

Shade or energy. Resource views at the Kunene river  
(Angola/Namibia)  
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## Introduction

This case study of real and ascribed resource views on a riparian stretch draws on experience during a feasibility study for a joint Angolan/Namibian hydropower project on the Kunene river. The study departs from what developed into a politically profiled situation in Southern Angola and Northern Namibia. National interests in river water use have stood against a community interest in a very narrow riparian zone of the Kunene river. But the issue proves to be regional. At present the river forms what can be described as a line oasis for the local people. This quality is the key to current livestock production capacity not only in the riparian common lands but also far beyond.

In the national perspectives the catchment area concerned is marginal. These out-lying areas came in focus due to their potential for energy production to meet national needs, primarily in Namibia. Added on top of the domestic situations has been an intense global NGO interest in the issue of potential hydropower production. The situation has brought about the main reflections in the current paper, on local situations and on the impact of an environmentalist pressure network. When addressing local/global relations, analysts usually think about layering (local, regional, national, international, or some similar peels) because of a conventional structural thinking. However, it seems, not only from this case study, that networking rather than layering would be a proper analytical point of departure, given the action orientation of environmentalist groups. Instead of knowledge based groups with participants from different expertise levels, identity shaped networks operate on stereotyped environmental images.

## 1. The hypothesis

The debate over hydropower projects on the Kunene has taken a similar form to that concerning whales. There is a tendency in the environmentalists' debate to deal with all hydropower projects irrespective of quality, such as size, purpose and location. An upstream small-scale multipurpose plant would differ from a downstream plant with flood control and a large water magazine. There is a danger for the debate to fail to distinguish between "species" traits just like a whale debate has concerned "whales" without seeing to features of the different species. Kalland (1993) has analysed this whale debate and identified an abstract "super whale" with an aggregate of composite traits of the different whale species. The proposal in the current paper is that the Kunene has become an analogous "super hydropower project", drawing the attention of all views irrespective of hydropower "species". In that debate the riparian commons have a key role.

This riparian zone of the Kunene has different meanings in terms of common resource. It forms a key component in a local pastoral production system, providing livestock reproduction resources (fodder, water and not least shade). It represents an emergency food area for both humans and animals during critical weeks of the seasonal cycle. The river holds the potential as a national asset for improved self-reliance and political independence from the big neighbour South Africa. It is located within the SADC region political domain, still with insufficient legally binding agreements. It is an international river much on the international agenda of hydropower production. These different interest layers are all proper levels of analysis. But there are yet other dimensions in the debate, in a way more fundamentalist and bringing positions closer to the problematic criticism of “super whale hunting”. If a point of departure is that hydropower projects by definition are bad, this may lead to an attitude that the different layers of interest analysis are irrelevant. Such a position can be found in at least parts of the debate surrounding the Kunene river. That position, the paper suggests, can be ascribed an international environmentalist network with a positioning that is scale invariant.

Without going into great empirical detail, the paper hypothesises that such environmentalist positions are found that feature similar stereotyped positions to the one concerning the “super whale”. Experiences from newspaper and television coverage along with NGO performance suggest congruence in problem perceptions about the plight of the struck indigenous population. The issue is raised not in order to criticise critics but to look into another way of approaching local – global connections.

Parallel to the conventional layering seems to be a variety of epistemic community kind of networks, where the epistemic element is given not by a joint knowledge base but by a joint attitude base. This positioning refers to experience that suggests that large-scale development projects may fall victim of political decisions or other altered contextual circumstances (for instance altered taxation policy, energy policy or devaluation of a currency) also when well-intended. A preconceived idea is then that hydropower projects are poorly planned and that implementation comes too early. An element of time and urgency seems important and suggests an action orientation as part of an identity formation.

The study proposes this feature to be problematic. It has to do with the role of NGOs, one-issue and oriented by design, and at the same time to an increasing extent expert and multi-purpose if institutionalised.

## 2. The study

One challenge is according to last section to depart from a riparian commons both in order to understand what it means to those relating directly to it, and what it means to the essentially American-European network of likeminded (urban-oriented?) environmentalists. The study points at two interest groups and their interaction, with each other as well as internally:

- inhabitants directly affected by a potential project
- environmentalists, “working for Nature”.

Membership of the former category is place specific and individuals are involved through their resource management. The latter category is shaped as a virtual community with membership based on a common reference frame outside the community affected by project plans. The challenge for the study outlined in this paper would be to seek characteristic features of such cultural groups, and ask whether the environmentalist reference is proper to indicate shared values. If this were the case, the next step for a future study would be to try and specify what signals such sharing.

The purpose of this paper is to touch on both internal and external views on the riparian stretch that has been scrutinised in the feasibility study (NamAng 1996a and 1996b). This could be achieved by using the Kunene river not only as a place specific case but also as a symbolic representation within the positioning of network members irrespective of their layer positions.

Depending on frame of reference a fairly substantial list of resource views can be made. This paper stresses two, shade and energy. They are placed as a binary pair so as to reflect a layering perspective. Shade is an important asset of the extensive livestock production locally, and energy is an important aspect of the resource use in national and international perspectives. But there are several shades of interpretations of all the resource views surfacing in ways that connect with the “super whale” debate. In both the hydropower and the whale debates the positioning is not obviously layer specific but rather ideological with roots in a global construct, perhaps nature conservation, rather than being political, concerned with economic dependencies.

The concluding suggestion in the paper is that a conservationist positioning comes close to the original colonial mentality, suggesting for instance that Natives should remain in balance with Nature and that those primary food producers depending on natural resources should remain as *Naturvölker*. This congruence is not generated out of ideological ill-will but is a product of globalisation and the mass media based perceptions taking many forms, the “super hydropower project” being one. The conservationists’ concern with indigenous peoples on level with concepts like rain forest, for instance, has a paternalistic and maternalistic bias. The positioning is often associated with environmentalist groups. The paper subscribes to that.

With the introduction in this environment of a possibility for a hydropower project, yet another large-scale impact seems likely. The section touches on social consequences and on how common resources are perceived and maintained. The different views on the riparian commons from the prime users are accounted for briefly and contrasted with a number of shades of interpretations of community interests. At the end of the day the ethical issue has boiled down to how the interests of a small riparian population, in this case partly only seasonal, can be balanced with the democratic rights of a majority population.

### **3. Setting and resource views at the Kunene river**

The inhabitants of the riparian zone of the Kunene river subsist primarily on livestock rearing. While the cultural tradition of relying on riparian commons has deep historic roots, the current social forms are of shallow time depth. Today's so-called traditional pastoral Himba society is to a great extent shaped by colonial events (Portuguese, German and South African dominance). The

pastoral production system relies on the riparian zone in a seemingly sustainable fashion, but ecotourism and unemployment seem to begin to degrade both physical and social landscapes.

The NamAng feasibility study (1996a and 1996b), with its great number of independent background studies for its environmental assessment, provides material for several approaches to local resource views. One would be cultural, focusing on ethnicity and common values seen from the point of point of view of ethnic membership. Another could be demographic, departing from the population structure in the area and the needs of inhabitants. A third approach would be based on differentiation according to resource use locally. Those individuals actually inhabiting the riparian zone, that is a smallish group of people living fairly permanently along the river, are then treated as a category separate from other regional inhabitants (of the same ethnic extraction).

In terms of ethnic composition the Namibian side of the Kunene river is fairly homogenous. The Angolan side, more populated, is less so. Focus in the debate has been on the Himba inhabitants who dominate the Namibian but not the Angolan side of the river. In demographic terms the Angolans side is more densely populated. It is heavily affected by civil war. The Namibian side has also been exposed to war-like situations and population movements. The latest census indicates an out-migration by young men, presumably job seekers. Finally, the division into directly and indirectly affected people locally shows great variation at the onset of project studies. The gap between old/young, men/women, and rural/urban views has closed within the communities as a consequence of the hydropower debate.

### **3.1 The riparian CPR in community views**

Literature sources on southwestern Angola are scanty. More precise information is found in literature dating back to the mid-19th Century. Reports of that time largely deal with the Kunene River, since it is the only perennial river in the area. The river had by the time proven to be of great significance for the colonial ambitions. During these times of European settlement and before, also the African populations migrated and established new home areas on ethnic grounds. The raid-like migration of the Jagas, who crossed all of Southern Africa around the end of the 16th Century proved to be of particular importance for the current settlement patterns. The Jaga also passed through southwestern Angola and settled there for a while. Most of the conflicts behind the migrations had their roots in stock raiding.

The Himba settlement in the area is not documented in the written sources. One theory (Estermann, 1969) is that the people had crossed the entire southwestern Angola in a coordinated manner before settling in current areas. The capacity of the Himba to be flexible in times of stress and search new alternatives is emphasised in his analysis of their migration.

With the arrival of European colonialists, i.e. primarily Portuguese and Germans, followed a situation where the inhabitants were drastically integrated into a world system. The Berlin Conference in 1885 made it necessary for the emerging colonial powers to compete over the friendship of the chiefs as a means to control territory. In order to make a colonial claim, effective territorial control was required. Therefore, trade was established, gifts were given, missionaries sent and missions established, including schools and health stations. Such early efforts added up to

a general scheme to gain confidence and friendship of local powers. They were followed up by the “hut tax” that was established on a regular basis in Angola in 1920. The tax was officially seen to aim at making a contribution to the Angolan economy. In terms of international relations, however, it had the prime political message that Angola was within the Portuguese hegemony in the region. The contribution to a colonial economy was limited throughout 1920-1960 partly because the area is inaccessible and partly because of its aridity and poor economic capacity.

White settlements and compulsory cheap labour signified this. The Kunene area was sparsely populated. The prime production resource was cattle, a commodity difficult to export due to long distances, health problems and poor competitiveness at the market. In contrast, coastal fishing was rich, although constrained by the desert-like circumstances along the shores. With the beginning of the freedom war, compulsory labour was abolished by the Portuguese authorities in 1961. Instead, a new policy was introduced, stressing economic development and improving social conditions.

The local population could feel the effects of planned colonial development. Even if people continued with their traditional way of life, an increased police control at the created international border could be observed, military operations were held with severe impact on livestock movements. The economic activities became even more constrained on two occasions. One was when civil war broke out and the other when the South African occupation took place. Both events contained a message for people to retain a high degree of subsistence economy.

The Portuguese revolution that took place in 1975, brought political independence for the colonies. One consequence in the Kunene area was the civil war broke out. In consequence the infrastructure in Southwestern Angola gradually became weaker. This is the current situation.

Also the northwestern parts of Namibia have been the stage for similar deeply felt historical changes during the last 150 years (Bollig 1998a). A small predatory group of raiders, closely related to the Cape based economy of livestock and weapons’ trade had great impact. The raids forced people into exile, and they deprived parts of the population of their means of production. A long-term consequence was also an ethnic differentiation where some of the current Himba groups were established on both sides of the river (particularly the Tjimba mountain inhabitants and foragers). The Himba community in Southwestern Angola developed a special economic profile by engaging in commercial hunting, being scouts and working on plantations (Siiskonen 1990). The Rinderpest epizootic of 1897 killed practically all cattle in the area, forcing many Himba to seek employment with the Portuguese colonial authorities as mercenaries against “rebellious natives”. Many herders rebuilt their family herds of livestock through external resources, later by working for commercial hunters or farmers, or acting as mercenaries within the colonial army. In the wake of the German ethnic cleansing of Namibia from most of the Herero (a closely related ethnic group), most Himba settlement was on the Angolan side of the river.

After World War I Himba groups could move back to the left side of the Kunene. The impact of the South African administration, which was present in Kaokoland of Northern Namibia from 1917 onwards, was more comprehensive. Ethnicity was ascribed significance in an increasing manner. By 1920 there was accordingly an extremely complex set-up of power groups in the area.

The set-up was further complicated when from 1925 onwards Herero from the Outjo/ Kamanjab area were relocated by force into the southern parts of the Kaokoland. This influx was increased in magnitude when more Herero families came back from Southern Angola (Bollig 1998b).

Livestock trade regulations were gradually increased in Namibia. The effect of a policy to protect white-owned livestock was that pastoralists on communal lands were effectively kept away from the market. With the growing integration into the South African colony followed further gradual loss of options. Not least did work for white employers come to a standstill. Mining was closed down. Labour recruitment from the outside had only limited impact in the Kunene area (in contrast with neighbouring tracts). During the 1960s to the 1990s some gradual change of the economic set up seem to have taken place despite strict regulations, although this is not documented. The situation changed drastically in the late 1970s when the South African Army was based in three places in the river catchment. After independence in 1991 livestock development projects have been introduced, including improved marketing facilities, and the issue of restrictions to open access to Common Resources addressed. Educational service and standards in the region are extremely low. Up until the advent of independence, health services in the subregion were extremely underdeveloped.

The historical experience of the pastoralists on both sides of the river has thus been that life has been influenced by outside forces throughout the past century. The lifestyle and subsistence orientation towards pastoralism have been considerably shaped by a colonial history in the riparian area. The same background applies to the formation of the Himba as the distinct ethnic group, or cultural category, we see today. They total about 8,000 – 10,000 (NamAng 1996b), although slightly higher figures have been quoted (no proper census with full coverage is available).

Economic resources are limited in the Kunene area, and natural pastures along with water make up the income basis for most inhabitants. The sustainable forms for livestock production in this semi-arid environment has shaped an evolution of an integrated system of transhumance and range management, in the entire Kunene Region as well as in the riparian area. No options exist.<sup>1</sup> Looking more closely at adaptations to the natural environment, the pastoral systems that relate the Himba and their cultural and social systems to the natural resources are different. However, all “solutions”, whether based on migration routes along the river, out from it, or within the riparian zone itself, rely on access to the river as a linear oasis in times of need.

Based on the 1991 Census for Namibia (Republic of Namibia 1993 and 1994), the Himba on the left side of the Kunene should total around 12,000 in 1995.<sup>2</sup> The Census also shows that the population in the interior of the region live in some 372 scattered rural settlements. Opuwo, the district centre, is the only urban settlement of any significance in the sub-region, accommodating

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<sup>1</sup> There is an important economic sideline, though, not accounted for in the debate, in the shape of what seems to be a great mining potential and export of precious stones.

<sup>2</sup> The regional background study in NamAng (1996b) accounts for this. 26,176 people were resident in the former Kaokoland in 1991. Extrapolations based on a high growth rate of 4.5% per annum, project the population to be 31,200 in 1995. Informal evidence suggests that the Herero comprise roughly 60% of the total population while the Himba and other smaller ethnic groupings make up the remaining 40%.

4,234 people in 1991 (16% of the total population of the former Kaokoland. The population of Northern Kunene Region as a whole, is extremely young.

Arable agriculture holds little prospect for expansion although improved production for domestic consumption might be possible. The greatest potential for the development of the sub-region is livestock production. The potential for a tourist industry in Northern Kunene is also promising. All such new development inputs would require careful regulation, given the sensitive ecological and cultural circumstances. One policy strategy could be to take note of the significance that the riparian commons have, shade included, and focus on adapted alternatives where the aim is holistic alternatives replacing riparian commons.

The Angolan side of the Kunene river falls in the Kunene and Namibe provinces. The administration systems have collapsed in many parts of the province and the physical infrastructure has been destroyed. Reliable statistics are not available. The principal agricultural activity in the Kunene Province is rainfed cereal production in combination with livestock rearing. The commercial sector is extremely weak due to the civil war. Also the educational sector has not functioned properly, and health services are poor or non-existing. The total population of the province comprises officially of around 350,000 persons, while aid sources give a figure of around 250,000, decreased due to the ongoing war.

The climate in the Namibe province is semi-arid or arid. Surprisingly few households are involved in livestock farming, and yet the sector as a whole has potential. This being the case, the potentially most economically viable activity in the province is coastal fishing. The education system in the province is extremely weak and health service and health infrastructure all have deteriorated severely during the last decade. The province experiences continuous water shortages. Also this province has not seen a census since 1970. This projected suggests a population of around 130,000. However, local officials suggest that 220,000 is a more reliable figure, given an influx due to the civil war.

The riparian zone as a common resource seems to play a less significant role on the right side of the river. The population in Angola is more numerous, also after reservations for unreliable statistics. On the drier left side there are no options to natural resource use than relying on extensive livestock production in an environmental security fashion, with the riparian zone not only as a cultural but also as a production node in a pastoral production styled subsistence.

### ***3.2 The riparian CPR in the community's external relations***

The recent Himba history indicated above, from pre-colonial and early colonial until present, shows a dramatic variation on the theme of nomadic pastoral behaviour. Inhabitants see their current lifestyle as being sustainable; reliable livestock production at core with backup from small-scale farming and dôme palm nuts along the river. The Kunene is the lifeline in such a system. Not least the access to shade in this riparian zone is crucial for survival and livestock reproduction.

The strength in the opinion in the local community to keep up the current lifestyle is thoroughly documented. The community's socio-cultural institutions and environmental management are



observed as being adapted to the natural environmental conditions. Social, community based, institutions form a major cultural asset for dealing with environmental and other problem management. Decision-making over land issues connect, with three socio-cultural institutions; Chieftaincies, lineage continuity and age-sets. Chieftaincies are related i.a. to environmental management through decisions over reserve grazing areas, which are kept for emergency periods. Lineage continuity includes forefathers so that great significance is ascribed to ancestral graves. Most related areas are “owned” by the oldest man of the family to whom a newcomer must turn before grazing that land (the “ownership” does not allow for excluding others from using the area, nor does it open for selling land). The age-sets are organised across society in three tiers based on seniority. Members of the same age-set show special respect to each other and thereby form a basis for information exchange and informal decision-making.

The Himba religion carries the essence of the culture. The family graves, preferably centrally located in the riparian area, form a central element in that religion. The graves represent a continuity, both socially and territorially (Jacobsohn 1995). Relations between generations (the dead and the living, but also among the living) are manifested through initiation rituals performed with the grave as the crucial site for the occasion. Relations between the person and the land are expressed symbolically, through the sacrifice of livestock, or smearing of fat on the gravestones. In analytical terms, the graves express major cultural messages:

- lineage continuity (names of deceased relatives are repeated at initiation rituals on the site),
- identity (for the same reason and because living relatives have the major occasion for meeting one year, approximately three years and then less frequently after a death),
- authority (only heads of families can initiate a ritual through signalling it with bringing fresh leaves to the grave and managing the sacred fire, lit at the grave and brought to a fireplace in the kraal), and
- affluence (expressed in numbers of heads of oxen at the grave).

Apart from graves and settlements, water points and pastureland, along with the riparian vegetation predominantly upstream from Epupa Falls, are key spatial features. The role of sacred places, in particular at Marienfluss and Epupa Falls, is also ascribed particular attention.

At a meeting with national and regional politicians along with the feasibility study team on August 22, 1995 at Epupa, Chief Kapika in a speech reasoned as follows: The river is the source of Himba life. Its banks provide wild fruits. A dam would mean permanent loss of grazing. The Himba are not refusing a hydropower project for the sake of refusing, but in order to save their lives and their graves. He therefore appeals to the politicians not to pressurise the Himba and assumes that the initial investigations starting at that time were not going to leave the people in peace. Given that the present regime does not practice apartheid and that the government is the father and the mother to all citizens, he finally appealed to the mother to have mercy, and accordingly to leave the Himba alone.

Such a statement, directly or indirectly, expresses a number of important socio-cultural issues:

- Vegetation is greatly valued, be it the riparian forest (reserve food and medical plants, for instance) or grazing land;
- Graves are central for cultural identity and social continuity;
- Graves are also highly significant for land tenure claims in that they verify claims for customary land use;
- The local Epupa Falls area is a socio-cultural centre (along with Marienfluss);
- People's emotional relations to land are highly significant and finds the clearest outlets through the existence of graves;
- The significance of the Kunene River is fundamental in Himba culture even if pasture, rather than water, is the most scarce commodity in the local pastoral system,;
- the identity as Himba is community based, and many seem to feel alien to the modern nation state.

The issue of relocation of graves has been a key to mobilising emotions during the political process stirred by project plans. It has not only to do with culture and identity of a small group exposed to major national change, it also connects with land tenure rights. Customary rights can be claimed with reference to location and time depth of a family grave.

The attitudes to land right issues among those living in the riparian zone shows a very negative attitude to the potential project. This is in contrast to the other citizens like the young and village and town dwellers (NamAng 1996b). The attitude surveys concerning those directly affected were carried out at a peak of the public debate around a possible hydropower project. This fact most likely reinforces the clear message from the surveys: Land is common to the ethnic Himba, and the Chiefs represent the group and are ascribed a symbolic ownership. A community based natural resource management system would be the propagated Conservancy (Jones 1999:3) extended, where the inhabitants organise into a formal institution under clear leadership with a constrained but transparent mandate.

This means, claimed by critics of ascribing land rights to those directly affected in the riparian zone, that an indigenous group with a few generations' time depth draws on a colonial design to propagate its interests. The statement is true to the extent that *apartheid* shaped the constraints that brought about the strong emphasis on subsistence economy and, hence, a traditional lifestyle and group coherence. The question whether this cultural form is sustainable can be debated. At face value a small ethnic group has established a sustainable form for living in harmony with Nature. This ideal picture has been propagated though an interplay between local leadership and mass media coverage. The prospects for such an enclave are not without challenge, and the demographic information indicates an absence of young men, suggesting labour migration and urbanisation.

The national mass media coverage and the international coverage have concerned the situation of the Himba. They have been dealt with as being local people forming an indigenous population in spite of a varied historical background. They have, furthermore, been treated as a homogenic population in spite of several complicating dimensions such as gender, occupation, age and degree of urbanisation. This streamlining of the debate is, for the current paper, an early warning about a hidden "super-whale".

## Resource view on the Kunene river from outside the riparian zone

### ***The energy needs and national interest views***

This paper is concentrated to two resource views on the Kunene river riparian zone, that is of those directly affected by a possible hydropower project and of environmentalists with principal views on hydropower as a form of water resource use. Both categories have appeared as actors in the process of forming a feasibility study (NamAng 1996a), through participation and through providing second opinion. Also other levels of acting are central for the hydropower issues, but addressed here.

Thus the paper does not analyse national energy needs or alternative energy sources. The fact is that there are heavy interests expressed at national level. These include an extrapolated future demand for energy, which has to be met either through import or own production. It also includes a political dimension of maintaining a relative independence of South Africa for Namibia. The long-term political goal of upholding reliable energy production in co-operation with the since long civil war struck Angola is yet a level for resource views. Finally, the also political issue of state building and integration of out-lying parts of Namibia into a national administration with an ideological focus on parliamentary political processes has relevance. The latter is not only a centre – periphery issue but also one that reflects past political groupings around *apartheid* and other oppressive systems, and where inhabitants of the North often are blamed to have sided with white South Africa. Proper resource use has a reconciliation role to play.

### ***The environmentalist interest in riparian areas***

In a recent article Brosius (1999:277) raises the issue of understanding how the environment is constructed and represented in social science. He sees this as an important field for anthropological research. It would supplement the more conventional role of enhancing an understanding of human impacts on soil and biological systems. The social impact assessments (SIA) at project and strategic levels in connection with hydropower projects aim both ways. For riparian commons a hydropower project is a crisis for local resource use and resource views in that access is challenged and new interested partners appear.

An SIA also goes the other way, that is not only looking at social impacts on a riparian zone in a hydropower project, but also looking at the impact on society from a change in resource use. Both these perspectives are propagated also from the environmentalist side, be it in a combined manner. Focus is on Nature or on natural resource use, while issues raised concern a development project impact on local communities as well as existing soil and biological systems. The effect is similar to what Brosius refers to. He makes the observation in connection with campaigns against logging in Sarawak that “I was profoundly disturbed by the images I saw being purveyed by Euro-American environmentalists” (1999:280). He points at the active engagement of environmental organisations and at the rhetoric focusing on the quality of Penan as a group of hunter/gatherers (deeply affected by logging) but presented through images being romantic and objectifying. His observation is that such “essentialized images” feature in preservationist campaigns “whether aimed at cetaceans, baby seals, rain forests, wilderness, or indigenous peoples” (*loc.cit.*).

Such globalised or transnational networks between environmentalists based on a common understanding of proper knowledge, that is which knowledge should be proper, boiling down to an ideological positioning. Messages concerning what would be proper appears also in the context of the “indigenous peoples” within such riparian areas exposed to possible hydropower exploitation. The case of the Kunene river riparian zone is similar to Brosius’ description of the Sarawak situation. There is a similar need to problematise the performance of environmentalism, suggested by Brosius, and the fact that NGOs play an ever-growing important role. In the case of hydropower criticism one role for committed individuals and NGOs is to raise consciousness. The activities come closer to lobby groups than to long-term research or interaction. Their profile is rather direct action, and the means mass media and information technology.

The debate in the Kunene river case seems similar to the one accounted for by Brosius. He sees the following as key research questions for an analysis of an environmentalist performance: “Who is listened to and ignored and in which contexts? Who is it useful to be engaged with, and who is it necessary to establish distance from?” This is another way of expressing the network principle and the identity implication of being involved or outside. Hubs in such networks may be placed at different organisational layers, and members may perform within different contexts but for a purpose agreed on at least implicitly in the network.

A common frame of reference is urgency, certainly the case for riparian stretches where hydropower projects are considered. The short time frame may, in fact, be the foundation for the environmentalist resource view in connection with riparian zones. The reflection is to leave things as they are in order to defend Nature until more is known. This reference to urgency becomes conserved for the sake of maintaining a mandate, just like in the overlapping case of NGOs.

The action label is exploited in many situations. The second opinion given on the Epupa study is one example which fits nicely with the outlined environmentalist profile in that the evaluation covers only part of the study and in that the ambition level to access all information basis has proven low. One may suggest that action be performed with a network fixed aim of a particular kind of project, rather than of scrutinising a particular setting for a project. This suggests the super-whale dimension of an environmentalist research view on hydropower projects, a preconceived notion that they are bad, irrespective for instance of the opinion of a local population.

The issue raised reflects the more important tendency for single issue NGOs (or IGOs) to become institutionalised and remain in business not as long as is necessary but as a goal in itself. There are two recent criticisms of NGOs, which apply potentially on a case like the Kunene riparian zone. Both are addressed in the Economist (Jan 2000). One is expressed as a worry whether NGOs are in fact non-governmental, as they claim. This is a matter addressed, for instance, in Hjort-af-Ornäs and Krokfors (1993:214), where accounts are given of how easily long-term Northern-based government financed institutions may enter action-oriented NGO mobilisation.

In the case of the hydropower debate that description could be widened into the question whether NGOs are action oriented for the sake of achieving a sustainable result, or action oriented for the

sake of performing on an environmentalist arena. This is in fact the other issue raised in the article (*loc.cit.*). There is a more and more obvious tendency towards becoming institutionalised, far from the original ideology of being action oriented.

The worry with the latter tendency in the example of Epupa is that NGOs are suddenly ascribed a double role. They are both being action groups working for what seems as a “good cause”, and being issue experts on environmental impact assessment or social impact assessment. A problem emerges when the action positioning is fixed, target settled through for instance an environmentalist consensus such as suggested by Brosius. The ideological goal of protecting Nature is then given first priority, before listening to the views of the various directly concerned parties through the means of participation in a planning process. The methodological development into more efficient participation forms, for instance, seen in a long-term perspective may contradict expectations on people to prefer to live in harmony with Nature. The contradiction that emerges can be phrased as one between short-term and long-terms targeting. On the one hand a goal may be to achieve a tactically motivated result, on the other hand it may be sustainability through strategic change.

In the case of Epupa study a common position from the environmentalist school of thinking, to use Brosius terms, was that going into facts and figures in a study of environmental or social impacts was not seen as being of prime importance. Of course there were variations, from the journalist refusing to read a report, to the IGO representative giving statements but not remaining for discussion at public hearings. The reasons for such a principal position would be that a hydropower project in itself by definition was negative, irrespective of its design.

One fundamental argument could be that all large-scale projects are placed in political contexts that will make the projects extremely vulnerable to national or international policy change. Small modifications on a national scene may impact dramatically on the local scene, and it is not possible to build safety nets into such situations. The only safe strategy would be for inhabitants of riparian commons, for instance, to remain dis-connected from the state as far as possible. If the implication is to suggest living in harmony with Nature, the Brosius’ derogatory label of being romantic seems to hold.

One example is the Swedish Luleälven, where the hydropower development was made on the assumption that mitigation to local communities would be forthcoming from real-estate taxation, at the time of planning going to the municipality concerned. However, Swedish parliament changed the system so that taxes no longer would go to local authorities but instead have been turned into a state taxation. The principle which then applies with the alternative design is that all tax income are pooled centrally before possibly redistributed to the inhabitants of the Luleälv communities. No earmarked resources can pass through the national system. No guarantees would then remain for a resource flow on par with the originally anticipated mitigation level.

This is one example of how a well-intended design for riparian commons can become blocked from decisions in its contextual setting. Another example is the economic situation in the 1980s in Vietnam where mitigation was calculated in local currency. A profound devaluation of that currency leaves mitigation level today on a tenth of the intended level. The struggle to find models

for resource use that would counter such dramatic impacts has been going on many years. Jones (1999) gives one illustration of approaching the issue from a wildlife perspective. Hjort-af-Ornäs and Karlsson (1999) raise the question more principally by sketching the organisational consequences of trying to apply CPR models from project level more generally.

### ***Layers of resource views or one reflection of a basic opposition?***

The NamAng (1996a but not 1996b) feasibility study was evaluated on the initiative of the International Rivers Network (IRN). This has been done in a manner regarded as easy-going by some and professional by others. At the time of presenting this feasibility report, accusations were strong. The interpretation of being easy-going is backed for instance by the performance at the public hearing. The IRN representative could apologise for not having read the entire report, yet make statements and then leave before an open discussion, while still being appreciated by environmentalists. The academic analysis from an American university was only based on parts of the feasibility study, and seemingly intended to suggest that a hydropower in itself is bad. An apology was made for not having read the background studies, followed by a statement that this would not alter the need to uphold a general critical monitoring of hydropower development in the world.

The principal claim that can be made is that if all hydropower projects are environmentally detrimental, then a debate should not be on the level of mitigation or project performance, it should be on the level of ethical principles. Instead of going into the details of the use of riparian commons and resources views here, the ambition could be strategic. Political rhetoric aiming at blocking policy decisions that may open for hydropower in contrast to other energy sources or even for a declining national economy. This positioning seems to be yet another indicator of a “hydropower super-whale”.

The layering approach to identifying resource views of the riparian stretch can be summarised as follows:

- The local perspective of the fairly permanent inhabitants concerns tenure issues and agricultural production circumstances.
- The regional perspective concerns the seasonal (or cyclical with longer frequency) role of a riparian zone for widespread production systems. This interest is summarised in the need for shade in the reproduction cycle for livestock but could also be expressed in terms of emergency food access as well.
- The national interest level is represented by the need for reliable energy production.
- The international interest follows inter-state relations in connection with water access and water rights, irrigation production, political and military relations, and the like.
- The global relationship is represented by a “super-whale” aspect of a hydropower project as by definition prohibitive in that they imply detrimental environmental change.

The two views addressed in the above sections, those directly concerned and the environmentalists, connect with some of these bullet points. Each view has been rudimentarily outlined. They are both preconceived. Of course, the view of current inhabitants in the riparian

commons is that what seems as open access is negative. Interplay with global development through the international mass media coverage of the possible project has generated a local political process. This features a temporary political reinforcement of local limited political authority placed on the role of Chiefs. Through operation on the international and not national arena a strong positioning has been made in harmony with the environmentalist mode of thinking, and in conflict with the established national political form.

The internationalisation of information flows, shaped by mass media has been rapid over the past decades. Information technology has moved from rapid distribution of tape recordings of key speeches in the 1970s into internet communication in the 1990s. This has brought a massive globalisation built on commercial mass media culture. In the case of the views on the riparian commons along the Kunene, the debate over possible hydropower projects concerns something else. It is a “super-whale” syndrome and issues at stake are not what they seem to be. The following table over some idealised pictures and what the reality looks like illustrates this issue.

Picture	Reality
A. Indigenous inhabitants	2-3 generations; coming from Southern Angola
B. Pastoralists since time immemorial	Former commercial hunters and farm hands in Portuguese pay a few generations ago
C. People live in harmony with Nature rather in a Rousseau-ian style	Imbalanced demographic profile with out-migration; intense livestock marketing
D. One ethnic group, the Himba	A mix of ethnic background, Himba in minority on the Angolan side
E. Consensus decisions among local population	Rifts according to gender, age and employment
F. Poor people become exposed by a project through denial of CPR rights	Saami visitors regarded inhabitants as affluent livestock owners
G. A healthy and untouched population	Great health problems, not least with alcohol and rapidly emerging STDs

What this discrepancy between ideal and real pictures of riparian zone issue at the Kunene stretch stands for is outsiders’ search for contours of a local culture. The idealised pictures can be seen as a general globalisation process through iconisation of for instance indigenous people. The issue of rural development seems to catch on a gain when a next wave of a global urbanisation process emerges that involves also the North, with its tendency towards mega-cities and sparsely populated rural tracts in between.

### **Different paths and sustainabilities for the Kunene riparian commons**

One message out of the aggregate views on the riparian CPR of the Kunene river is that it reflects a globalisation in a Donald Duck tradition. Let a completely different CPR debate illustrate. In the Swedish Baltic archipelago rages a debate between local inhabitants and national authorities over the design of a national park comprehending some of the most beautiful islands. The local position

is that the natural resources are properly managed common resources that have been kept intact through private local cautious management: The Swedish *allemansrätten* allows sufficient common access to Nature. The national position is that the European Community has set standards for what a national park shall look like (with an easily accessed centre inside the park and organised routes to various scenic settings). What we actually witness is a head-on collision between two models for CPR access, the local Swedish and the global blueprint. By going for the global blueprint other models are suppressed.

The same point is valid for the views on the riparian common resource along the Kunene river. Local inhabitants see themselves as proper resource managers in need for social service from a national system. Policy makers have in the past tried the conventional national park approach, now on the Swedish agenda, but shifted to models for combined conservation and production considerations. This has taken the form of Conservancies on the Namibian side, institutions of wide geographical distribution with a company-like administration but a constrained trade (such as water use but not pasture use, or the use of the land for eco-tourism but not building infrastructure).

One emanating question is what options may look like for the management or development of the Kunene river riparian CPR. Are there different paths towards a more or less utopian end-state of sustainability? Or will different sustainable development policy decisions lead to different end goals? Is there a danger that the global and urban based debate will have such an impact that global models for CPR management are forced upon a local situation, while local culture is ascribed a decorative role in a global division of pluralism?

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