

A new approach to landscape level management and smart partnerships Joint Management Agreement between Orupupa Conservancy and Conserve Global

Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) has adopted two approaches to augment Community-Based Natural Resource in Namibia. This includes adopting a landscape level management approach that increases effectiveness and efficiencies and initiating smart partnerships where IRDNC's own resources and capacities are inadequate in fulfilling conservancy support needs. Both these approaches are being piloted in Orupupa Conservancy.

Background

In 1996, Namibia passed legislation granting communal area residents the right to form conservancies. This legislation gives registered conservancies consumptive and non-consumptive use rights over wildlife and other natural resources, together with the responsibility to manage them sustainably.

Today there are 36 community-based conservancies in the northern Kunene region of Namibia – the Orupupa Conservancy being one of them. While the proliferation of conservancies in the Kunene Region is encouraging, IRDNC, the major supporter of these conservancies does not have sufficient capacity to effectively meet all these conservancies' needs; and hence, many conservancies, especially those in the Kunene Highlands receive limited tangible benefits from their commendable conservation efforts.

Against this background IRDNC is adopting a landscape approach to conservancy support. This involves amalgamating conservancies into clusters in accordance with shared challenges, opportunities and landscape characteristics that include bio-physical and demographic features. Considerable progress has been made over the past few years with the 'People's Park' (PP) initiative which involves the Ehi-rovipuka, Omatandeka and Anabeb and Sesfontein Conservancies in a coherent landscape unit that potentially forms a corridor with Etosha and Skeleton Coast National Parks. This initiative has been generously supported by the Oak foundation, Tusk Trust, Namibia Chamber of Environment and FNB Namibia.

At the same time IRDNC is also starting an initiative to develop a Highlands Elephant Tourism Development concept that identifies the tourism attractions and potential in this cluster of conservancies. Acknowledging its own limitations in optimising this potential, IRDNC has facilitated interest from Conserve Global (Conserve) for a partnership with Orupupa Conservancy.

Conserve Global

Conserve envisions an Africa where wilderness and its biodiversity is secured and recognised as a valuable public good and is on a mission to deliver effective conservation management of Africa's concessions and community conservancies that unlocks socio-economic value and equity for rural communities. Conserve secures mandates for vacant concessions or is subcontracted by community conservancies to deliver a conservation management service. The objective, in each case, is simply to safeguard project sites through effective management and to optimise economic potential and attendant benefits for people.

Conserve expressed interest to work with IRDNC as a conservation management service provider to community conservancies in the Kunene Highlands region, with Orupupa Conservancy as a proposed pilot site to demonstrate Conserve's value proposition, with the potential to expand to support other conservancies in the region. The aim is to work with communities in close collaboration with IRDNC to

provide management support and funding. Conserve's approach does not remove the conservancy's commitment or responsibility to own and manage their natural resources. Instead, by providing strategic support services Conserve hopes to build on and deepen the conservancy members' ownership and ability to benefit from their resources.

The decision to focus on Orupupa initially was informed by several attributes of this conservancy.

The Orupupa Conservancy

Orupupa Conservancy, founded in 2011, comprises an area of 1234 sq km and is characterised by several artesian springs that are shared in relative harmony by the Herero people living in scattered villages and the Highland Elephant. The conservancy has interesting features including a spectacular San rock art gorge (Otjorutatua), Ekoto Village, which is of great significance in recent Herero history and culture, and the Ekoto Cliff which forms a scenic backdrop to the village and is regarded as the highest single barrage cliff in the world.



Ekoto Tufa Cliff. Photo credit: Michael Wenborn

In addition to the Highland Elephant, the conservancy takes great pride in conserving other species including Mountain Zebra, Black-Faced Impala, Leopard, Black Eagles and large nesting colonies of Rosy Faced Love Birds associated with the tufa cliffs.

While the inhabitants of the conservancy have a proud conservation and cultural heritage, they are challenged by lack of employment and economic opportunities. Their livelihoods are based mainly on livestock farming (mainly goats) which in recent times has been threatened by drought, climate change and rangeland degradation. Due to the recent drought that resulted in a significant loss of their livestock, many have turned to vegetable farming to supplement their food requirements. This has resulted in increased conflict with elephants and disrupted the harmonious co-existence that prevailed in the past.

A recent scoping of tourism opportunities in the conservancy revealed high potential for tourism as a viable alternative livelihood opportunity, but the conservancy does not have the technical and funding capacity to unleash this potential.

Conserve Global Visit to Orupupa Conservancy

In April 2022, Conserve visited the Orupupa Conservancy with IRDNC. They met with the Ekoto Headman, other traditional authority leaders and the conservancy committee, and experienced the rugged and diverse landscape including Otjorutatua Rock Art Gorge, Ekoto Tufa Cliff and village and the Forgotten Valley.



Rock Art Etching. Photo credit: Peter Breunig

Discussions confirmed a strong meeting of minds and values and the visit culminated in an ‘in principle’ agreement that Conserve will provide a management service to the conservancy, that needs to be ratified through a democratic process including local community meetings and a Conservancy Special General Meeting planned in June 2022.

Conserve is committed to working with the Orupupa Conservancy and IRDNC to provide support and funding that will demonstrate the potential of a strong partnership that expands the range of innovative approaches to community conservation already tested and proven in Namibia.



Ekoto Headman Kapara Kapara (seated). Photo credit: Roger Collinson