

Working with the Swaziland Tourism Authority (STA)

Tourism is a priority sector for the government and could strengthen the national development strategy and sustainable long-term economic development of Swaziland. Conventional hotel-dwelling sun-seekers have become independent travellers, who want to walk freely in a remarkable, natural setting, meet Swazi people, taste home cooked food, and experience the peace, culture and heritage of the kingdom. In the past three years through the support from the EU, STA has established seven community based tourism sites, managed by community trustees who meet monthly and guided by constitutions developed at the beginning of the project. Community tourism can empower communities economically and profits are reinvested into the business and used to support community projects such as schools or clinics.

In 2005 Skillshare International Swaziland partnered with the STA to establish tourism as a national priority. STA is responsible for developing co-operation within the public sector and with the various sector stakeholders (private sector, communities and civil society) to facilitate appropriate investment and promote tourism.

These seven desirable tourism scenic spots are in rural areas inhabited by people without experience of tourism. Skillshare International has provided project management expertise and training for members of the community to run and manage the lodges and other sites. Development worker Meg Schoch was recruited in October 2005 as a Technical Advisor for the STA and is currently funded through our PPA with DFID. She has successfully managed the construction project of the Mahamba Gorge Lodge and built the capacity of the local manager on business management and financial skills. She feels very confident that they are ready to take over the management of the lodge without her day to day management support. The next stage will be to build the capacity of community trustees in business management skills and governance, as well as supporting the managers in six other sites.

Meg explains *"In the five months that I have been here I have accomplished a lot more than I had anticipated, the project is 98% complete and I have also trained the managers on the overall management of the lodge. I think they are now anxious to start managing the site without me, though I will be available to provide instant support as they need me. My role with the Lodge will now be providing monitoring support as required. I think I have been a useful part of the project".*



Mahamba Gorge

Our support to STA is in line with our country plan in which we have made a commitment to support organisations which promote sustainable tourism development that will encompass sound environmental practices, respect of social and cultural values and sound economic practices. Our regional plan commits us to "Building the capacity of institutions and community based organisations to develop and manage sustainable community based tourism programmes."