

Mabibi baseline

March-April 2024

1.1 OVERVIEW

Mabibi is a community of around 111 households, tucked into the coastal grasslands between the northern edge of Lake Sibaya and the coastal dune forests. The community is divided between the kwaZibi and kwaTembe Traditional Authorities and indunas for both TAs' are resident in the village.

It is accessible by road from Mbazwana and Sodwana Bay. Mabibi resembles villages outside the iSimangaliso Wetland Park more closely, having access to a similar level of development including electricity for the whole community, yard taps from a communal water scheme for 95% of households, a clinic and community hall. All households have sanitation arrangements in the form of pit latrines and all households also practise rainwater harvesting, either by using drums or roof harvesting into JoJo tanks. Most of the household yards are fenced and gardens and fields are more prevalent and more extensive. There is no communal garden or cropping area. A substantial number of livestock are in evidence (poultry, goats and cattle).

Tourism is well established, in the Mabibi campsite and the Thonga lodge both of which have been in operation for long time, as well as a couple of homestay arrangements through iSimangaliso and more recently the Wild Trust.

Fishing, coastal harvesting and use of reeds for building and craft is undertaken by around 50% of the households. Around 80% of households use the local forests for firewood (in addition to having electricity) and building materials.

Unemployment, while still high is not as evident as in the northern villages inside the park. Some community members are employed in the tourism industry, others undertake fishing for income generation (41%), remittances from family members are also more evident (54%) and around 41% of the community also undertake small businesses. Sale of farm produce for income generation is undertaken by around 22% of the community. 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 40 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 (47% of adults).

Community members feel that the rules enforced by iSimangaliso are oppressive and unhappy with the restrictions imposed on natural resource use and farming. Participants also voiced a need to be consulted before decisions are made that affect them. They have requested improvements in road infrastructure, more employment and a library in the community.

1.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS

In the baseline survey undertaken by MDF and the Wildtrust hub staff and interns, 22 of the 111 households in the community were interviewed between March- April 2024.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There is a larger percentage of female headed households (59%) than 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 1-13 individuals. Large households are common in the village. All the households have more adults than children, something that is quite unusual in rural KZN settings. Only around 10% of the population in the village are pensioners.

In terms of age, the population in Mabibi is very similar to the average demographics of rural populations in South Africa.

Age group in years	StasSA %	kwaDapha %
0 -14	28,8	28
15-34	35,1	37
35-59	27,1	27
>60	9	8

The population of Mabibi is roughly 610 individuals living in 111 households. There is also a small but significant group of individuals in the village suffering from physical disability (around 30 individuals) and mental disability (~5 individuals). These 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, as a very small proportion of these households actually receive disability grants.

1.3 INCOMES AND LIVELIHOODS

Of the 22 households interviewed 15 households (68%) fall below the national poverty line (R1558/month/capita income). Per capita incomes range from R420 – R7 300 per month.

Per capita income	Percentage of households
<R1 558/month	68%
<R800/month	45%
R800-R1100/ month	18%
R1200-R3000/month	23%
R3100-R7300/month	14%
Female headed household average	R1 530
Male headed household average	R1 870

In Mabibi, unlike the more northern hub villages in the park, the average per capita income for both female and male headed households are around or above the national poverty line with male headed households earning around 18% higher incomes. 32% of the households in this village earn a per capita income that is higher than the poverty line – which is significantly different from the other two hub villages, where only 5% for Nkovukeni and 8% for kwaDapha fall into this category.

In Mabibi the impact of the short term youth job creation processes on the household income is lower due to alternative income streams for these households Only 1 of the households interviewed relied solely on this income in addition to social grants for their livelihood. All other households are engaged in some form of income generation (fishing, farming, small businesses, craft and remittances).

Sources of income are the following:

Source of income in order of frequency	Source of income in order of importance/amount
Child grants	Employment
Remittances	Wildtrust contracts
iSimangaliso contracts	iSimangaliso contracts
Pensions	Fishing
Small businesses	Small businesses
Fishing	Remittances
Reeds/craft	Pensions
Local farm produce	Reeds/craft
Wildtrust contracts	Local farm produce
Employment	Child grants

Income generation from use of natural resources such as fishing and coastal harvesting (41%) is common in the village. Those involved in contract fishing and the tourism industry earn significantly higher incomes than those fishing for food and ad hoc sale of surplus. Harvesting of reeds and grass and making of craft is undertaken by around 36% of the households. In Mabibi 41% of the households also undertake a range of small businesses and local income generation activities not related to natural resource use, unlike the two northern hub villages where reliance on the natural resources for livelihoods is extremely high.

Food shortages are reasonably common in the community, with 55% of households suffering from seasonal shortages for 2-4 months of the year. Here around 14% of households do not experience food shortages at all and no households indicated chronic food shortages.

1.4 AGRICULTURE

A reasonably wide range of agricultural activities are undertaken, including dryland cropping within the household boundaries, gardening, fruit production, some poultry and goat husbandry and cattle.

Activity	% of HH	Units	Comments
Household dryland cropping	27%	200m ² /household	Crops include mainly cassava, peanuts and sweet potatoes, and gourds/pumpkins, as well as maize and beans
Household vegetable production	18%	200m ² /per households	Crops include green peppers, onions, tomatoes, spinach, beetroot and lettuce.
Fruit production	64%	1-4 trees per household	Trees include mangoes, lemons, avocados, oranges, guavas and some indigenous fruit including indigenous fruit trees.
Poultry	41%	7 chickens on ave	Some households have a few traditional chickens, but other have reasonably large flocks of between 20-40 chickens, including a few layers and broilers.

Goats	9%	4 goats	Goats roam freely, some homesteads have kraals but not all.
Livestock	9%	5 cattle	Cattle roam freely. Herders are employed. It is likely that cattle ownership is in fact a lot higher than reported. It was also mentioned that people from outside the village bring their livestock to the area to graze, bolstering numbers further.

Generally, more traditional, low external input farming practices are employed in the village. Burning and ploughing are still undertaken, although at household level small patches of land are cleared by hand to plant crops. Householders use small amounts of manure (cattle, goat and chicken) to fertilize their soils. They irrigate by hand from available household water, and/or individual boreholes, which tend to be quite salty.



Figure 1: Above clockwise. Two examples of homestead production layout, with self-constructed fences, patches of crops such as green peppers and onions and fruit and indigenous trees dotted around. Also visible in the 1st picture are some poles for building resting against a tree, harvested locally as well as 200l drums for watering crops. The picture above right shows also mangoes and orange trees- the latter showing signs of drought and lack of nutrients.

Destruction of crops and fruit harvests by wildlife is not common in this village. Constraints in production are from lack of water, heat and extremely infertile soils.

1.5 INFRASTRUCTURE

The table below summarises infrastructural considerations in Mabibi village.

Infrastructure type	Description	% HH	Comment
Fencing	Self-constructed, makeshift	77%	Fencing for household boundaries common in the village and those who did not report fencing, did in fact have makeshift arrangements, but not 'proper' fencing. This is typical of rural communities with high numbers of livestock.
Dwellings	Brick and cement	100%	Usually between 1 and 3 times 2-4 room structures per homestead

	Reed	14%	Usually 1-3 times 1-2 room structures per homestead. Some homesteads only have reed dwellings (24%). Poorer households are more likely to have the reed structures.
Energy	Electricity	100%	All households have Eskom electricity.
	Solar, gas candles	0%	There is very little evidence of solar, gas or use of candles in this village.
	Firewood	77%	Collected from forest patches nearest to each homestead. There are no restrictions imposed by the community. Households still predominantly use firewood for cooking, even with electricity supplied to their homes.
Sanitation	Pit latrines	100%	All households have pit latrines, some constructed by the households themselves but most supplied through their local municipality.
Water	RWH-200l drums	55%	Households generally have 200l drums and basins for RWH, - some rooves are thatched and not easily conducive to rainwater harvesting
	RWH 2400l Jo-Jos	73%	Many households have at least on JoJo tank. 36% of households have between 2-3 JoJo tanks.
	Communal borehole	100%	People with access to the communal system have taps in their yards, with unrestricted access to water.
	Own borehole	0%	Interviewees did not report having own boreholes, but it is expected that at least a few households in the village have these.
Access	Roads		There are unpaved access roads, through neighbouring villages from Sodwana.

Mabibi has seen a much higher level of infrastructure and services support from the local government structures than the 2 other hub-site villages inside iSimangaliso Wetland Park, evidenced through 100% coverage in terms of electricity, sanitation and household water provision, as well as in the presence of a clinic, primary school, community hall and a number of local shops/spazas in the village. Villagers are still concerned about the condition of their access road, which is a very sandy track and not suitable for all vehicles.

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.

1.6 SOCIAL ORGANISATION

There is a local church group which provides a social safety net support to its members to which around 16% of the community belongs and a local funeral insurance group (38%). A few individuals have funeral policies with more formal institutions in Manguzi. A number of individuals have also received training from a range of institutions in the past – including conservation and fisheries management, agricultural training and small business training.

1.7 NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Due to the larger population in the area and reasonably high level of use of land-based natural resources, environmental degradation in the area is evident. 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. 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.

Community members have an understanding of their impact on the environment. 64% of respondents however, felt that their use of resources had no negative impact on their environment. Despite this, 78% 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, improved road access, RDP houses and a library. There was also a request to lift the restrictions on Agriculture to allow people to make a living from farming.

1.8 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 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.
- Focus on improved agricultural practices for intensification of household food production is important.
- Diversification of agricultural activities to improve synergy between soil, water, plants and animals in this system, to improve production and productivity
- Significant support with rainwater harvesting is crucial, especially for those households which do not already have JoJo tanks.
- Systems for improved water management and grey water management can relieve some of water shortages at household level.
- Taking the pressure off the fishing and coastal resources is a priority.
- 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.