

The Sheya Uushona Conservancy





• QUICK FACTS •

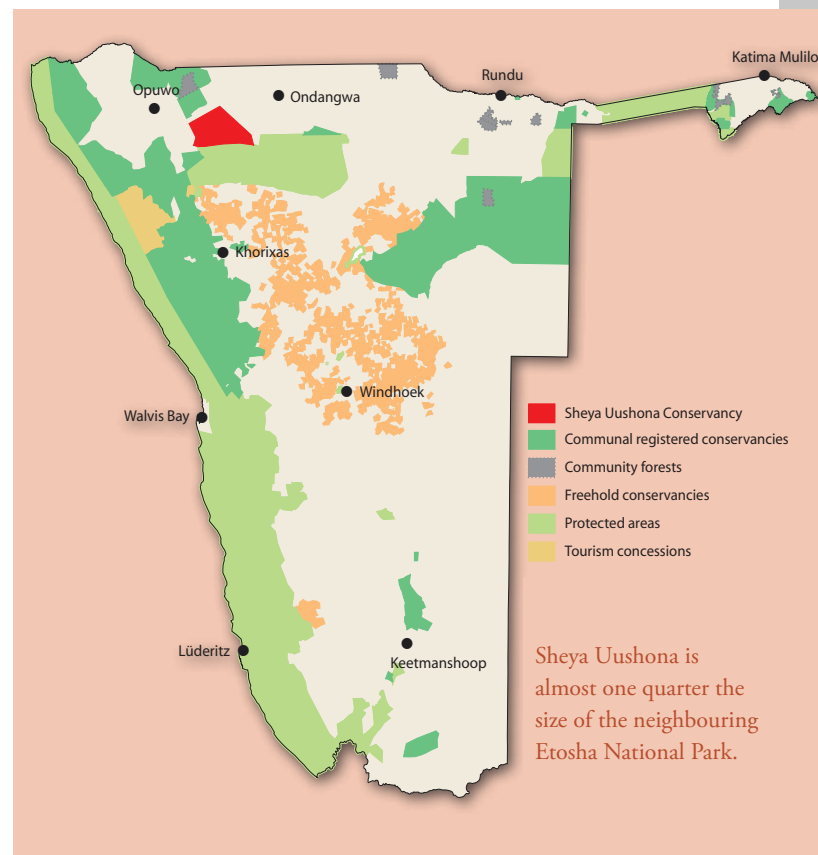
- Sheya Uushona is a legal management body for the development of its people and sustainable use of natural resources.
- It is situated on the northern border of the Etosha National Park in the Omusati Region.
- Sheya was registered as a conservancy by government in September 2005.
- It covers an area of 5,066 square kilometres.
- The conservancy was named after King Sheya Uushona who reigned in Ongandjera between 1862 and 1878.
- The main languages spoken are Oshigandjera and Hei//om.
- About 35,000 people live in Sheya Uushona. Their incomes are largely from wages and business earnings, remittances, pensions and crop and livestock farming.
- Wildlife includes elephant, lion (occasionally), ostrich, springbok and red hartebeest.
- There is potential to develop tourism and trophy hunting in the conservancy.

• WHAT IS A CONSERVANCY? •

- A gazetted area of communal land where residents can augment farming incomes with revenues earned from wildlife and tourism.
- Most conservancy incomes are cash based, whereas most farming incomes are in kind.
- Wildlife increases as a result of its new-found value in conservancies.
- The value of conservancy land and its natural resources is now greater than before.
- A conservancy and its resources are managed by a group of people elected to serve the interests of its members.
- A forum is provided through which services and developments can be channeled and integrated.

• THE HISTORY AND BACKGROUND TO SHEYA UUSHONA •

The conservancy lies in the Omusati Region and falls within the Okahau constituency except for a sliver of land in the west which forms part of the Ruacana constituency. The 5,066-square-kilometre area is one of only three conservancies that borders the Etosha National Park, the others being Ehirovipuka and King Nehale. There are two emerging conservancies (Orupupa and Otuzemba) to the west, while Uukwaluudhi conservancy lies to the north of Sheya Uushona.





The famous Ngandjela Pan.

Etosha and Sheya Uushona lie in the Owambo Basin, a broad depression covering much of north-central Namibia and a large area in southern Angola. Wind-blown sands and river-borne sediments have filled the Basin over the last 70 to 65 million years. The sands are not suited to crop cultivation because they contain few nutrients and are too porous to retain enough water for plant roots in the surface layers. Broad-leaved, deciduous woodlands and acacias are common in the sandy areas, whereas mopane is the predominant tree on more clayey soils formed from sediments carried by water. Most of the mopane are shrubs which rarely reach more than two or three metres in height. Crops are also difficult to grow on the clayey soils because they are often saline and have a hard pan layer just below the surface. Most farming in the conservancy therefore concentrates on livestock, particularly on cattle, goats and sheep.

There are many salt pans in the area, of which the Ngandjela Pan is the best known because of the high quality of salt harvested there over hundreds of years by people from all over north-central Namibia. The average annual rainfall of 300–450 millimetres falls in the summer, usually between January and March. Apart from temporary pools of water after heavy rain, all water is obtained from underground sources. Modern windmills pump water from boreholes in some places, but there are also thousands of hand-dug wells, called *omadhiya*. Most of these reach depths of 20 or 30 metres, with 10 or more wells often dug very close to each other. The wells belong to different families which send their cattle to graze around the cattle posts close to the wells (see photograph on inside cover).



Buckets attached to long ropes are used to draw water from these deep, hand-dug wells known as *omadhiya*.



Most of the conservancy area has been used for seasonal grazing for many decades. Some temporary cattle posts later developed into permanent settlements consisting of several or more resident households. The biggest settlements, such as Amarika, Uutsathima and Onamatanga, have grown into villages with their own schools, clinics and businesses.

Sheya Uushona lies within the jurisdiction of the Ongandjera traditional authority. While all of Sheya consists of communal land, large parts of the conservancy are used, and owned for different purposes. Fourteen large private farms, some of which some are larger than 10,000 hectares each, have informally been established on this land. The farms belong to wealthy owners who live elsewhere. The Ministry of Lands & Resettlement also plans to survey and allocate another 44 large farms in the conservancy. The Omatambo-Maowe veterinary camp in the south-western corner of the conservancy covers over 32,000 hectares.

The idea of forming a conservancy arose when residents noted how the neighboring Uukwaluudhi conservancy was benefiting from its wildlife resources. Community members, the traditional authority and the local Regional Councillor then decided to form their own conservancy with the aim of creating an environment to which wildlife would return, where tourism could be developed to generate income and jobs, and where fauna and flora would be protected. The Rössing Foundation provided support during the early stages of formation, which included the demarcation of boundaries, registration of members and the writing of the conservancy constitution. These steps were necessary for the area to be registered as a conservancy with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism. The constitution was accepted at Okahao in 2003 and, after resolving a boundary dispute, Sheya Uushona was registered in September 2005. The conservancy enjoys the patronage of Namibia's first President, Sam Nujoma, who was born in the region.



While the area is not known for biotic richness, significant numbers of wildlife occurred there historically. These included white and black rhino, elephant, and giraffe. Some of these large mammals are now returning, usually coming out of Etosha through breaks made by elephants in the fence that surrounds the national park. Large mammals now found in Sheya Uushona include springbok, red hartebeest, kudu, oryx, elephant, lion, leopard, caracal, black-faced impala, duiker, steenbok, spotted hyaena, black-backed jackal, warthog and the occasional black rhino. There are plans to reintroduce more animals to enhance the value of the conservancy for tourism, and to help restore some of the diversity of wildlife.

• THE ECONOMY OF SHEYA UUSHONA •

Although the majority of residents engage in farming, especially growing *mahangu* (pearl millet) and tending cattle, goats and sheep, most household income is derived from other sources, such as wages, remittances, business earnings and pensions. The new incomes offered by the conservancy are therefore additional to farming and the many other sources of revenue on which people living in Sheya Uushona depend.



Eggs of the mopane worm hatch into colourful animals (see opposite)

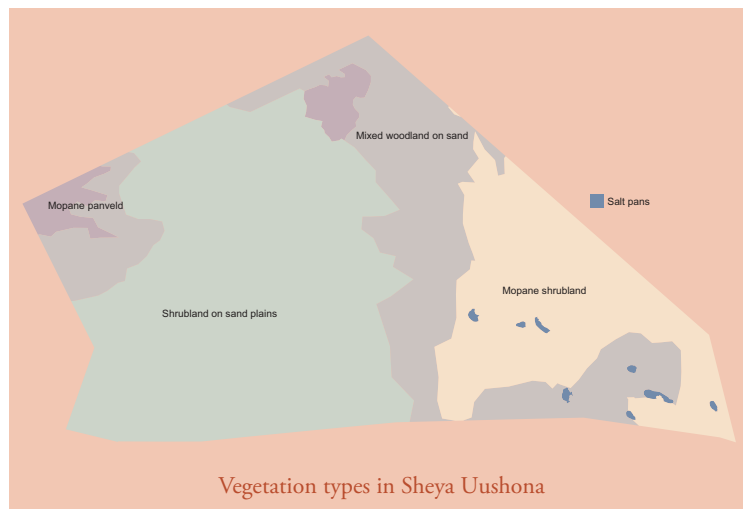
HARVESTING MOPANE WORMS

The caterpillars of the Emperor moth (*Imbrasia belina*) are known as mopane worms (locally as *omagungu*), since the larvae feed on mopane leaves. These worms provide an important source of protein and are harvested and dried for domestic consumption and sale. The conservancy has been earning about N\$25,000 per year from fees generated by harvesting permits. Some of this money has been used to employ people to administer the permit system and to monitor the harvesting.

Harvesters are now strictly forbidden to chop branches or whole trees to harvest the mopane worms. Neither may they cut and burn wood to dry the harvested caterpillars over fires, which must therefore only be sun-dried or boiled. Periods during which harvesting is allowed are controlled so that the resource is not over-exploited. Residents pay less than outsiders for harvesting permits. Harvests are sold at local markets and to a few bulk buyers who sell to a national supermarket and retailers in Windhoek. A handful of dried worms sells for N\$15.

PLANTS

International market demand for the seeds of the Kalahari Melon (*Citrullus lanatus*) and Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) is increasing as the products gain popularity. The conservancy could exploit this opportunity by developing itself as a reliable supplier that manages its resource. Mopane is extremely valuable as firewood and as timber for construction, since the wood is termite-resistant. Baskets made from grass and Makalani palms (*Hyphaene petersiana*) are sold at the conservancy office in Okahao, and the craft subcommittee of the conservancy plans to develop this enterprise further.





HUNTING AND TOURISM

Game densities are now too low to allow for substantial hunting quotas for trophies, shoot-and-sell or own-use hunting, but these sources of income will grow once more game is reintroduced and populations increase. The Ministry of Environment & Tourism has allocated a small trophy hunting quota to the conservancy but a contract with a professional hunter to market the hunts has yet to be concluded. Trophy hunting would provide concession fees to the conservancy, as well as jobs for residents who would gain skills in game management, hunting, skinning and hospitality. Meat from trophy animals would be distributed to the conservancy as well.

Meat from own-use hunting of springbok and ostrich has been the only regular benefit of hunting, although incidental meat benefits have been obtained from the control of problem elephants. The meat has been used at meetings of the traditional authority and annual general meetings of the conservancy.

An assessment of tourism potential in Sheya Uushona suggests that a mid-range lodge would work best for the area. Again, residents would acquire skills and experience in this industry, and secondary enterprises could further generate income from crafts and visits to traditional villages, cattle posts with their fascinating *omadhiya*, and the spectacular pans where salt can be gathered.

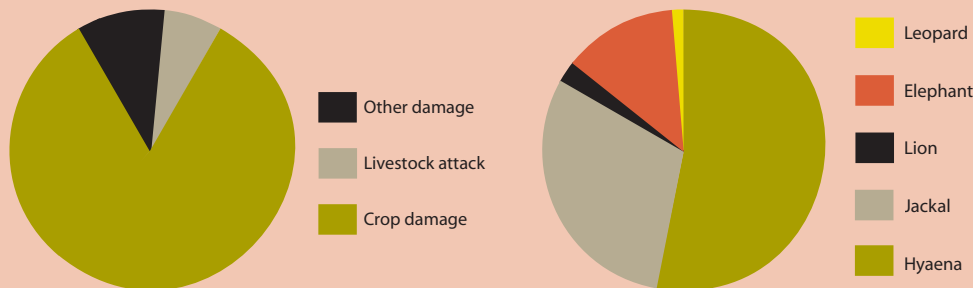
INCOMES USES AND EMPLOYMENT

All funds are now channeled into two accounts: the community trust fund is used for the development of schools and other social projects, while the operational fund covers the costs of meetings and transport. Cash benefits will in future be allocated to operational costs (30%), benefits to members (30%), the traditional authority (12%) and savings (28%).

Fourteen community rangers are employed to patrol the conservancy to monitor wildlife, report poaching and to accompany wood and mopane worm harvesters. They are supervised by a coordinator.



Some of the crafts available at the conservancy office at Okahao



The frequency of different types of human-wildlife conflict (left) and the kinds of animals involved (right) over the past few years in Sheya Uushona. Livestock damage accounts for over 85% of all wildlife incidents reported in Event Books. Hyaenas and jackals are the main culprits, accounting for more than three-quarters of attacks on livestock while the big cats (leopard and lion) only cause 4% of the incidents.

Elephants are reported to cause about 12% of the incidents.

• MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING STRUCTURES •

The conservancy has a Management Committee of over 100 people, selected from the six districts in Sheya Uushona. There is also an Executive Committee of 19 elected members. All major decisions are taken at annual general meetings. The conservancy has adopted the Event Book monitoring system to keep records of wildlife sightings and incidents of problem animals or poaching. Only springbok have been reported as being poached.

The Management Committee has promoted integrated natural resource management for some time. This is based on the Forum for Integrated Resource Management (FIRM) approach, which is a means for a community to establish its own vision and objectives so that support and services from government, non-government organisations and donors are coordinated.

The conservancy intends to broaden and integrate its natural resource base by applying for community forest status, since the conservancy legislation only provides rights over wildlife and tourism.

There are also plans to zone the conservancy into areas allocated for different uses so that resources can be better managed and conflict between land uses reduced. For example, livestock, crop farming, and wildlife that do not impede farming activities would all occur in a 'Multiple-use Zone', while a 'Forest and Livestock Grazing Zone' would provide for the controlled use of tree products and livestock grazing. A fenced 'Core Wildlife Zone' will be set aside as a breeding area for game, and this is where most tourism development will occur.

• CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE •

Sheya Uushona's location on the border of the Etosha National Park brings both problems and opportunities. Human-wildlife conflicts are common, mainly due to animals moving into the conservancy from Etosha. Livestock losses to predators and damage to crops, fencing and water installations by elephants pose the greatest problems. Although residents keep cattle in kraals at night, light fires and bang drums to frighten off predators, incidents still occur, and there is no compensation scheme for losses. If not addressed, the conflicts could lead to a loss of support for the conservancy.

However, opportunities for tourism in the conservancy will increase substantially if closer linkages with Etosha are developed. For example, a gate at Naruwandu could be opened to provide access to and from the park, thus drawing tourists into Sheya Uushona as an area of Namibia that is currently off all established tourism routes. Another possibility

is to remove the fence separating the proposed core wildlife zone and Etosha to allow the free movement of game into the conservancy. This would enlarge the overall size of Etosha as a conservation area and boost the value of the conservancy for tourism. Sheya Uushona could also apply for a tourism concession inside Etosha. Namibia's Policy on Tourism and Wildlife Concessions on State Land now allows the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to award concessions in protected areas to communities in recognition of losses caused by problem animals and the loss of access to land and resources. The implementation of these proposals would provide significant benefits to both the conservancy and Etosha, and would do much to enhance the value and use of Namibia's natural resources.

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