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CONSERVING COMMUNITIES

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While many countries in Africa, such as Kenya, struggle with declining wildlife populations, Namibia's wildlife numbers are on the rise thanks to an innovative program called Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). Unlike many other African nations where government ministries control environmental protection, under CBNRM, Namibia puts local people in charge of managing wildlife. Because these local people benefit directly from the natural resources on their land, they view flora and fauna as valuable assets worth protecting. Thus, CBNRM offers a unique and innovative path to economic development while also promoting natural resource conservation.

WHAT IS CBNRM?

CBNRM IS AN environmental stewardship program. Under CBNRM, the government delegates the rights to control wildlife and other natural resources within a given area to self-organized local communities called conservancies. Conservancies have the legal right to manage and profit from wildlife and the right to benefit from tourism. Together, these rights create a powerful incentive for people to conserve natural resources.

Wildlife tourism and eco-tourism are increasingly lucrative segments of the tourism industry. The growth of this industry marries beneficial entrepreneurship with resource conservation.¹ Conservancy members protect wildlife precisely in order to enhance business opportunities: they benefit from having more animals on their land.² Tourism diversifies livelihoods by giving rural Namibians options beyond subsistence farming or herding. It promotes environmentally friendly behavior, strengthening the connection between local people and natural resources.³

For example, rural communities often struggle with animals that prey on their herds. In the past, the farmers would kill the predators, but now they seek ways to co-exist. Some

conservancies have developed self-insurance systems to pay for animals lost to predators.

Unlike the employees of a government agency, who do not benefit directly from environmental protection, the efforts of conservancy members do provide immediate benefits to their community. The income generated by tourism is used to support projects within the community, such as improving school facilities and supporting the elderly.⁴

CBNRM IN NAMIBIA

THE GOVERNMENT OF Namibia launched the CBNRM initiative ten years ago with three goals in mind: conserving wildlife and other renewable living resources on communal land, increasing economic development in communal areas, primarily through tourism, and strengthening local governance.⁵ The first communal conservancy, Torra, opened in 1997. Since then, more than 50 conservancies have been established. Incomes, as well as wildlife numbers, are increasing, natural environments are being improved and preserved, and poverty is being alleviated.

Since its independence in 1990, Namibia has been a relatively stable country with low levels of corruption. Namibia's political stability has been a large part of CBNRM's success as it allows for a consistent policy towards conservancies and wildlife protection. In contrast, Zimbabwe's instability and economic decline has destroyed its once successful CBNRM program, CAMPFIRE.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

SINCE IMPLEMENTING CBNRM, wildlife numbers in Namibia—particularly in the northwest and northeast—have increased quite substantially. From 1984 to 2000, the population of elephants more than doubled from approximately 5,000 to over 10,000.⁶ Populations of springbok, oryx, and mountain zebra have similarly increased.⁷

Conservation in Namibia differs in important ways from the more centralized approach taken in many other African nations. When local people lack rights to manage wildlife or ben-

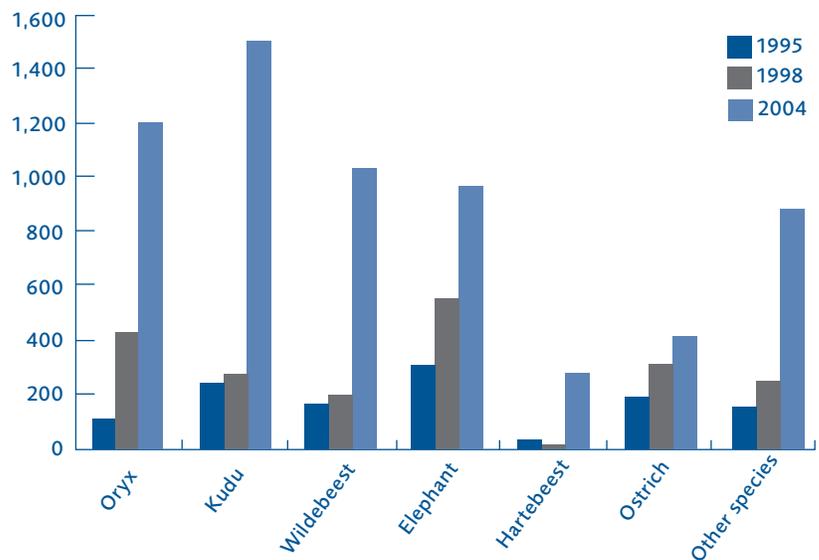


Photo: ifriendly/Creative Commons

efit directly from the use of wildlife, wildlife becomes either a burden or a target for poaching. When people lack rights over potentially destructive animals, such as leopard or elephants, the animals are seen as a real threat and they provide few, if any, benefits. CBNRM completely changes this equation. Even troublesome animals become valuable assets if they draw tourists.

For example, #Khoadi //Hoas is one of Namibia's largest conservancies. Home to 10,000 people it covers over 360,000

TABLE 1: WILDLIFE POPULATIONS ON CONSERVANCIES



Source: *Namibia's Communal Conservancies: a review of progress and challenges* (Windhoek: Namibia: NACSO, 2006).

hectares. The 2,000 members of the conservancy receive a variety of benefits, including compensation for damage done to crops, livestock, and buildings by elephants; small loans; renovated schools; support for pensioners; and elephant watering points that keep the animals away from farmers' precious water supplies and crops. Rather than driving elephants away, the people of #Khoadi //Hoas entice them with "safe" watering holes.

By decentralizing protection, CNBRM reduces the costs of protecting natural environments. The incentives CBNRM programs create on the local level reduce the need for large-scale government protection of wildlife,⁸ increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of environmental protection within a country.⁹

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

CATERING TO TOURISTS, conservancies host lodges, campsites, restaurants, and sell hunting concessions, often in partnership with private firms. These amenities create local jobs and training, and steady sources of income. Employment opportunities help alleviate rural poverty. Over its seven years, the project created nearly 6,000 jobs, 800 of them full-time.¹⁰

The skills and confidence gained by living and working on the conservancy are transferable to other jobs in other industries. Being a part of the conservancy makes the members better candidates for employment in other industries, where they could potentially earn a greater income.

Through conservancy work, local people increase and improve their ties to the wider world. Conservancy employees work

with representatives from NGOs, Namibian government agencies, private enterprises, as well as scholars and journalists interested in how the conservancies work. Regular contact with these people from the outside world builds conservancy members' negotiating skills, gives them new ideas and useful information, and earns them respect and some prestige from outside groups.¹¹

Conservancy members also build expertise by managing their conservancies. Identifying and registering members and engaging these members in conservancy activities, helps conservancy members develop stronger ties within the conservancy community and expands their social networks.

THE RETURN OF THE RHINO

Bob Guibeb, a member of the #Khoadi //Hoas conservancy feels that conservancy control over the wildlife dramatically impacts the environment.

Wildlife numbers are really increasing. I see increases in every species. When we started, there was no wildlife. The animals were owned by the Ministry, so people poached them. Everyone was poaching. What ownership means is you have to take care of it.¹²

Bob's comments echo those of Damaraland Camp manager Lena Florry:

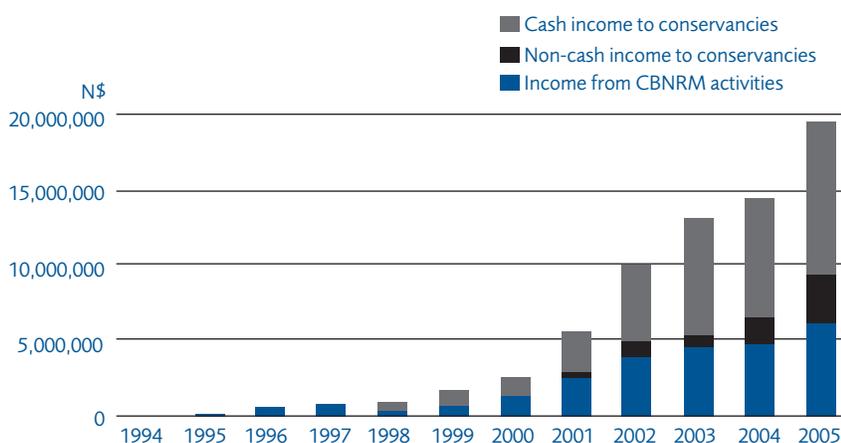
People come here to see the desert elephants, the magnificent scenery and wildlife, the black rhino, and the local people.... We have stopped poaching because people value wildlife and see what tourism can do.¹³

BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

DESPITE THE SUCCESSES of Namibia's CBNRM project in protecting the environment and increasing the standard of living of the rural poor, there is still room for improvement. Certain changes could better align incentives, leading to even greater environmental protection and further increases in prosperity.

The Namibian government owns much of the land in Namibia, including the land the conservancies occupy. This legal structure creates uncertainty over the responsibility for dealing with intruders and the use of land.¹⁴ As this uncertainty disrupts the incentives that reward conservancy members for protecting wildlife, Namibia needs a clearer hierarchy of decision-making authority. In addition, the government should consider the creation of conservancy titles to give conservancies greater authority to exclude potentially harmful intruders.

TABLE 2: CONSERVANCIES' INCOME



Source: *Namibia's Communal Conservancies: a review of progress and challenges* (Windhoek: Namibia: NACSO, 2006).



There are other problems within the conservancy communities that slow development and growth. Conservancy members need continued support to develop skills, especially those related to financial management, bookkeeping, improving communications capabilities, and business development.¹⁵ NGOs have provided essential financial and technical support. Conservancies strive for self-sufficiency, and short-term assistance may aid in long-term independence.

CONCLUSION

IN JUST OVER a decade, CBNRM in Namibia has scored big gains: local people are preserving wildlife and the environment, the prosperity of rural communities is increasing and local people are developing governance institutions. CBNRM gives conservancy members incentives to protect the environment, leading to the return of animals like the black rhino. As this innovative program promotes rural economic development by increasing incomes and alleviating poverty and gives previously disenfranchised rural people opportunities to self-govern, Namibia's CBNRM program points the way towards a better future.

ENDNOTES

1. World Travel & Tourism Council (2006: 21). The study states that the travel and tourism industry directly generates 3.7 percent of Namibia's total gross domestic product and accounts for 4.7 percent of total employment.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 478, 482.
4. Terry L. Anderson & J. Bishop Grewell, "From Local to Global Property: Privatizing the Global Environment? Property Rights Solutions for the Global Commons: Bottom-Up or Top-Down?" *10 Duke Environmental Law and Policy Forum* (1999): 8.
5. Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Programme Details, <http://www.met.gov.na/programmes/cbnrm/cbnrmHome.htm> (last visited July 18th, 2007); The NGO Integrated Resource Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) played a key role in the promoting CBNRM in Namibia. See Brian Jones, "The Evolution of a Community-based Approach to Wildlife Management at Kunene, Namibia" in *Africa Wildlife & Livelihoods*, David Hulme & Marshall Murphree, eds. (2001) 160.
6. Joseph R. Berger, "The African Elephant, Human Economies, and Inter-

national Law: Bridging a Great Rift for East and Southern Africa," *Georgetown International Environmental Law Review* 13 (2001): 436.

7. Namibian Association of CBNRM Associations, *Namibia's Communal Conservancies: A Review of Progress and Challenge*, 23 (2004).
8. Anderson and Grewell, "From Local to Global Property," 78.
9. Sean T. McAllister, "Community-Based Conservation: Restructuring Institutions to Involve Local Communities in a Meaningful Way", *Colorado Journal International Environmental Law and Policy* 10 (1999): 220-221,
10. WWF Life Plus Semi-Annual Report, April 2007.
11. Caroline Ashley, "The Impact of Tourism on Rural Livelihoods: Namibia's Experience" (working paper, Overseas Development, 2000), <http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/wp128.pdf>.
12. Interview with Mr. Bob Guibeb, administrative head, #Khoadi //Hoas Conservancy, May 5, 2006, Palmwag, Namibia.
13. Jan Vertefeuille and Joanna Ben, "Conservancy movement takes off in Namibia," *Eco tourism, peopleandplanet.net*, October 11, 2005, <http://www.peopleandplanet.net/doc.php?id=2557>.
14. McAllister, "Community-Based Conservation," 217.
15. Interview with Benny Roman, Committee Member, Torra Conservancy, Bergsig, Namibia. (May 4, 2006); Interview with Bob Guibeb, administrative head, #Khoadi //Hoas Conservancy, May 5, 2006, Palmwag, Namibia.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION READ COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NAMIBIA: A CASE STUDY, NUMBER 10 IN THE MERCATUS POLICY SERIES, [HTTP://WWW.MERCATUS.ORG/CBNRM](http://www.mercatus.org/cbnrm)

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