

Rebranding of the Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park in South Africa: Reflections on Benefits and Challenges for the Former of St Lucia

Noel Chellan¹, Mdu Mtshali² and Sultan Khan³

School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-mail: ¹<chellan@ukzn.ac.za>, ²<msthalim@ukzn.ac.za>, ³<khans@ukzn.ac.za>

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ABSTRACT Post-apartheid South Africa has witnessed an explosion of both national and international ecotourism given its many years of restrictions on the movement of people in the past. Much of its biodiversity has been commodified through branding and re-branding in order to capture a fair share of the international ecotourism market. The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, located in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal, was the centre of land claim contestations by the local inhabitants who have been removed from the park due to colonial occupation and later apartheid segregation policies. Locals who have been victims of forced removals from the Park staked a claim to be co-consumers of development and financial benefits accruing from this natural asset. Despite many unfinished challenges facing the politics of the Park, in 2007 the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park was re-branded as the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (iSWP) to market it as an indigenous and local product. One of the rationales for re-branding was the assumption that its previous name competed against another international tourist destination located in the Caribbean. Given the multi-faceted nature of the Wetland Park as a place product, the paper tests out the extent to which this re-branding from a globalised to a localised ecotourism name destination has reproduced itself in terms of benefits, both tangibles and intangibles in the all White town of St Lucia.