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# Local Food Systems and Responsible Tourism: A Strategy to Strengthen Rural Livelihoods? A Case Study from South Africa

Master Thesis

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## Abstract

**Background:** In South Africa high levels of food insecurity and income inequality among the black and colored communities prevail. Governmental programs have addressed this issue with minor success, so far. Linking local food systems (LFS) with responsibly managed tourism has been noted as a potential strategy to channel tourism industry benefits directly into marginalized rural communities.

**Objectives:** This research aims to investigate, if an organic farming and life skills training program in cooperation with an eco-tourism lodge can establish a LFS that translates income from tourism into ecological, economic, and social sustainability of the program and people involved.

**Methodology:** The study was situated in the Western Cape, South Africa, and applied a qualitative research approach, assuming case study as strategy of inquiry. From March to May 2012 data were gathered through participatory action research at the training facility and the lodge. Additionally, interviews with ten key stakeholders were conducted. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and concepts from organizational behavior served as underlying theoretical frameworks for conceptualization and analysis.

**Findings:** The organic farming and life skills training program indeed translated income from tourism into sustainability benefits for the local communities and other stakeholders of this program through the establishment of a LFS with the adjacent eco-tourism lodge. However, the program did not reach its full potential, because organizational relationships and processes of decision-making between all stakeholders were negatively impacted by an eventful history of structural changes and a lack of fluent and reciprocal communication. The previously criticized inclusion of a business-orientation into such a capacity-building project remained a challenge, yet appeared to be a necessity to safeguard financial sustainability.

**Recommendations:** All stakeholders of such a project should share a common understanding of the goals, roles, and strategies how responsible tourism and local food systems should be put into practice. Further, the perception of the black and colored communities regarding the value of smallholder agricultural capacity-building as well as the availability of ecological conditions suitable for food production may be key aspects for the success of such projects.