



Chapter 3

Contextualising CBNRM in Namibia

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Introduction

The discussion in this chapter focuses on providing an understanding of the origins and wider contexts of CBNRM in the wildlife and tourism sectors. It begins with a short discussion of some of the conceptual foundations of CBNRM. Then it provides a narrative account of the evolution of CBNRM based on original research, interviews with key stakeholders and secondary sources. The discussion of the evolution of CBNRM is complemented by an understanding of the development of policies and legislation to support wildlife management, utilisation and tourism in communal areas. The discussion then explores CBNRM in the broader context of rural development in Namibia and briefly considers development and conservation in a wider global sense. This provides a foundation for understanding the current focus of CBNRM and locates it in the context of post-Independence change and increasing concerns for addressing national development objectives. The WILD Project was conceived in this context and aimed to provide information based on household-level research to address better the links between rural livelihoods and the new development opportunities provided through improved natural resource management and use. Chapter 4 picks up the discussion and explores issues associated with the implementation of CBNRM and how current priorities and organisational arrangements affect outcomes in terms of support for improved livelihoods.

CBNRM in Namibia is really more of a movement than a project or programme, and one that is seen by some as a leading model in the country for a more integrated and holistic approach to rural development (Jones *et al.* 2001). Some see it as a means to achieve conservation, providing benefits and incentives for local community participation. Others see it as a development strategy in its own right: a means of achieving the aim of diversifying the rural economy through sustainable natural resource utilisation. At the local-level, CBNRM relates to improving NRM through the development of the required institutions, and to utilising

natural resources (wildlife and other resources) sustainably to provide benefits, thus supporting local livelihoods. CBNRM is also associated with managing and distributing tourism revenues generated as a result of improvements in resource management (i.e. increased wildlife populations draw more tourists). Furthermore, CBNRM aims to integrate new land-use options with existing livelihood strategies in order to conserve wildlife and improve the welfare of rural people. The key elements of these approaches and focal points can be summarised as being associated with institutional development (and associated empowerment and capacity building), NRM, and enterprise development (principally associated with tourism). These three ‘pillars’ underpin the current manifestation of a national CBNRM programme (see Chapter 4).

Conceptual Foundations

CBNRM in Namibia (as in other parts of southern Africa) rests on the central hypothesis that if a resource is valuable and landholders have the exclusive rights to use, benefit from and manage the resource, then sustainable use is likely to ensue. The benefits from management must exceed the perceived costs and must be secure over time (Steiner and Rihoy 1995).

There are three main conceptual foundations to this hypothesis. One is based on the notion of *economic incentives*. The assumption is that the most critical decisions regarding the allocation of land, resources and management investments are based primarily on economics rather than conservation considerations (Jones and Murphree 2001). It is therefore necessary to give a resource such as wildlife a focused value that can be realised by the landholder. The landholder will be unlikely to invest time, effort and finances into managing a resource if the benefits do not exceed the costs. This perspective suggests that it is an economic rationale that underpins the various ways in which wildlife is used and managed. Benefits, however, need not only be financial, but might include a range of ‘intangible’ benefits.



Examples of these include: the cultural value and role of wildlife in terms of people's historical connections and sense of identities as these are associated with their land and ancestors; the value of hunting wildlife in terms of social status and power for some groups; and the food security values of wildlife as a safety net. Here the critical issue relates to the various ways in which the resources are valued by different groups of stakeholders. The economic and financial values of wildlife have, however, assumed an increasingly important position in terms of the development of CBNRM.¹

Another of the conceptual foundations is the concept of *devolutionism*. In all southern African countries, authority over wildlife was in the past centralised by the state. In order to create positive conditions for landholders to manage wildlife sustainably, the ability to take crucial management decisions needed to be devolved² from the state to the landholders or occupiers.

The third conceptual foundation of CBNRM is that of *collective proprietorship*. Murphree (1994) defines proprietorship as "sanctioned use rights, including the right to determine the mode and extent of management and use, rights of access and inclusion, and the right to benefit fully from use and management". This implies a form of tenure. Secure tenure is important for resource users to be confident that they can invest time and effort in management and reap the benefits. 'Collective proprietorship' is the situation whereby a group of people are jointly given sanctioned use rights over land or resources, which they are then able to manage according to their own rules and strategies. The issue of proprietorship is centrally concerned with the notion of rights. In Namibia, and particularly in the context of redressing the inequities of apartheid, addressing proprietorship (and devolution) provides a foundation around which CBNRM addresses shifting rights over the management and use of wildlife from the state to rural communities. CBNRM has therefore been based largely on the concept of a communal property regime, i.e. where a defined group of people collectively manages and uses the common property resources within a defined jurisdiction (Jones and Murphree 2001). This further implies the development of some form of local institutional arrangement that governs decision-making, but one that is sanctioned by the state therefore giving a degree of legal proprietorship to communities.

Despite the importance of the conceptual underpinnings of CBNRM, much of the early development of CBNRM

focused on managing practical problems associated with the huge losses of wildlife and concerns by local people to take back control over managing their resources. As CBNRM gained momentum in Namibia, the conceptual thinking that was developed in the 1980s and 1990s (within the region and further a field) relating to common property resource management merged with the practical activities of people working in the field. The combination of practical experience, pragmatism and solid conceptual foundations led to a more coherent rationale for CBNRM and paved the way for a more comprehensive national programme. The next section of this chapter focuses on a description of the evolution of CBNRM in Namibia.

The Origins of CBNRM in Namibia

Administrative divides and divisions

Historically there was a sharp administrative divide between the protected areas, freehold farmlands and the communal areas in Namibia. This divide was by no means confined to the issue of wildlife protection and management, but importantly related to the provision of services by the colonial government. From the 1920s, until shortly before Independence in 1990, the territory of what is now Namibia (then South West Africa (SWA)) was administered by the South West African Administration (SWAA). Protected areas and privately owned farm lands were dealt with by the SWAA, Windhoek. Matters relating to the black African populations were dealt with from Pretoria through the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (DBAD). This divide in terms of administration had implications for both wildlife management and conservation, and for socio-economic development within the communal areas of Namibia. Two key factors that contributed to differences in terms of both socio-economic development and the conservation status of wildlife between communal areas and freehold farmlands designated for whites were the legislation associated with wildlife management and the forced resettlement of black populations to so-called 'homelands' under the apartheid system.

Conservation and resettlement

Between 1947 and 1976, the focus of conservation was on managing protected areas, game reserves and dealing with wildlife on commercial farms. Communal areas remained distanced from wildlife regulatory and law enforcement policies of the SWAA until 1975. During the pre-Independence period, various administrative and regulatory initiatives were made to deal with the management of wildlife (Aribeb no date), but of particular note was the

¹ This was highlighted in Chapter 1, which provided the latest data on the current financial value of wildlife in terms of collective and individual incomes from wildlife utilisation and tourism within the conservancies.

² Devolution in this context is viewed as the surrender by the state of elements of authority and responsibility to units with non-state constituencies. Decentralisation is viewed as a structural dispersal of state control to sub-units of the state apparatus in a bureaucratic hierarchy (following Jones and Murphree 2001).



decision to implement the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1967, which gave commercial farmers ownership rights over certain game species. This ordinance was designed following the publication of a report by the Frank Commission (1965). The basic recommendation of the Frank Commission was that unless game on private farms acquired a commercial value to farmers, they would undoubtedly hunt it to extinction. The game, after all, competed with livestock for basic resources (water and grazing) and predators posed a threat to stock. The legislation recognised, for the first time, a distinction between huntable game and bird species, in contrast to protected and specially protected species (Aribeb no date). Regulations were introduced that allowed farmers to utilise game in a controlled manner. This enabled farmers to hunt, sell, capture and relocate wildlife according to their own economic interests.

The effects of this legislative change led to a massive increase in the numbers of wildlife on freehold farms. Between 1972 and 1992, for example, there was an 80% increase in combined wildlife numbers on freehold land (Barnes and de Jager 1996). This trend contrasted sharply with the continuing decline in wildlife numbers in communal areas (with some notable exceptions). For example, declines were acute in the former Ovamboland (now the north-central region), and parts of Otjozondjupa. There was a similar pattern of decline in other communal areas of Namibia. In the north-west, Kunene Region (former Kaokoland and Damaraland), for example, there was a dramatic decline in wildlife numbers, particularly desert-dwelling elephant and the black rhino. There were a number of contributing factors that led to the declines of wildlife populations in communal areas. These included increases and relocations in the human and domestic stock populations of these areas, the accompanying loss of habitat, the lack of appropriate legislation promoting local-level management and utilisation, heavy poaching, periods of drought, and in the north-west and north-east, the presence of the SADF.

A few years before the Frank Commission gave its recommendations for legislative change in the freehold farms, the Odendaal Commission (1964) provided the impetus for the South African Government to relocate African populations to 'homelands' in outlying areas formerly leased or owned by commercial farmers. In many cases these were forced relocations, involving the resettlement of people on the basis of ethnic origin. In the north-west of Namibia, these resettlements affected what are now the southern Kunene and Erongo Regions (formerly Damaraland). The human population densities of these areas

increased dramatically (although overall densities remained low), with many families being resettled on what would have been single-family occupancy white-owned farms. In addition to the existing infrastructure (fences, boreholes and roads), the Government provided additional boreholes, and veterinary services, which led to an increase in the number of domestic stock that were being reared in these areas. This put additional pressures on wildlife populations (Vaughan *et al.* 2003c). It is important to recall that during the last 30 years of colonial rule, the black populations were subject to the policies of apartheid. Apartheid seriously disadvantaged the black populations in terms of their access to markets, to education, to basic political and democratic rights and to legal opportunities to benefit from the wildlife in their areas.³ In the context of conservation, the fact that white freehold farmers enjoyed the protection of legislation that enabled them to gain substantially not only from the commercial exploitation of wildlife on their lands, but also through their livestock and other forms of agriculture, was simply an extension of the discrimination found in other sectors.

One of the most fundamental results of colonial policies is the existence of a dual land-tenure system comprising the freehold land and state-owned land. At Independence the freehold sector (almost exclusively white) comprised 43% of land, communal areas (state-owned) 41% and conservation areas and other state land 15%. Close to a million people lived on communal land, while a few thousand people owned freehold land. In many instances the land allocated to black tribal groups was amongst the least suitable for growing crops and livestock farming, constituting large parts of the arid north-west and of the Kalahari sandveld in the east and north-east. Freehold title enables owners to use their land as security for raising finance for improvements and provides the necessary security of tenure to promote investment and improvement. Residents of communal land have usufruct rights over the land and resources. Although traditional authorities allocate land for various purposes, the State has ultimate control over who uses the land and how the land is used.

In summary, until Independence successive administrative decisions by the South African Government paid little or no attention to the conservation of wildlife in communal areas, nor did the administration implement measures to improve the welfare of black populations in the same way as they had for white freehold farmers. A dual tenure system entrenched white ownership of land, but left black communal area residents with tenure insecurity. It is against this historical backdrop that the developments leading to a CBNRM programme in Namibia must be examined.

³ Communal area residents enjoyed hunting, but this was illegal and condemned as poaching. People shot for food as well as for commercial purposes (Vaughan *et al.* 2003d).



Community involvement in wildlife management

In this section the discussion focuses on the Kunene Region of north-west Namibia, the decline in wildlife populations and subsequent efforts to protect wildlife in the communal areas of the region. It is in the north-west that the foundations for the development of CBNRM were laid.

In 1970, following the Odendaal plan, Damara peoples were moved to former freehold farms in the newly formed 'homeland' of Damaraland, now southern Kunene. Northern Kunene was proclaimed as Kaokoland and reserved for people of Herero and Himba ethnicity. In Damaraland the farms where people were settled were previously fenced off for livestock. They normally consisted of a single substantial farmhouse with a number of satellite cattle posts, each of which was serviced with a borehole or other water source. It was reported that during this period there was plenty of wildlife (Vaughan *et al.* 2003c). During the 1970s the populations of people increased, as did stock numbers. These increases led to pressure on wildlife: much of it was effectively pushed into the areas considered marginal for stock keeping. During this period a number of schools were also built, and the road network improved (particularly in southern Kunene (former Damaraland)). By 1973 the veterinary fence (aimed at halting the spread of livestock diseases) or 'red line' was under development, but not complete. This had the effect of limiting the movements of game during particular periods of the year.⁴

During this period local people did hunt for subsistence and for limited sale, but there were few firearms and ammunition was not readily available, so local people rarely hunted with guns. Despite this, wildlife use was an important part of people's culture, providing food, incomes, status and ritual and medicinal items. The traditional leaders during that period had sufficient respect and power to at least control to a limited extent local hunting (Ben Beytell pers. comm.). In some areas there were also informal rules associated with controlling hunting – "you would have to consume completely the animal before being given permission to hunt another" (Vaughan *et al.* 2003c). Authority over nature conservation, however, remained in the hands of the nationally elected central Government, and as such the traditional authorities had no power to control hunting by outsiders. Hunting of wildlife was, however, common practice among Government officials and other influential people who could obtain permits from the SWAA (Owen-Smith 2002). In addition, people from communal areas to the north (formerly Ovamboland) and the freehold farmers would hunt illegally. This system of hunting (legal and illegal) would have had an impact on wildlife numbers but it was not until the Angolan war in the mid 1970s that events

conspired to have a huge impact on wildlife, particularly for commercially valuable species such as elephant, black rhino and zebra (Gibson 2001).

In the mid 1970s Portuguese and others from the newly independent Angola are reported to have increasingly hunted in the north-west (Vaughan *et al.* 2003d). When SWAPO started guerrilla incursions into northern Namibia from Angola and the SADF moved into the north-west, poaching intensified and there was huge pressure put on species such as Hartmanns zebra, elephant and black rhino – particularly sought after for their skins, ivory and horn respectively. During this period firearms (notably .303s) were being brought into the area both by Angolans (who were willing to purchase skins and ivory) and the SADF for defence purposes. These firearms were acquired by local residents.⁵ The situation became so acute that it is reported that by the early 1980s as many as 120 elephant carcasses, of which about 85% showed clear signs of having been shot, or the tusks removed by power saw or axe, were recorded by one researcher (Owen-Smith 2002). By 1982, less than 70 elephants survived throughout the western areas of Kunene (from an estimated 300 in 1970 (Viljoen 1982)). To compound the situation further there were two serious droughts during the early 1980s. This led to huge reductions in the number of livestock and plains game in the north-west. It has been reported that livestock numbers crashed from an estimated 160,000 to approximately 15,000 (Gibson 2001). This would have put additional pressure on wildlife as people resorted to hunting for survival.

Conservation during the early 1970s (c.f. Ordinance of 1975) was still in the hands of the DBAD in Pretoria. Between 1978 and 1981, however, changes began to take place. Among these was the SWA elections, which brought many aspects of administration directly into the hands of professionals who were based in Namibia. There was also during this period a change over in personnel in the SWA Government. At this stage, however, there were still no black game rangers in the Directorate of Nature Conservation and Recreational Resorts, and it remained difficult for white nature conservation personnel to work in the north-west. By 1981, responsibility for nature conservation in all the 'homelands' was finally transferred from Pretoria to the Directorate of Nature Conservation in Windhoek (Owen-Smith 2002). Also in 1981 Chris Eyre, a full-time senior Nature Conservation officer was stationed at Khorixas. This led to the appointment of the first black game rangers (among them Nahor Howaseb) and to the distribution of a skeleton staff (comprising by 1983 only six full-time staff, including a ranger station at Sesfontein) to cover the whole of Kaokoland and Damaraland (*ibid.*)

⁴ The veterinary fence is largely a legacy dating back to 1919, when the South African authorities proclaimed certain areas within a so-called Police Zone. Mendelsohn *et al.* (2002), in the *Atlas of Namibia*, point out the following: "The Zone also served to contain the mobility of both people and animals, as well as the spread of cattle diseases from northern Namibia to the central and southern parts of the country."

⁵ These rifles can still be found in limited numbers among people in the far north-west (W/E workshop 2003).