

**Is Custodianship of Wildlife Resources in the Commons the  
only way forward?**

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## Acronyms

**ADMADE**

**CAMPFIRE**

**CBNRM** Community Based Natural Resource Management

**CBO** Community Based Organisation

**GDP** Gross Domestic Product

**IUCN** World Conservation Union

**NDP** National Development Plan

**NGO** Non-Governmental Organisation

**NRBCT** Natural Resource Based Community Tourism

**NRMP** Natural Resource Management Programme

**OUZIT** Ockavango Upper Zambezi Tourism Initiative

**TBNRM** Transboundary Natural Resource Management

**SADC** Southern African Development Community

**SNV** Netherlands Development

**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme

**USAID** United States Agency for International Development

**WFHB** Women's Finance House, Botswana

**WMA** Wildlife Management Area

**WTO** World Tourism Organisation

**WTTC** World Travel and Tourism Council

**WWF** World Wildlife Fund

## **Executive Summary**

Communities in Southern Africa's communal lands have become 'custodians' of their natural resources. Post-colonial governments have ensured local community participation in 'conservation of biological resources' and themes of property rights, sustainable use, resources values and the equitable distribution of conservation costs and benefits.

Governments and institutions have incorporated global sustainable natural resource management strategies and tourism related action plans as wise-use models to address economic, political, cultural and ecological concerns in the commons. SADC have endorsed this rhetoric as an appropriate approach to demonstrate that sustainable use and management of wildlife (resources, flora and fauna) is a viable economic alternative for communities now farming marginal land; increase local employment and income generating opportunities from community-managed natural resources; as well as expand the role of women in the decision making processes in local economies. There is as yet however, little evidence of 'real' tangible opportunities and benefits to expand community participation outside of the 'wildlife' resource management framework.

The realities of rural community integration fall short of policy and planning rhetoric caused by the lack of harmony in legal institutional frameworks, land tenure issues, access and accessibility to resources, benefit sharing, conflict resolution, partnerships and enterprise development. Is this because communities do not own the commons?

Challenging the interpretation of 'custodianship' in the commons of Southern Africa highlights global development strategies and action plans as inappropriate for community's needs. In conclusion the paper identifies the failure to even consider the profound changes necessary to work towards a true 'sustainable' society although alternatives are suggested. Management strategies have in fact intensifying the maldistribution of resources, inequalities in political representation and power, and the growth of a consumptive-led society in the commons.

## **1 Introduction**

Communities in Southern Africa's communal lands have become 'custodians' of their natural resources. Underpinned by policy that has emerged from post-colonial governments within the region, communities have sought to form legal conservancies; community based organisations or common property regimes with management control over the resources with a view of socio-economic upliftment through integrated 'sustainable' conservation of biological resources, or more commonly, natural resource management strategies and action plans.

Perceived by those involved in reform and sustainable natural resource management to be the most appropriate long-term sustainable process for securing property rights, sustainable use, resource utilisation and equitable distributions, the reality nevertheless is far removed from rhetoric, as communities are encouraged by government and institutions to enter into partnerships with the private sector in the name of development and poverty alleviation.

In fact recent categorisation of land tenure in the region indicate that communities fall within either two paradigms - private or public ownership. According to Rihoy (1998) the two categories have become problematic, in that they seek to clarify between the type of property rights and type of ownership over that property. The state nevertheless still owns the land or the resource on the land, but communities or the private sector have the right of access and utilisation to co-manage. The question that needs to be asked therefore, is this the accepted way forward for the commons? In having only two property groups, have communities been absorbed into the private sector as they relate to sustainable natural resource management, without the opportunity to 'formally' own land in its entirety? Is this not a duplicate of previously held colonial authoritarian decision making policy that neglects to understand that traditional communities have in fact been using 'responsible' and sustainable techniques and regulations for decades. According to Rihoy (1995) traditional indigenous customary systems have however continued to evolve and maintain existing subsistence methods, irrespective of colonial nature policy. Techniques that reform policy and biodiversity-conservation management have misunderstood. The reform process perceived the communal lands to be ineffective when used by the 'mass' populations, and therefore converted ownership to individual private holdings.

Previous research has shown (Mayoral-Phillips, 2000) that partnerships are perceived by government in the region, NGOs and conservation organisations to be essential in order to prevent a free for all by the private sector. Stakeholders involved in community natural resource management have placed significant emphasis and expectation on wise-use nature-based, wildlife and green sustainable tourism models that serve only to highlight conservation as the dominant agenda within the commons. By attaching a value to the resource, typically wildlife, stakeholders have systematically preserved 'humans and animals do not mix' ideology in the interest of sustainable commons natural resource management. Too much emphasis has been placed upon wildlife eco-tourism as the most appropriate developmental tool in the region. Questions therefore arise as to whether communities are in fact securing and benefiting their investment in the commons through 'supposed' demand driven nature-based, wildlife and eco-tourism related projects?

This paper will examine the rhetoric of natural resource management in the commons and reality of sustainable development, including nature-based and wildlife forms of tourism, all of which are now so endorsed within southern Africa as development tools for community socio-economic upliftment. Furthermore, the paper will seek to identify new forms of appropriate land tenure and utilisation policy that challenge the notion that custodianship of the commons is inappropriate for the future development of community empowerment.

## **2 The Policy that Drives the Process**

Southern African Governments have placed significant emphasis on community development in the commons through ‘Community Based Natural Resource Management’ (CBNRM) to secure livelihoods by redressing rural poverty, redeveloping agrarian land systems, resolving rural population densities and redistributing socio-economic benefits. The CBNRM process evolved from government incentives that in theory ensured local community participation in ‘conservation of biological resources’ and themes of property rights, sustainable use, resources values and the equitable distribution of conservation costs and benefits<sup>1</sup>.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Natural Resource Management Programme (NRMP) has supported and incorporated the CBNRM process. SADC country members have incorporated NRMP rhetoric into their own National Development Programmes (NDP) as an appropriate and sustainable wise-use natural resource management model, aiming to:

- Demonstrate that sustainable use and management of wildlife (resources, flora and fauna) is a viable economic alternative for communities now farming marginal land.
- Increase local employment and income generating opportunities from community-managed natural resources.
- Expand the role of women in decision making processes in local economies through CBNRM, and
- Improve the exchange of CBNRM related information in the region.

In addition to CBNRM, a new dynamic has been introduced to Southern Africa's natural resources management process. Transboundary Natural Resource Management (TBNRM) although not entirely related to the commons, yet has a direct impact upon them, aims for sustainable use of the natural resource between sovereign states which share common eco-systems or resources, through planning, policy and management of economic, cultural and social development. TBNRM is underpinned by the global notion that countries and regions must protect wilderness areas against a growing global population crisis. Within this rhetoric, institutions have incorporated global sustainable natural resource management strategies and tourism related action plans as wise-use models to address economic, political, cultural and ecological concerns of stakeholders across national boundaries. Grundy-Warr & Rajah (1997, cited in Singh, 1999:1) suggest that this has arisen at a time when:

- There are increasing global-scale interdependencies in economic, technological, military, cultural and ecological spheres of activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Munasinghe and McNeely cited in USAID, 1999

- Human beings have increasing capacity to intervene in and alter Earth life-sustaining processes.
- There are new dynamics in interregional relations, and
- There are new scientific paradigms concerning the way the Earth functions.

### **3 Where does the rhetoric come from?**

The rhetoric of Governments and institutions within Southern Africa arise from processes that are underpinned by globally inspired ‘sustainable’ Brundtland and dominant Earth Summit environment and conservation policy. Regional and national strategies and action plans, inclusive of wildlife and nature-based tourism are funded by donor agencies following the rhetoric that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This ‘sustainable’ development approach, although widely accepted as a popular slogan, has begun to wear thin. Ten years on since the Earth Summit, the slogan has sacrificed real substance, as it compels us to adopt a narrow economic language, standard of judgement, and world-view in approaching and utilising the earth<sup>2</sup>. The sustainability ideal rests on an uncritical, unexamined acceptance of the traditional world-view of progressive, secular materialism. It regards this world-view as completely benign so long as it can be made sustainable.

Furthermore, critics have highlighted the destructive nature of this world-view sighting the actions of institutions such as the WTO, UNDP, WWF and USAID who have sought to maintain their role as co-ordinators of socio-economic development, inclusive of communal land management programmes, whilst endorsing ‘new’ patterns of ‘alternative’ Brundtland styled sustainable and market driven ‘growth’ and development. The fact is that development of the commons in Southern Africa mirrors “authentic, untouched, unvisited, off the beaten track”<sup>3</sup> dominant ‘eco-wildlife’, ‘nature-based’ and supposed ‘responsible’ cultural tourism destinations in countries such as Thailand, India, Costa Rica, Belize, Turkey and the Pacific Islands.

### **4 The System and Statistical Facts**

Custodianship and partnership development in communal areas creates conflicts between dualistic local authorities, typically between property systems legitimised by statutory law and traditional customary conventions. Different systems apply to the region. In Zimbabwe and Botswana, authority is given through a democratic system, but management of land and the resource is administered through traditional communal forms. Whilst in Namibia, authority is granted through traditional institutions, but restricted through democratic pressures advocating executive accountability. Such disparity serves only to strengthen the exploitative nature of knowledgeable private eco-tourism developers and conservation organisations who seem only too willing to drive a wildlife and nature-based tourism ethos as the most appropriate developmental tool without seriously considering market supply and demand for the product. The table below details the four most developed communal land systems within Southern Africa highlighting wildlife as the main policy and legislative focus for community best management. The table also shows the percentage of land and population for the respective countries within communal lands.

<sup>2</sup> See Troung, 1990, Pearce, 1991, Fernandes, 1994, Monbiot, 1994, Munt, 1994, Pleumarom, 1994a, 1996, Phillips, 1996b.

<sup>3</sup> Pleumarom, 1994a:143

<b>Country</b>	<b>Botswana</b>	<b>Namibia</b>	<b>Zimbabwe</b>	<b>Zambia</b>
<b>Land Legislation</b>	Tribal Lands Act 1968 Tribal Grazing Lands Policy 1995	Constitution of the Republic of Namibia 1992 and customary law	Land Acquisition Act 1992 Communal Lands Act 1982 Land Commission 1994	Land (Conversion of Titles) Act 1985 Land Act 1995
<b>Resource Policy &amp; Legislation</b>	Wildlife Conservation Policy 1986 Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act 1992	Nature Conservation Amendment Act 1996 Conservancies Policy 1995 Community Based Tourism Policy 1995	Amendment to the 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act 1982	Policy for National Parks and Wildlife 1997 Wildlife Act 1998
<b>Land Management System</b>	Community Based Organisation (CBO) Wildlife Management Areas	Conservancy Councils CBO Wildlife Management Options	CAMPFIRE Districts  Wards	ADMADE Wildlife Management Association Community Resource Boards
<b>Resource Focus</b>	Wildlife and Veld Products	Wildlife and Wildlands	Wildlife	Wildlife
<b>% Area of Country Communal Land</b>	71%	41%	65%	76%
<b>% National Population Living Within Communal Land</b>	60%	70%	56%	52%

**Table 1: Communal Land Systems and Utilisation**

Government's encouragement of partnerships with the private sector has served only to compound community mal-distribution not upliftment. Legally communities can generate income from the lease of land in designated areas within the commons. The reality is that little benefits accrue from such arrangements outside of job creation. Little if any long-term approaches include community tenure, meaningful tangible and intangible benefits that would result in a truly consumptive-led society. In fact these processes serve only to marginalise communities further promoting wildlife and nature-based eco-tourism as highly consumer-centred activities, catering to the alternative lifestyles of the new middle classes of urban societies.

Table 2 below details the number of communities involved in tourism related natural resource projects within communal lands of Southern Africa.

Country	Botswana	Lesotho	Malawi	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe
Hunting Concessions	8			1	1			22	18
Photo Concessions	1		1		2			2	
Self-guided or Guided nature walks/hiking	3	7			14	5	24		13
Campsites, Chalets, Homestays	3	9		1	22	6	15	3	
Treks with Ponies, Horses, Donkeys or Camels		2			2		1		1
Boats, Canoes, Mokoros, Fishing or Diving	2		1			5	9		
Village Development Tours							22		
Traditional Village Culture, Music and Dance		2	1			10	18	2	5
Handicrafts	7	4		1	5	5	2	2	1

**Table 2: Natural Resource Based Community Tourism**

**Source: USAID, 2001**

What emerges from the table above is a clear and dominant focus upon wildlife and nature based activities leaving few options for communities to diversify alternative land utilisation and enterprise development. Hunting and wildlife management concessions, together with accommodation facilities seem the most viable developmental tool for government and conservation institutions. Why is it that governments aggressively drive eco-related tourism activities in the commons? Perhaps the answer comes from statistics promoted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (2000). In Sub-Saharan Africa, travel and tourism is expected to generate US\$40 billion of economic activity by 2000, growing to US\$91 billion by 2010, contributing 2.9% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2000 and rising to 4.0% by 2010. Employment is estimated at 10.2 million jobs or 7.2% of the total employment in the region for 2000, which is 1 in every 13.8 jobs. By 2010 this figure is expected to grow to 15.3 million jobs, 8.5% of the total employment or 1 in every 11.7 jobs. Southern Africa generated US\$3.3 billion in tourism receipts in 1998, with 8.2 million arrivals, representing 30.4% of the Sub-Saharan region (WTO, 2001).

In light of these figures governments could be excused for driving eco-related tourism development. However, in reality with bed night occupancy rates standing at only 30% this product falls short in providing legitimate socio-economic upliftment for communities outside of job creation. Alarming new projects such as the Ockavango Upper Zambezi Tourism Initiative (OUZIT) funded by the Development Bank of Southern Africa is developing a 260,000km<sup>2</sup> eco-related tourism and economic development zone creating 30,000 new beds through wildlife related accommodation. Interpretation of this can only signify that, government and donors seem only too willing to establish the supply product without creating the demand, yet again developing 'white elephants'. All that has been achieved is to reshape the



commons into more 'sustainable' ventures, reiterating Urry (1990) by consuming places, facilitating a touristic gaze that is now so engrossed within capitalist, 'global-consumerism' that the end result has witnessed the systematic destruction of regional cultures.

Nevertheless, successful natural resource based community operations in Southern Africa, such as Khama Rhino Sanctuary and Trust, Botswana; Malealea Lodge and community, Lesotho; Damaraland Camp, Namibia; and Cultural Tourism Programme, Tanzania had 'best practice' combinations of the following:

- **Ownership** of land and resources
- Community composition
- Community institution
- Natural Resource Based Community Tourism product design
- Management structure - for example, are the products managed by skilled managers?
- Skills level
- Marketing strategy
- Linkages for example to the private sector and donors
- Business agreements
- Intangible and Tangible Benefits to community
- Benefit distribution mechanisms.

Undoubtedly such best practise empowers and strengthens community upliftment in the commons. Needless to say few communities benefit from such, and thus achieve no common goal for socio-economic development. The key and fundamental issue relating to successful community projects across not just tourism related development but alternative solutions to wise-use sustainable natural resource utilisation is ownership of the land and resource upon it. Those individuals or institutions that are involved in this debate or aid projects relating to natural resource management in the commons understand comprehensively that a community with legal entitlement to own the land progress and prosper through development far quicker than the reverse situation. In light of this fact, why is it that governments in Southern Africa instigate policy reform within a 'custodianship' framework? Decentralisation of land ownership, alternative land utilisation techniques and decision-making must surely be a priority if the region is to 'meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

## **5 Alternatives to wildlife**

Those involved in commons related initiatives should consider alternative utilisation options outside of the 'wildlife pays, wildlife stays' 'wise-use' framework. In a recent IUCN-SNV Support Programme, CBO's were challenged to seek alternative options. These were the main conclusions:

- The type and amount of benefits created will differ per option, resource potential and confidence.
- Intangible benefits are often overlooked yet maybe more important than financial benefits for long-term sustainable development.
- Self-operated activities will create more intangible benefits for CBO's.

- Joint venture agreements may create the highest financial benefits, but do not create much employment, provision of community services, generate intangible benefits, nor strengthen community awareness for conservation.
- External support is higher for self-operated CBO's, and
- Using a multiple-activities approach minimises the number of disadvantages and enhances the creation of employment and income, the potential for provision of community services, the generation of intangible benefits, and the strengthening of community awareness concerning conservation.<sup>4</sup>

One such example is the Kgetsi ya Tsie Rural Women's Microenterprise Development Programme in Tswapong Hills. The Kgetsi ya Tsie have through the Women's Finance House, Botswana (WFHB) pooled together veld resources, changing the conditions of production and marketing, and have increased their average value from P440 per annum in 1997 to P2,595 per annum in 1999. The WFHB operate a major group micro lending and microenterprise development programme, bringing together over 400 active rural women resource users.<sup>5</sup>

Reaction from a recent NRBCT Southern Africa Workshop held in Pretoria, October 2001 highlights the need to strengthen and formulate new and appropriate policy and action plans according to Africa's strengths. Although NRBCT had a tourism related focus, the principles have been adapted to respond to alternative commons utilisation:

### **5.1 Government policy and legislation**

- Need for the existence of appropriate government policy and legislation on alternative natural resource utilization
- Commitment by government to implement alternative policy through legislation and government agencies

### **5.2 Alternative Product institution**

- Need for the existence of a national alternative product organisation or institution in countries that wish to have them
- Need for a national centralized database on NRBCT initiatives and operations

### **5.3 Land and resource use rights**

- Full tenure or ownership of land by communities
- Recognition of resource user rights of communities by other bodies. Communities must be seen as equal players.

### **5.4 Community structure and institutions**

- Existence of a well-defined community
- Ideally, beneficiary communities should be small
- Presence of a strong and representative community leadership
- Existence of a democratic community institution

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<sup>4</sup> CBNRM Support Programme. Occasional Paper No 2, 2000: p27

<sup>5</sup> The Kgetsi Ya Tsie Rural Women's Micro-enterprise Development Programme, 1999.

- Presence of an appropriate and equitable distribution mechanism for alternative product revenue.

### **5.5 Awareness and understanding of alternatives**

- Recognition by the community and private sector of traditional techniques and indigenous knowledge systems
- Recognition that development is a medium to long-term process
- The community should adopt a business approach to alternative product development

### **5.6 Provision of advice**

- Availability of quality impartial advice on legal and technical issues for the community.

### **5.7 Relationships with the private sector**

- Involvement of and linkage with private sector is necessary
- Existence of good relations between community and private sector partners
- Existence of written agreements between community and partners.

### **5.8 Skills and training**

- Recognition by community of need for skills and proactive efforts to obtain them
- Need for professional or experienced management
- Involvement of NGO and/or donor agencies in skills training.

### **5.9 Product development**

- Familiarization visits to other alternative product operations to assist for example in setting up pricing structures from lessons learnt from other similar operations
- Ensure product supply is what demand wants. Alternatives are in a position to develop new products
- Ensure acceptable standards of operations and products.

### **5.10 Marketing and promotion**

- Existence of national marketing strategies for alternative products
- Existence of appropriate marketing plans for each product operation
- Availability of assistance with marketing for community-owned operations
- Need for Internet websites for marketing and promotion of products
- Ensure linkages to other appropriate websites
- Integration of community products into the mainstream industry

## **6 The way forward for natural resource management in the commons**

Whilst this highlights the diversity of alternative forms, stakeholders inclusive of nature-based tourism in the commons of Southern Africa have the potential to integrate new forms of appropriate 'African' growth to the benefit of communities. In fact communities have the potential to drive this process forward outside of the accepted global sustainable process in a manner that is unique and characteristic of Africa. If the Botswana government, for example, recognised the potential of Bushmen communities in the Central Kgalagadi as truly African and a viable economic tool, then promoters of alternative-tourism could maximise this potential to the benefit of all. Instead the Botswana government misses the point when reflecting SADC's NRMP aim of increasing local employment and income generating opportunities from community-managed natural resources.

Custodianship represents the structural intensity of mal-distribution. If alternatives are promoted, communities can then and will be empowered to own the means of production without being just custodians, decide on what adds value, and then benefit from the process in a manner that is uncompromising, humanitarian, and void of sustainable progressive secular materialism. The result of which is an African solution to an African problem.

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