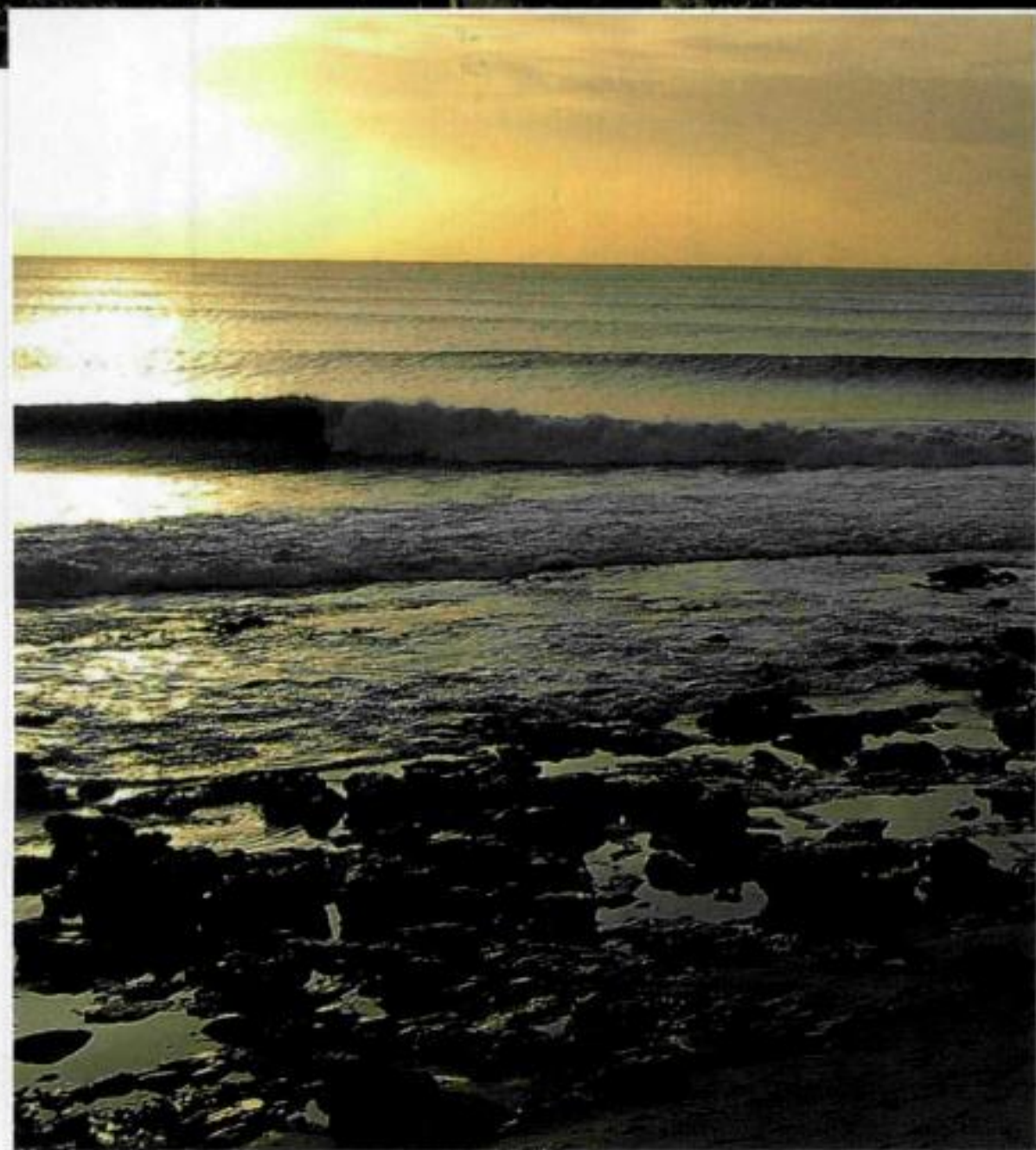


# Support for community eco-tourism helps create jobs in the Eastern Cape

***Support from the National Development Agency (NDA) of South Africa and Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) is helping to boost community-based eco-tourism in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, where unemployment rates are critically high.***

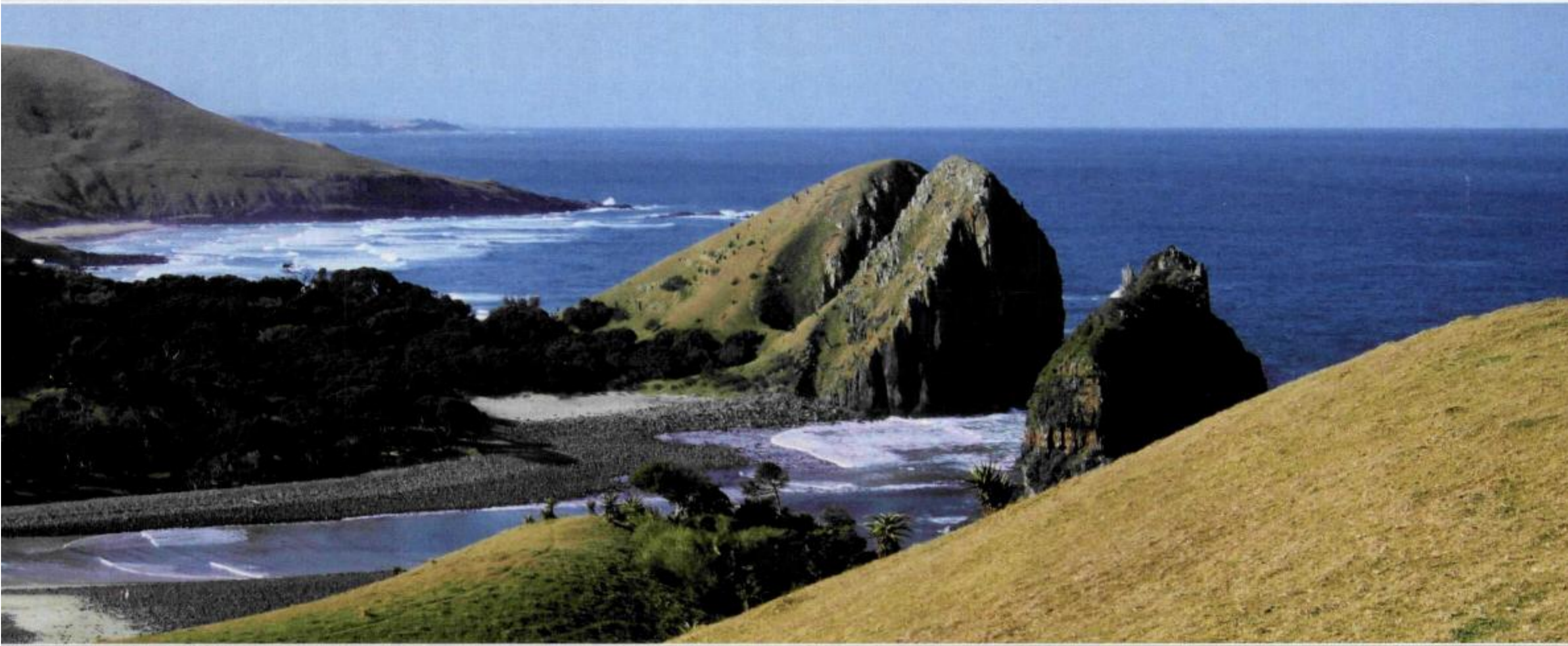


The NDA recently provided funding of more than R2 million to FTTSA to implement its programme called Strengthening Community Tourism for Sustainable Local Economic Development. This follows negotiation between FTTSA and the NDA, whose social development programmes in rural areas traditionally had funded income-generating activities such as agriculture, said Jennifer Seif, Executive Director of FTTSA.

The support from the NDA will go towards FTTSA's long-standing relationship helping the Mehlooding Community Tourism Trust to improve standards of service, through a number of capacity-building and skills-building activities.

Mehlooding trust is one of six community tourism initiatives that FTTSA is assisting under the Strengthening Community Tourism for Sustainable Local Economic Development project funded by the NDA. Five of the community-based initiatives are situated in the Eastern Cape.

Mehlooding Community Tourism Trust represents more than 25 rural villages



in the northern area of the Alfred Nzo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape, according to a statement from the NDA.

The trust owned and ran a traditional guesthouse and an adventure trail that included five chalets, built and staffed by the surrounding communities. The infrastructure for the trail and guesthouse had been built using national poverty relief funds, which provided short-term job creation and skills development through labour-intensive activities.

To date more than 20 local people had been employed by the trust through the guesthouse and trail, said the statement.

The Eastern Cape's high unemployment rate of 28% called for drastic measures to ensure job growth. "Tourism in the province is one industry that will combat the spiralling unemployment rate in the current economic recession," the NDA said.

The Eastern Cape province had accounted for an increasing number of domestic tourists in 2008, coming second only to KwaZulu Natal. Meanwhile, the Wild Coast along both provinces had been labelled as the next successful tourism region by Minister of Tourism, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, at a recent tourism launch in Port Elizabeth, the NDA said.

FTTSA is working with a cluster of four enterprises on the Wild Coast, including the Mehlooding guesthouse and adventure trail, that are wholly or partially owned by a community trust. The community tourism development project includes a Grahamstown cluster of 40 township homestays that are all black-owned and operated.

"We are helping to improve the quality of the products that the enterprises offer, through training and support like helping tourist guides to become qualified and registered," said Seif.

A second phase of the two-pronged approach to strengthen community tourism will be to improve the initiatives' access to markets.

"The second phase will focus on marketing the products, including to the domestic market so South African holidaymakers consider these very, very affordable options," said Seif.

South Africa is unique in being the only country to certify businesses in the tourism sector for fair trade practices, Seif said. As part of its work as a non-profit organisation promoting sustainable tourism development, FTTSA facilitates the world's first tourism Fair Trade certification programme.

The label awarded to qualifying businesses signifies a commitment to Fair Trade criteria that include fair wages and working conditions, and respect for human rights, culture and environment.

Already three of the six community tourism projects targeted by the project have qualified for fair trade in tourism status, said Seif. FTTSA has 51 businesses officially certified, with many more in the pipe-line, she said.

Seif emphasises the impact that a tourism initiative that employs 10 or 100 people, who are fairly and decently paid, can have on a poor community through the re-circulation of money in the local economy.

FTTSA's training highlights another benefit of community tourism initiatives that can ensue if tourists and holidaymakers are encouraged to spend their money further in the local economy, for instance by having their hair braided or taking fishing lessons.

Just R100 spent in a cash-strapped Eastern Cape community in that way can make a huge difference, Seif points out.

The sixth community tourism initiative being supported by FTTSA's project is a group of 12 homestays in the southern Cape. The establishments are all owned and operated by women who are beneficiaries of land restitution in South Africa, said the FTTSA web site.