



AmaBomvana traditional leaders host historic indaba

Call for Wild Coast region's rich offerings to benefit rural communities

LULAMILE FENI

Drawing inspiration from the North West province's Royal Bafokeng tribe who own platinum mines in Rustenburg, AmaBomvana traditional leaders from Elliotdale and Coffee Bay are on a quest to see their rural communities benefit from the region's marine resources and be part of the country's oceans economy.

About 50 traditional leaders, royal council advisers and fishing co-operatives' leaders recently attended a historic two-day Rural Maritime Development Indaba at Haven Hotel at the Cwebe Nature Game Reserve in Xhorha, engaging with maritime experts and environmentalists on how to enrich their communities from the region's marine resources.

The Bomvana Regional Development Forum (BRDF) seeks to drive development programmes and tap into the ocean economy and marine resources development.

Nkosikazi Nosintu Gwebindlala, whose Nosintu Gwebindlala Foundation organised the indaba, said it was historic that traditional leaders hosted a maritime indaba themselves.

"We seek to tap into the opportunity vested in the maritime resources of this area for the advancement of rural community development," she said.

Among the region's spectacular beaches and tourist attractions are Cwebe, Hobeni, Bulungula, Xhorha Mouth, Nkanya, Qatywa, Lubanzi, Seaview, the Mapuzi Estuary and Coffee Bay, with famous Hole-in-the-Wall.

"We want to participate fully in the maritime space and have the resources benefit our communities.

"We need a maritime school. The natural resources at our disposal must benefit our communities economically and academically.

"Our indigenous fishers and those harvesting oysters and mussels must go commercially and have a national market or export.

"Local hotels should be buying from them. The seas should benefit us on a large scale, create employment and provide for future generations," Gwebindlala said.

Concern was expressed that members of local fishing co-operatives did not have commercial licences allowing them to fish for business use.

"Coastal tourism is a niche area with the potential to create employment, especially for rural communities.

"However, the lack of community involvement in tourism development processes is a hindrance to the socioeconomic prosperity in our area," Gwebindlala said.

SA Maritime Safety Authority (Samsa) chief operations officer Sobantu Tilayi said AmaBomvana must be able to participate in the mainstream economy using the resources they had.

"This initiative will prevent urban migration. Our strategy is to build an international maritime centre by 2030 and have a vibrant rural maritime economy," Tilayi said.

As part of a maritime rural support programme, Samsa will provide interventions to assist the local community with maritime sector skills development for entrepreneurial ventures.

Samsa will organise training of young people to be skippers and look at establishing a maritime school focusing on maritime economic development.

Community members will be equipped with fishing safety measures.

Traditional leaders will be capacitated by the SA International Maritime Institute and Transnet on marine issues.



IMPORTANT OCCASION: AmaBomvana traditional leaders and fishing cooperatives' leaders converged for a two-day Rural Maritime Development Indaba at Haven Hotel at Cwebe Nature Game Reserve in Xhorha. Picture: LULAMILE FENI

"Rural communities, though settled in a potential area that by some accounts is endowed with some of the world's best natural resources, with massive maritime economic development potential, remain poor, marked by high unemployment rates," Tilayi said.

Kgomotso Selokane, CEO of Heron Marine SA and also a Maritime Business Chamber member, said: "It's pleasing to see royals coming together and being decisive for the betterment of their people.

"It is an amazing initiative, especially in SA which is failing most of the disenfranchised and the voiceless people.

"They are also planning for the next generation and the maritime economy is being taken seriously," Selekan said.

She said indigenous local fishers had permits which they could only use for "self-sub-

sistence fishing", not business use.

"They need commercial licences to fish for business use and create a livelihood for themselves and realise the economic benefit," said Selokane, who is also the BBBEE Transport Sector Council chair.

She committed R60,000 for refrigerated containers for fishers' harvests and R30,000 for fishing equipment.

Maritime Business Chamber CEO chair Unathi Sontsi said rural people were not benefiting economically from the ocean.

"The chamber has adopted the BRDF to assist with skills and enterprise development initiatives as this will boost Eastern Cape economic growth that will create jobs and reduce poverty.

"The government must maximise its willingness to support rural communities and re-

lax several legislation and regulations that prohibit development in rural communities.

"Rural coastal communities have a great potential for marine tourism, pharmaceuticals and exploration of oil and gas," Sontsi said.

Retired environmentalist Mandlenkosi Zide said: "Natural resources are over-regulated and such regulations are not interpreted to the communities they are located in.

"These communities need to know the science behind the conservation of the species in the seas and forests in the jurisdiction.

"There is a lack of information on the status of cottages lying on our coastline and the value they provide to the local economic development of the area," Zide said.

One AmaBomvana's elderly traditional leaders, Nkosi Mzolis Diliza, is the founding member of the BRDF, and is the founder and group CEO of the Strategic Partners Group, the Gautrain empowerment partner.

"I started this idea of the ocean economy and BRDF to fight poverty in our area and together make better use of the mineral resources at our disposal," said the former CEO of SA's Chamber of Mines.

Diliza said the Wild Coast also depended on the agricultural economy, with numerous projects aimed at resuscitating rural agriculture.

"Coastal tourism, fishing and agriculture improvements can create jobs, making the region a strong competitor in the global marine and farming industries," Diliza said.

The 74-year-old said he planned to focus fully AmaBomvana development issues when he retires in 2026.

The BRDF wants to establish a fully-fledged maritime development programme that creates various small businesses, operating small boats for various tourist requirements, mainly exploring the lagoons and river crossings, and commercial fishing.

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