

Executive Summary of an Evaluation of the Wilderness Foundation Umzi Wethu Programme

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Preface

The poem below by a 2010 Umzi Wethu graduate exemplifies the gratitude and the views expressed by most graduates to the evaluators about the Umzi Wethu programme.

Thank you! Thank you!

*Thank you is a word I don't hesitate to say
 But leaving the ones you love is just a pain
 What must I say?
 Turning my back on the people that gave me my first break
 But letting me spread my wings and see how far I can go
 Conservation is not just a job
 It is my lifestyle
 Now I will go out there to make Umzi proud
 I will never forget the day you made me shine
 You made me see I am a star and I will always shine
 Thank you to all those who played that part
 All these dreams I had
 You turned them into reality
 I can't believe it's real
 Please someone wake me from this dream
 All these tears I cry today
 Is a blessing of what I gained
 This journey was not a game
 Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!
 I was not alone in this journey
 We were a team
 We made it through this valley
 With the guidance of the good management
 You are the champions
 How did you manage to make us see we're worth something?
 How did you manage to make us respect nature like we do?
 Only they can answer those questions we have
 Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!
 Thank you to those guys that were with me along the way
 Thank you to Umzi Wethu for making us shine
 Now we are going to pave the way for others who are coming here to stay*

By Andile Kula, Umzi 6 Field Guide Graduate

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

An independent evaluation of the Wilderness Foundation's Umzi Wethu programme for the 2005-2010 period was carried out in July 2010 by a two person team. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand how effective the programme is in achieving its goal. The goal of the programme is to *'enable vulnerable youth to sustain a livelihood in the formal eco-tourism and hospitality sector.'* Specifically the evaluation assessed:

- 1) The effectiveness of the Umzi Wethu programme in achieving its goal.
- 2) The impact or immediate changes it is bringing about for vulnerable youth, their families and communities.
- 3) The sustainability and replicability of this type of programme.
- 4) Improvements needed or recommendations to improve programme impact.

2. The context

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Eastern Cape of South Africa is 20%. Poor communities are heavily affected by the epidemic with meagre household resources often needing to be spent on health care and funerals leaving few household resources for young people to further their education beyond high school. As the poorest South African province economically, the Eastern Cape provides limited employment opportunities for young people.

3. The Umzi Wethu Programme

The Umzi Wethu (UW) programme was designed in 2004-2005 and started in 2006. Its objectives are to:

- Improve the overall health and wellness (physical, psychological, social and spiritual) of students to enable them to be economically active and productive.
- Improve student's knowledge and respect for the environment through active engagement in conservation.
- Allow Umzi Wethu students and graduates to become socially responsible and contribute meaningfully to improve the communities they live in.
- Provide access for Umzi Wethu graduates to attain a level of sustainable financial independence and stability upon graduation and beyond.

UW is a one year residential programme for vulnerable young men and women between 18 to 26 years of age. Youth are trained and supported to obtain skilled jobs in the eco-tourism and hospitality sectors. A detailed description of the programme is provided in section 6 of the main report.

4. Main Conclusions

The conclusions are based on the evidence gathered both from documents and discussions with graduates, members of their families, employers, government, Umzi Wethu candidate selection partners and staff of the Wilderness Foundation South Africa and the Wilderness Foundation UK.

The Umzi Wethu programme is relevant: The need for programmes that work with vulnerable youth to ensure that they have a sustainable positive livelihood for their future is great. At present the youth unemployment rate in South Africa is 74%. HIV/AIDS rates remain high, affecting many households and putting strain on family resources. While youth from many such households want to further their education beyond secondary levels, the opportunities to do so are small. Rather, the environment in which many of them live leads some youth to fall into a life of crime, gangs, drugs, drink and prostitution.

While there are youth training schemes being run by government and other civil society agencies, most only focus on either technical skills development or life skills development. Few programmes provide a holistic approach that will ensure that the person maintains a positive and successful career path and remains positively connected to their community and the natural environment.

The Umzi Wethu programme is effective at bringing about positive and profound change: Feedback from all stakeholder groups, including graduates and staff, is that the programme is succeeding in achieving its goal. Currently 107 young people have graduated or, 91% of those who entered the programme. Of the 70 young people that graduated from 2007 to 2009:

- 97% of them were successfully placed by Umzi Wethu in internships and jobs after graduation.
- 81% of these graduates are still employed in full-time positions and providing a livelihood for themselves and their families.
- 7% of these graduates are furthering their studies.
- 12% are seeking work.

Youth graduate with both personal and professional skills and maturity. This enables them to be employed in skilled jobs in the hospitality and eco-tourism sectors. Such employment changes their lives for the better and some of those employed are already moving into management positions or pursuing further education. The outcomes set by the programme in terms of improvements in a graduate's overall well-being; knowledge and respect for conservation, and economic well-being are all being achieved. There was less evidence related to achievement on the social responsibility outcome, which was only introduced into the programme in 2008. However, some graduates reported ways that they are giving back to their community such as by mentoring and talking with young people in schools.

Collaboration with partners is effective: All selection, employment and training partners report that there is effective collaboration. Most were involved in the initial feasibility and planning of the programme. They spoke positively about the relationship they have with the Umzi Wethu team and said they could call and discuss issues when the need arises. All want to continue to be involved with the programme in the future. While programme engagement with student's families and communities was limited in the past, the Umzi Wethu team is developing ways to strengthen these relationships now that the programme has matured. In addition, the staff feel that with the maturity of the programme it is timely to try and influence South African government youth development and training policies.

Changes brought about by the programme are expected to be sustained: It is expected that the depth of personal change brought about in those completing the programme will be sustained well into the

future. In terms of employment, the programme assists graduates to find a job and monitors them for two years after graduation, providing them with support during that period if difficulties occur. The team knows that the true test of success of the approach will be whether the graduates stay in employment over the long term, with some moving into higher management positions and continuing education. Such achievements are starting to happen and all graduates we interviewed have long term goals they are striving towards.

The Wilderness Foundation has multiple sources of funding for the Umzi Wethu programme. It is committed to fully supporting the programme over the coming years and hopes that the evaluation findings on impact will inspire others to support this effort as the social returns from this programme in the Eastern Cape are high. With the Umzi Wethu approach now fully developed, the team is ready to develop a strategy for sustainability that defines ways for them to add profit making sections that will help to cover more of the programme's operational costs and employ some graduates in the future.¹

The UW approach is worth replicating: Given the impact and the need for such youth development programmes, it is definitely worthwhile to replicate the Umzi Wethu approach in other parts of South Africa and beyond. However, it would be important to replicate all aspects of the programme from the selection process, through the personal and skill development processes, community outreach activities, the wilderness trails, and the job placement and support phase. In addition it is important to provide students with residential accommodation while in training. This provides them a safe environment, away from risks and stress which they may confront if they remain in their communities during the one year period of the programme.

The efficiency is significant; the programme is well-worth the investment: The financial cost of selecting, training and placing a graduate in a job is well worth the investment. There are huge social returns as graduates are confident, employable, and help their families financially and psychologically (this is in terms of pride and reduction of stress because there is someone in the household with a steady job and income). The costs are low in comparison to other programmes. For example it currently costs R70, 000 for each person to complete the programme and be employed whereas it costs R130, 000 for the government of South Africa (GOSA) to keep a youth in jail for a year.² Instead, an Umzi Wethu graduate is expected to be employed for many years and generate an income within the first two years of their employment of at least R60, 000.³

The immediate impacts of the programme are positive: Graduates described the immediate impacts of participating in the Umzi Wethu programme. Many of the impacts cited are those intended by the programme. The most significant changes were the growth in graduate confidence, maturity and leadership skills. These personal and professional skill developments have enabled graduates to enter sustainable employment. This is leading to immediate impacts on the family in terms of increased

¹ In 2009 Umzi Wethu established a catering unit that currently employs 3 graduates and generates income that covers some operational costs.

² During an interview the evaluation team was informed that it costs a government economic development agency one million Rand to create a skilled job in the Eastern Cape.

³ At the time of writing the exchange rate was R7.30 to US\$1 making the cost of the programme for one student US\$9,589.

income, pride and ambition. We assume that these changes are producing positive effects in the communities but due to time constraints the team did not verify them especially as it may be too early to do so. We assume that the impact in the communities of having an Umzi graduate in their midst is positive especially if graduates return to their communities as peer educators,⁴ bringing motivation and hope to their peers and younger siblings.

A positive unintended impact is that the programme is changing attitudes and mindsets about gender roles of both the young men and young women involved. There were no other unintended impacts identified.

5. Recommendations

The recommendations presented here are those prioritized with the Wilderness Foundation senior management team and endorsed by the independent evaluator.

Strategy: Develop a strategic plan with stakeholders that define ways of expanding the programme so that a greater number of vulnerable youth are reached in South Africa and in other African countries. Within the strategy, define ways to increase the number of selection and employing partners that participate, and define ways to ensure their engagement over the long term.

Financial sustainability: As part of the strategy, develop plans that can ensure the long term financial sustainability of the programme and increase employment opportunities for the youth who complete the Umzi Wethu programme.

Communications: Better communicate the full scope of the programme to all stakeholders. This includes selection and employing partners as well as families of graduates. In particular, provide reports to selection partners on the graduation and employment success rates of the candidates they recommend. For families, provide them sufficient information so that, if they wish, they can support their child during their year with Umzi Wethu and after.

Community involvement: Strengthen the involvement of graduates, families and their community in the programme.

Replication: Identify agencies that want to replicate the Umzi Wethu approach and help them to conduct a feasibility study on programme establishment.⁵ In addition, extend this Wilderness Foundation programme into the most marginalised communities in the Eastern Cape.

Employment sectors: Complete a feasibility study to identify other employment sectors that need skilled employees and businesses that would be willing to collaborate with Umzi Wethu in ensuring that graduates are employed or have access to internships.

Monitoring and evaluation: Start developing case studies or social histories with interested graduates that describe the transformation and experience for them from the time before they entered the

⁴ Training of Umzi Wethu students as peer educators was introduced in 2008.

⁵ Such a process is already underway with a partner in Cape Town.

academy through their first year of employment. Use these studies to communicate the value of the programme to funders and to influence South African government policies on youth training and development programmes.

Work with some of the selection partners to set up a system to measure the social returns of the programme for graduates and families. Within the process identify ways to assess the benefits for the wider community of having Umzi Wethu graduates in their midst.

Periodically complete an impact evaluation to verify the changes taking place, positive and negative, intended and unintended.