Project: National Biodiversity Project: Conservation of Iona National Park

Type of document: Results of the technical meeting on the implementation of the Management Plan with residents and visitors to the Iona National Park

Date: 2 September 2016

Local: Infotur Hotel, Province of Namibe

Attendees: List of attendees attached



A technical meeting was held on the 2nd of September 2016 at the Namibe province in order to present the zoning plan and to identify key-activities to be developed in this final phase of the project with targeted groups. The event was chaired by the Provincial Director of regional, urban and environmental planning, Ms. Maria Eduarda Pombal, the Municipal Administrator of Tômbua, Mr. João Ernesto, and the National Coordinator of the Project, Mr. Aristofanes Ponte.

The zoning plan was presented by the International Park Manager, Mr. Bruce Bennett, who pointed out the four spatial zones and sub-zones at the Iona National Park (NP). After the detailed explanation of each zone and sub-zones, a discussion was opened to the attendees.



The Provincial Director emphasized that a park regulation has to be elaborated/updated and shared with the public. Park rangers and tourist guides have to be equipped and habilitated to receive visitors in the Iona NP.

The Municipal Administrator of Tômbua stressed the need to involve the local communities in the implementation of the Management Plan to successfully achieve the objectives.

Tour operators also stressed the necessity to consolidate a park regulation and to establish a timeline to implement the Management Plan of the Iona NP. Once the regulation and the zoning plan are approved in political level, training and licensing by the tour operators will be made necessary. They highlighted the need to offer a counter-proposal to local communities which have been living with their cattle in sensitives zones of the park. However, operators also drew attention to the fact that the park, especially areas with the highest tourism potential, has been occupied mainly by populations that are not traditional himbas. Most of them immigrated from other provinces or country and are small businessmen. So reinforcing immigration control is required and restricts the amount of cattle living inside the park is also essential to guarantee the Iona PN conservation.

The need to elaborate and propose an official tourism itinerary – with the posts entrance and park routes – was highlighted by the tour operators and the Provincial Director. In addition, park boundaries with the Tômbua need to be clearly defined. Using local plants and the oldest tracks of the railway, which have around 34km, were suggested to define these limits.

After concluding the zoning plan discussion, ways to create alternative livelihoods and to involve local communities in the park conservation were elicited from the attendees. This exercise aimed at identifying key-activities that should be prioritized and developed during the final phase of the project. Below, activities that were pointed out during this brainstorm are listed:



- Developing cultural activities with communities (himbas) and identifying potential events that could be open to the public / visitors;
- Spending a few days with himbas groups;
- Identifying potential tourism activities, such as riding donkeys, taking boat trip on the Cunene river (Monte Negro post);
- Constructing a natural pool which needs to be under community responsibility;
- Promoting training and providing technical assistance to communities;
- Developing exchange activities with Namibian communities for tourist exploitation;
- Defining hiking routes in the mountains;
- Defining potential attractive tourism sites. The identification process has to be done with communities consultation (there are 6 *sobados* – community groups – inside the park) by always taking into consideration the greatest tourism potential (accessibility, attractions etc.).

Then, steps to increase the interaction with communities and to implement the key-activities plan were emphasized by the audience:

- Communicating the zoning plan and its objectives to local communities. This process has to be done by park staff with a local NGO supports;
- Holding meetings with *sobas* and communities to identify attractive sites and activities;
- Constructing minimum infrastructure for the campsites and creating picnic areas with barbecues grills;
- Selecting local people in each tourist area to be equipped by a NGO to receive visitors and to take care of the campsites infrastructure;
- Promoting a community internship program at the local tourism companies;
- Creating Iona NP website where it is possible to find tourism attractions, accommodation/facilities, local tour operators, maps etc;
- Elaborating a folder with Iona NP map, roads, animals etc;
- Elaborating and installing road signs with kilometers, access to park (road categories);
- Identifying local crafts to be sold to tourists (leather, metal, clothes, dishes and knives, shoes).