

Profit Marauders or Catalysts for Conservation?

Sandile Zeka

Contrary to claims that nature conservation is a western-oriented practice earmarked to help countries in the developing world to conform to acceptable norms of governing natural resources, this brief seeks to challenge this fallacy. African communities have practised nature conservation for centuries. Unfortunately, the colonisation of the continent has deprived these communities of this ancient practice. It has been argued, repeatedly, that the establishment of protected areas is a government initiative that promotes the interests of the private sector and tourists at the expense of local communities. However, there has been a concerted effort by researchers and lobby groups to 'bring back' the ownership of protected areas to local communities, particularly in the developing world.

Introduction

This brief critically addresses the reasons why the legitimacy of protected areas is continuously contested by local communities; and the role local communities should play in ensuring that much of land and wildlife that were once theirs are utilised in a manner that benefits these communities.

The continued sale of 'excess' wildlife by the South African National Parks (SANParks) without the sanctioning and ultimately any advantage to local communities is likely to spiral into a full-blown commotion between local communities and protected areas. Animal rights organisations and other civil society movements relentlessly voice their resentment of the sale of wildlife. However, this contestation is minor compared to the looming rupture from local communities who always (rightfully) claim custodianship and ownership of

tangible and intangible resources within protected areas. According to opposing arguments, selling wildlife to private buyers will not guarantee that they will not be used for hunting purposes. In the midst of this debate about the sale of wildlife; one notes the missing voices of local communities. This is despite the rhetoric that local communities are partners in the governance and management of nature reserves in South Africa. This brief posits that conservation is an activity that has been practised in Africa long before colonisation. As such local communities should be legitimate beneficiaries of natural resources which exist in their land. Colonisation resulted in the rejection of traditional African practices of conservation such as seasonal hunting for food security purposes, the use of areas marked for conservation for sacred practices such as communicating with ancestors, and selective harvesting of plants for medicinal purposes.

In the midst of the debate about the sale of wildlife; one notes the missing voices of local communities

Sandile Zeka is a Research Specialist at the Africa Institute of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

these communities continue to argue that the new approach in conservation seeks to destroy norms and values that have always guided African communities

These practices were replaced by western-oriented practices such as hunting for sport purposes, and using conservation for tourism ventures rather than for the benefit of local communities. These divergent and often contradictory norms, values, and assumptions as regards to conservation have to a greater extent fuelled animosity between local communities and government-led conservation agencies. Consequently, local communities were dispossessed of their rights to conservation of natural resources. Despite the exclusion, and in other instances the forced removal of local communities in areas designated for conservation, these communities continue to be critical role players in the conservation of natural resources. Unfortunately, decision making, and ultimate benefits from conservation continue to elude local communities. Therefore, it is imperative that norms, values, and assumptions that local communities possess regarding the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources are recognised by government in an effort to harmonise relationships between agencies who manage protected areas and local communities.

Nature Conservation and its Challenges

Whilst communities worldwide have always practised nature conservation, this practice has been hindered, in some instances, by population growth and wars. Taking advantage of these challenges government initiated conservation measures under the pretext that they sought to avoid the extinction of wildlife and other natural resources. As evidence shows in this brief, these initiatives resulted in the marginalisation of local communities on their role in the conservation of natural resources. They also culminated in the founding of formal institutions to carry out and promote conservation in the 19th century.¹ This century was characterised by the formation of conservation agencies. Yellowstone National Park was established in the United States (US) in 1872; national parks were also established in Canada, South Australia and New Zealand in the 1880s and 1890s.²

South Africa, like other developing countries such as India, followed suit and established game reserves. It started with the enactment of the Cape Act for the preservation of game in 1886, followed by the establishment of the Sabie Game Reserve in 1892, which later became the Kruger National Park in 1926.³ Indeed, this was a sub-Saharan African phenomenon, as 1899 also saw the establishment

of Ukamba Game Reserve in Kenya. The preservation of wildlife was intrinsic to the establishment of these conservation agencies. In Africa, one of the most obvious functions was to deter Africans from hunting.⁴

The implementation of government-led conservation practices was based on western norms and values from the beginning. This approach led the local communities to see practitioners in these agencies as nothing more than new missionaries who would convert developing countries' culture into western bureaucratic norms and values.⁵ As a result, local communities did not perceive these agencies as legitimate.⁶ This idea of 'fortress conservation' has brought with it myriad forms of contestation. In particular, these communities continue to argue that the new approach in conservation does not only strive to impose western-oriented practices on conservation. It also seeks to destroy norms and values that have always guided African communities in their interaction with natural resources.⁷

The continued disenchantment of local communities and their role in conservation strategies culminated – in the 1980s and 1990s – in more attention being given to the plight of local communities as critical role players in the conservation arena.⁸ Concerns on the exclusion of local communities in government-led conservation practices have been registered in a number of global forums. For instance, debates at the Third and Fourth World Congresses on National Parks and Protected Areas in Bali in 1982 and Caracas in 1992 signalled new thinking for environmentalists, governments, and agencies managing protected areas.⁹ The adverse impact of protected areas on local people was a particular concern in these global forums.¹⁰ Despite much revenue generated in protected areas, neighbouring communities still find themselves living under poor and squalid conditions.

Protected areas need to be integrated into economic development planning frameworks and the needs of local people should be a priority.¹¹ While both the Third and Fourth World Congresses on National Parks called for urgent restructuring of relationships between protected areas management and local communities, the benefits of natural resources in the conservation sector still elude these communities.

Partial Legitimacy and the Dubious Existence of Protected Areas

Despite the enactment of the National Parks Act of 1926 which brought about changes in the

management of the Kruger National Park, challenges to its legitimacy and of protected areas in general continue.¹² Apart from placing powers in the newly-established Board of Trustees, norms and beliefs which operated in the past still continue. The emphasis was still on the appreciation of the value of wildlife and landscape. Furthermore, this emphasis was on tourists who became, and are currently, chief beneficiaries of the national parks. It led to the termination of sporting activities which, before these changes, had enjoyed tremendous prominence in the park.¹³ In addition, Kruger National Park was named a 'national heritage'.¹⁴ Those in power regarded these legal and bureaucratic changes as factors that legitimise Kruger National Park as a national asset. Therefore, this organisation would be recognised by the citizenry.

Despite these changes, Carruthers questions the national heritage status awarded to Kruger National Park. With the exclusion of local communities, and especially the black population, she asks "[w]hose heritage was to be enshrined in the park?"¹⁵ Indeed, local communities perceived the establishment of the park as a direct violation of their land rights. Their dissatisfaction was further exacerbated by their exclusion in the management of the Kruger National Park. Therefore, the communities did not regard and accept these changes as legitimate because they were both excluded in the formulation and played no role in the implementation process.

Commenting on legitimacy, Ponton and Gill argue that it refers to the degree of acceptance which the political regime enjoys among the community.¹⁶ They argue that it is of utmost importance that controlling groups not ignore that potential instability can be caused by the rejection of their legitimacy. Clearly, the Kruger National Park is a classic example of an institution whose foundation and existence is resented by local communities. The inculcation of integrated natural resource management through building on local skills and local forms of cooperation that could have promoted voluntary participation was absent in the establishment of Kruger National Park.¹⁷

In KwaZulu-Natal, the Msinsi Nature Reserve also adds to a litany of problems between protected areas and local communities. This protected area cuts across the Salem community; the community regards it as an island whose hegemony in that area is persistently being forced to prevail over their own. Accusations from the community are an indication that they are not only concerned by hostile relationships with Msinsi Nature Reserve, but are to a greater extent, an expression of

dissatisfaction about the legitimacy of the Msinsi Nature Reserve within the land that is tenured by the community of Salem.

In Africa, failure to gain support and cooperation from local communities has resulted in ceaseless poaching that has not only destabilised the management of parks, but has also led to the adoption of behaviours that are inimical to norms and values prevalent in these societies. For instance, local people have always engaged on controlled and seasonal hunting.¹⁸ However, in response to exclusionary practices imposed by the park management, community members embark on unselective and uncontrolled hunting habits when an opportunity arises.¹⁹ In recent years, particularly after the democratic election in 1994, nature reserves in South Africa have sought, through various government legislations, to harmonise their relationships with local communities.

Rhetoric and Unfulfilled Promises

Trust is defined as a firm belief in another person or process, and could be promoted through a continuous and open exchange of information which regularly guarantees each stakeholder's confidence in the other. In theory, decision-makers and all stakeholders concerned regard natural resource conservation as an initiative aimed at involving local communities, creating jobs and ensuring that benefits accrue to these communities. However, this is not usually the case; hostile relationships emanating from lack of trust have also been demonstrated in a study entitled "Community-Based Natural Resource Management and the Problem of Predation: the case of Salem, South Africa."²⁰

One of the findings, as narrated by local communities in partnership with Msinsi Nature Reserve, is that a number of promises including an undertaking to build schools and clinics from the revenue accrued from the supposedly co-management tourism venture run by the Msinsi Nature Reserve were never fulfilled. This is despite a commitment by both parties to better relationships for the sustainable management of the reserve. On the other hand, constant accusations from the reserve management are that communities continue, among other misdemeanours, to poach wildlife in the reserve and graze their animals in areas designated for tourism. According to reserve management, this is a breach of an agreement reached by the two parties.²¹

These accusations and counter-accusations indicate that although the community of Salem and the management of Msinsi Nature Reserve have

With the exclusion of local communities, and especially the black population, she asks "[w]hose heritage was to be enshrined in the park?"

pledged to forge a close working relationship, they nonetheless fail to realise this objective. Coming from different backgrounds, these two stakeholders failed to highlight the importance of trust. On the contrary, both parties have resorted to unilateral decision making practices which have little or no bearing on enhancing the trust of local communities' trust. Evidently, their relationship was not established on trust; hence they both failed to honour agreements they had reached.

Power to the People: Can Local Communities Influence Decision Making Processes in Protected Areas?

While protected areas remain the pivots of conserving natural resources, their existence and operation has to undergo an ideological change so that local communities can accept them.²² This ideological change should include direct responses to the obvious institutional weaknesses such as weak policies that are frequently divorced from policy development in other government departments.²³ Co-existence and collaboration between protected areas and local communities should be projected towards affording these two actors an opportunity to engage in activities that are aimed at empowering each other on how to better manage conservation ventures. Defined as giving the individuals the authority to participate in decision making, to contribute to their ideas, to exert influence and control, and to be accountable, empowerment could help to bridge relationships for the benefit of natural resources.

Management for purposes of supplying market demands for safari hunting and tourism is emphasised to the detriment of local communities.²⁴ The lack of a structured process involving both Zimbabwe's Communal areas Management for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) and local communities is a good demonstration of this fact. The treatment meted out to local communities by CAMPFIRE managers is indicative of the contempt with which local people are regarded.²⁵

Similarly, evidence from a study conducted in Salem points out that Msinsi management is favourably biased towards the need of tourists, and this trend tends to obscure the needs and role of the community.²⁶ One of the challenges this community has to deal with in their relationship with the Msinsi Nature Reserve is the continuous impounding of their cattle when found grazing on a strip of land earmarked as a site to be used by tourists for game viewing, particularly photographic safaris. These problems continue unabated

despite an undertaking by both parties to peacefully co-manage the Msinsi Nature Reserve.²⁷ However, the success of most safari hunts is a result of the knowledge of local communities in tracking animals.²⁸ Yet these trackers are treated as "unskilled labourers rather than recognized as qualified guides," argues Murombedzi.²⁹

A key dimension put forward in these case studies is the significance of social capital as an element that helps in reconnecting inter-organisational relationships. Whilst there is debate surrounding the precise definition of social capital, there is a general agreement that this concept refers to the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures.³⁰ It is in this context that this concept is used in this brief. The evidence is the failure of initiatives which, despite financial support, have fallen short of strengthening relationships between local communities and conservation agencies. There is a need to better understand why social capital has not been overtly engaged as a critical resource that could help in fostering constructive relationships.

The challenge is to institutionalise behavioural norms, values and assumptions the locals have on the governance of natural resources. Whether locally, regionally or globally, there are concerted attempts to forge sound relationships between local communities and conservation agencies. Shared governance is critical in establishing and sustaining relationships. The challenge is to channel efforts towards a collaborative approach that aims at, among others, establishing strong institutional regimes founded on social capital. These regimes could help in easing, and in some cases eliminating transactional costs associated with inter-organisational conflict. It is through focusing on institutionalising inter-organisational relationships that behaviours of both local communities and conservation agencies can be better managed.

Conclusion

Despite the continued rhetoric pointing to successful co-management initiatives aimed at local communities and protected area managers, there is a need to strengthen relationships between these two actors. Relationships between conservation agencies and local communities are crucial in promoting better decision making and better management of protected areas. Relevant government departments should constantly monitor relationships between local communities

Local communities are not only custodians of land adjacent to parks, but they are also custodians of animals within the parks

and protected areas. Information exchange, trust and inter-organisational networks are critical resources on which sound inter-organisational relationships should be built. It is in this light that local communities' assumptions should be included in every initiative or decision making process by protected areas. There is a need for government to ensure that norms and values local communities espouse in regard to the governance of protected areas become an integral part of the general park management system. Local communities are not only custodians of land adjacent to parks, but they are also custodians of animals within the parks. Once these animals escape from the parks it is these communities that are the first to interact with these animals. It is therefore incumbent to ensure that any decision taken by parks' management in regard to either selling or culling of animals is taken in collaboration with local communities. Mandatory sharing of monetary benefits accruing from sales and auctions could go a long way in advancing sustainable development.

This brief has also argued that certain norms and values have always bonded local communities for many years. It is therefore important that protected areas, in their dealings with local communities, acknowledge the norms and values these communities rely on when interacting with natural resources. It has also demonstrated that trust should exist in the relationships between management of protected areas and the relevant communities. Therefore, it is imperative that both agencies tasked with managing protected areas; and local communities engage in partnerships that are founded on trust in order to amicably resolve their differences.

Recommendations

Alvesson has observed that “[c]ontemporary social life in many ways destabilises a coherent sense of self identity.”³¹ Perhaps local communities that have been geographically isolated for a long time are less exposed to destabilising forces of change and more easily retain their sense of identity. However, as land and wildlife is central to the sense of community cohesion among the indigenous people of Africa,³² decision making in protected areas is perceived as an opportunity to exercise their land rights. It is therefore imperative that:

- Local communities play a central role in the governance of resources (both tangible and intangible) in protected areas. As the users and

custodians of resources in protected areas local communities should be afforded more ownership rights of the protected areas

- Decision making processes regarding the sale of wildlife should include input from communities, and a portion of proceeds from these sales should be allocated to these communities
- Government should pass new legislation that is informed by contemporary challenges that local communities face – these include poverty, lack of jobs, and the ever increasing standards of living – as ‘neighbours’ of protected areas; and ensure that the use of resources in protected areas has benefits for local communities
- Government agencies and local communities should jointly govern protected areas to avoid conflict and contestation that presently exists between these two stakeholders
- Finally, the socio-economic hardships that people in rural areas face and in particular those adjacent to protected areas, should be better addressed through disaggregating economic spin-offs between protected areas and local communities.

Failure to urgently respond to these challenges is an open invitation to local communities to invade and make use of what they perceive as theirs within protected areas.

Notes and References

- 1 W. Adams, 2001, *Green Development: Environment and Sustainability in the Third World*. London, Routledge
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 J. M. MacKenzie, 1989, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism*. Manchester, University of Manchester Press.
- 4 Adams 2001.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 J. Carruthers, 1995, *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History*. Pietermaritzburg, University of Kwazulu Natal Press.
- 7 Adams 2001.
- 8 D. Western and R. Wright, 1994, ‘The Background to Community-based Conservation,’ In D. Western, R.M. White and S.C. Strum (eds), *Natural Connections: Perspectives in Community-based Conservation*, Washington, DC, Island Press, pp 1–14.
- 9 J. McNeely and K. Miller (eds), 1984, *National Parks, Conservation and Development: The Role of Protected Areas in Sustaining Society*, Washington, DC., Smithsonian Institution Press.
- 10 Adams 2001.
- 11 J. McNeely, 1993, ‘Economic Incentives for Conserving Biodiversity: Lessons for Africa’, *Ambio*, 22, pp 144–50.

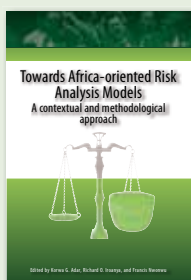
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Carruthers 1995. *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History*. Pietermaritzburg, University of Kwazulu Natal Press.
- 14 McNeely 1993.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 G. Ponton and P. Gill, 1982, *Introduction to Politics*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell LTD.
- 17 J. Pretty and I. Guijt, 1992, 'Primary Environmental Care: An Alternative Paradigm for Development Assistance', *Environment and Urbanization* 4: 22–36.
- 18 Adams 2001.
- 19 Western and Wright 1994.
- 20 S. Zeka, 2005, 'Community-Based Natural Resource Management and the Problem of Predation: The Case of Salem, South Africa', In V. Dzingirai and C. Breen (eds), *Confronting the Community Crisis in Community Conservation: Case Studies from Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg Centre for Environment and Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Adams 2001.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 J. Murombedzi, 2001, 'Committees, Rights, Costs & Benefits: Natural Resource Stewardship & Community Benefits in Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE Programme,' In D. Hulme and M. Murphree, (eds) *African Wildlife & Livelihoods: The Promise & Performance of Community Conservation*. James Currey Ltd, Oxford.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Zeka 2005.
- 27 Murombedzi 2001.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Zeka 2005.
- 30 See P. Bourdieu, 1977, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, translated R. Nice; J. Coleman, 1988, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95–S121; and A. Portes, 1998, 'Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, pp 1–24.
- 31 M. Alvesson, 2004, 'Knowledge Work: Ambiguity, Image and Identity,' In K. Starkey, S. Tempest, and A. McKinlay (eds), *How Organizations Learn. Managing the Search for Knowledge*. London, Thomson Learning.
- 32 A. Adedeji, 1999, *Comprehending and Mastering African Politics: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, London, Zed Books Ltd.



Land and Water Management in Southern Africa
Towards sustainable agriculture
Edited by Calvin Nhira, Alfred Mapiki and Patrick Rankhumise
ISBN 978-0-7983-0214-2
Price R 250,00



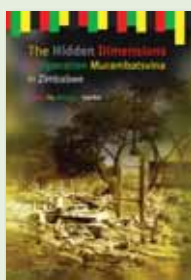
Land and Water Management in Southern Africa
Towards better water use in semi-arid and arid areas
Edited by Alfred Mapiki and Sehlare Makgellaneng
ISBN 978-0-7983-0215-9
Price R 250,00



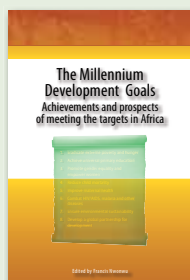
Towards Africa-oriented Risk Analysis Models
A contextual and methodological approach
Edited by Korwa G. Adar, Richard O. Iroanya, and Francis Nwonwu
ISBN 978-0-7983-0213-5
Price R 120,00



African Political Elites
The Search for Democracy and Good Governance
Edited by Francis Nwonwu and Dirk Kotze
ISBN 978-0-7983-0184-8
Price R 120,00



The Hidden Dimensions
Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe
Edited by Maurice Vambe
ISBN 978-0-7983-0216-6
Price R 120,00



The Millennium Development Goals
Achievements and Prospects of Meeting the Targets in Africa
Edited by Francis Nwonwu
ISBN 978-0-7983-0121-8
Price R 120,00



A-Z: Continental and country profiles, Second edition
Edited by Pieter Esterhysen
ISBN 978-0-7983-0199-2
Price R 250,00



Greening the Great Red Island: Madagascar in nature and culture
Edited by Jeffrey C. Kaufman
ISBN 978-0-7983-0181-7
Price R 120,00



Africa Institute of South Africa

PO Box 630
Pretoria
0001
South Africa

No 1 Embassy House
Bailey Lane
Arcadia
Pretoria

Tel: +27 (0)12 304 9700
Fax: +27 (0)12 323 8153

E-mail: ai@ai.org.za,
Website: www.ai.org.za

AISA is a statutory research body focusing on contemporary African affairs in its research, publications, library and documentation. **AISA** is dedicated to knowledge production, education, training and the promotion of awareness on Africa, for Africans and the international community. This is achieved through independent policy analysis, and the collection, processing and interpretation, and dissemination of information.

Publisher: Solani Ngobeni
Project Manager: Rose Bopape
Editorial Assistant: Matau Setshase
Administrative Assistant: Rose Lepule

Publications Intern:
Tshepiso Makgalemele

Design, layout and typesetting:
Berekile Pila Projects

Printing:
Karen Graphics

ISSN 1998-7994



9 771998 799009