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On October 18 the 2012 Markhor Award for Outstanding Conservation Performance will be awarded to the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organizations (NACSO). Through the Markhor Award, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) honors conservation projects that link human livelihoods with the conservation of biodiversity.

Conservation means using resources so that they will be available for future generations, and in Namibia this is happening through the CBNRM Program: Community Based Natural Resource Management.



Photo 1: Meat for Distribution in the Tora Conservancy

Rich in wildlife and stretching over a wide geographical area, Namibia's desert, savannah and riverine areas are as biologically diverse as they are fragile. It was the Namibian post-independence government's visionary approach to the sustainable utilization of natural resources that created the conditions in which rural Namibians could benefit from wildlife whilst conserving the environment. Legislation in 1996 led to the establishment of the first communal conservancies.

The partnership that followed, between the Ministry of Environment & Tourism, support NGOs under the umbrella of NACSO, and rural communities themselves, has created conditions in which conservation has been able to prosper.



Photo 2: An MET ranger and community game guard on the Caprivi game count

The two Namibian ladies collecting the award on behalf of their organizations have a remarkable story to tell. As Minister of Environment and Tourism, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has managed the growth of Namibian communal conservancies from 50 when she became Minister in 2008 to 76 today, covering almost a fifth of Namibia's land area. Maxi Louis, through NACSO, has provided consistent and solid support to CBNRM, allowing conservancies and the program to grow.

Communal conservancies are self-governing entities which enjoy the same rights over wildlife and tourism as private farms, and they are democratic. Conservancy members vote for a committee, and collectively earn money from trophy hunting and game sales, as well as from joint ventures with lodge operators on conservancy land.



Photo 3: Minister Nandi Ndaitwah (left) and Maxi Louis share a moment at Namibia's Tourism EXPO

In giving the Award to the MET and NACSO for the Namibia Communal Conservancy Movement, the CIC noted that the introduction of communal conservancies in Namibia, and their growth, had "initiated a paradigm shift in community attitudes towards wildlife." In the 1980's wildlife populations were threatened with local extinction. A severe drought exacerbated a decline in numbers caused by rampant poaching – both by the South African armed forces occupying Namibia, and by locals who saw little value in wildlife that ate their crops and livestock.

Now, in contrast, wildlife is seen as a growing asset by rural communities. Communal conservancies derive a direct income from trophy hunting, with 42 concessions run by professional hunters, and they sell excess game to commercial farms. In addition, meat from hunting is distributed to conservancy members. It is important to understand hunting in the context of conservation. Conservancies and the MET work closely together to monitor wildlife numbers, which have been increasing since the CBNRM policy began – thus ensuring viable and sustainable harvests of game.



**Photo 4: The CIC Markhor Award**

A cornerstone of conservancy management is the employment of game guards. A typical conservancy will have six or more guards who routinely patrol conservancy areas and keep in contact with local farmers. Everybody knows who is who, and strangers looking for poaching opportunities are quickly spotted.

With increasing wildlife numbers there are more opportunities for tourism. Conservancies make joint venture agreement with tour operators, who invest capital in lodges and campsites. The result is more income to conservancies and greater job opportunities.

It's a concept that was exemplified in Pakistan, where the name 'Markhor' comes from a mountain goat species. Once threatened with extinction, the population has multiplied 25 times in recent years because of benefits derived from the sustainable use of the species. It's a paradox that awards like the Markhor help the public to understand that benefits from the hunting of wildlife have improved the lives of community members by placing a value on wildlife, which local people now want to conserve.

The work of the MET and NACSO in supporting the Namibian communal conservancy movement has led to a widespread and sustained growth of wildlife populations in Namibia, where communal conservancies have grown from four, in 1998, to 76 in 2012.

In Namibia, communal conservancies are required by the MET to have a sustainable game management plan based upon annual game counts.

The north-west count, taking in the vast expanses of Kunene Region, is the largest road based game count in the world. In Caprivi Region, which is a mosaic of forests, floodplain, and riverine areas, the game count is done on foot, with over 800 kilometers walked in a few weeks. By spotting wildlife from the same paths and tracks, at the same time every year, reasonably accurate estimates of wildlife numbers can be drawn up.

Under sustainable use management, wildlife numbers have steadily increased. In the north-west, for example, Hartmann's Mountain Zebra numbers have grown from an estimated 1,000 in 1982 to around 27,000 today, and the population of the desert-adapted elephant has grown from about 150 to 750 in the same period. Lions in Kunene have expanded in range and number, and Namibia is the only country in Africa with an increasing giraffe population.

Minister Nandi Ndaitwah and Maxi Louis will be able to point to these successes when they receive the prize in India, on behalf of the communal conservancy program. Both ladies would, no doubt, place the credit elsewhere – and it is indeed a grass roots Namibian story of rural Namibians exercising good governance and control over wildlife, improving their livelihoods and benefitting biodiversity.

[Markhor Award, Namibia, Sustainable Use](#)

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