

Walking with nature. Protected areas, people and prosperity

CBNRM vs TBNRM – allies or enemies?

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Namibia's now well-known community-based approach to conservation has reaped some tangible benefits for both wildlife and people, as outlined elsewhere on this page. Less tangible but no less important are the social and more 'qualitative' benefits, also listed separately in this article. However, possibly the greatest opportunity and benefit of community-based natural resource management is just starting to emerge. This is its potential to facilitate eco-region or landscape-scale planning *and* implementation.

Namibian community 'conservancies', 19 of which are already gazetted with another 40 or so emerging, cover an area of about 8 million hectares in 11 of the country's 13 regions. Some of the conservancies contain bio-diversity hotspots, contiguous groups of conservancies take in large parts of or all of different ecosystems and a number buffer national parks or form corridors between parks or specially protected areas. Several are on Namibia's boundaries with Angola, Botswana and Zambia.

'Ecological networks' or 'bioregional planning initiatives' – ranging from massive multi-national or bi-national programs to smaller single-country eco-zone projects - are in their early stages around the world - e.g. Meso-American Biological Corridor; the South-Africa-Mozambique-Zimbabwe trans-boundary project; Yellowstone-Yukon; Netherlands ecological network; Cheshire Econet - but most share a set of proactive objectives that includes whole ecosystem biodiversity conservation, focusing on ecological coherence through connectivity, restoration and reconnection of specific habitats, and importantly, they integrate conservation with various forms of sustainable economic development (Bennet and Wit, 2001; Phillips 2003).

These large-scale programs are believed by many to be one of the more significant developments in conservation for a number of obvious reasons, and they hold the potential to lift conservation into a new paradigm, in the true sense of the word. They attempt a holistic approach at a biologically rational scale, for example. As Phillips (*ibid*) points out, the true value of such initiatives for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development need to be assessed over the next few years. They do, however, have a major constraint: No management tools can be applied to the environment to improve the resource base at such a broad scale. The success of large-scale programs will depend on the existence of smaller scale units to manage resources in such a way that biodiversity and productivity improves.

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) - and in Namibia's case, conservancies, which create the social structure for improving management on communal lands - can provide these smaller scale units.

Although CBNRM requires a truly, local grassroots focus, and eco-region management is large-scale, both types of programs move away from conservation's familiar defensive stance – trying to stop desertification or deforestation, rescuing a species on the endangered list, trying to catch poachers etc – and work towards a holistic, proactive goal.

Eco-region programs involve land on which people live and on which various levels of government/s and different institutions operate; so do CBNRM units, such as conservancies. Both eco-region conservation (ERC) and CBNRM attempt to create something new, using the synergy of new partnerships and teamwork – albeit an ecologically coherent corridor across several countries or a small, effective *local* institution with the will, knowledge and capacity to manage its local resources. The challenges are not dissimilar, just the scale. The former, (ERC), fails if the latter – conservancies, farms, national parks etc.- are not effective decision-making units and are not improving their resource bases. ERC does not happen because a good plan is drawn up by experts – it requires functional and effective institutional arrangements on the ground.

CBNRM and parks- adding value

By now, few people in the conservation world still see a dichotomy between protected area conservation and community-based conservation (Magome, 2003), and most of us accept that the two approaches are complimentary routes towards the same goal, and in fact, each can add real value to the other. It is also becoming widely accepted that successful CBC requires devolution of real rights to local users, as well as the tools and skills to exercise those rights. This almost always requires the development/ evolution of appropriate, democratic, representative, transparent local social institutions (Jacobsohn and Owen-Smith, 2002). And it is these local institutions that offer a real opportunity not only for large-scale eco-region planning, but also for their actual implementation.

The development discourse now understands that a key reason development initiatives fail or fall short of their objectives, in spite of billions of dollars poured into developing countries, is because very often no appropriate, local representative social structures exist to take ownership of such initiatives. In Africa's case, this is because colonial history has disrupted or even destroyed local social structures, including those involved in resource-use management (Murembedzi, 2003). In other cases such structures never existed as they were not needed in small-scale, non-industrial societies.

Why Namibian conservancies are an exciting development in the relatively new thrust for ecological coherence lies in what a conservancy *is*. Although conservancies each have their own aims and management plans, at base a conservancy is really just a local social structure which enables a group of people who share resources to plan collectively and jointly implement their decisions.

Communal area conservancies are unfenced, open systems, zoned by members for different land-uses – wildlife, tourism, mixed farming and wildlife etc. - and therefore must co-operate and co-ordinate with neighboring conservancies who share some of the

same natural resources such as a watershed or a catchment, a river or mobile wildlife species.

Thus, for the first time ever in Namibia, there is the potential to successfully plan and implement at both a local and an eco-regional scale. For the first time government has a set of environmentally responsible and accountable local social structures on communal land to plan with, and to put such plans into action.

Of course, social structures alone will change nothing. We need to know the root causes of environmental degradation that has taken place on *all* land use types in *all* countries, and how to improve biodiversity and productivity. The inherently holistic approach some small-scale rural communities tend to take – combining social, economic and environmental aims – needs to be built on, not broken down. There are lessons here that the northern hemisphere would do well to recognize.

Conservancies are currently starting to move beyond wildlife management and monitoring, and different local models of more integrated or holistic natural resource management are being developed and tested. For example, e.g Khoadi //Hoas Conservancy's FIRM approach (Forum for Integrated Resource Management); Kwando Conservancy's holistic management planning process (IRDNC Caprivi report 2002), King Nehale indigenous landscape mapping (Nott and Verlinden/Rossing Foundation report 2002).

Some Namibian regional planning has already started to take place. This includes the North-West Tourism Plan, incorporating the Kunene and Erongo regions of Namibia, and the Caprivi tourism planning process, which is currently underway. Both tourism plans have taken the local social units – conservancies – into account as well as the regional environment.

In both cases, many of us involved in Namibian CBNRM believe there is a high likelihood of the plans being implemented, rather than merely filed on some dusty shelf or box of CDs. This is because they include conservancies, local social units who want tourism development and who will push for their plans to happen. The conservancies also make implementation possible because there are now local structures to take responsibility for appropriate pieces of the plans. Without such local drivers, - without local structures in place - these plans would probably go the usual way of various government "master plans" – nowhere.

Dangers of trans-boundary initiatives

Trans-boundary initiatives are the southern African version of eco-region-based conservation and various big programs are underway. Having seen CBNRM as a key ally for successful implementation of such programs, we also need to be alert to the danger trans-boundary approaches hold for CBNRM in general, and conservancies in particular in Namibia.

Apart from the obvious pitfalls of the current trend for some southern African trans-boundary projects to be externally driven by donors and large international NGOs, there is also a real risk that the large-scale approach could do real damage to CBNRM. There are several reasons for this risk.

African governments have shown themselves to be wary of decentralization of power and devolution of rights. Because eco-regional or trans-boundary programs require government-to-government agreements and interaction, they could be used by governments, uncomfortable with devolution, as a way to take back power from communities.

The same effect could happen inadvertently, and Namibian NGOs and conservancies have already experienced some of the risks in Caprivi Region where different organizations, working at different scales can easily mis-communicate and create competition and confusion. Trans-boundary and large-scale initiatives may push development processes too fast for the newly established conservancies which need time to develop capacity and roots. Another problem is that the support agencies that are co-ordinating at cross-boundary levels are not accountable to governments or communities – only to their donors. Thus trans-boundary projects can easily become driven by outside agendas.

The real risk is, of course, that of dis-empowering conservancies and thereby destroying the sense of local ownership which drives the conservancy program, leading to improvements in the resource base.

So on the one hand, we have one of the greatest conservation opportunities to date which could be harnessed by governments, private sector and NGOs, working with local communities across the landscape to actually implement holistic biodiversity and sustainable development goals; on the other hand we face a great threat to CBNRM.

More than 100 000 rural Namibians are involved in registered or emerging conservancies, and the Namibian Government has been a leader in Africa in CBNRM policy and practice. Although true partnerships – between government and communities, government and NGOs, communities and NGOs – are never easy, here too Namibia has set an example. Now, we need to build on these relationships and partnerships to turn small-scale conservation achievements in parts of Namibia and neighboring countries into large-scale, regional successes.

Direct benefits from Namibian CBNRM program

- Increasing wildlife numbers, including black rhino, desert-adapted elephant, giraffe, gemsbok, and springbok, where CBNRM has been practiced. The trends are dramatic, e.g. from a few thousand or less springbok, gemsbok and zebra in 1982 to more than 100 000, 27 000 and 14 000 respectively in Kunene Region in 2002.

- Communities across the country are clamoring for the return of game to their land. In 2002 wildlife worth nearly R3 million was translocated to start re-stocking such areas. Nineteen communities in Kunene Region alone have requested the return of wildlife.
- More than 8 million hectares of land in 11 of the country's 13 regions have been registered as or are developing as community-owned and managed conservancies. Four conservancies are already independent of start-up donor funding, and their income pays for management costs, as well as making a profit for their members.
- Communities themselves earned more than R11 million in 2002 from community-based conservation and tourism.
- More than 3 500 rural Namibians have fulltime or part-time employment in conservancies or community-based tourism enterprises, excluding those jobs in the tourism private sector.

Less tangible, social and qualitative benefits of Namibian CBNRM

- The generation of local vision for a better future.
- Local community recognition that human development depends on wise management of natural resources.
- The evolution of local conservation ethics, embedded in nascent, democratic local institutions.
- Community capacity built, new skills developed, attitude changes.
- The growing entrenchment of principles of accountability, transparency and equity within conservancies.
- The forging of strong partnerships.
- Teamwork between community members, between conservancies, between NGOs, between government and NGOs.
- The beginning of a more holistic natural resource management approach – beyond wildlife - by local users themselves.
- The linking of responsibilities and rights.
- Opportunity to link conservancies into a large-scale regional biodiversity and sustainable development network

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