



Johan Jooste

The craft shop at Khowarib near Sesfontein illustrates some of the opportunities available to rural people. The sale of quality crafts could earn communities considerable income in the future.

THE PEOPLE'S ROLE IN CONSERVATION

BY
BRIAN JONES

NAMIBIA has an excellent network of protected areas, but many important ecosystems and habitats do not fall within parks and some are threatened by human activity. Much of the country's wildlife is found outside protected areas and key species such as elephant move between parks and neighbouring communal land.

Conservationists have realised for some time that new methods are needed if conservation is to succeed outside protected areas. New approaches have been developed which focus on the role of people within the environment and how conservation and development can be linked.

These approaches recognise that the best people to look after and conserve natural resources are the people who use them. They also recognise that rural people have developed their own knowledge base about the environment, have their own systems of managing natural resources and most rural societies have some form of conservation ethic.

In many cases these indigenous management systems have been removed or eroded by a variety of factors, and other imperatives have become more important than adherence to a conservation ethic. Poverty, for example, often drives people to take a short term view and use whatever is immediately available for survival. Poor people do not have options or alternatives. Many rural people cannot afford to put aesthetic or cultural values before the need to find the next meal. This does not mean that rural people do not attach cultural and aesthetic values to resources such as wildlife.

In the past, rural communities had their own systems for managing resources such as grazing, fisheries, forests and wildlife. Many of these systems have broken down or have become weakened. Sometimes local or community control over resources has been replaced by centralised government control. This has been the pattern with wildlife throughout Africa, including Namibia.

Where wildlife was once a communal



Bruno Nébe

The President of the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative, Tsamco Toma addresses a land use planning workshop near Tsumkwe in 1992. The meeting, which was attended by community and government representatives, is one of many discussions which encourage partnership in natural resource management in rural areas.

(or common property) resource used by rural people for a variety of purposes, it now belongs to the State, and can only be used with State permission. Control over wildlife rests with the central government and no longer with local institutions and leadership structures. In most African countries this means that very little legal use of wildlife is allowed and most use takes place illegally in the form of poaching.

Community-based conservation aims to restore the incentives for conservation that rural people have lost. It aims to restore a

form of communal control and management of resources such as wildlife to local people and to enable them to benefit directly from the use of the resource. Its focus is resources which are still viewed by rural people as common property resources, or former common property resources which have become "open access" i.e. where management systems have broken down and individuals or groups help themselves without any effective control.

Wildlife is a good example of a former common property resource which has become



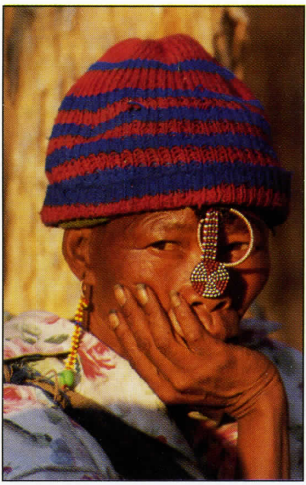
Johan Jooste



Manni Goldbeck

Far left: Fish are an important resource for communities in the north. Government and NGOs can help communities to achieve higher yields, but the commitment to harvest sustainably must come from the people themselves.

Left: Rural people depend on renewable natural resources for their survival. To develop and maintain appropriate management systems, communities need to be given ownership over their resources.



Bruno Nebe

This San woman near Tsumkwe spends much of her time gathering food, collecting water and tending gardens. Women in rural areas are the main users of natural resources and play a crucial role in their management.

open access. It was used for a variety of reasons by rural people in the past – for skins, meat, fat, and trade. There were also controls for managing wildlife, sometimes based on chief's rights to game, or religious and cultural belief. These systems were eroded in Africa during colonial times as control over wildlife became increasingly centralised by the State. Use of wildlife for meat, skins or trade has become "poaching" of State-owned animals. Use can only take place with the permission of the State. In Namibia, the alienation of rural people from wildlife has been increased by a pre-Independence system which favoured use by white commercial farmers and foreign trophy hunters and largely excluded use by rural Namibians.

Community-based conservation is not a new concept, and it is taking place wherever communities have rights over resources and are actively managing those resources with a view to the future. In Namibia, the Government and NGOs have realised that community-based approaches can be an important conservation tool, and have begun working with rural communities to build on existing conservation values and natural resource management systems and those of the past which have broken down.

Before Independence NGOs took the lead in trying to involve local communities more closely in wildlife conservation and in enabling them to receive economic benefits from the use of wildlife.

Garth Owen-Smith, now of Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), and Chris Eyre of the then Directorate of Nature Conservation and Recreation Resorts, worked with communities in north-western Namibia to set up a community game guard system.

Although their wages were paid with donor funding, the guards worked for their community and reported to their headman on wildlife numbers and movements and on poaching activities. They reflected a belief among the community that wildlife should be protected

and should not disappear for future generations.

Owen-Smith, with Margaret Jacobsohn, a social scientist working in the north-west, later assisted the small community at Purros to resolve conflicts which arose due to frequent visits to the community by tourists. A tourism levy paid to the community by safari operators helped remove some of the reasons for conflict and also provided income to the community from conservation related activities.

Another NGO, Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), encouraged local communities and entrepreneurs in the north-west to develop camp sites for tourists, enabling local people to share in the increased income that tourism brings to Namibia.

After Independence, the new Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism began exploring community-based conservation as a new approach, drawing on the experiences in Namibia of IRDNC and projects in neighbouring countries.

A national Community-based Natural Resource Management Programme (CBNRM) has been developed which aims at restoring to rural communities the rights to use and benefit from wildlife and assisting communities in setting up new management systems and adapting existing or creating new management institutions.

The programme rests on a partnership between Government, communities and NGOs, and is assisted by the private sector and donors.

One of the main aims of the programme has been to develop a policy and legislative framework which will give rural people rights over wildlife so that they can gain a financial benefit from the sustainable management of wildlife on their land. A policy which uses the formation of a conservancy on communal land as the means for communities to acquire rights over wildlife has been approved by Cabinet. Amendments to current legislation will put this policy into effect, while new legislation is being developed.



Mami Goldbeck

One of the many options available to communities is to become involved in tourism. Mokoro safaris are popular with foreign visitors and are the ideal way to view the swamps of eastern Caprivi.