25 years of CBNRM in Namibia: A retrospective on accomplishments, contestation and contemporary challenges

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Abstract
Namibia’s conservancy programme was launched officially in 1998 and, by 2005, Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) was firmly established in Namibia’s national development plans. The uptake of the conservancy model by rural residents all over the country and the growth in CBNRM earnings, have been extraordinarily rapid. The country’s CBNRM policies have been lauded as the most progressive of their kind in southern Africa. Given that the evolution of CBNRM in Namibia is linked to the broader historical processes of colonisation and apartheid, and the highly skewed land distribution which those systems engendered, the recurring themes that arise in evaluating CBNRM are no surprise: they hinge on institutions, authority, heterogeneous interests within ‘communities’, and the uncertainty of rural land tenure. This article examines both CBNRM’s successes as well as the academic criticism it generates, and, importantly, offers an assessment of key challenges facing Namibian CBNRM today, including the sustainable support of the rapid growth of conservancies, changes in the environmental donor landscape, and the rise of an international anti-hunting lobby. Our intention is to provide perspectives from both an academic and a practitioner’s point of view.

Introduction
Since the early 1980s, there has been a global shift in environmental conservation models away from exclusive protectionism of wildlife and natural resources, towards local participation and collaboration in natural resource management.1 Although some

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have argued that the spectre of protectionism has re-emerged since the late 1990s, the framework for ‘community’ or ‘community-based’ conservation has become widely accepted by donors, governments and NGOs in southern Africa.

Broadly, Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) refers to ideas, policies, practices and behaviours which seek to give those who live in rural environments greater involvement in managing local natural resources — soil, water, species, habitats, landscapes or biodiversity — and greater access to the benefits derived from those resources. CBNRM is a discourse and practice which has quickly established its roots among state conservation agencies, aid donors, and conservation and development NGOs in southern Africa. The community-based conservation approach is closely tied to the ‘participation’ orthodoxy, global decentralisation and democratisation reform, the growth of interest in ‘common property regimes’ for economically ‘efficient’ resource management, and to arguments that have challenged Hardin’s pessimistic ‘tragedy of the commons’ thesis.

Literature in the political ecology field, together with that in anthropology and environmental history, has drawn attention to the historical, social and political dynamics surrounding material and discursive struggles over the environment, including those in southern Africa. In southern Africa and in Namibia, CBNRM projects have changed the power relations both among rural entities and between these groups and NGOs and governments. New local institutions and practices have proliferated as a result of CBNRM interventions. This has significant implications for environment, governance and democracy.

After a brief introduction to CBNRM in southern Africa, this article examines the rise of CBNRM in Namibia and in particular the rise of the conservancy programme. We flag both the programme’s successes as well as academic critiques and, importantly, offer an assessment of key challenges facing Namibian CBNRM today, 25 years after Namibia’s independence. Our intention is to provide perspectives from both an academic and a practitioner’s points of view.


The rise of the ‘New Conservation’ in Southern Africa

In southern Africa, the ‘new conservation’ approach is said to mark a departure from, and a challenge to, earlier ‘fortress conservation’ models. Initiated by colonial administrations, the ‘fortress’ model involved the creation of protected conservation areas from which Africans were forcibly, and often violently, removed or displaced and subsequently excluded. Preservation and exclusion were the key principles on which national parks were founded, and created the hostility with which many rural Africans came to view conservation efforts. The ‘new conservation’ model thus has a weighty historical legacy to overcome.

Three other central ideas underpin the theory of ‘community conservation’. Firstly, it asserts that a legal and policy context of devolution must be created so that rural people can manage their own resources. This emphasis is linked in part to the failure of state bureaucracies to micromanage the environment, protect biodiversity and coerce citizens into conservation. Secondly, ‘community conservation’ re-conceptualizes conservation along the lines of ‘sustainable development’, wherein natural resources can be utilised and managed, rather than simply preserved, to achieve both developmental and conservation goals. Thirdly, CBNRM incorporates neoliberal economic thinking on markets. In theory, if and when people place high economic values on natural resources, the likelihood of conservation is enhanced. The economic rationale is that poor people who participate in wildlife and natural resource management will benefit economically from activities such as tourism and monitored safari hunting. In turn, conservation objectives can be tied to development needs.

To date, CBNRM in southern Africa and Namibia has been concerned primarily, though not exclusively, with providing rural communities with strong proprietorship over their

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6 Hulme and Murphree, “Communities”; eadem, “Community Conservation”.
11 Hulme and Murphree, “Communities”.
natural resources (for example, establishing community organisational and institutional management)\textsuperscript{12} and with the management of wildlife on communal land, that is, land whose ownership is vested in the state, but which is designated for use by farmers on a communal basis.\textsuperscript{13} Significant influences on CBNRM include the region’s legacy of colonialism and apartheid — notably the extensive social and political engineering of populations, institutions, space and resource use by the state — combined with legislative and social changes implemented since independence. CBNRM projects have often entered onto contested terrain in terms of authority over land and natural resources.\textsuperscript{14}

\section*{CBNRM in Namibia}

Like other natural resource management policies in the region, the evolution of Namibia’s conservancies is linked to broader historical processes of colonisation and apartheid, and the highly skewed land distribution engendered by those systems. A dual tenure system entrenched ‘white’ freehold title over land whilst designating state-owned communal land for ‘blacks’, onto which many were forcibly relocated and which they had no right to buy or sell.\textsuperscript{15} Since independence, communal land residents have had usufruct rights over land and resources. Although the National Land Policy, the Traditional Authorities Act (2000) and the Communal Land Reform Act (2002) provide for Traditional Authorities’ involvement in land use planning and allocation of customary land rights, the state has ultimate control over how the land is used, and by whom.\textsuperscript{16} However, there has been considerable inconsistency in how this distribution of authority plays out in practice.

The story of Namibian CBNRM’s pioneer years in the country’s north-west is now well known.\textsuperscript{17} This region suffered a massive decline of internationally-valued wildlife species


\textsuperscript{17} Jones, “Policy Lessons”; Sullivan, “Communalizing Discourse”; Brian T.B. Jones, \textit{A Critical Analysis of the Development of Namibia’s Community-Based Natural Resource Management Programme. Competing Interests in Natural Resource Management: Success or Failure in the Creation of Viable Common Property Management}
in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly desert elephants and black rhino, as the result of drought and organised illegal trafficking, mostly by high-ranking apartheid officials. These factors were exacerbated by region-wide armed conflict. In the early 1980s, Garth Owen-Smith, in conjunction with local traditional authorities, established local wildlife protection schemes, notably a ‘community game guard’ system. The apartheid government and orthodox conservationists viewed these efforts as eccentric and subversive at the time. Later, Owen-Smith and Margaret Jacobsohn established a pilot community-based tourism project which aimed at counteracting the negative effects of tourism experienced by Himba and Herero pastoralists. The pair subsequently established the successful NGO Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) which influenced the conservancy legislation for communal areas that was passed under the Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996. Their experiences, along with those of several other NGOs which eventually came together to form the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support NGOs (NACSO), also informed the development of a national CBNRM programme.

CBNRM’s predominant manifestation in Namibia is the ‘conservancy model’. Communal area residents who form a common property resource management institution (a conservancy) are granted proprietorship of, and have management responsibilities over, certain wildlife species. The ultimate ownership of wildlife, however, like the ownership of communal land, remains with the state. To be registered as such, a conservancy needs to have a defined boundary and membership, a representative management committee, a legal constitution recognised by government and a plan for the equitable distribution of benefits.

Namibia’s conservancy programme was officially launched by Founding President Sam Nujoma in late 1998. By 2005, CBNRM was firmly entrenched in Namibia’s national development plans and its approaches had been extended into other sectors, including community forestry and water management. Given that “Namibia’s conservancy policy has been heralded as the most progressive initiative of its kind in southern Africa”, IRDNC and other NACSO member organisations have accrued a substantial degree of legitimacy as innovative, pioneering contributors to this legislation. Conservancy formation and institutional support, which has catalysed re-conceptualizations of land,

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19 Jones, “Critical Analysis”.
21 Jones, “Policy Lessons”.
23 Sullivan, “Communalizing Discourse”: 159.
resources, ‘community’ and space by environmentalists and local actors, had been one of these NGOs’ primary activities for over 10 years by 2005.

The uptake of the conservancy model by rural residents all over the country, and the growth in CBNRM earnings, has been extraordinarily rapid. By 2013, 79 conservancies had been gazetted, covering 19.4% of Namibia’s land area and incorporating over 175,000 members.\(^{24}\) In 2013, community conservation earned more than NAD 72.2 million, with tourism and trophy hunting as the biggest sources of direct benefits.\(^{25}\) Not all revenue accrues to conservancies; some of it, like revenue from crafts, goes directly to the producers, but this outcome is nonetheless fostered by the conservancy programme. By 2015, 82 conservancies had been formed and over 177,000 people incorporated.

Overview of conservancy accomplishments and CBNRM benefits

The conservation gains of conservancies are indisputable. We refer here briefly to key trends: wildlife recovery, revenue generation, game meat harvesting, job creation, democratic governance and policy adoption in other sectors.

After the inception of conservancies there were massive increases in wildlife numbers in the mid-1990s, levelling out in the early 2000s. In general terms, wildlife populations are still increasing in conservancies, although certain species in the north-west have recently shown some declines as a result of a combination of factors, including drought. A dramatic example of the overall long-term trends which demonstrates the recovery in wildlife populations is the re-establishment of ancient migration routes of zebra between northern Botswana and Namibia’s Chobe floodplains since 2004.\(^ {26}\) In 1995, Namibia’s elephant population stood at an estimated 7,500; today they number 20,000. Population estimates of lion, mountain zebra, sable antelope and the desert-dwelling black rhino show similar upward trends.

The overall increase in wildlife numbers has made more game available for community harvesting and trophy hunting. Many conservancies are now allotted sizeable game quotas for trophy hunting. In 2013, consumptive use of wildlife alone delivered 542,280 kg of game meat (valued at NAD 9,761,040) to local communities, and earned them over NAD 20 million cash income from trophy hunting alone (not including other methods of game harvesting or the value of own-use meat).\(^ {27}\) During a recent IRDNC evaluation, game meat distribution from hunting was mentioned most consistently as a


\(^ {27}\) NACSO, State of Community Conservation.
major benefit delivered by conservancies to communities, even though game meat only made up 7% of total conservancy revenue in that year. Whilst the jury is out on whether revenue alone provides sufficient incentive to protect wildlife, it is clear that the hunting industry has promoted wildlife as a way of using communal lands, enabling communities to generate substantial income, and demonstrating the economic value of these resources to the national economy.

Conservancies have facilitated a variety of other income earning opportunities for rural people. These include the sale of crafts, thatching grass and other natural-resource-based small business, such as the production of essential oils from indigenous plants, and Devil’s Claw, a medicinal plant. Revenue from these plant resources previously had limited commercial value; they now provide considerable income to local harvesters, often women without a formal education who do not otherwise have access to cash income.

Despite governance challenges which we discuss further below, conservancies have facilitated the establishment of democratic institutional structures that have built human capital for rural people to govern, manage and administer tourism and development. In 2013, conservancies generated 6,472 jobs for formerly disadvantaged rural people. Beyond jobs, a major benefit of conservancies often voiced in local interviews is that a great number of local meetings are facilitated and financed by the conservancies. The conservancies are reported to have improved the general standard of education and contributed to improvements in health of local communities.

Given their success, CBNRM approaches have been adopted and adapted as an implementation strategy in the forestry, fisheries and water sectors in Namibia. The programme has also promoted the building of relationships and partnerships and improved the capacity of civil society in Namibia for collective action with government, inter-CBO and inter-NGO. The fostering of such strategic partnerships at local, national and international levels has undoubtedly expanded the social capital of Namibians for joint action.

Critiques of CBNRM in Southern Africa and Namibia

Whilst CBNRM theory is brighty optimistic, its practice and implementation have been subjected to substantial criticism. Critics have questioned the extent to which CBNRM can in fact break free from ‘received wisdom’ about the environment and from a

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29 Ibid.


‘fortress’ mentality, and have qualified CBNRM’s economic rationale and success. Outcomes for livelihoods and conservation are often hard to evaluate for want of good data. Some analyses have explored the social and political implications and effects of CBNRM projects — particularly the work of NGOs — for local identities and for access to, and authority over, natural resources and their benefits. This inevitably invites discussion of the themes of devolution, ‘governmentality’ (new forms of self-regulation which echo modes of control historically associated with the state and which serve to alter systems of local authority), and the role of institutions within CBNRM. NGOs and local CBNRM institutions are new players on a stage where ‘traditional’ and other authorities already operate. Thus it also invites discussion of the role of ethnic identities in building institutional and group authority. Critics have questioned whether CBNRM does indeed devolve conservation management from the state to the local level. A further critique concerns the extension of state and NGO authority and private sector interests into remote hinterlands through CBNRM. Last but not least, critics have called for a more nuanced analysis of the role of environmental NGOs and their often ambiguous contribution to social change. NGOs’

work in some cases reinforces the state’s authority on the one hand, and fragments local authority on the other. This rests uneasily with NGOs’ intentions of increasing local authority over resources through devolution.40

Devolution also raises the question of pre-existing institutions such as chieftainships which also have interests in land and natural resources. CBNRM creates a new axis of authority alongside these when it establishes new local institutions such as CBNRM committees. Traditional authority also raises the question of group identity, particularly ethnicity. Ethnic identities have persisted or even mushroomed in many postcolonial states and in post-apartheid Namibia and South Africa despite the associations of ethnic identities and institutions with the repressive regimes of the past.41 This suggests that mobilizing ethnicity, among other things, is an important political tool for making demands on more powerful actors for rights and resources. It also suggests that ethnicity is a forum for contesting the distribution of resources within groups.42 This aspect, however, has been neglected in the context of CBNRM analyses, and begs the use of more historical approaches towards community conservation.

Also relevant to divergent interests in and dispersed axes of authority over natural resources is the question of who really benefits from CBNRM. Analysts have noted that intended beneficiaries are either not sufficiently compensated for the inconveniences of conservation,43 or that benefits are accrued elsewhere before reaching them,44 often by traditional and political elites, the state or private business.45


40 Taylor, Identity, Authority and Environment.


43 Brockington, Fortress Conservation: 9.

44 Murphree, “Communal Approaches”.

It is clear that the subjects of CBNRM actively engage with CBNRM, in some instances embracing it even at personal cost, and in other instances contesting it. Such actions are intimately related to local histories, identities, economics and politics which play a crucial role in how CBNRM projects are received and realised. Local identity dynamics may not always cater for the type of human-wildlife relationships that CBNRM planners envisage for project beneficiaries. Such examples suggest that authority over land, natural resources and CBNRM benefits is continually contested among different interest groups – for example, among different branches of the state, NGOs, ethnic groups and so on. Where CBNRM projects lack legitimacy, they may be actively resisted by the intended rural beneficiaries.

With a view to better understanding the multiple interests and actors within ‘communities’ and environmental projects, recent work has called for greater attention to the role of informal and formal institutions in CBNRM. Despite attempts to legitimate new institutions and projects, CBNRM actors often underestimate the embeddedness of existing political authority institutions and the implications this has for struggles over the capture and control of new resources. Where community-based organisations have proliferated under decentralisation reforms, the resulting diffusion of powers among these institutions can create competition and conflict over authority and belonging. Contestation has also arisen over the material and intangible benefits that may accrue from CBNRM projects and the NGOs that facilitate them. The success of CBNRM is critically affected by the extent to which new projects and institutions can secure legitimacy at the local level, which begs the question as to how they achieve this and in whose eyes. It is in this regard that identity- and authority-building often become critical processes; CBNRM is also a forum in which identity may be mobilized by certain interest groups as a means of asserting authority, such as in the case of Khwe people in Zambezi region.


Black and Watson, “Local Community”.

Ribot, “Choose Democracy”.

See Jones, “Critical Analysis”.

Murphree, “Communal Approaches”; Black and Watson “Local Community”.

Taylor, Identity, Authority and Environment; idem, Identity and Community Conservation.
Critiques of Namibia’s conservancy programme

Although widely celebrated among conservationists, conservancies have not always achieved their espoused ideals. These shortcomings are best outlined by Jones and include weak devolution of proprietorship over wildlife, with government retaining considerable control over management decisions, and the difficulty of replicating the incentives and conditions which have prevailed on freehold land for many years. Thus, sustainable management of renewable natural resources in conservancies may be further out of reach than on freehold land. Additionally, the formation of new conservancies has often exposed or fostered local-level conflict. The nature of such conflict varies considerably, given the different social, economic, political and environmental characteristics of different conservancies, as well as temporal dynamics.

There are several recurring themes, however, relating to institutions, authority, financial governance, heterogeneous interests within ‘communities’, and the uncertainty of rural land tenure. Firstly, communal areas have been subject to a plethora of community-based institutions over and above conservancies, given the different types of natural resources they contain and the different levels at which these are ideally managed. In some instances, there has been overlap or conflict between the policies and legislation of different sectors. ‘Competing’ individuals, groups and institutions may have to labour more intensively to construct and assert their legitimacy in the context of natural resource management, be it CBNRM or other types of projects.

Secondly, a key axis of contestation concerns the relationship between existing Traditional Authorities and new CBNRM institutions. CBNRM policy and legislation do not formally provide for traditional leaders to be involved in conservancies and there is no requirement for conservancy committees to be sanctioned by local or regional political structures. This presents complications given Traditional Authorities’ role in ensuring sustainable resource use. Nevertheless, these factors again vary considerably from place to place and many conservancies have made significant efforts to involve their Traditional Authorities. Indeed, CBNRM projects in Namibia have often become a forum

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53 Jones, Critical Analysis.
56 Seely, Evolutionary Process; Legal Assistance Centre, Our Land.
for individuals, groups and institutions to vie for legitimacy, sometimes along ethnic lines.58

Thirdly, case studies from Kunene and East Caprivi (now Zambezi) Regions, amongst others, reveal that conservancy politics have been closely influenced by the heterogeneous nature of ‘communities’, whose different interest groups have often contested authority, resources and CBNRM revenues.59 Contestations have been played out along the lines of political affiliation, gender, generation, ethnicity and geographical location.

Sullivan argues that the opportunity to establish conservancies is appropriated by local people as a forum for expressing and contesting claims to land, rather than, or in addition to, as a means of gaining rights over wildlife.60 Her analysis can be usefully combined with that of Jones, who emphasizes the crucial differences in the security of freehold compared with communal tenure, particularly in terms of proprietorship over land.61 Sullivan therefore argues that rural people’s discussions about conservancy formation “have provided a much-needed outlet for debate regarding land redistribution in the context of speculation and optimism ushered in by an independent Namibia”62 With this comes the need to construct histories and identities that support those claims to authority.63

Conservancies can thus be seen as spaces in which local people articulate their demands for land and related resources, both to the state and other local groups. In addition, engagement with CBNRM projects may create openings to build alliances with NGOs and international donor organisations, and to participate in regional and global discourses about the environment and/or indigenous minorities which may provide useful tools for shaping identities and furthering certain local interests in authority over land and resources.64

58 Taylor, Identity, Authority and Environment.
60 Sullivan, “Communalizing Discourse”.
61 Jones, Critical Analysis: 141; see Sidney L. Harring and Willem Odendaal, ‘One day we will all be equal...: A Socio-Legal Perspective on the Namibian Land Reform and Resettlement Process, Windhoek, Legal Assistance Centre, 2002.
63 See Taylor, Identity, Authority and Environment.
2015 realities: where things stand today

We now reflect on the contemporary realities of the CBNRM programme in Namibia, and highlight some key factors including the rapid growth of the conservancy movement, the use of conservancy legislation as a proxy for authority over land use, changes in the environmental donor landscape, the rise of poaching and international animal rights lobbying, local governance challenges, intergenerational social dynamics and the role of livestock and veterinary concerns.

The conservancy movement has grown extremely fast. Today, 25 years after Namibia’s independence, and 17 years after the official state-sanctioned launch of the conservancy programme, an unanticipated total of 82 conservancies have been formed. Given the rapid growth of the conservancy movement, Namibia’s Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and local NGOs have been hard-pressed to provide the necessary institutional support services. As a result, many of the newer conservancies have not garnered sufficient support to build their capacity to govern, manage and administer themselves.

A significant proportion of younger conservancies were established with limited or no NGO support – many of them have low densities of wildlife and their members are intensive agriculturalists. The establishment of some of them may have been driven by the promise of future benefits but, most likely, their existence is a result of what Sullivan identified with the observation that conservancy status gives local people a perceived measure of control over their land and resources. Conservancies only give rights over hunttable game and are regarded as the legitimate party in negotiating tourism arrangements, but have also come to be seen by many rural people as a mechanism to influence decisions about land use, and as a means for communities to mobilize at a local level to assert themselves as a distinct ethnic group or to define the boundaries of their traditional leadership allegiances.

A second key factor relates to changes in the international donor landscape. For over a decade, Namibia was the darling of the CBNRM donor world, and its programme was supported by a vast array of international funding mechanisms, including USAID’s Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) programme, and later the Millennium Challenge Account. However, Namibia’s re-designation as a middle income country in 2009 has led to reduced levels of donor support for CBNRM. This comes at a time when most NGOs feel that such support is still needed to cater for growing numbers of conservancies, and to assist them in meeting the MET’s standard operating procedures and compliance requirements for conservancies. Along with this shift in the international donor landscape has come a phase of belt-tightening by NGOs. NGOs have begun to develop plans to secure sustainable financing to ensure long-term support for conservancies and other CBNRM institutions. A Sustainability Strategy for CBNRM has been developed by a joint government and NGO taskforce, and individual NGOs are exploring alternative

65 Sullivan’s observation, in: Sullivan, “Communalizing Discourse”.
financing methods, such as endowment funds and the provision of highly specialised consultancy services.\footnote{National CBNRM Sustainability Task Force, Namibia National CBNRM Sustainability Strategy, Windhoek, 2012.}

The Communal Land Reform Act of 2002 has noble intentions of improving land access and tenure for Namibia’s formerly disadvantaged population (see Werner, this volume). The act allows for individual land registration, which inadvertently risks eroding the common property regime that forms the philosophical basis for conservancies. As population pressures increase and land becomes further fragmented into individually-controlled parcels, the potential for wildlife movement and ‘large landscape conservation’ is increasingly eroded on an ecological level, but also culturally, as land (and inadvertently the resources on that land) increasingly comes to be seen as a privately-owned resource. There has been some exploration of community group rights, but this does not have huge traction and has not been centre stage in the CBNRM interventions.

Another key contemporary factor for consideration is the alarming increase in commercial rhino and elephant poaching in Namibia, with trends resembling those in the early stages of the wildlife crime epidemic which has plagued South Africa since 2012. After two poaching-free decades, the first instances of black rhino poaching were registered in Namibia at the end of 2009. To date, 84 rhino carcasses have been discovered in the communal areas of the Kunene Region and in Etosha National Park. Whilst elephants are not critically endangered in Namibia, they too are under threat. It is estimated that over 70 elephants have been poached in the Zambezi Region in the past year alone.\footnote{New Era Staff Reporter, “60 Rhinos Poached”, New Era, 12 May 2015, <https://www.newera.com.na/2015/05/12/60-rhinos-poached/> [accessed 18 October 2015].}

furore caused by the Dallas Safari Club rhino hunt auction in Namibia, and by the killing of ‘Cecil the Lion’ in Hwange, Zimbabwe, has revealed both the scale of international opposition to sustainable use, and a significant lack of understanding of southern Africa’s wildlife policies. It is also striking to note how the efforts of international animal rights activists to discredit hunting amount to sanctions being forced on disadvantaged communities trying to unlock value from their natural resources.

Next, with regards to local governance, conservancies have become complex businesses with multiple income sources. They employ staff and are responsible for managing multiple assets, including infrastructure and vehicles. However, the management committees elected to oversee the conservancies do not usually have the technical skills to manage increasingly complex operations. To overcome these challenges, CBNRM practitioners have encouraged conservancies to hire skilled staff. But, for the most part, conservancy members have resisted the recruitment of professionals because it ultimately diverts conservancy revenue to ‘outsiders’. Conservancies also have a weak institutional memory: conservancy committees and staff are regularly voted off (as most conservancies hold new committee elections every few years) or are dismissed as punishment for having abused conservancy resources. Their removal might also be an attempt to ‘spread the benefits’ to more members, which results in a lack of continuity and loss of capacity.

Other governance challenges include the struggles of members to hold their committees accountable for conservancy finances. As conservancy income increases, there has been a proportionate increase in conservancy operational expenditure, but not always increased income reaching members. Some members have voiced their disillusionment at Annual General Meetings as inadequate benefits reach households.

Intergenerational social dynamics must be mentioned in relation to governance. It is widely reported that at the inception of the conservancy programme, elders were passionate about wildlife recovery and willing to make immense personal sacrifices for wildlife (e.g., enduring human wildlife conflict without seeking compensation). However, it is now commonplace for young people to seek money and quick returns, making it increasingly difficult for conservancies to remain relevant and to capture the imagination of the younger generation, even though it is the young people who often have the numeracy and literacy required for conservancy administration. During one IRDNC workshop, a senior staff member pointed out that the NGO should not “just teach graveyards”. What this person meant is that NGOs are investing disproportionately in working with adult rather than youth populations. As NGOs and conservancies grapple with the realities of a new generation with different aspirations, they are trying to develop strategies to engage the youth.


69 For the case of Kyaramacan in Bwabwata, see Taylor, Identity, Authority and Environment.

70 Owen-Smith, Arid Eden.
Another factor is the role of livestock in Namibian CBNRM. Despite ownership of large herds of cattle usually being in the hands of the influential, wealthier sectors of rural communities, livestock development could provide an opportunity for impoverished rural communities to improve their lot and create sustainable livelihoods. Nyambe confirms that livestock is considered the most important asset or source of household income in most households in the Zambezi Region. In this context, buffalo, as carriers of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) — whose populations grew by as much as 295% between 2004 and 2009 — are considered a potential threat to the livestock industry. For example, producers of beef in non-‘FMD-free’ areas are confronted by serious barriers to trade. It is estimated that the total loss in farmers’ income from Meatco due to the inability to trade during the 2011–2012 FMD outbreak was approximately NAD 16,036,957. FMD outbreaks have led to regular shutdowns of the abattoir in Katima Mulilo in recent years and have crippled the local economy. Despite measures recognized by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to manage the risks associated with FMD, there is increasing political pressure from local farmers’ groups to reduce wildlife so that the livestock marketing sector has a chance to grow. Namibia’s efforts to maintain its EU market for beef, and the resultant control measures that have been imposed by Europe, are undermining local farmers’ chances of benefiting from opportunities in both buffalo (through trophy hunting) and beef, thereby blocking the potential for both the livestock and wildlife industry to unlock its true value.

In other parts of the country, especially the Kunene Region, the extreme drought that began in 2012 has decimated herds with cattle prices dropping by 50% since 2012.

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72 Jacob M. Nyambe, Enhancing Livelihood Strategies of Rural Communities Prone to Climate risk in the Caprivi Region of Namibia, unpubl. PhD, University of Limpopo, 2013.


74 Van Rooyen, Beef Production.


Wildlife numbers have also fallen, but wildlife is more resilient in times of drought than cattle. Meat and income from wildlife are regarded by several conservancies as providing a ‘lifeline’ during drought,\textsuperscript{77} demonstrating the value of wildlife as an adaptive measure during extreme climatic events, and confirming the economic advantage to and livelihood options for conservancies when both livestock and wildlife are maintained as forms of land-use.

Last but not least, at policy level, the legal framework for conservancies is limited to wildlife. This results in inadequate attention to other sectors, including water, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, which are equally critical to natural resource management and to people’s livelihoods. There has thus been a move by NGOs to further incorporate other sectors into the programme.

Conclusions

This article has traced the rise of CBNRM in Namibia, where community conservation policies have been lauded as the most progressive of their kind in southern Africa. CBNRM has been concerned primarily, though not exclusively, with providing rural communities with robust proprietorship over their resources, particularly wildlife, and with establishing community organisational and institutional management systems. The speed of the uptake of the conservancy model by rural residents all over the country, and of the concurrent growth in CBNRM earnings, has been extraordinary. By 2015, 82 conservancies had been formed and over 177,000 people incorporated therein.

The programme has achieved many of its goals for environmental and human development. These include widespread wildlife recovery; revenue generation, game meat harvesting and job creation for poor rural populations; the growth of democratic governance structures; and adoption of similar policies by other sectors in Namibia such as forestry, fisheries and water.

This article has also examined the academic criticism that CBNRM generates, both more broadly and with respect to Namibia specifically. Critics have questioned whether CBNRM does indeed devolve conservation management from the state to the local level, and whether CBNRM actually facilitates the extension of state and NGO power and private sector interests into remote hinterlands. NGOs’ work may, in some cases, reinforce the state’s power and authority on the one hand, and fragment local authority on the other. CBNRM creates a new axis of authority, and a new forum in which rural people contest power, authority, identity-building and conceptions of space at a local level. Who the real beneficiaries of CBNRM are is another question. In some cases, CBNRM benefits are accrued by local elites before reaching members. In the case of CBNRM in Namibia, there are several recurring themes which hinge on institutions, authority, financial governance, heterogeneous interests within ‘communities’ and the uncertainty of rural land tenure.

Today, the CBNRM programme in Namibia faces a number of challenges. These include: how to maintain adequate support for conservancies in the face of such rapid growth in conservancy numbers; changes in the international environmental donor landscape; the rise of poaching and international animal rights lobbying; ongoing local governance challenges, including the pressures for conservancy benefits to trickle down to household level; intergenerational social dynamics; and the increasing impact of livestock and veterinary concerns.

Despite these challenges, several new opportunities are emerging to promote more integration between wildlife and other sectors, and to further entrench CBNRM principles in rural development programmes. In addition, there is an opportunity to exploit over two decades of Namibian CBNRM experience to influence and inform the shaping of CBNRM discourse and practices in neighbouring countries and beyond, especially in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area.

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