

# **Living in a Global Commons – the case of residents of a national park in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KaZa TFCA), southern Africa.**

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“The empowering of local communities will not be enough to ensure the functioning of large Transboundary Natural Resource Management Areas. The sheer scale of such a venture is so large that, after achieving empowerment, it will be necessary to develop new institutions that enable a mosaic of communities to represent themselves in the higher decision taking forums and to co-ordinate their ecological management across a wide landscape. This requires both delegation of some authority upwards and a strong degree of accountability downward (Murphree, 2000).

## **ABSTRACT**

In 2006, five southern African countries pledged their support for the establishment of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, also known as the KaZa TFCA. The driver behind this global commons is that it houses the largest population of African elephant left in the world. Sioma Ngweze National Park lies in the far-flung south-west corner of Zambia and is the least developed park in Zambia. Yet from a global commons perspective, it forms the geographic heart of the KaZa TFCA and is a corridor for elephants moving from Botswana into Zambia and Angola. International transboundary NGOs (Peace Parks Foundation and Conservation International) have recently taken a keen interest in the Park’s status.

As a result of the Park being inhabited, there is an overlay of three institutions operating – an ancient traditional authority, a local government authority (District Commissioner and councillors), with the wildlife authorities being a relative newcomer. This is ironic considering land tenure in the Park is that of a state protected area.

Elephant moving north through the Park need access to water, food and refuges. The Park’s main riverfront is however, also home to over 4 000 people living a remote, subsistence existence and needing access to water and land for agriculture. The development challenge is to balance the needs of local people and with that of migrating elephants. Projects promoted by the transboundary NGOs so far include promoting conservation farming and chilli production (for sale and use as an elephant deterrent). Human settlement and elephant corridors are also being mapped and there are plans to improve park infrastructure and implement a park management plan.

Appropriate institutional change lies in a co-management agreement between residents of the park and park authorities for benefit sharing. Deproclamation of key settled areas in the Park to a more appropriate status is also possible.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Political boundaries hamper meeting conservation objectives, especially in areas with migratory wildlife and where boundaries split river basins between countries and divide human populations. For this reason, Transfrontier Conservation Areas<sup>2</sup> or TFCAs are being given increasing support in southern Africa as a regional model for governing shared wildlife and tourism resources.

TFCAs are located in different countries and jointly managed in the long-term for conservation and tourism with the political support and commitment of these different countries. Their three primary objectives are biodiversity conservation, economic development and peace and cooperation (Hanks, 2003).

In their most simple form, TFCAs can consist of two protected areas in two different countries carrying out joint management for the benefit of wildlife migrations and tourism flow – for example the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park between Botswana and South Africa. Shared governance is relatively simple in this case as the two protected areas have similar and complementary land-uses for conservation and tourism.

The picture gets more challenging when a TFCA includes land held in communal tenure. There is a potential for conflicting land use as livelihood activities on communal land can lead to land transformation and habitat loss. Increased wildlife numbers can negatively impact of agricultural and human safety. However when there are strong community wildlife initiatives (or Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) initiatives as they are know in southern Africa) on communal land within a TFCA, there are good opportunities for synergy despite the units for management being very different. This is because country-driven TFCAs and locally-driven CBNRM programmes have the overlapping objectives of conservation, development and good governance. Also CBNRM programmes encourage the empowerment of local people over wildlife resources and the development of strong local institutions that can engage with outside initiatives.

CBNRM aims to link conservation and development by extending rights to use wildlife and other resources to communal area residents so they may get benefits (financial and non-financial). In turn the benefits act as encouragement to govern resources in a sustainable way. There is the potential for TFCAs to use CBNRM initiatives as a local tool for to achieve biodiversity conservation and economic development outcomes.

However the broad scale of TFCAs has the potential to be mismatched with the local scale of community based natural resource initiatives. The reason for this is that the unit of decision-making and control with TFCAs is national or international. With CBNRM, the unit of decision-making should local – that is, the same unit that manages and receives benefits (Murphree, 1997).

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<sup>2</sup> The World Conservation Union (IUCN) uses the term “Transboundary Conservation Areas” or TBCAs.

This paper documents local practitioners' experience in working within a TFCA in southern Africa that includes a mixture of land-use, where there is a considerable portion of communal land and where most of the population are subsistence farmers. It looks at the opportunity for synergies between the regional scale of focus of working in a TFCA with the much more local scale of community based natural resource management and builds on an earlier experience before the TFCA was established (Murphy *et al*, 2004). It also documents some of the challenges in proceeding with local conservation and development activities in the context of the TFCA framework. The context is made more interesting as the focus of activities is in an inhabited state protected area in Zambia.

### *1.1 TFCAs as means for regional governance of shared wildlife resources*

The enabling legislation for TFCAs in southern Africa is enshrined in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Wildlife conservation and Law Enforcement promulgated in 1999. Article 4(f) of the protocol commits members to "Promote the conservation of shared wildlife resources through the establishment of transfrontier conservation areas". There are at least seven formalized TFCAs in southern Africa with many more potential ones having been identified.

The institutional frameworks of TFCAs commonly have a centralized Secretariat, a number of high-level Committees (including one at Ministerial level) and numerous Working Groups or Task Forces. They do not however, provide for explicit local community input into decision-making and planning. Once a Memorandum of Understanding is signed between member states on how they will collaborate on the TFCA initiative, mechanisms would be set in motion to move this agreement towards the adoption of a formal Treaty and the constitution of a permanent joint management structure.

### *1.2 Kavango-Zambezi TFCA as a shared wildlife and tourism area*

Five southern African countries have pledged their support for the establishment of the largest<sup>3</sup> and most ambitious TFCA, the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, also known as the KaZa TFCA. Its vision is to "establish a world-class transfrontier and conservation area and tourism destination in the Okavango and Zambezi river basin regions of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe". The area includes world renowned wetlands (the Okavango Delta) and their associated savanna woodland that make up some of Africa's main tourist and scenic attractions, including Victoria Falls, a World Heritage Site.

Article 4 and 5 in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the five countries include principles such as ensuring the protection and management of the KaZa TFCA areas and to "foster trans-national collaboration and co-operation among Member

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<sup>3</sup> 300,000 square kms.

States in implementing ecosystem and cultural resource management” through the establishment of the KaZa TFCA. One of the five member states, Zambia has already completed an Integrated Development Plan for this nation’s component of the TFCA (PPF, 2008).

The KaZa TFCA is of global conservation significance as it houses the largest, population of African elephant left in the world. Due to conservation efforts, many of these elephant are found in Botswana. Indications are that elephant populations are starting to move north to colonise old elephant habitat where wildlife was decimated through widespread poaching and warfare (especially Angola, the Caprivi Strip in Namibia and Zambia) (Chase, 2007).

Protected areas in the TFCA should ideally be linked by corridors to facilitate coordinated wildlife management. In this regard, the KaZa TFCA is extremely fortunate as it is richly endowed with CBNRM programmes in Namibia, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe who have benefited from decades of funding from donors and NGOs such as USAID and WWF. Initiatives to foster community stewardship of wildlife are already in place.

## **BACKGROUND**

### *2.1 Sioma Ngweze National Park in Zambia*

Of the fourteen protected areas in the KaZa TFCA, one such protected area in Zambia is the Sioma Ngweze National Park (SNNP) that is linked to protected areas in Angola, Namibia and Botswana. SNNP lies in the remote south-west corner of Zambia and is the third largest but one of the least developed of Zambia’s 19 National Parks. Its western boundary encompasses the Kwandu River Floodplain which is an important corridor for elephants moving from Botswana into Zambia and Angola. SNNP is also an Important Bird Area having globally threatened bird species (Leonard, 2005).

The Park is surrounded by communal lands designated as the West Zambezi Game Management Area (GMA). There are no tourist facilities and very little park infrastructure. The Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) is the responsible institution for Park management.

### *2.2 Inhabited status of Park*

In most of southern Africa, local residents were moved from national parks prior to their proclamation. This has not happened in SNNP. The influence of warfare in neighbouring countries meant no park development took place after the Park was proclaimed and the resident local population along the Kwandu River was allowed to remain. The wildlife authorities opened an outpost in the Park only in 2005, thirty-three years after the Park was proclaimed in 1972 (CI, 2007).

Most of the Park's population lives along the riverfront which is the main source of permanent water for elephant and wildlife. The development challenge is to balance the needs of local people and with that of migrating elephants and other wildlife

Zambia, like all other countries in KaZa TFCA (except Angola) has a CBNRM Programme. The Zambia Wildlife Act of 1998 provides a legal framework for the formation of Community Resource Boards in areas surrounding national parks and mechanisms for communities to participate in benefit sharing. Residents of SNNP have been able to be represented on these structures but benefits so far have been modest<sup>4</sup>.

### *2.3 Governance structures within SNNP*

With the inhabited status of the Park, there are three distinct institutions operating. These are the traditional authority, a local government authority (District Commissioner and councillors), with the wildlife authorities and their CBNRM structures being a relative newcomer. Sixteen government, community or non-governmental organizations operate to some extent in the inhabited section of the Park. Main infrastructure includes three schools and a clinic.

The institutional design of traditional leadership is based on customary law and leadership succession through lineage structures. SNNP falls within the Great Barotse Empire ruled by the Barotse King and the Barotse Royal Establishment. The power of the Traditional Authorities both in the Park and outside is very strong and there have been six generations of traditional leadership or Chiefs within the Park boundaries<sup>5</sup>.

SNNP is also part of the Shangombo and Sesheke Districts of Western Province in Zambia. Local government takes the form of a District Council structure with the District Commissioner based in the nearest, large town about 140km away (Sesheke). In SNNP there is one councillor with eight sub-wards<sup>6</sup> that make up the Imusho Ward. With regard to the structures set up by the wildlife authorities, residents within the Park are represented on the Sesheke West Community Resource Board (which represents all communities in and around SNNP) through a democratically elected Village Action Group. In theory agricultural land use in the Park is forbidden but as park regulations have never been enforced, residents continue to crop, keep cattle, use firewood and building materials from forests and fish in the river. Wildlife populations have been decimated and there is very little local poaching.

The different institutions exhibit a high level of cooperation governed by mutual respect and a common vision for development<sup>7</sup>. This is probably encouraged by the remoteness of the area and the strong need for collaboration over development. A good example of this collaboration took place over the organization of a local road clearing project funded

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<sup>4</sup> About US\$1000 in 2004 used for community development projects.

<sup>5</sup> Chief Imusho 6<sup>th</sup> was installed as the latest chief recently and is a Clinic Officer at a local Clinic.

<sup>6</sup> These are called, "Mbao, Kataba, Malombe, Kapolota, Kanyanda, Ntungu, Kuongo and Nantuu".

<sup>7</sup> The good cooperation between CBNRM structures and Traditional Authorities has also been observed across the border in neighbouring Namibia (Long, 2004)

by an NGO. Without any outside facilitation, the three organizations worked on the planning and implementation of the project. ZAWA approved the project and patrolled the new route with traditional authority members. Road workers were chosen from the eight different council sub-wards to achieve an equal geographical distribution of cash earned. The road was cut through the bush in record time and was of a high standard.

In addition to these governance structures, there is also a transboundary community forum in place with a neighbouring community based organization in Namibia – the Kwandu Conservancy – which is just across the international border and shares the same ecosystem, language and culture. This forum was established by a Namibian NGO (Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation) as a tool to facilitate community based transboundary natural resource management. The idea is that both communities collaborate on transboundary natural resource issues of common interest such as fire management, anti-poaching and stock theft.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYNERGIES BETWEEN TFCA<sub>s</sub> AND CBNRM**

As mentioned earlier, the main synergies between the TFCA and CBNRM initiatives lie in the shared objectives of biodiversity conservation, economic development and good governance. Below are two examples of how these synergies have played out - local input was canvassed for the Zambian Plan for the TFCA; and resources from transboundary NGOs and donors are being harnessed for local development.

### *3.1 Local input into TFCA planning process*

In the planning process for the TFCA in Zambia, this opportunity for synergy was taken up by the ZAWA who recognized the need for active stakeholder engagement. They pursued a participatory planning process in the development of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for their section of the TFCA. The main purpose of the IDP was to provide information on the approach the Zambian government plans to take regarding the management, use and conservation of natural and cultural resources in the area. The IDP planning process included soliciting input from local government, traditional authorities, CBNRM structures and the private sector through a series of workshops<sup>8</sup>. Local NGOs facilitated the participation of community based organization at the meetings by providing transport and accommodation.

Representatives from SNNP were able to table their written input into the plan which included their concern with escalating elephant damage to crops and the need to benefit from tourism development. The IDP also includes a Concept Development Plan for SNNP which acknowledges the existence of people in the Park and proposes “secured villages” that is, villages afforded some protection from wildlife.

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<sup>8</sup> Funded by the international donor community through PPF.

### *3.2 Donor and NGO interest in the TFCA concept*

Donors and NGOs bring with them resources that can facilitate local development. A number of donors have pledged future funding support to the TFCA to be routed through the centralized TFCA Secretariat. The German Bank for Reconstruction (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau) has pledged funding support for infrastructure development within the Park. For the remote and marginalized residents in SNNP who have suffered years of neglect as a result of warfare, this is a very welcome opportunity.

With the establishment of the TFCA, international transboundary NGOs (Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) <sup>9</sup> and Conservation International (CI) <sup>10</sup>) have taken a keen interest in the Park's status. The PPF have assisted with the development of a Park Management Plan and have appointed a local person as a Technical Advisor to the Park who is playing a key role in the Park's development and in the development of the neighbouring communities.

Projects promoted by CI include local mapping of villages in the Park. Conservation agriculture is being promoted as a replacement for the traditional agricultural practice of "slash and burn" that causes large destruction of elephant habitat, produces low yields and leaves a large field perimeter to protect against crop raiding elephants. Conservation Agriculture uses minimum tillage methods that reduce the destruction of natural habitat by producing much higher yields on smaller fields that are easier to protect<sup>11</sup>. Early planting enables crops to be harvested before the elephants arrive at the start of the dry season.

After a review of human-elephant conflict mitigation in the KaZa TFCA (Hanks, 2006), farmers in SNNP are being encouraged by CI to grow chillies as a means of reducing human-elephant conflict. Elephants can be deterred by using rags soaked in used engine oil that has been mixed with dried, crushed chillies and tied to fences, or setting alight a locally made chilli 'briquette'.

## **CHALLENGES**

Some of the challenges faced in working within a TFCA framework include increasing formality and complexity; increased potential for resource conflict and the potential for raised expectations that are not met.

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<sup>9</sup> The PPF is a South African based NGO set up to assist governments to develop TFCAs. PPF commissioned the Pre-feasibility Study for the KaZa TFCA and is assisting countries with developing the Integrated Development Plan for their component of the TFCA.

<sup>10</sup> Conservation International have a TFCA unit based in their Cape Town regional office and have been active in the Park since 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Through the use of good land selection methods, basins, mulching, regular weeding and improved seed.

### *3.1 Increased regulation and formality*

Issues of national sovereignty can slow down progress while the proper authorizations are obtained. Although CI had been active in SNNP for two years, operations were stopped for a four month period in early 2008 while the necessary written authorization was obtained. However this formalization brings with it the opportunity for enhanced coordination of activities.

### *3.2 Increased conflict over resources*

Speculation over potential routing of donor funding fuels conflict and rumour-mongering between NGOs. The free flow of information from the KaZa TFCA Secretariat to the member states has the potential to defuse this situation.

### *3.3 Unrealistic raised expectations*

TFCAs are not a salvation for all development needs. A common criticism in the implementation of TFCAs is that expectations are raised and not delivered. In a survey of the economic contribution tourism makes in the KaZa TFCA, Suich warns that this contribution “should be neither over- or under-emphasised; sustainable tourism development should rather be recognized as one element of a suite of development strategies that are required to overcome poverty and stagnant economic development in the region” (Suich, 2005).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

For the residents of SNNP in Zambia, their prime location in heart of the KaZa TFCA will bring profound change. The extent to which this change is positive will depend on how closely aligned community development objectives can be made with those transboundary natural resource management. Early indications of the will to include their local aspirations into national decision-making are positive.

Possible solutions to benefit sharing for residents of the Park include a co-management agreement with park authorities. De-proclamation of key settled areas in the Park to a more appropriate status is also possible while retaining corridors for wildlife movement to and from water sources.

The KaZa TFCA Pre-feasibility Study documents the idea that “ways be found to propel effectively the voice of communities to as high a level as possible” (PPF, 2006). However, within the TFCA institutional framework there is no formal way to ensure local needs are taken into account. Authority is centralized at national and international government committee level and it is not clear what role working groups have in decision-making. The onus will be on key individuals on these TFCA structures to make links to the local level and to ensure benefit flows are not captured by elites. Appendix 1 records a number of guiding principles that can act to optimize local level into transboundary natural resource management initiatives.



The development of the “new institutions” that Murphree (2000) mentioned that will “enable a mosaic of communities to represent themselves in the higher decision-taking forums and to co-ordinate their ecological management across a wide landscape” does not appear to be on the KaZa TFCA agenda.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CBNRM – Community Based Natural Resource Management

CBO – Community Based Organisation

CI – Conservation International

KaZa TFCA – Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

NGO – Non-governmental Organisation

PPF – Peace Parks Foundation

SNNP – Sioma Ngweze National Park

TFCA – Transfrontier Conservation Area

ZAWA – Zambian Wildlife Authorities

## **APPENDIX 1: Optimising local level input when developing and implementing transboundary natural resource management initiatives<sup>12</sup>**

- ✓ Promote active participation of representative local people as equal partners in planning and implementation (e.g. provide capacity building and transport/accommodation for their meaningful participation at relevant fora).
- ✓ Focus on poverty reduction, improvement of local livelihood opportunities and promote food security. Do not be limited to tourism and wildlife initiatives.
- ✓ Support and complement the work of other relevant parties e.g. CBOs, NGOs and private-sector business.
- ✓ Encourage exchange of information, resources and expertise about donor funding and project activities to build on synergies in and between countries
- ✓ Work towards complementary agendas between NGOs to avoid unnecessary competition.
- ✓ Monitor and assess progress with regard to the extent to which local communities benefit.
- ✓ Build strong, local level transboundary initiatives as a foundation for large-scale transboundary initiatives (if and when they arrive).
- ✓ Nurture existing informal transboundary linkages where appropriate (e.g. sharing skills amongst groups of related people across international borders)
- ✓ Engage with transboundary initiatives to try and bring a local-level focus (even if objectives seem mismatched and misguided).
- ✓ Identify and promote amongst all stakeholders, common values and a common vision based on shared values.
- ✓ Plan and deliver large-scale initiatives in an integrated way rather than in a piecemeal and fragmented manner.
- ✓ Achieve co-ordinated planning and protection (e.g. complementary management plans or wildlife monitoring).
- ✓ Look for new opportunities on the ground to support transboundary linkages and relationships (e.g. transboundary visits between local people).

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from Chengeta et al, (2003).