of their impact on the environment. 42% of respondents felt that their use of resources had no negative impact on their environment, 21% felt their impact was low and 27% felt their impact was high. 79% of respondents felt that nature needs to be protected to be able to continue to provide resources and services for themselves

and their children. This clearly indicates an innate understanding of resources conservation and protection among the community. They have felt the impact of climate change in the form of increased heat, more heatwaves and weather variability, with more frequent and intense storms. Rainfall has been similar, but more variable.

Relationships with the iSimangaliso MPA are strained. A recurring comment from community members was that the rules imposed are restrictive and abusive and that control has been heavy handed in the past. Throughout a call for discussion with the iSimangaliso authorities and better information provision from them was heard. Community members on the one hand appreciate the protection of the natural environment, and on the other feel that nature is seen as more important than people and that they are unable to make a living given the restrictions on resource use. They appreciate the short-term job opportunities and food parcels as these have been crucial given the constraints on other land use options in the area. Requests for support have included more job-opportunities not just for youth, improvement in living conditions, electricity, road access, a bridge across the lake, shops and seeds for planting. Requests also included support for tourism activities and support for the women's cooperative to access a tent and chairs for events.

1.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Given the small group of young children between the ages of 0-6 years – demand for a creche may not be very high, but crucially should be combined with additional support for primary school children (sanitation, housing, energy, nutrition, health and education)
- Job opportunities for the age groups of 35-59 years need to be given priority as this is also the group most reliant on natural resources in the area to survive and the main breadwinners in these households.
- Provision of basic sanitation and WASH education and services should be a priority.
- Significant support with rainwater harvesting is crucial.
- Support for and development of options for solar energy would alleviate a lot of the present discomfort.
- An improved system for provision of fuel for pumping water and distribution of water to households should be given attention. Presently only those households who can afford fuel for pumping and who are reasonably close to the borehole have access.
- An improved system for delivery of gas can make a huge difference.
- Systems for provision of monkey and hippo proof fencing/cages for both food production and poultry husbandry could assist to provide improved yields and better livelihoods support.
- Systems for improved water management and grey water management can relieve some of water shortages at household level.
- Better land use management in the wetland community garden is important for improved production and protection of the wetland.
- Access to the community is an issue that needs innovative solutions, as presently neither a road nor a bridge across the lake are viable options. Construction of stabilised paths to allow carts could be one option.
- iSimangaliso to engage more constructively with the community in terms of information provision, outlining rules and regulations and appreciation for the livelihoods constraints of the community members.