Common-property rangelands management in Namibia: the 'conservancy' model in communal areas

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Introduction

One of Africa's comparative advantages is its large number of charismatic megafauna, centred on semi-arid and dry sub-humid rangelands. The presence of such wildlife, sought after by the tourists and hunters of the developed world, presents opportunities for rural Africans to diversify their economic activities, therefore providing greater resilience in drought prone environments (Ashley 1995; Ashley & Barnes 1996). However, in Namibia, as elsewhere in Africa, until relatively recently, rural Africans were denied access to wildlife as a significant resource (e.g. Jones 1996). New policy and legislation has reversed this situation, adding wildlife and tourism to the livelihood strategies of rural people. The model that has developed based on the development of common property resource management institutions called 'conservancies' provides appropriate incentives and institutional mechanisms for residents of communal land to manage their land and resources more sustainably (Ministry of Environment and Tourism 1995a,b; undated).

Namibia is the most arid land south of the Sahara with highly variable and erratic rainfall both spatially and temporally. About 13.5% of Namibia (total area of 823 144 km²) consists of protected areas, 44% is freehold farmland and 41% supports 70% of the population of 1.6 million on communal land (Brown 1992; Barnard 1998). A century of colonialism resulted in the centralisation of the control of wildlife as a resource in the hands of the State and the imposition of unjust and restrictive laws concerning the use of wildlife. Rural people became alienated from wildlife, conflicts arose between communities and conservation authorities, and the once abundant wildlife populations declined dramatically (Jacobsohn 1991/2; Jones 1995; Owen-Smith 1996). Communal land residents suffered the costs of damage to crops and water installations by elephants, livestock losses to predators and loss of land to State-run protected areas, yet had no control over the animals causing these costs and received little benefit from them (e.g. Jacobsohn 1996; Richardson 1998).

New common-property model

Post-independence policies explored ways of restoring rights as well as conservation incentives to rural communities over wildlife and tourism through a Community-based Natural Resource Management program. The program was initiated through a series of 'socio-ecological surveys' involving participatory rural appraisal and concurrent rapid ecological assessment by multi-disciplinary teams (Jones 1993; Brown & Jones 1994). The surveys resulted in a number of local projects in different parts of the country. Close institutional co-operation has been achieved between the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, responsible primarily for the development of the policy and legislative framework, field-based non-government organizations who provide support and capacity building to local communities, and local people, who are taking on the responsibility for sustainable management of their natural resources (Jones 1996). Funding and technical assistance has been accessed from donors and international conservation agencies.

The development of local projects and the reform of policy and legislation in tandem as part of a coherent national Community-based Natural Resource Management program was a particular strength of the Namibian approach. The community projects that resulted from the socio-ecological surveys acted as pilots, helping to develop and test methods of community mobilization and organization, benefit distribution plans, and modes of partnership between different actors. The experiences of these projects helped feed back into the development of policy and legislation which was taking place in parallel at the national level. The development of policy, legislation and practice was therefore grounded in experiences at grass roots level and was not the product of theorists and planners removed from practical implementation issues, or imposed by donors or international conservation agencies (Jones 1997, 1998).

The conservancy model

The new policy and legislative framework allows for self-selecting groups of people (social units) within a defined area (resource management units) to establish registered and gazetted conservancies which then have exclusive use of the wildlife (conditional upon sustainable use) and commercial tourism. A conservancy must have a recognised and undisputed boundary, a list of registered members, be legally constituted, have a management committee accepted by the membership and a plan for the equitable distribution of benefits (Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia 1996, no.1333 and no. 1446). No one may be excluded from membership on the grounds of race or ethnicity or sex. The approach promotes linkages and collaboration with traditional authorities, which gives credibility to the emerging conservancy committees. To date four communal area conservancies have been gazetted, covering an area of about 1.7 million ha. The area under communal conservancies is expected to double by mid-1999.

Benefits earned by conservancies and emerging conservancies

Although conservancies are just beginning to operate and conclude contracts with hunting and photographic safari operators, a number of benefits have already accrued to participating communities. For example, the recently gazetted Tora Conservancy in Kunene Region, two years ago concluded an agreement with a photographic safari company for the development of an up market tourist lodge on its land. As part of a profit-sharing arrangement, over the past year the conservancy has received benefits of more than N$280 000 (US$46 000) from the lodge development, in community income and salaries. The conservancy committee is involved in overall policy-making for the lodge and local people receive preferential employment opportunities. Significantly, local people are trained not only for menial jobs but also for management activities.

The Nyae Nyae community (a group of mostly San people) in the Kalahari in north-eastern Namibia, was able to conclude a trophy hunting agreement over two years very soon after its registration as a conservancy in late 1997.

Other financial benefits to communities have included the wages to community game guards, and women resource monitors. In 1993, the hunting of surplus game in Kunene Region by several communities provided meat worth several thousand dollars US, while in 1998, 600 women in Caprivi earned over N$390 000 (US$65 000) from the sale of thatching grass.
Although cash earnings per household from Community-based Natural Resource Management activities at this stage are still relatively small, they make a big difference to cash-starved communities where there are few wage earning opportunities.

Namibia's experience in Community-based Natural Resource Management contrasts with other southern African countries which have focused almost exclusively on financial returns. The non-financial benefits of Community-based Natural Resource Management and conservancy development are less tangible, harder to measure, but from the perspectives of social development and ecosystem sustainability, can far exceed financial benefits in significance (Ashley 1998). Five kinds of non-financial benefits have been identified: (i) capacity building and empowerment, (ii) more secure livelihoods, (iii) cultural and aesthetic values of wildlife and local traditions, (iv) enhanced natural resource base, and (v) political, social, economic and environmental benefits at the national level.

Jones (1998) identifies three distinct phases to the Community-based Natural Resource Management program:

1. 1980-1992, from poachers to gamekeepers. Communities develop responsibility for wildlife through the community game guard programme and other local initiatives. The benefits are mainly social empowerment and enhanced cultural values of wildlife.

2. 1992-1997, from gamekeepers to proprietors. Communities prepare for conservancy formation and start enterprises. The first financial and livelihood benefits emerged, helping to sustain commitment, while social benefits from capacity building continue to grow.

3. 1998 onwards, self-sustaining community institutions. Once conservancies are operational and actively managing their natural resources, they start to form partnerships, all five types of benefits will be enhanced, and conservancies are poised to become “sustainable common-property enterprise units”.

Constraints to overcome in the conservancy program

Although the Namibian Community-based Natural Resource Management program is making remarkable progress, a number of constraints can be identified. To achieve the social cohesion and common vision required to implement common-property resource management (and to meet the conditions set out in the legislation), communities need to spend a large amount of time in meetings, which has opportunity costs for other activities individuals might consider important. The length of time it took to effect policy and legislative reform from the time when this was first discussed with pilot communities led to individuals losing faith that change would really occur. At one stage this threatened to undermine the momentum of conservancy formation in some areas. With four conservancies gazetted, running effectively and generating significant financial and other benefits, the momentum is now greater than ever.

There are also some inherent problems in the flexibility of the policy and legislative framework. For example, communities must define themselves, and agree upon boundaries with neighbours. This often exacerbates existing conflict over land and resources and causes delays in conservancy formation. One group of people isolated geographically from the rest of the community, have decided to form their own conservancy, despite being linked to the bigger community through a number of factors including traditional leadership. This process of conservancies expanding and shrinking can be expected to continue as communities over time find the appropriate social scale at which community organisation is desirable and practical and the ecological scale at which resource management is both necessary and practical.

The conservancy policy is flexible in its approach to how communities should use their income, leaving it to the community to decide whether wildlife and tourism income should be used for community projects or as dividends to individual households. The only requirement of the legislation is that communities should have a plan for the equitable distribution of income. The element of choice is an important aspect of empowerment and control over a community's own affairs. However, there is the risk that households and individuals will not perceive a direct link between the income and their input into managing the resource, if the income is put into community projects or a bank account. There is also the danger that income will be used for infrastructure type projects which are really the province of government, letting government shirk its responsibilities.

Another constraint is the limited technical capacity with the country to implement conservancies as a national endeavour. The government sector is presently unable to provide the necessary support to communities in natural resource monitoring and evaluating, and is slow to reach decisions on wildlife utilization. Non-governmental organizations which support conservancy development are few and over-extended, and have little experience in the enterprise development aspects which are rising to prominence in the program.

Namibia lacks an appropriate rangeland management policy, and grazing for domestic stock in communal areas takes place mainly within open access management systems. There is increasing tension between small-scale subsistence livestock farmers and larger commercial livestock farmers in communal areas, with the latter fencing off large parts of the communal rangelands for their exclusive use, but often using the open rangelands in the early part of the season and retreating to their fenced areas as rangeland condition deteriorates. This is a reflection of the fact that the policy and legislative framework provide communities with rights over some resources (wildlife and tourism) but not others (e.g. grazing, water and savanna or woodland products), and not land rights. Secure and exclusive group land tenure is crucial for sustainable land and resource management on communal land. A new land policy for Namibia provides for legally constituted bodies and institutions to gain long-term leases over land. This will enable conservancies to become land holders.

Conservancies and the future

Despite the problems and constraints of conservancy formation, rural communities are also beginning to see the potential that rights over wildlife and tourism bring for enabling them to manage their resources in a more integrated way. They can now legally control wildlife numbers on their land and balance numbers with their livestock. All four conservancies have started land-use planning and land zonation, with areas designated primarily for wildlife and tourism, others for mixed wildlife and livestock, for residential and livestock, etc. These proactive management activities significantly reduce competition and conflict over scarce resources and, when supported by the broader community, provide the framework for holistic and integrated resource management initiatives. The conservancy provides a new institutional mechanism for such integrated management.
management. Both the forestry and water sectors are devolv-
ing authority to community committees based on the conserv-
ancy model. There is the possibility for conservancy commit-
tees to acquire rights over forest and water resources, and where
resources need management and planning at a smaller scale to
conservancies, relationships can be developed between the
conservancies and these other management institutions. Ex-
clusive land rights will, in one step, allow communities organ-
ised into conservancies to exercise control over all their natu-
ral resources, including grazing lands, and thereby become fully
functional and sustainable community-based common-property
enterprise units.

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Pastoral-nomadism in Tibet: between tradition and modernization

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Introduction
Tibet is clouded in mystery as perhaps no other land in the
world. The mystification of a country can be harmful to progress
and development. This has affected the majority of Tibetans
who survive on a simple form of farming and pastoral-nomad-
ism. This paper discusses some findings from a survey of pas-
toral-nomadism on the Tibetan Plateau, conducted in 1993–
94. The main interest here is to examine the response of an
agricultural system when policies which are a product of
pastoral-nomadism on the Tibetan Plateau, conducted in 1993–
94. The main interest here is to examine the response of an
agricultural system when policies which are a product of a par-
ticular ideology are applied to a region with a unique physical
and cultural environment (Karen 1976; Tsundue 1998).
The Tibetan Plateau is classified as arid and semi-arid cold
desert. The northern area consists of sparse alpine meadows
(Kobresia pygmaea), influenced by a climate with short

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