

Developing partnerships in a paradigm shift to achieve conservation reality in South Africa

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In South Africa, communal rural community development has, for the most part, been viewed as an add-on, rather than as an integral value in the broad spectrum of conservation activities being practised in the country. This paper, therefore, argues for the reality-based adoption of an extension of existing conservation paradigms to incorporate the development of communal rural communities as an integral part of the overall wildlife conservation and management policy in South Africa. The answer to the seeming contradiction in the focus of wildlife conservation and rural development lies in the development of wildlife management programmes based on multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional interaction, by also harnessing scientific knowledge and skills found in the social sciences. In this manner, the present largely lip service related to so-called community participation in wildlife management can be changed into programmes which really achieve conservation-based community development enhancing survival for both the communities and their inherent natural resources.

Key words: sustainable utilisation sustainable development, communal rural communities, community development, wildlife management.

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Introduction

Since 1980, the philosophy arguing the dependence of biodiversity conservation on direct interaction with local communities by linking sustainable utilisation to sustainable development, has become an important part of wildlife management policy all over the world (IUCN 1980). In Eastern and Southern Africa the practical implementation of this approach in community-based programmes in wildlife management has blossomed over the past 10 years, albeit with mixed results (Child 1991; Doungoube 1990; Etoori 1990; Kamugasha 1990; Kiss 1990; Newby 1990; Talbot & Olindo 1990). In South Africa in particular, the development orientation implicit in the meaning and content of community participation in wildlife management, however, still seems not to be well understood by all wildlife managers, most of whom having been trained within broad Western cultural value systems regarding conservation. Consequently, the devel-

opment of communal rural communities (meaning those rural communities living in proclaimed, so-called tribal areas, which largely constituted the land of the former homelands) has for the most part been viewed as an add-on rather than an integral value in the broad spectrum of conservation activities being practised in South Africa today. Therein lies the need for a paradigm shift in our thinking on conservation-based rural community development.

This paper, therefore, argues for the reality-based adoption of an extension of this new paradigm to incorporate the development of communal rural communities as an integral part of the overall wildlife conservation and management policy in South Africa. This can be created by developing meaningful partnerships. As a consequence, the new conservation emphasis then is a question of how we manage our environmental and wildlife resources to the benefit of the country's human population, rather than continuing

with the present emphasis placed on how we manage the country's human population to the benefit of our environmental and wildlife resources.

The South African National Parks, as a national conservation body and the conservation authorities in the nine provinces of South Africa all propagate interaction with local communities as a part of their policy statements (see URL: <http://www.parks-sa.co.za>; <http://www.parks-nw.co.za/>). However, the implementation of this philosophy into real practical terms with measurable results is still largely lacking in many instances. The main current problem is that most of the conservation programmes of all these agencies are still focussed on wildlife as a point of departure, and not on the interaction between human developmental needs and the principles of wildlife management. The necessary interaction between wildlife and social scientists on the highest decision-making level also still does not exist to any major degree. Notable exceptions do occur in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and to an extent in the North West Province.

The nature of the problem

Although the homeland concept was abolished in South Africa after the 1994 elections when the country was divided into nine new Provinces which include the former homelands, an estimated 48 % of South Africa's black population today still live on the 14 % of land which constituted these former homelands. That translates into more than 17 million people who live off a subsistence agriculture within a communal utilisation system in more than 800 chieftaincies or tribal areas, with a mean annual income of approximately R6,000 (US\$1,000) per family. Approximately 30 % of this annual income is derived from old-age pensions which are paid to the aged in such families (URL: <http://www.statssa.gov.za>). Depending on where such communal rural areas are situated, the joblessness of the potentially economically active population of these areas

can fluctuate between 40 % and 80 % (Sidiropoulos *et al.* 1998; Van Tonder 1999). This means that most of these people remain dependent on the natural resources of the areas in which they live as a consequence of the perpetuation and enhancement of their dependence on subsistence agriculture. Coupled to a conservatively estimated population growth rate of 2.7 % per annum, and the fact that more than 50 % of the population in the communal rural areas are currently under the age of 16 years (URL: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/>), the subsistence pressure on the natural environment of the 14 % of the land on which these people live, will become so severe and unrealistic within the next ten years, that the government will be obliged to extend the land available to such communal communities just to make room for people to be able to live there. Doing so, however, will have no real influence on raising the living standards of these people. However, this could well have severe negative implications for maintaining the number of conservation areas currently being managed in the different provinces. Moreover, close on 90 % of all the official protected areas in South Africa also border on communal communities, or are situated in their close proximity (Els 1996a). The real conservation threat is that by their very location, these government-owned conservation areas are some of the cheaper alternatives in terms of land-costs alone for the much needed extension of these communal lands.

The change in the political process in South Africa which encourages communal rural communities to have a rightful say in their own future, has already impacted severely on all conservation-related activities and thinking in South Africa. Whereas middle and top management staff involved in conservation activities in South Africa to a certain extent realise the need for community involvement as a valid conservation activity, they don't really understand how. The vast majority are all natural scientists who have not been trained in the people management skills necessary to be involved in, or to facilitate rural development (Bothma 1995). They most certainly are also not trained to be

involved in the development of capacity at grass roots level in communal communities. Although all conservation staff should today clearly have a degree of knowledge and expertise to deal with conservation-based community development in the ordinary run of their duties, it is, however, unrealistic to expect them to be fully qualified in what essentially is a separate field of expertise. Nevertheless, such a deficiency must be addressed, and this paper attempts to give a viable alternative to this vexing problem.

The current reality

The expectations which have been created among the rural communities of today for unequalled development following the latest government's election with its vast majority in Parliament, and the unqualified promises as to the upliftment of the quality of life of all the people in the country, have to a large extent created the perception that the people of South Africa's communal rural communities are entitled to unprecedented development in the near future. Moreover, they fully expect the government to provide this from a perceived uninterrupted flow of money withheld from its coffers in previous years. Sadly, however, the more dire need for urban development has led to a virtual breakdown of the development process in the communal rural areas. Furthermore, the lack of even basic maintenance of existing infrastructure because of high costs and the lack of capacity to manage it properly, as well as the incapacity of local government structures to make any real difference in rural development, has, however, also not yet been grasped by these communal rural communities who are so desperately seeking meaningful change.

It has been calculated by development economists that only 5 cents in every R1-00 of taxpayer's money which was spent in the former homelands actually reached the grass roots level for development. In 1998, the same economists calculated that 5 cents in every R3-00 of taxpayer's money reached grass roots level in those provinces in which

these former homelands were situated (Van der Westhuizen *pers. comm.*). The nett result is that the living standards of the communal rural communities are actually deteriorating more drastically than is commonly perceived.

The situation is further negatively compounded by the continual increase of the human population in communal rural areas as the survival of these communities are directly influenced by the country-wide joblessness which is projected to reach 43 % in the year 2004, if the possible impact of AIDS on the economy were not taken into account (Van Tonder 1999). This is a stark reality which combines with the seemingly ever-increasing downward spiral of the country's economy which, in turn, further increases the real survival-driven pressures on the utilisation of natural resources in South Africa's communal rural areas.

These detrimental influences on the daily lives of communal rural communities in the country, are bringing direct and continuous pressures to bear on wildlife managers to allow the unrestricted utilisation of all the natural resources found inside conservation areas for the sake of community survival (Els 1996b). To stem this unrestricted utilisation demand, the wildlife managers in most of the country's conservation areas have had to become directly involved in community development in neighbouring communities so as to ensure some level of sustainable use. The reality of this situation, has now led to rural development having become an undeniable line function responsibility of conservation authorities. In many instances it is not a popular conservation aspect for them to contemplate, especially when such development is enhanced through the sustainable utilisation of the renewable natural resources under their control (Borrini-Feyerabend 1997).

As an estimated 56.5 % of formal conservation activities in South Africa happens on the provincial government level (Hanks & Glavovic 1992), the severity of the situation is further compounded by the fact that

provincial conservation authorities have to operate under current immediate, and sometimes devastating operational budgetary restrictions. Even to the extent that through a real lack of funds, their personnel are frequently restricted in, and even stopped from fulfilling their everyday conservation tasks. For example, the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service's budget was reduced with 48 % during April 2000 (Matthews, W. *pers. comm.*).

The natural science related management ability and expertise of wildlife managers in South Africa has never been in doubt. Moreover, as wildlife managers *per se*, they must be considered to be in the top echelons of the trade, if not internationally, definitely so in Africa. Therefore, it has been the human sciences related management aspects of wildlife management in South Africa that has, and still is, creating immense practical implementation problems. These problems are perpetuated by the perception that to be a good wildlife manager one only has to have a pure background in natural sciences. This despite the fact that it was the human inferences in the trade in ivory that created the opening for a recent partially lifting of the CITES ban on the trade therein. Because of the excellent work of its natural scientists, the elephants are not doing badly in South Africa (Van Aarde *et al.* 1999). However, it is the vast number of the country's communal rural and poor people who are creating conservation's management problems through the persistence of a reality-based perception among the people of such communal rural communities that conservation, and conservators, care more for and about wildlife than for and about human beings. The very real, and very strong, perception among people living in communal rural areas of South Africa that all conservation activities are meant only to benefit affluent local people and foreign tourists, is therefore continuously perpetuated (Els 1996b).

Therefore, the creation of expectations among communal rural communities by developers and government officials alike, that development in such areas can be fund-

ed entirely from the perceived unrestricted income of a never-ending stream of international eco-tourists who have an insatiable interest in South Africa's wildlife and its indigenous cultural heritage (URL: <http://www.peaceparks.org.za/>), is untruthful and extremely dangerous for the future relationship between communal rural communities and any nature conservation activity in this country. In this regard, the creation of undeliverable expectations is most probably the most insincere way of conducting so-called community participatory programmes for the sake of nature conservation. International tourists don't visit all areas of the country in the numbers that would make an economic difference at grass roots level even in the majority of communal rural areas of this country (URL: <http://www.satour.org/MainIndex.html>). The creation of such expectations among people living in communal rural areas remains unrealistic and untruthful in its content, especially if the crime rate remains at its current high level. Private agencies and developers have to be very clear and honest in their propagation of job creation and wealth sharing through wildlife related tourism, albeit a political correct cliché (URL: <http://wildnetafrica.co.za/bushcraft/dailynews/index.html>). The medium to long-term benefactors of such types of development are usually mainly the developers, affluent locals, and foreign tourists, and not the communities at large.

The argument which is often used, namely that there are good examples of how to integrate wildlife management and communal rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa, and that these could be transferred to South Africa, is also unrealistic within the local context. It is granted that programmes like for instance CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe (Murphree 1990 & 1991), the Maasai-Mara system in Kenya (Collett 1987), the Ngorongoro Conservation Authority's programme in Tanzania (McCabe *et al.* 1992), the LIRD and ADMADE programmes in Zambia (Lungu 1990), and similar programmes in Botswana (Lawson & Mafeka 1990; Peake 1999), and other, are functioning with varying degrees of success.

However, the consequential argument that these programmes can summarily be implemented in South Africa is invalid because the political scenarios and land-use patterns in these areas are just too different from that of South Africa. Therefore, we cannot simply take over these programmes and impose them on the South African situation.

It is often reported that more than 70 % of all the wildlife in Kenya and Zimbabwe are found outside their mostly unfenced conservation areas. In South Africa, possibly more than 90 % of all its wildlife are found inside fenced conservation areas which include a large number of privately-owned game ranches. In addition, the human population density and the stocking rates of domestic stock in the communal rural areas of South Africa make the implementation of programmes, modelled on CAMPFIRE, for instance, practically impossible in South Africa (Els 1996b). In 1990, Murphree reported a human population density in the communal areas of Zimbabwe of 5–10 people/km² (Murphree 1990). In contrast, in the same year the human population density in the communal areas of the Lowveld of the Northern Province and of Mpumalanga was calculated at 174 people/km² (Els 1996a). These facts illustrate the immense basic difference between the regional scenarios which have to be dealt with. These differences not only apply to wildlife management, but also to the political decisions which will soon have to be taken at a national level concerning the ownership and utilisation of wildlife in the communal rural areas of South Africa.

It is true that some of the wildlife managers in South Africa have been able to learn from, and take over, the principles of community involvement, as well as the principles related to the sharing of responsibility and accountability in order to enhance sustainable utilisation of our biodiversity from other successful African orientated programmes. However, the largest section of the wildlife managers and academics involved in conservation activities of some form in South Africa still have to, albeit with reluctance,

make a shift in the manner in which they think about the management of such principles. It is unrealistic to expect that all the wildlife managers in South Africa can and should become skilled rural community developers merely because they have to manage wildlife resources adjacent to nearby heavily populated communal rural areas.

Solution: a paradigm shift towards concerted multi-disciplinary action

The answer to the seeming contradiction in the focus of wildlife conservation and rural development, therefore, must lie in the development of wildlife management programmes based on multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional interaction. This interaction will have to harness the scientific knowledge and skills found outside the natural sciences in the social sciences.

To really manage people-orientated wildlife management programmes in South Africa effectively in the future, timeous, pro-active and bold political and management decisions will have to be taken soon. However, these decisions must not be so bold as to disregard and totally rephrase present policies regarding this matter. Yet they have to be bold enough in the context of resetting the aims and boundaries of wildlife management in the South African context so that they include all the relevant disciplines outside the traditional domain of the natural sciences. In doing so, the wildlife management focus must be broadened to become a process driven by a decision-making and field-implementing team of multi-disciplinary, and even multi-institutional specialists working from the basis of a shifted paradigm. This paradigm should operate on the principles which are derived from the answer(s) to the following basic question: how do we manage South Africa's environmental and biodiversity concerns to the benefit of South Africa as a whole, including her diverse cultural and natural resources.

Whether they like it or not, politicians, economists, academics and in-field wildlife man-

agers will have to understand that wildlife management in South Africa has, by default, already become part of the process of development in communal rural areas bordering traditional conservation areas because of the lack of sufficient governmental development funding flowing into the rural areas of the country. They also need to understand that the fragmentation of the present development process in communal rural areas into different programmes run by different government departments and even non-governmental organisations in isolation in the same rural areas, will have to be consolidated into multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional efforts aimed at regional development. In applying this process, all conservation areas in a specific region will have to become integral parts of the potential for the socio-economic development of that specific region. Moreover, if any of these conservation areas have no real conservation value, such pieces of land should be utilised for other economically sound land-use systems to the benefit of the people of the specific region.

In a certain sense the Spatial Development Initiatives of the current South African government have already started this process. One example is the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative which includes the eastern section of Swaziland, the southern section of Mozambique, and the northern section of KwaZulu-Natal (URL: <http://www.lubombo.org.za/>). Unfortunately such initiatives are still only interpreted within an eco-tourism-driven, Western economic development context. It thus lacks the required rural African orientation in the holism of the human and environmental interaction which this paper emphasises as, and urges to become, the central axis of all future developments in this regard.

The top management structures of the various conservation agencies in South Africa are also urged to rephrase the role which their social scientists and development experts play in the higher echelons of environmental decision-taking. It will suit them to establish more concerted links with the various research institutions and conserva-

tion orientated non-governmental organisations who already have a development emphasis and vision, and which are more keenly focused on real rural development results. Forging such links must be done to accelerate the establishment of practical applications free from administrative and bureaucratic interference and harsh budgetary constraints which are currently being experienced by the conservation authorities of most of the provinces of South Africa. A prime example of such a partnership can be found in Zimbabwe where the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management worked with the ZimTrust, a private non-governmental organisation, and with the Centre for Applied Social Sciences at the University of Zimbabwe, to establish the CAMPFIRE programme. This action later established the CAMPFIRE Association which aims to further develop and manage the programme (CAMPFIRE 1990; Raybourn 1995). This co-operation is a good example of how the coherence of focus and executive powers can lead to the co-ordination and implementation of multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional programmes of this nature.

The multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional approach to wildlife management, as argued for here, also implies much closer co-operation between all the national and provincial conservation agencies and various academic institutions at the tertiary level. The aim of the conservation agencies should be to release themselves from their own territorial imperatives so as pro-actively create a situation where an outcomes-based system of training and research within a new paradigm is applicable to the direct practical needs of wildlife management and rural development at a managerial and grass roots level. This must, however, not be done with the emphasis on managing human-wildlife conflicts, but on managing human-wildlife co-existence.

This, is the challenge of our particular South African conservation reality.

The alternative is to absolutely over-utilise our wildlife to near extinction. Then,

because of our emotional response to the sickening loss our natural heritage and biodiversity (Huntley *et al.* 1998), we can respond by building up our natural environment again as has happened in the USA for instance (Conaway 1992). We have a clear choice and have to come to a decision as to which of these two paths we want to follow in the future of wildlife management in South Africa.

Following a multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional path in South Africa is not entirely novel, however. It has already been done. The recently-established goal-orientated research co-operation between the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service and the Centre for Wildlife Management, the Centre for Africa Tourism and the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology (Environmental Anthropology and Community Development sections) at the University of Pretoria, is an example of such a new focus. The latter programme will address the sustainable resource utilisation and eco-tourism research priorities of the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service in the Maputaland region of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), and has conservation-based community development as its primary aim. It is also an example of the type of practical involvement and appropriate training which future wildlife managers must have. They must not only be able to serve appropriately in the various conservation institutions in the country, but they must also be equipped with the necessary managerial skills to become involved, through relevant non-governmental organisations, with the practical and goal-orientated conservation-based community development problems of a specific region.

The emphasis and thrust of the mentioned research programme is further enhanced by a multi-institutional involvement through the Universities of Natal, Zululand, the Natal Technicon, and the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority. The programme has further been endorsed by the South African National Research Foundation by making research funding available. This makes the pro-

gramme highly applicable, in both its training potential and in simultaneously finding management solutions to real conservation and development issues in Maputaland. Moreover, the fact that graduate students in eco-tourism, and those from the natural, social, and economic sciences work together in the research emphasis of the programme so as to jointly answer a specific problem, makes this a prime example of the type of realistic integration of multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional research which this paper proposes as a new paradigm.

The emphasis and long-term meaning of the content of this paper is, therefore, simple: if people cannot realistically survive in the rural areas of South Africa, the country's wildlife will definitely also not do so. Jointly, however, they can help to give real content and meaning to the philosophy of an African Renaissance which is a current imperative on the political agenda of the South African government.

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