

# Founders' Charter & Operating Principles

## Purpose

Transfrontier Parks Destinations (Pty) Ltd, TFPD, was established in 2004 to manage, market and operate Community-owned hospitality facilities in Transfrontier Parks and adjacent Conservation Areas. The TFPD story has been written 'on the way'. Over time our operating terrain has broadened to include places en route to those areas, and our vision has grown to more fully embrace the core guiding values outlined below.

In this context, the foundational purpose of TFPD is to partner with Communities in commercialising their tourism assets. Rural Communities are at a disadvantage from the outset: their leaders have generally not been skilled in business principles, and the available labour pool is generally unfamiliar with hospitality industry requirements. TFPD aims to partner with the Community which owns the hospitality facility to impart understanding and skills - understanding of basic business principles, and skills in all areas of hospitality. Part of this cooperative, collaborative process will be to develop the expression of relational sensitivity to others and to the environment in which we live out our joint purpose. Another part will be designed to ensure the financial and social beneficiation of each Community concerned.

From a tourism perspective our joint projects provide the space for our guests to *connect and engage* deeply with nature and the cultural expressions offered by our local, rural Communities. In the words of HRH Princess Irene of the Netherlands: *"Unconsciously we know how nature and especially the wild can heal us, bringing us peace and clarity again in our lives .... In eco-tourism, local communities ... by their spiritual and practical traditions ... show how to live in close and constant contact with nature."*<sup>1</sup>

## Core Guiding Values

UBUNTU, the spirit in which TFPD seeks to operate, is an ancient code of ethics, referring to the essential 'humanness' of the human spirit - to goodwill, generosity, dignity, reconciliation, assuming responsibility for each other's well-being and the willingness to solve problems together. 'Umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu' means 'a person is a person through other persons.' Archbishop Desmond Tutu points out that because of the harsh need to survive together " .... the Ubuntu spirit is strongest in stable, settled, communities in the rural areas ...."<sup>2</sup>

PARTNERSHIP is what characterises the relationship between TFPD and the owning Communities at our various destinations. A lovely Shona proverb states: '*Chra chimive hachitswane inda*' - a thumb working on its own is worthless. It has to work collectively with the other fingers to get strength and be able to achieve. In partnership we learn and grow together, and in so doing we co-create a unique future relevant for each facility.

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH DIVERSITY. Conservation is at the heart of TFPD's business ethic. In the words of Fr. Richard Rohr OFM: "*Observing nature, we see that diversity is essential to balance, wholeness, and resilience. Ecosystems thrive when a variety of species of plants and animals nourish each other. .... The world is a relational system full of complex inter-dependence among very different creatures. If we want sustainable communities, we must always welcome the 'other' and learn to see our neighbor as ourselves.*"<sup>3</sup>

HOSPITALITY. African custom accepts the notion of family to include not only the wider family but also the 'village family'. At each of our TFPD destinations our desire is that our visitors automatically become a member of our local family for as long as they share time amongst us. Guests are exposed to discovery of self through others and nature, new traditions, encounters and stories.

## Founders' Charter

Arising from the primary connecting purpose and core guiding values above, TFPD lives within a Founders' Charter that embodies:

- Working with Communities which own tourism assets, and which do not at this stage have the skills or resources to establish a sustainable business;
- Equipping Community members with new skills for their personal development in business, specifically in the tourism industry;
- Putting into practice both socially and in the workplace an environment that constantly expresses dignity and personal as well as communal well-being;
- Patterning our presence in harmony with the surrounding environment so that conservation is a lived reality;
- Encouraging guests to be participating visitors who will take more from their experience than what their money can buy.

This Charter forms the ground from which TFPD grows, as well as setting particular goals to which TFPD matures.

In order to ensure that the principles and guiding values established in these early years are

retained and maintained, TFPD has formed an Advisory Committee, the external Chairperson of which is Professor Harold Goodwin, Emeritus Professor, Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University. In addition, TFPD engages with a number of key figures in tourism and environmental matters as advisors and mentors on this journey.

## Operating Principles

The Charter is put into effect through the operating principles detailed below.

The various hospitality facilities in South Africa that form part of the TFPD family are all owned by rural Communities which do not yet have sufficient skills or resources to operate and comprehensively manage their assets on their own. Consequently, through its stated mission of “partnering with Communities to commercialise their tourism assets,” TFPD has a two-fold intention: firstly, to operate an efficient and sustainable business that meets all the standards required for four- and three-star guest facilities; and secondly, to partner with Communities in the fullest sense for mutual benefit and enhancement of their skills and assets. This is done in the context of strict fiscal discipline and sound corporate governance, together with sensitive and passionate social commitment. To fulfil these intentions, TFPD enters into specific partnership agreements with the owners, and these agreements contain key elements of Community benefit, which include:

- Creating in partnership a sustainably profitable tourism facility that not only provides benefits to guests, owners, staff and operator in a fair and equitable way, but enhances the value of the Community's asset.
- Leadership of the owning Communities meeting regularly with TFPD management staff to monitor the operations of their lodge or camp. This shared experience provides fertile space in which both owners and operators learn, discover and grow. Owners who are unfamiliar with good business practice find new understandings that have general application for them, and TFPD staff members are introduced to new cultural perspectives that deepen their personal and communal life experience.
- All staff members employed at each facility originating from the owning Communities, unless the skills required for the post are not currently available. In the larger lodge facilities, managers are drawn from outside the community and part of their responsibility is to train and upskill local staff.
- Training of staff being an ongoing part of the operations. TFPD has a comprehensive staff development programme aimed at improving skills in all operating disciplines as well as general life skills.

- Rental or profit share being an integral part of the income of the owning Communities. These proceeds are channelled through trusts or foundations run by designated Community leaders who are responsible for applying the funds to Community projects, such as youth development programmes, home industries, social development and educational programmes.
- The lodges and camps prioritising the purchase of goods and services required for their normal operations from providers in the local Community. In this way new and existing entrepreneurs are supported in their endeavours. Where appropriate, local artists are given space to create and sell their crafts on site. In such cases the artists keep the full sale value of all the crafts they sell to guests.
- Guests visiting lodges and camps in the TFPD family being invited to experience the particular cultural expressions offered by the relevant Community. They are encouraged to get involved as respectful participants rather than just remaining observers and are introduced to, and encouraged to support, the services and activities offered by members of local Communities — such as enjoying local cuisine, visiting a local tavern, attending traditional dancing or participating in a crafting session.
- All guests in TFPD run facilities paying a standard Community levy as part of their accommodation cost. This levy is channelled through the TFPD Foundation into projects that add further benefit to the relevant owner Communities. The trustees of the TFPD Foundation, in consultation with the relevant Community, respond to applications for assistance or initiate projects deemed pertinent to the needs of each owner Community. The TFPD Foundation also receives gifts through other channels in order to fulfil its Community development mandate.

Conservation is a critical part of our business operations and our community interaction. To this end the TFPD fabric incorporates as operating principles:

- The use of environment-friendly products at all levels of the operations wherever possible;
- The inclusion of alternative energy sources in all new facilities, while at the same time implementing the replacement of existing energy sources that have a detrimental effect on the environment;
- Effective waste management policies and training of all staff in these practices;
- Training of all staff in all areas of conservation both in established Conservation Areas and outside such areas;
- Promoting the specific environmental gifts of each particular location so as to encourage both staff and guests to enjoy and honour what is offered;

- Where Community land use allows, TFPD is exploring the development of designated game and nature reserves where both general and endangered species of fauna and flora can thrive.

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1. *HRH Princess Irene of the Netherlands, Eco-Tourism: evolving our consciousness from consumers to partners of mother Earth The Enviropaedia 2016 pages 296 - 297*
  2. *Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Eco-Ubuntu: Ubuntu: "humanness", community-centred living, The Enviropaedia 2016 pages 292 - 293*
  3. *Rohr, Richard Daily Meditation: Community: Diversity in Community, Centre for Action & Contemplation, Friday 22nd April, 2016 <https://cac.org>*