

People and ecosystems in space and time: lessons from a decade of community-based conservation in Southern Africa

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Presented at SIRC 2000 – The 12th Annual Colloquium of the Spatial Information Research Centre
University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
December 10-13th 2000

ABSTRACT

The "Evaluating Eden" project, initiated by the International Institute for Environment & Development in 1996, consists of nine regional reviews and more than 30 case studies of community conservation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Seven case studies and a regional review were conducted in Southern Africa and the main lessons learnt from them are presented in this paper. Most ecologists agree that community based natural resource management and community conservation are showing serious shortcomings. The financial benefits to communities are small, the cost to conservation is high, and the institutions created to manage revenue are often fragile and open to conflict. But are these flaws fatal, and do they mean that conservationists should go back to the orthodox, 'fines and fences' approach? The Evaluating Eden project corroborates the hypothesis that these shortcomings represent short-term inadequacies, surmountable through adaptive management, rather than fatal flaws. Current failures result mainly from the way the community conservation model is being applied rather than the failure of the model itself. A number of important lessons were learnt during the research process. Although there is no blueprint for success, the probability of failure will be reduced if these guidelines are followed. The orthodox and top-down 'fines and fence' approach is not a viable option for conservation in South Africa. Managers and researchers have to continue experimenting and adapting their management, in search for more sustainable strategies..

Keywords and phrases: biodiversity conservation, conflict, land, participation, protected areas

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the results of seven Southern African case studies conducted by a consortium of researchers in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe, under the auspices of the international "Evaluating Eden" project. The larger project consisted of nine regional studies around the world in Latin America, North America, West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, South Asia, South-East Asia and Australia, where researchers asked the same basic question: "*under which conditions does community conservation work*"?

2 CASE STUDIES

Case studies were conducted in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

Table 1. Localities where case studies were conducted, and participants

LOCALITY	RESEARCHERS
Eastern Cape: Dwesa and Cwebe	Herman Timmermans
Mkambati	Thembela Kepe, Ben Cousins & Stephen Turner
North-West: Madikwe	Hector Magome, David Grossman, Saliem Fakir & Yolande Stowell
Northern Province: Makuleke	Conrad Steenkamp & Mafisa
Botswana: Sankuyo & Khwai	Lesley Boggs
Namibia: Communal Conservancies	Brian Jones
Zimbabwe: CAMPFIRE	Richard Hasler

3 NEW INSIGHTS

3.1 Initiatives differ

We found that community conservation initiatives take many different forms, depending on the motivation for their establishment, the type of land tenure, the potential of the area to generate revenue, how access is controlled, and how much funding is available.

Mainly biodiversity conservation	MOTIVATION FOR ESTABLISHMENT	Mainly politics & development
Freehold	LAND TENURE	Communal
Low	REVENUE-GENERATING POTENTIAL	High
Top-down, state control	CONTROL OF ACCESS	Totally community controlled
No participation, coercion	ROLE PLAYERS' PARTICIPATION	Community-driven
High	DONOR SUPPORT	Low

Figure 1. Different types of community wildlife management initiatives. Initiatives seldom occur at a single end of the spectrum, but are rather situated somewhere along the continuum of factors

3.2 Achievements fluctuate

The achievements of community conservation initiatives vary greatly over time. To evaluate them at a single point in time (like taking a 'snapshot') can be very misleading.

Figure 2 shows how the achievements of community conservation can change over time. Facilitators and officials need to be prepared for these fluctuations and should not give up at the first sign of a downward trend.

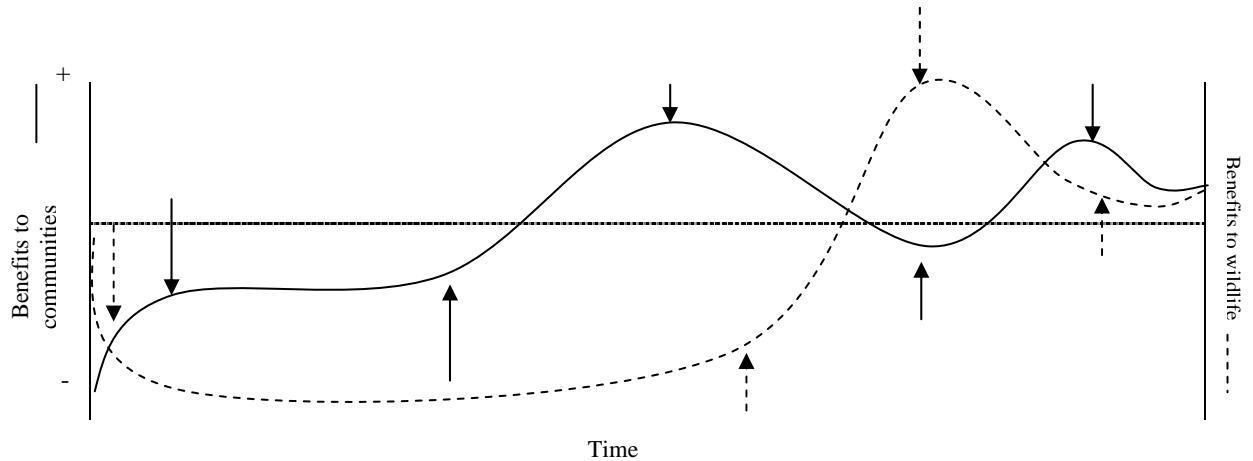


Figure 2. Changes over time in the benefits provided by a hypothetical community wildlife management initiative.

3.3 Communities are complex

Communities are not only more complex than we think, but more complex than we *can* think. Within each community there are numerous livelihood groups or clusters, and some of them only emerge long after the establishment of an initiative. Neighbouring villages in most instances differ substantially in terms of their problems, needs and histories, and facilitators should guard against 'lumping' different groups of people together as the same community.

3.4 Benefit-sharing and custodianship do not automatically go hand in hand

One of the key assumptions of community conservation is that people will automatically look after natural resources of given the authority to do so. This is not always true, and there are many examples of communities managing resources unsustainably despite being given custodianship of the resource base.

3.5 Local governance is unpredictable

Despite the intensive efforts by donors and governments to invest in local institutions, these local bodies in most instances do not have the capacity to manage the benefits derived from conservation. In fact, the very institutions that have been set up to manage revenue become focal points for conflict. The trend is that the weakest in the community remain side-lined, while those at the centre of power try their best to get hold of an unfair share of the benefits. These local government systems do however vary from country to country in complex ways, and it is not easy to generalise about their strengths and weaknesses.

3.6 Financial benefits tend to be over-estimated or over-stated

The benefits from conservation can only in exceptional circumstances compete with the benefits from other livelihoods such as livestock farming and agriculture. The exceptions are where communities are small, and where the value of resources is high. It should however be borne in mind that even small sums can make a big difference to people's livelihoods, especially to the lives of the very poor. The importance of wages should also not be underestimated. Lease fees typically make up 4 to 12% of turnover in a tourism enterprise, whereas wages typically constitute 30% of turnover. In addition, wages are much easier to access for poor people, as no special managerial skills are required and the chances of irregularities occurring are low.

4. IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS FOR THE SUCCESS OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

4.1 Institutional ingredients

4.1.1 Strong local institutions with management skills, and education

This helps to improve communities' bargaining power, and enables them to manage conflict better. Education also helps communities to avoid 'conservation through the back door' e.g. through false promises about jobs and income.

4.1.2 Skilled officials

Skilled officials are able to facilitate collaboration between different government sectors, and understand and accept the 'new rules of the game'.

4.1.3 High quality, light-touch facilitation

High quality facilitation implies that there will be assistance without disempowerment.

4.1.4 Enforcement and monitoring

Enforcement and monitoring should be done by the local institutions, and local people should participate in making the rules. A lack of enforcement invariably leads to a depletion of resources, but also signifies a lack of commitment to sustainability. One of the most useful strategies to encourage monitoring and local law enforcement is to encourage participatory monitoring.

4.2 Financial ingredients

4.2.1 The advantages and disadvantages of donor money

Donor money is most useful as seed funding, early in the life cycles of projects. Initiatives that rely too much on donor money tend to become driven from the outside. The over-expansion of NGOs is another problem caused by prolonged and excessive donor funding. Donors should not only invest in community institutions, but also in individual entrepreneurs.

4.2.2 Managing expectations about jobs and income

Making false promises can lead to extreme tensions later on, even if the initiative generates substantial benefits to communities. The question needs to be asked: are false promises not another form of coercion?

4.2.3 Placing more emphasis on non-financial benefits

Non-financial benefits from community conservation are often more significant than financial benefits. These can include political empowerment and recognition, improved relations, improved livelihood security, training, gaining a distinct identity and pride, and the formation of new institutions.

4.3 Socio-political ingredients

4.3.1 Policies that work

Good conservation policies allow power to be delegated to local role players, under certain conditions. Such policies should also facilitate the establishment of new institutions, and should clearly lay down the ground rules / preconditions for benefit-sharing. Organizations should provide clear guidelines to officials, and policy-making should be an open, process-based approach

4.3.2 Power balances

Powerless communities tend to use the only source of power at their disposal: subversive tactics. Power balances, on the other hand, lead to mutual trust and respect developing.

4.3.3 Land tenure and ownership

The importance of security of land tenure to communities cannot be over-emphasised. Our results show that land-owning communities then to invest in training, and take a long term perspective on development.

4.4 Ecological ingredients

4.4.1 Mechanisms to promote sustainable use

Such mechanisms include monitoring to prevent over-use, environmental impact assessments, law enforcement and strategies to combine the consumptive and non-consumptive use of wild products.

4.4.2 Low potential for alternative land use

Community conservation tends to be more successful in low rainfall areas with low agricultural potential, low mining potential or areas threatened by livestock disease

5 CONCLUSIONS

Community conservation is a process that is dynamic, and there is no blueprint for it. Facilitators, conservation professionals and communities should set clear and acceptable goals, and be prepared to change them if necessary. It is important to monitor the process regularly, and anticipate conflict and mistakes. All those involved should be prepared to adapt their actions, strategies and even their goals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eddie Koch and Hector Magome have contributed to the Evaluating Eden synthesis and are gratefully acknowledged, as is the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) for funding the research.

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