



Ubuntu in Practice*

Documenting the partnership between the Sabi
Sand Pfunanani Trust & Good Work Foundation

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**Ubuntu* is a Southern African philosophy that is often translated as 'I am because you are'. It focuses on the idea of shared humanity and working together for one another.

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Introduction

This summer, I embarked on my LiA in the beautiful province of Mpumalanga, South Africa, to work on the project of a lifetime. This project focused on creating a medium of communication in the form of a documentary on the important partnership between the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve (SSNR), Sabi Sand Pfunanani Trust (SSPT) and the Education NGO Good Work Foundation (GWF). While these organisations have different purposes within the Greater Bushbuckridge region, their partnership plays a crucial role in the area's socio-economic ecosystem and its development. Together, their collaboration helps create and deliver opportunities for education and employment within this region, as well as creates a bridge to connect the area's communities surrounding the reserve. Ultimately, the partnership aims to transform what was once an area that was historically seen as divider, into an inclusive landscape for the people that live in and around it.

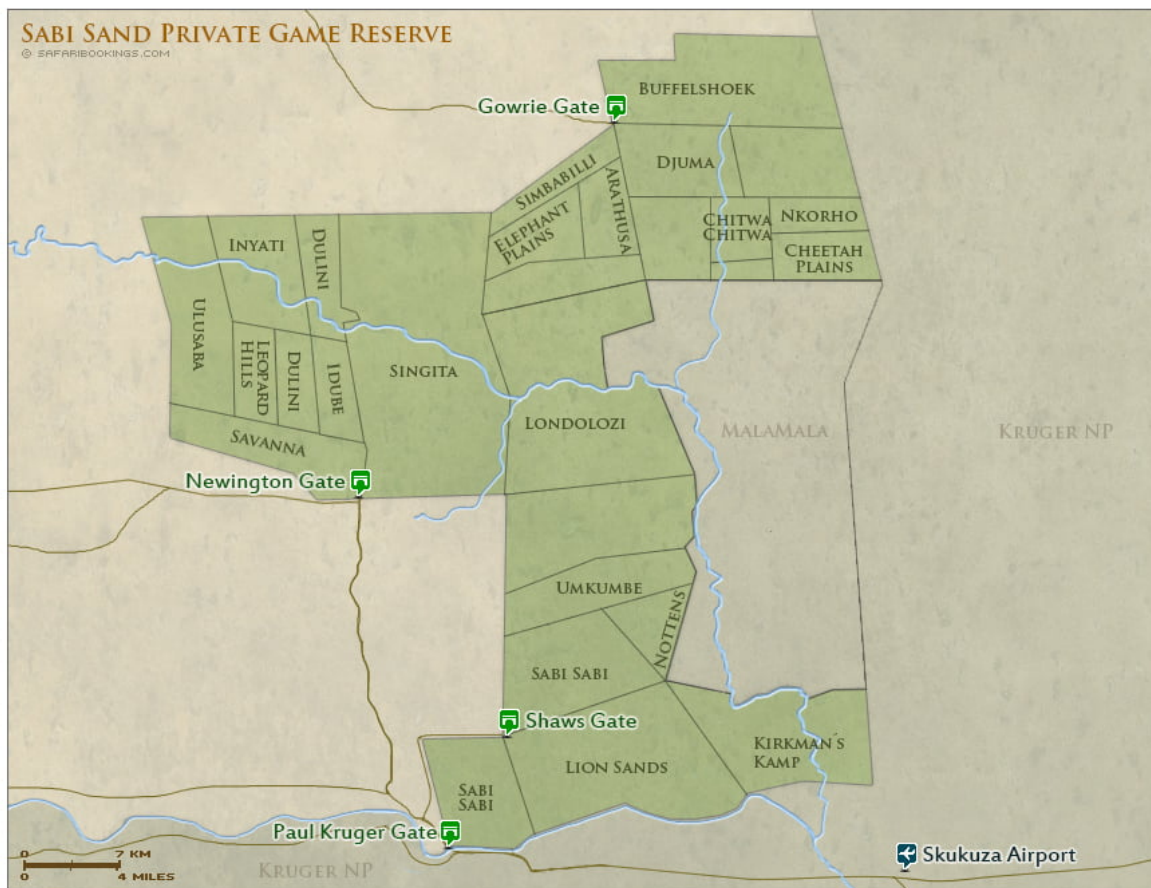
As a proud South African, it has been an immense privilege to work with these two organisations and to document the incredible impact that their individual projects and partnership have created within the Greater Bushbuckridge region. I believe that this partnership is a true representation of what *ubuntu* and *pfunanani*, 'I am because you are' and 'helping one another', means in practice. When society comes together with a shared purpose, the scope of a project and its output is limitless.



1.Unpacking the Landscape

Before exploring and unpacking the project's key goals and objectives, it is important to understand this landscape from a socio-economic perspective and what role each of these organisations plays in this partnership.

SSNR is a privately owned and run game reserve situated in Mpumalanga, South Africa. The reserve borders the famous Kruger National Park, which is one of South Africa's largest tourist attractions, and shares a 50-kilometre boundary with the park of which all is unfenced. The reserve was established in 1934, with the fenced boundary between the 2 reserves only being removed in 1993. SSNR is known to be one of South Africa's best reserves for spotting the 'Big Five' and for offering a wide selection of accommodation including luxurious lodges.



However, beyond the fenceline of the reserve, there is a very different socio-economic setting. Currently, the Greater Bushbuckridge region has an unemployment rate of 52% and a 64% youth (between the ages of 15 and 34) unemployment rate.

In recognition of SSNR's role within the Greater Bushbuckridge region and its responsibility to uplift the surrounding communities, the Sabi Sand Pfunanani Trust (SSPT) was established in the mid 1980s. *Pfunanani*, which translates to 'help one another' from Xitsonga, describes the core mission of the trust: Support and uplift the reserve's bordering and surrounding communities through community-driven and initiated projects centred around 3 pillars, those being education, environment and enterprise; establish and strengthen relationships between these communities and the reserve; and transform the identity and perception of the reserve within these communities. While the environmental and enterprise pillars focus on aspects such as food security and business development respectively, the education pillar focuses on 2 key areas: Early Childhood Development (ECD) through the creation and support of ECD centres, as well as through its support and collaboration of digital education centres founded and run by Good Work Foundation (GWF).



GWF, founded by Kate Groch in 2005, is an education NGO currently operating within the Greater Bushbuckridge region and Free State. GWF specialises in delivering digital education through its 6 digital learning centres, 5 of which exist within the bordering communities of SSNR. GWF has 2 core programmes of which are offered

at all of its campuses. These programmes are its Open Learning Academy and its Bridging Year Academy. However, at its central Hazyview Campus, further programmes aimed at providing additional skills and qualification for potential employment within areas such as SSNR and Kruger National Park are offered, such as the Conservation, Hospitality, and IT Academies. Supplementary programmes include the Career Academy and Facilitator Academy, of which the programmes aim to give students better clarity of which industry they would like to enter, or and the skills to teach its programmes within the campuses, respectively.



2. Project's Goals and Objectives

When I first came in contact with SSPT, a key concern raised was how the trust was communicating its projects to its stakeholders, as well as its outcomes and impact. While the trust has issued impact reports and has had engagement meetings with the lodge and property owners in SSNR, the communities surrounding the reserve, and the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve Board, it was felt that this medium did not always portray the importance and impact of the Trust's projects and its partnerships within the region. However, by using a digital and emotive medium such as a documentary,

stakeholders would be able to see the direct impact of the Trust's work in an accessible, quickly digestible format.

Although the Trust has an abundance of projects across its 3 pillars, it was decided to focus on the education pillar as a case study for how this medium of communication could work and to demonstrate the extent of its impact. Education is a key pillar to any successful economy and country. Thus, creating an education system that skills and empowers individuals is crucial for South Africa's future. After meeting with SSPT's Chairperson and General Manager, Tanya Dos-Santos Ford and Michelle Scott-McGinn, I was introduced to one of the Trust's biggest partners in delivering education within the region: Good Work Foundation. From this point and after having meetings with key GWF members including Kate Groch (CEO), Gemma Thompson (Head of Development) and Sarah Matthes (Head of Marketing), I was exposed to the complexity of the partnership between these 2 organisations, and the importance of each organisation in both providing the opportunity for education and upskill, as well as employment opportunities within SSNR and the Greater Kruger Landscape.



After these meetings and identifying the core message the documentary needed to convey, the project's key goals and objectives were outlined and then approved by the 2 organisations

Project's aim:

Visually communicate in an emotive and factual medium the symbiotic relationship between SSNR, SSPT and GWF. The documentary must highlight the economic and social benefits of the partnership, as well as the impact on the surrounding communities and region as a whole.

Key message to be communicated:

- Show how the GWF ecosystem has helped create employment opportunities within the Greater Bushbuckridge region.
- Show that this partnership is a commitment from each party to foster and strengthen the working economy within the region

Key objectives:

- Produce a 12 minute documentary on this partnership by following the stories of 2 GWF graduates who are now working in the Sabi Sands Nature Reserve as a result of the GWF & SSPT linked Academies
- Documentary must service as product to share the stories of GWF and the partnership, as well as to be used for investment/growth purposes, in an informative manner.

Project structure

The project required several interviews, as well as visits to both GWF and SSNR which is SSPT's headquarters. The interviews included leading members of both SSPT and GWF, as well as the 2 graduates operating within the GWF-SSNR ecosystem. These interviews were conducted at GWF's main Hazyview campus and SSNR accordingly. This enabled me to get a first-hand account of the environment in which these organisations operate and to be immersed in the organisations' and graduates' day-to-day operations. Furthermore, visiting each location allowed for me to collect 'B-roll' footage, which has been used to support any information provided by the interviewees, as well as to provide the viewer context of the environment which is the Greater Kruger landscape.

Project timeline

A filming schedule including travel to the GWF Hazyview Campus, SSNR, and interview locations of the 2 graduates was then formulated and presented to all relevant stakeholders to ensure the project was achievable and time-bound. This was also to ensure the availability of interviewees, and travel accessibility to projects and locations.

3.Key Stakeholders

This project comprised of various stakeholders and intended impacts. These stakeholders and the desired outcome from the project are summarised in Table x.

Stakeholder group	Desired outcome from project	Importance of project
Sabi Sand Pfunanani Trust (SSPT)	Clearly communicate impact of SSPT's work and the importance of partnership with GWF for region and reserve's future; demonstrate its role in providing opportunities for employment and education within region; create an accessible, shareable and long-term applicable medium that can be published on all social media platforms for continued awareness.	Ensure continued financial support and shared understanding from SSNR stakeholders; help communicate changed role of reserve to surrounding communities to grow support and collaboration.
Good Work Foundation (GWF)	Visually demonstrate impact of GWF's work and academies; clearly communicate GWF's role within the region and transforming the scio-economic environment; create an accessible, shareable and long-term applicable medium that can be published on all social	Ensure continued financial support and acquire new avenues of investment both nationally and internationally; medium's use as justification for further

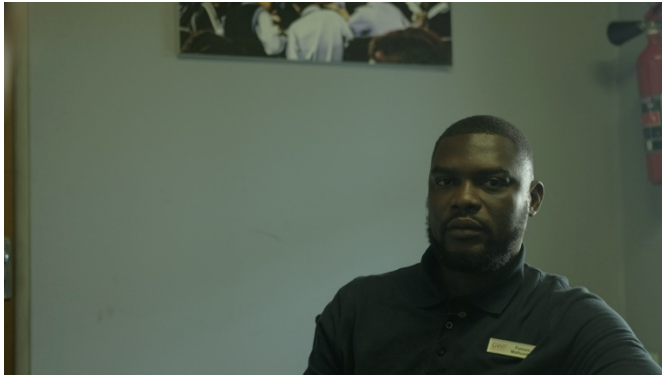
Stakeholder group	Desired outcome from project	Importance of project
	media platforms for continued awareness.	expansion of campuses and programmes.
Communities surrounding Sabi Sand Nature Reserve (SSNR)	Understand the partnership's work, delivered outcomes, and ways to become involved in ecosystem; identify the role of each organisation within the region and its importance.	Become more involved and included in the reserve's benefits and socio-economic ecosystem; access to opportunities of education and employment.
Investors of GWF & potential donors and investors (based in South Africa and/or internationally)	Gain a first-hand perspective on the human impact of GWF and the importance of the academies; justification for financial support.	Expand and strengthen awareness about organisation's work and outcomes; help attract new and diverse channels for future funding.
SSNR Board members and lodge shareholders	Understand the far reach of SSPT and the importance of the Trust within the reserve and the region; identify the partnership between SSPT & GWF.	Provides a clear justification on why SSPT should continue to support and be involved in GWF's work; demonstrates the necessity of the education pillar within SSPT's framework.

Identifying these stakeholders and what they would hope to achieve from the documentary, helped to shape the underlying message of the medium, as well as formulate interview questions and selection of B-roll shots. Furthermore, it provided evidence to justify the need for the documentary and the project itself.

4. Final Project Outcome

This project has resulted in the creation of a 14-minute documentary that can be implemented from a marketing perspective for both GWF and SSPT. The final documentary follows the story of the partnership between SSPT and GWF. This was achieved by unpacking the landscape surrounding SSNR and the Greater Bushbuckridge region, the role of each organisation in the partnership, and the impact of the partnership by sharing the stories of 2 graduates from the Conservation and Bridging Academies that are working in SSNR. To explore the story of this collaboration, I interviewed the Chairperson (Tanya Dos-Santos Ford), General Manager (Michelle Scott-McGinn) and Community Liaison Manager (Isaac Hlatshwayo) of SSPT, as well as key members of GWF including the CEO & Founder (Kate Groch), Special Projects Manager (Fumani Mathumbu), Hazyview Campus Manager (Marcia Pungulimwe), Head of Development (Gemma Thompson), Conservation Academy Co-ordinator (Sibusiso Mnisi), and Hospitality Academy Co-ordinator (Tshepiso Thelingoane). These interviews served to gain a better understanding about the history of each organisation, its day-to-day operational activities, and the impact they have made individually and collective within the region. It also showed a different perspective from each person on why they could argue the importance of the partnership.

To complete the GWF interviews and collect B-Roll footage, I had the opportunity to visit GWF's Central Campus in Hazyview. At the Hazyview Campus, I was able to spend time recording the various academies and programmes taking place in GWF's ecosystem including the Open Learning Academy, Bridging Year Academy, Conservation Academy and Hospitality Academy. Being able to immerse myself in the world of GWF and see its widespread impact was an experience I will never forget. From being able to watch the everlasting enthusiasm of the students and facilitators in the Open Learning Academy classes, to participating in a Hospitality Academy simulation, to learning about the region's birdlife with the Conservation Academy in a round of Safari Bingo, I was able to see and capture the essence of this incredible organisation. Organisations like GWF who are committed to addressing the missing pieces of the rural education space provide South African youth a chance to create a future of hope and opportunity.



To capture work of SSPT and conduct the remaining interviews, I was fortunate enough to visit and stay in SSNR at SSPT's headquarters at Shaws Gate. During my time in the reserve, I spent time with Isaac and visited the Trust's numerous projects within and outside the education pillar. This included: visiting GWF's other digital campuses situated in Justicia, Huntington, Dumphries and Lillydale; visiting urban food

gardens supported by SSPT that supply the reserve's lodges and the surrounding communities; and visiting the community of Dixie to see the grounds for the new and upcoming GWF digital learning centre.



I also had the privilege of interviewing Conservation Academy graduate Tshuxekani 'Cruz' Gumede and Bridging Academy graduate Sithembiso Trevor Watt, both during my time in SSNR. Tshuxekani is a full Trails Guide at Lion Sands while Sithembiso is working as a stock controller at Dulini. This was an unbelievable opportunity to really see the partnership's impact on the ground and in the lives of members from SSNR's surrounding communities.



One of the numerous highlights of my LiA was being able to participate in one of the partnership's activities being the School Safaris, which enables students from primary schools in SSNR's surrounding communities to go on a safari in SSNR. The purpose of this initiative is to help GWF's achieve its educational aim of conservation immersion between Grades 5 to 7, where students are exposed and educated about the wildlife within the reserve as well as its embedded history and heritage.

For some of these students, these safaris are the first time that they would have been able to explore nature reserves such as SSNR or seen wildlife in their natural habitat. Initiatives like this are so important as not only to help strengthen the relationship between SSPT and the communities, but they also serve as a tool to create awareness about the role of these nature reserves within the region's economy and landscape.



5. Significance of Project

What I have learnt from these interviews is that the partnership and its initiatives have assisted members of the community to find and obtain employment closer to home, allowing communities to grow economically and bring financial security to many more homes. Furthermore, by establishing a link between the reserve and the surrounding communities, SSNR and the Kruger National Park have changed its identity in the eyes of the region, from being once a symbol of division and inequality, to a place of prosperity, opportunity, and natural beauty.

Delivering an emotive and personal perspective on the justification of the partnership allows the various stakeholders understand why the link between the reserve and the surrounding communities, as well as the bridge between SSPT and organisations working in the region, is vital for the reserve's future and the economic perspectives of the region.

Furthermore, the documentary blended the emotive story with numerical evidence of the partnership's impact. Below are just some of the incredible impacts this collaboration has created within the region that have been included in the documentary:

- Since 2013, GWF has expanded from a team of 6 to a network of more than 200 staff across its 6 campuses.
- 76 839 learners have become a part of GWF's family and academies.
- GWF's Open Learning Academy now reaches 13 023 students across 40 schools within Mpumalanga and the Free State from Grades 3 to 9.
- Since the Hospitality Academy's inception in 2019, 151 students have been trained and graduated.
 - Under the leadership of Tshepiso and her team, the Academy has had a 100% pass rate with no dropouts in the South African College of Tourism's annual examination for the last 6 years.
 - 100% of the 2025 cohort are now employed in internships across the industry.
- The Conservation Academy has trained 60 students since 2019.
 - For the past 3 years, the Academy has achieved a 100% pass rate in the annual Field Guide Association of South Africa examination.
 - Almost 90% of the 2025 cohort are now employed within the Greater Kruger area.
- Alongside Sithembiso, there are currently 44 other GWF graduates who are working within SSNR and Kruger National Park's hospitality economies
 - These jobs range from front-of-house, chefs, to stock checking, housekeeping and bartending.
- Alongside Tshuxekani, 5 of the Conservation Academy's 2024 and 2025 cohort alone are working in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve.
 - Other Conservation Academy alumni working in Sabi Sand Nature Reserve include Tsundzukani Whati, Londolozi's first female tracker.

This documentary showcases an ecosystem of collaboration, passion and implementation. It highlights a group of individuals who are dedicated to working

together to transform the region and its identity. Furthermore, it provides a working example to other nature and game reserves within South Africa and globally about the necessity of working with community to ensure a unified front to develop a bright future.

6. Leadership Skills Applied and Developed

This project has not only pushed me outside of my comfort zone, but it has also allowed me to grow in a multitude of ways from a leadership, technical and personal perspective.

Although this LiA took place in my country of birth, I got to explore regions far outside the familiar landscape of my home city of Johannesburg. Being able to travel to Hazyview and SSNR, a part of South Africa to which I have never been, allowed me to learn more about Mpumalanga and the Greater Bushbuckridge region. Seeing first-hand the socio-economic hardships that have been caused by poor service delivery and inequality, alongside communities' efforts to overcome them together, showed me the power of collaboration and resilience. It is a true demonstration of how when unified in intent and drive, South Africa's potential as a country is limitless.

In addition, this project allowed me to learn more about the image historically associated with game reserves, and the significance of its transformation within the region and the communities themselves. These protected spaces, during the height of Apartheid era, were a symbol of racial discrimination and forced land removals. They were used as a divider and removed access to the natural beauty and benefits of the region from those who historically lived on it. Now, in post-Apartheid South Africa, as the country continues to build in democracy and unity, reshaping these shapes and ensuring that these communities surrounding the reserve are included and prioritised is critical. In order for these game reserves to continue to exist, the communities need to be part of its future. Being able to see the work of SSPT and how they are actively involving its neighbouring communities is a demonstration of their dedication to the creation of an inclusive game reserve. It is an ecosystem and working model that can be used as an example across South Africa.

Furthermore, prior to this project, I had minimal experience in professional videography and its various techniques, systems, and methodologies. However, I have always had a love for photography and the art of storytelling through visual mediums. Therefore, this project provided me an opportunity to throw myself in the deep end and learn new skills including shot types and framing, camera movement, interview techniques, composition, sound selection, and post-production editing. By having the courage to step into something completely outside the realm of my university degree and explore the creative world of documentaries, I was able to grow in confidence and ability within this field. It also allowed the chance to connect and collaborate with experts within the space to obtain advice on the documentary's storyline, choice of interview questions, camera equipment and editing software. This helped me develop a final product that is usable and applicable for both organisations to inform interested parties about their initiatives and also obtain additional funding.



Lessons Learnt

It has been a privilege to be part of the Laidlaw Research and Leadership Programme and to have completed my LiA with SSPT and GWF. This project was a chance to explore South Africa in a way I have never been able to before, and to truly see the power of *ubuntu* and *pfunanani* in practice.

