

# Using Tourism as a Means to Sustain Community-Based Conservation: *Experience from Namibia*

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This case study is about the Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) Project, which operates in Namibia under a Cooperative Agreement between USAID's Southern Africa Regional Office and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The project supports community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), through the provision of grant funding, technical assistance and training. The consortium that implements the project is led by WWF, and includes Management Systems International (MSI), the Rossing Foundation, and World Learning. The LIFE Project is the largest component of a broader Namibian CBNRM effort, which includes policy and technical support from Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism, as well as training and field support from numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Namibian NGO Integrated Resource Conservation and Development (IRDNC), a partner and grantee of the LIFE Project, is generally credited with initiating CBNRM in Namibia in the early 1980s, through its program in the northwest to involve communities in efforts to protect black rhinos.

A development topic currently generating much interest is how tourism can be used to generate funding to support rural development and conservation. It is no wonder, as tourism currently generates 10% of the world's income, and is the world's fastest growing industry.<sup>2</sup> International tourism, which has been growing at the rate of at least 4% per annum, is expected to continue to experience significant growth over the coming decade. Tourism to developing countries has been increasing since the 1950s, and is expected to increase at an even faster pace than the general global trend.<sup>3</sup> As more tourists spend their income in developing countries, particularly in nature-related destinations, such countries are increasingly looking for ways to use tourism receipts to spur local development. To ensure that tourism growth can be sustained, economic development planners and conservationists are trying to build in safeguards that will ensure that the resource base upon which so much of tourism is dependent can be sustainably managed. Otherwise both the economic and conservation benefits of tourism will be in jeopardy.

Developing and strengthening the link between conservation and tourism is an underlying premise of Namibia's CBNRM Program, and an objective that is supported by the LIFE Project. This case study discusses the LIFE Project's efforts to link tourism and conservation and, more specifically, shows how tourism can contribute to the development of sustainable community-based conservation organizations. In order to build such organizations, termed conservancies in Namibia, the LIFE Project works towards the following objectives: a) helping communities to attract tourism investment through the development of equitable joint venture partnerships; b) ensuring that communities gain skills to account for and productively manage funds (earned from nature-based tourism) for the benefit of their communities; and c) assisting communities to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to sustainably manage the natural resources upon which tourism is dependent.

The focus of this case study is on the LIFE Project's efforts to use tourism as a mechanism to support the operations of community conservation organizations. The project's broader conservation activities, which form a majority of the LIFE Project's efforts, are not discussed in detail within this paper.

## **I. A Historical Overview of Wildlife Utilization and Tourism In Namibia's Communal Areas**

Namibia is blessed with a rich heritage of spectacular wildlife which includes kudu, zebra, giraffe, wild dog, sable and roan antelope, lion, leopard, buffalo, hippopotamus and large herds of migratory

elephant. Namibia is home to 32 species of large mammals, and 80% of its large mammal population resides outside of parks and protected areas. Namibia's northern communal areas, where many of these animals roam freely, are also home to thousands of impoverished villages, whose residents practice subsistence agriculture and face an uncertain future. In northern Namibia's rural communal areas education levels are low, unemployment is high, infrastructure is generally poor, and the population is plagued by a high incidence of disease, including elevated rates of HIV/AIDS and seasonally high incidences of malaria. In addition, much of the area is far from transportation hubs and industrial centers. Consequently, Namibia's communal areas have had, and will continue to have, difficulty in attracting investment and creating employment. Although the main livelihood activity of most of the area's rural inhabitants is subsistence agriculture, soil fertility is poor, and rainfall is spatially erratic and generally low.<sup>4</sup> As population increases, already poor soils become overtaxed, agriculture spreads, and wildlife habitat decreases. A lack of economic alternatives, and unmitigated reinvestment into agriculture, is causing a decline in the productivity of the resource base on which many of the area's residents currently depend.

### **Wildlife Utilization and Regulation**

In Namibia's communal areas wildlife is owned by the state. Within these areas, wildlife-based tourism is an incipient but rapidly developing industry. Until very recently, the communities who live in areas inhabited by game species -- including sometimes destructive species such as elephant and lion -- have only marginally benefited from commercial wildlife-based activity.

While Etosha National Park is Namibia's premier tourist attraction, much of Namibia's big-game species, including the vast majority of the country's approximately ten thousand elephants, can be found on communal lands, or within protected areas adjacent to communal lands. Protected areas in the country's north include the West Caprivi Game Reserve, and the Mahango, Mudumu and Mamili National Parks. Since none of these parks are fenced, game is free to wander across park boundaries and into villages and agricultural areas. As a result, it is communal area residents who often bear the cost of conservation. There is occasional human loss, but more often there is cattle loss to lions. Elephants also cause substantial damage to grain agriculture. In some areas of northern Namibia it is not unusual for communities to annually lose large portions of their crops to elephants. For example, within the Caprivi's Kwandu area (adjacent to the West Caprivi Game Reserve) a 1998 survey indicated that 74% of residents had lost crops to wildlife within the past five years, and 38% of residents had lost crops to wildlife in three or more of the past five years.<sup>5</sup> While most crop loss is attributed to elephants, crops are also lost to hippopotamus, wart hogs, bushbucks, kudus and monkeys, among other species. So, not only have community residents not generally benefitted from the area's tourism, but communities have come to view wildlife as a nuisance -- something that has had a negative impact on their livelihood.

Historically, Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), whose mandate it is to manage the protection and sustainable use of wildlife and habitat, has relied heavily on regulation and enforcement to carry-out its role. In doing so, it generally restricted its management activities to protected areas. It only became involved in communal areas in its capacity as a law enforcement agency, to prevent people from "poaching" wildlife -- wildlife that local communities have historically lived with and relied upon as a source of protein, but which now legally belongs to the state. Not surprisingly, illegal hunting which flourished in Namibia over the past few decades, and the large-scale wanton killing of wildlife by the South African Defense forces during their occupation of northern Namibia (circa 1966-1988), led to a precipitous decline in game populations in communal areas. Once Namibia gained independence the situation somewhat stabilized, but illegal hunting

nevertheless remained commonplace since communities saw little reason to cooperate with national conservation policies.

Around the time of Namibia's independence, in 1989, there began to be discussion and efforts to address the recognition that many game populations were in decline as a result of illegal hunting and habitat loss. It was argued that this situation had evolved because the populations who lived in these areas were poor, and had no incentives to practice conservation. In fact, the converse was true. Since communities were not able to share in the benefits associated with wildlife, including trophy hunting and tourism, it was often in their best interest to transform wildlife habitat into grazing pasture and grain fields, activities from which they could derive direct benefits.

### **Tourism in Communal Areas: Historical Practices**

During South Africa's rule northern Namibia was off limits to travel. The area was heavily occupied by the South African Defense Forces, land mines were prevalent, and military skirmishes were frequent. However, once Namibia gained independence, international tourism interest rapidly increased. Since independence, Namibia's tourism industry has been the country's fastest growing economic sector, and is now the third largest earner of foreign exchange income. Tourism currently contributes 5% to Namibia's Gross Domestic Product, and comprises 13% of foreign exchange earnings.<sup>6</sup>

The recent upsurge in tourism to Namibia has been principally led by the country's commercial sector, and relatively little income has been earned from tourism by communal area residents, despite the high tourism appeal of such areas. A 1998 LIFE survey of six tourism lodges in northern communal areas revealed that all of these establishments were owned by someone from outside of the community, either someone from Windhoek, or by overseas investors. To secure operating "rights" all of the lodges surveyed had made informal agreements with traditional headmen, but none of these agreements included a legal requirement that the lodges share income with the adjacent communities, whose land they occupy. In Namibia, these deals have been the norm of operation, and are sometimes referred to as "blanket and brandy" deals, in reference to the informal nature of the agreements and a common belief that communities usually receive far less than market value for their agreements to allow lodges to be established. In fact, oftentimes "communities" would not receive any of the benefits of these deals, as whatever benefits resulted were often retained by traditional headmen and not shared with the larger community.

**Tourism's Typical Benefit to Namibian Communities:** When lodge owners were asked to cite examples of how they shared benefits with local communities they mentioned the following "assistance": a new suit had been purchased for a local headman; materials had been contributed for the construction of a new thatched traditional court (Khuta); transportation was periodically made available to take villagers to town; and local residents were given the "opportunity" to sell firewood to the lodges. While these benefits are valuable to the affected communities, in all cases they stop short of being characteristic of a formal business partnership -- such as one would normally expect to find between a commercial establishment and the owner of the land that is occupied by that establishment.

Overall, tourism lodges in Namibia's communal areas have not been treating communities, whose land they occupy, as partners in their business ventures. Relations between communities and the tourism lodge owners can most often be characterized as paternalistic, informal and *ad hoc*. In addition to not equitably sharing revenue, the agreements that the lodges operate under generally fail to address issues that are important for maintaining a community's commitment to conservation. One

example is how to compensate farmers who agree to tolerate living adjacent to wildlife areas, but as a consequence occasionally suffer crop and livestock loss. On the positive side, the lodges surveyed were the most significant generator of formal employment within the areas where they are located.

Thus, at the time the LIFE Project was established, Namibia's communal areas were beginning to experience an upsurge in wildlife-based tourism, but were largely excluded from gaining any of the benefits associated with these activities. This situation existed because the government's policies did not favor community participation in either consumptive or non-consumptive wildlife use, and because communities did not have the skills, organization or capital to be able to take advantage of market opportunities.

## II. Policy Context: The Enabling Foundation

**Namibia's Policy on Community-Based Tourism:** In May, 1995 the MET approved Namibia's Community-Based Tourism Policy. This policy grants rights to communities over tourism within their areas of jurisdiction. The Nature Conservation Act of 1996 (which allowed for the formation of communal area conservancies), grants conservancies the rights over non-consumptive use of wildlife, which includes tourism use. This legislation provides communities the exclusive right to operate commercial tourism activities within a registered conservancy.

**A New Beginning:** In June 1995, the MET granted Permission to Occupy status to Elias Xoagub, enabling the development of a tourism campsite at Twyfelfontein, the site of the world's largest known concentration of stone age petroglyphs. This marked the first time in Namibia's history that a tourism concession was granted to a black-owned communal-area business, and was made possible by the passage of Namibia's Community-Based Tourism Policy. Currently, several communal conservancies are applying for tourism concessions in order to control tourism within their boundaries.

Now, for the first time in Namibia's modern history, local residents are being given an opportunity to benefit from wildlife — and these benefits will largely be from tourism-generated revenue. Without tourism, and in particular tourism that can benefit local people, it is almost certain that the area's animal populations would continue to decline. Thus, for northern Namibia, sustainable wildlife utilization, including tourism and trophy hunting, appear to be the only economically viable mechanism to encourage improved conservation practices.

**Namibia's Conservancy Policy:** In June 1996 the Namibian Parliament amended the country's Nature Ordinance to allow rural communities to benefit from sustainable wildlife utilization, pending compliance with certain conditions. These conditions stipulated that

communities must form themselves into conservancies, and this meant that communities had to meet specified registration requirements. Government requirements for becoming a registered communal area conservancy include: mapping of the conservancy's boundaries, and having neighboring communities agree to the boundary demarcations; registering a conservancy's members, who should form a majority of the population within a conservancy's boundaries; forming an elected and representative management committee; developing a community-approved constitution; and developing a benefit distribution plan, which provides guidance on how financial and non-financial benefits will be shared among a conservancy's members.

Once a conservancy becomes registered (which has generally required a two to three year effort), it then gains authority to sustainably utilize and benefit from the area's wildlife. In particular, conservancies have the right to petition the MET for a sustainable wildlife off-take quota, which can be auctioned to trophy-hunting firms or used for consumptive purposes. In addition, the conservancy also gains tourism rights and, as a legal entity, has the authority to enter into contracts with private sector tourism operators.

The passage of Namibia's conservancy legislation in mid-1996 was intended to provide incentives to communities to conserve wildlife; to encourage a change of attitude whereby wildlife would come to be seen as an economic asset to be treasured and protected; to enable wildlife, and wildlife-based activities, to become an impetus to stimulate economic development in many of the country's most impoverished areas; and to help the government and communities to become partners in wildlife conservation.

There are currently four communal conservancies in Namibia, all approved within the past year, and another 22 or so others under development. Namibia's four communal conservancies cover an area of just over 1.6 million hectares.

### **III. The LIFE Project**

Against the aforementioned background, Namibia launched a CBNRM program in the early 1990s, with the MET's Directorate of Environmental Affairs playing the lead role in developing the policies that underpin the program. The premise of Namibia's CBNRM Program is that natural resources must have an economic value if those living within proximity of the resources are to have an incentive to practice conservation and sustainable use.

#### **The LIFE Project's Purpose and Activities**

The CBNRM program developed in Namibia has three areas of concentration: governance and community empowerment, rural economic development, and conservation.

- ***Governance and Community Empowerment:*** Communities can take advantage of rights promulgated under Namibia's Communal Area Conservancy Legislation by forming representative and accountable management committees. Although initially formed to manage sustainable resource use, once formed, the committees become skilled organizations able to manage and account for funds, undertake land-use planning, negotiate business agreements, and represent a community's interests on a wide range of land use and development issues.
- ***Rural Economic Development:*** Conservancies are a mechanism for communities to be able to earn income from wildlife-related activities, including from working with private sector firms in the areas of trophy hunting and tourism. Under the conservancy legislation, communities must develop equitable community-approved benefit distribution plans, and it is expected that many conservancies will establish and manage *community development funds*, which will be used to support local development initiatives.

- **Conservation:** The CBNRM program promotes conservation of biodiversity by creating the necessary incentives for communities to use resources sustainably. To ensure sustainable resource use, communities must develop resource management plans, and monitor that resources are being utilized at sustainable levels.

To support Namibia's CBNRM initiative, USAID developed the LIFE Project. Begun in May 1993, and scheduled to operate through early 2000, the project has been funded at \$25 million. A recently-approved second phase of the project, LIFE II, will operate from late 1999 through 2004, with a level of USAID support of \$12 million. WWF has been selected as the lead implementing organization for the first three years of the project's second phase. The latter two years of LIFE II USAID support will be contracted directly with Namibian NGOs, under the structure of a Namibian National CBNRM Program. One of the main objectives of the LIFE II Project is to support the development of a Namibian CBNRM Association, whose job will be to raise funds and manage grants in support of Namibia's National CBNRM Program, thus taking-over several of the responsibilities currently managed by the LIFE Project.

The purpose of the LIFE Project is to *Increase the Benefits Received by Historically Disadvantaged Namibians from Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in Communal Areas*. To achieve this purpose, the LIFE Project provides grants, technical assistance, training, and supports economic and policy analysis. The LIFE Project currently supports about twelve grants, which include the following activities:

- helping communities to form legally-recognized conservancies, so that local communities can control, and economically benefit from, the sustainable use of natural resources;
- promoting economic development, including encouraging private sector tourism investment and supporting small enterprise development, such as the development of campsites, craft outlets and cultural villages;
- improving natural resources management, by helping conservancies develop sustainable resource-use plans, training community game guards to monitor wildlife populations and conduct anti-poaching patrols; and by re-introducing game species;
- strengthening Namibian NGOs to be able to implement CBNRM activities; and
- supporting the establishment of Namibian CBNRM Association, and ensuring that it establishes a capability to raise funds and manage grants in support of national program objectives.

The project involves a variety of Namibian NGOs, as well as the MET, as grantees and partners. Overall project direction is under the authority of the LIFE Steering Committee, which is composed of NGO, university and government representatives, and is currently chaired by the MET's Directorate of Environmental Affairs.

Over the first phase of the LIFE Project a great deal of effort was put towards organizing communities into conservancy structures that are able to effectively represent community

interests, particularly in regard to resource management issues. As the LIFE Project continues, an increased effort will be directed toward helping conservancy committees to improve their ability to manage and monitor natural resources, and to operate themselves as self-financing development organizations.

### **Target Areas and Intended Beneficiaries**

The LIFE I Project was a pilot effort, designed to test the CBNRM concept in Namibia in a limited number of locations. These locations included the Nyae Nyae area of eastern Odjozondujpa (formerly Bushmanland), east and west Caprivi, and the area of Uukwaluudhi, located northwest of Etosha National Park. All of these areas are located within communal lands, and many of these areas are located adjacent to national parks or, in the case of eastern Caprivi, adjacent to Botswana's Chobe National Park.

The project's beneficiaries are defined as historically disadvantaged Namibians – meaning black Namibians, who suffered social and economic discrimination under South African apartheid rule. All project sites are located in communal areas, and within these areas living standards and income are low. Although there is a paucity of income and employment data on Namibia's communal area residents, the LIFE Project has undertaken socio-economic studies that confirm that project beneficiaries are economically disadvantaged. For example, in the Kwandu area, where the project is supporting the development of one of several Caprivi-area conservancies, it was found that 60% of the area's households do not earn any income to supplement their subsistence agricultural activity. Of the households who do report receiving regular income, over two-thirds reported receiving less than \$33 per month. In fact, across Namibia's communal areas, agricultural incomes are so low and variable that cash remittances and pensions are essential supplements for most families, and 17% of rural households regard remittances as their main source of income.<sup>7</sup>

Direct beneficiaries of the project will be those who will earn wage income as a result of project-related activities, including wages earned from tourism lodges and community-based tourism enterprises, those producing and selling crafts, and those employed on a full-time basis by conservancy committees. Other direct beneficiaries will include the many thousands of community members who will receive income distributions from net conservancy earnings, and those who will benefit from activities supported by the use of conservancy-generated community development funds. The LIFE Project estimates that there will be 56,000 conservancy members by 2005 (Namibia's current population is 1.6 million).

In addition to financial benefits, a number of non-quantifiable benefits will result from the LIFE Project. These benefits have been identified in a paper by Caroline Ashley entitled *Intangibles Matter: Non-Financial Dividends of Community Based Natural Resource Management in Namibia*. In this paper, Ashley states "empowerment is perhaps the most important benefit [of the CBNRM program], because rural communities, disempowered by colonialism and apartheid, have had few opportunities to gain rights and responsibilities, or develop skills and status. Empowerment is multifaceted, deriving from the many ways in which CBNRM activities and the gradual development of common property resource management strengthen communities' social organization." Other project benefits identified by Ashley include: a diversification of livelihood strategies, in particular the opportunity to use income and game meat as a way to cushion the affect of Namibia's periodic droughts; an

increased accountability of community leaders to their constituents; and support for traditional values, which place a preeminence on the cultural and aesthetic value of wildlife.

#### **IV. Linking Tourism and Sustainable Community-Based Conservation**

The LIFE Project is working in areas of Namibia where nature-based tourism is on the increase. However, the resource base upon which this tourism increase is dependent is fragile and, within Namibia's recent past, has not been sustainably managed. In turn, tourism development practices have not significantly benefitted local communities -- communities who must be relied upon to manage the areas' natural resources if tourism is to be maintained or expanded. And around it goes: an interdependent web of tourism, communities, sustainable resource management, and economic opportunities. The LIFE Project's intent is to help to ensure that the various strands of this web are in harmony, and that the web's various interest groups understand their interdependence, and find ways to cooperate for mutual benefit. If successful, the results of the LIFE Project will include a healthier and better managed resource base, an expanded and more profitable tourism sector, and a better standard of living for local communities.

A critical performance target under the WWF/LIFE Phase II Project is that a minimum of five conservancies will become financially self-sustaining by October 31, 2002. This section presents the strategy and activities that will be used to achieve the objective of helping conservancies to become self-sustaining.

#### **Community Based Tourism and the LIFE Project's Strategy to Develop Sustainable Communal Area Conservancies**

The LIFE Project's aim is that conservancies become self-financed independent natural resource management organizations, and that these organizations eventually expand their activities to represent community interests across a broad range of social and economic development issues. Based on the analysis of revenue-generating opportunities, it is believed that tourism and trophy hunting offer the best and most immediate promise as generators of conservancy revenue. In fact, by the year 2005, it is projected nearly 80% of conservancy revenues, or over \$500,000 in income per annum, will be earned through partnerships between conservancies and the private sector.<sup>8</sup> About 60% of conservancy income is expected to be generated through cooperation with private sector tourism lodges, another 20% through sustainable trophy hunting, and the remainder through conservancy-owned campsites, craft outlets, cultural villages and other tourism-related activities.

To effectively manage natural resources an average conservancy will consist of at least five full-time professionals, which will likely include a manager, a bookkeeper/finance assistant, two game guards, and one community resource monitor. Although all conservancies will have different needs, the LIFE Project believes that five full-time staff positions will be the minimum number necessary for a conservancy to effectively manage a community's natural resources. It is hoped, however, that most conservancies will develop to be able to employ more than a minimum configuration of staff. In addition to staff requirements, most conservancies will need to be able to maintain a vehicle, hire casual labors for various tasks, and maintain boreholes, fences and other wildlife-related infrastructure.<sup>9</sup>



A principal emphasis of Namibia's CBNRM Program is to help conservancies to become independent self-financing organizations. To ensure a community's support toward conservation, it is important that a conservancy be able to generate benefits that can be distributed among its broader membership, for example, by generating income that can be distributed to members, or used to support community development projects. Many of the benefits received by community members where conservancies have been formed, however, will accrue in the form of employment income from tourism lodges and hunting contracts, or from an increased level of economic activity within an area, such as increased agricultural marketing opportunities, or through the sale of firewood and thatching grass, rather than as a result of the distribution of net conservancy income. Nevertheless, it is expected that most conservancies in Namibia will be able to generate revenue in excess of their operating requirements, and thus will be able to periodically distribute benefits to community members. Aside from whether or not conservancies are able to make household distributions of income, a principal benefit of Namibia's CBNRM program will be the establishment of self-financed community conservation organizations that can exist in perpetuity, and which will be skilled in attracting increased investment and development into an area (in addition to managing natural resources).

The LIFE Project is placing a strong emphasis on improving conservation stewardship in communal areas, and ensuring that all communal area conservancies are able to self-finance their own operational costs. As part of this effort, the project works with each of its target conservancies to identify and implement a diversified range of income-earning activities, and to match conservancy management structures with income earning potential. The LIFE II Project will place an emphasis on narrowing the gap between private sector tourism and rural communities -- ultimately resulting in the development of formal business relationships between conservancies and tourism operators. A combination of increased income, together with improved financial management skills, should lead to the development of conservancies able to sustain and manage their operations. Sustainable conservancies will exist when they earn enough income to support their basic operations, and are able to analyze and manage finances in a manner that ensures revenue and expenditures remain in balance. Once conservancies are helped to reach financial sustainability, a role of the CBNRM Association of Namibia will be to help identify funding for additional capital developments, which can be externally financed but managed through the personnel and skills of existing conservancy structures.

### **Current Project Initiatives: Providing Communities Greater Self-Determination, Management Authority and Income**

The following are the current LIFE Project activities that will contribute to making conservancies sustainable.

- In the area of increasing tourism investment in communal areas, the following activities are undertaken by the LIFE Project.

**Assist Conservancies to Attract Private Sector Tourism Investment.** The LIFE Project works towards registering conservancies to become legal entities, so that they are able to enter into joint-venture business agreements; helps conservancies to produce tourism development plans, which build community consensus for linking sustainable natural

resources management and tourism development; provides assistance to conservancies to zone and map parcels of land to be used exclusively for business and tourism development; and increases conservancy knowledge of tourism, by offering study tours and training, principally through the work of the Namibian Association of Community-Based Tourism (NACOBTA).

**Provide conservancies assistance to better understand private sector interests, and to review joint venture proposals.** The LIFE Project has provided workshops for communities and NGOs to discuss tourism investment and joint ventures, and has done this through the use of presentations, discussion and role plays. In this way, communities become familiar with investment issues and negotiation techniques, and when the opportunity arises are prepared to deal with these issues within time frames acceptable to investors, who have a financial interest in concluding negotiations as quickly as possible.

**Create Forums to Build Community-Private Sector Partnership and Understanding.**

The LIFE Project initiated the establishment of a Communal Area Tourism Investment Review Committee, which is composed of NGO, private sector and government representatives, and whose role is to review proposals from private sector investors wishing to build tourism facilities in communal areas. The committee is an advisory committee, which reviews investment proposals and then provides a single set of observations to both investors and communities regarding how the proposal fits with CBNRM objectives and structures, as well as to what degree the proposal represents standard industry practice in Namibia. For example, a recent proposal review helped a potential investor understand that there are successful precedents for private sector-community joint management committees in Namibia, as had been requested by the community. The same review process helped the community understand that the 30 year lease proposed by the investor was not unusual, but rather was a fairly standard industry practice in southern Africa. In this way distrust between investors and communities can be overcome and both parties can learn a bit more about each other's business culture and practices.

**Encourage the establishment of joint management committees to ensure a mechanism exists for routine communication between facility managers and communities.**

As a first step to forming a joint management committee, community and tourism operator representatives need to define the committee's role and composition, and ensure that both parties are clear as to the issues over which the committee will have authority. In Namibia, tourism facility operators have insisted on retaining day-to-day management authority over operations, but have successfully used joint management committees for identifying workers, establishing personnel policies, approving an expansion of facilities or activities, maintaining a communications link to the broader community, and using the committee as a forum for solving disputes. These committees also provide community leaders opportunities to

**Collaborative Management Strengthens Relations Between Communities and Tourism Operators:** The Damaraland Camp uses a joint management committee to help it select employees. When first hiring employees the operator asked the conservancy to nominate three candidates for each available position. The operator then interviewed all of the candidates, selected particular individuals for a few positions, and made a short-list of its preferences for other positions. The conservancy management committee was then able to select final candidates from the short list and, in doing so, was able to take into consideration factors such as the financial welfare of the candidate's family and the necessity to share the jobs among several villages. Both parties were pleased with the process used and its outcome.

increase their skills in tourism and business management, and place them in a position to increase their management responsibilities as the venture proceeds.

**Ensure that communities become partners in tourism development, and equitably share in the benefits.** The LIFE Project works to help conservancies formalize their relationships with private sector tourism operators. Formalizing relationships will require the development of mutually-agreeable and transparent revenue sharing agreements, which generally ensure that communities gain some form of lease revenue, combined with a percentage of gross income. For example, a model agreement would stipulate that a community receive so much per year in the form of a flat concession fee, plus an additional amount of funds based on turnover and occupancy levels. The LIFE Project is currently encouraging communities to seek 5% of total revenue in the initial years of an operation, and then receive a gradually higher percentage as the business becomes established, occupancy rates increase, and capitalization costs begin to be recovered. It is hoped that once a business is fully established communities can earn 10%-15% of total revenues. The LIFE Project, however, provides this only as guidance, as it is between communities and investors to decide what is appropriate under any given arrangement.

**Ensure that joint venture agreements include clauses to provide communities training and opportunities to assume management positions.** Preference should be given to hiring workers from communities adjacent to the tourism business, and opportunities need to be created to allow workers to move into management positions. In the long term this is in both parties' interest, since the replacement of expatriate managers by community members should reduce operational costs and increase profit margins.

**Support the integration of community-based tourism into Namibia's mainstream commercial tourism industry.** The Namibian Association of Community-Based Tourism (NACOBTA), established with the support of the LIFE Project in 1996, is playing a significant role in helping communities to gain tourism skills and to develop small-scale tourism facilities. In the past two years, NACOBTA has provided training to over 200 rural community participants (over 2,000 person-days of training) in subjects such as *Introduction to Tourism*, *Building a Community-Based Tourism Enterprise*, and *Tour Guiding*. In addition, NACOBTA has recently begun a grant-making program to provide qualified enterprises funds to improve tourism facilities, such as campsites and cultural villages. Once tourism facilities are brought up to international tourism quality standards, NACOBTA works to make sure that the facilities are used by private tour operators. A current initiative of NACOBTA is working on the establishment of a reservation system for community-based campsites, in response to the private sector's need to be able to ensure clients accommodation in particular locations.

- In the area of increasing communities' ability to productively manage (tourism) revenue, the following activities are undertaken.

**Ensure that conservancy committees represent the interests of the broader community.** The LIFE Project, most often through support provided by partner NGOs, helps conservancies with their formation process, and helps to facilitate the selection of management committees that are representative of the community, as is required by Namibia's conservancy legislation. In many cases, this has meant that representatives are elected from various regions within the conservancy, or from each village within the

conservancy. In addition, it has been common for conservancies to appoint one or more members from traditional authorities to also serve on the committee. These committees must then develop governance procedures, which requires skills in meeting management, communication, and decision-making. After a committee has been formed, and has had some time to become familiar with its role, then the LIFE Project works with the University of Namibia to undertake surveys on the conservancy committee's effectiveness. These surveys ask community members to assess whether they feel the committee is representative of the community, whether it is doing a satisfactory job in managing the conservancy's development and informing members of issues, and whether or not members are familiar with and support the programs of the committee. The analysis of these surveys is fed-back to the committees, and then participatory management exercises are undertaken to improve the committee's structure and functions, as necessary. In Namibia, conservancy committees range in size between twelve and forty members, depending on the size and preference of membership. (An average conservancy includes 2,300 people.)

**Provide conservancies the skills they need to account for funds and undertake financial planning.** Financial management skills are a necessary foundation for the development of a successful conservancy. These skills will enable conservancies to undertake the following functions: effectively account for development funds, including grants from the LIFE Project and the National CBNRM Program; assess business development opportunities, and be able to negotiate contract terms with private sector investors; manage conservancy payroll and other financial obligations; and wisely invest net income in socially and economically productive activities. If conservancies do not gain a strong capability in the area of financial management, it is unlikely that they will become effective self-sustaining organizations.

**Develop and implement realistic conservancy sustainability plans, taking care to maintain a balance between operational revenues and expenditures.** As part of the Namibian National CBNRM Program, the Namibian Nature Foundation (NNF) plans to provide financial management assistance to all registered conservancies. Once a conservancy becomes registered, NNF will help the conservancy to track and project revenues and expenditures. Developed jointly by conservancy management committees and support NGOs, sustainability plans recommend how a conservancy should adjust its staffing and expenditures so that operational expenditures can be brought into line with revenues. As a general guide, the CBNRM program expects that conservancies should be able to cover 100% of their operational costs within five years of becoming registered. Because of varying income-earning potential, the size of conservancy staff and operations will vary between locales.

**Develop benefit distributions plans.** Conservancies are provided assistance in developing equitable distribution plans, and in deciding how to balance income distribution with the need to set-aside funds to cover conservancy operations. In some cases, conservancies have decided to share income with members through household-level distributions, whereas in other cases conservancies they have elected to establish community trust funds, which will be used to support local development projects. In either case, the LIFE Project provides workshop training and technical assistance to help communities identify and manage their particular preferences. The project has found that it is particularly important to return benefits to the broader community, as quickly as possible, as a way to maintain support for overall conservation efforts.

## V. A Modest but Promising Beginning: Impacts and Constraints

The CBNRM Program in Namibia is still in its infancy. Over the past seven years a great deal has been learned about how to effectively implement CBNRM in Namibia, and much effort has gone into helping a dozen communities form conservancy committees that are representative of community interests, accountable to their communities in the decisions they make, and capable of leading local area conservation and tourism development. The LIFE Project is now in a transition, from being a geographically focused pilot effort, to becoming one of several partners who support Namibia's rapidly developing National CBNRM Program. Full implementation of a national Namibian CBNRM program will entail broadening the geographic focus of conservancy support efforts, working with a substantially larger number of communities, and strengthening the structures necessary to technically and financially sustain the effort.

### Impacts to Date

In 1998, Namibia's first four communal conservancies were registered with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Now that a favorable policy environment exists, and NGOs and government have gained experience and capability in supporting conservancy development, the pace of conservancy registration is expected to rapidly increase. Currently, there are 22 emerging communal conservancies under development in Namibia, and at least four of these are expected to become registered during 1999. By 2005, the number of registered conservancies in Namibia is expected to reach 24.

For the many who have been involved in Namibia's CBNRM program, the registration of the country's first four conservancies has brought a sense of significant accomplishment, but also a reminder that registration is only a beginning. Following a conservancy's registration, a concerted effort must be made to improve natural resource management, generate NRM-based revenue, and increase a conservancy's ability to operate autonomously. The LIFE Project is currently planning its phase-out from Namibia, and is aggressively going forward with plans to transfer its responsibilities to Namibian partner organizations. In addition to transferring skills and responsibilities, the project is intent on clarifying and testing the processes that are necessary to enable conservancies to attain sustainability. If this can be achieved then the Namibian CBNRM program will have a clear path to follow in its continuance of CBNRM efforts, and this should eventually lead to 20 or so sustainable communal conservancies in Namibia, a large number of CBNRM beneficiaries, and dramatically improved

**A Promising Beginning:** In 1998, a total of nearly \$38,000 was earned from tourism and sustainable trophy hunting within the Nyae Nyae Conservancy -- over \$20,000 was earned by the conservancy itself, and an additional \$17,5000 was earned in wage income by members of the conservancy. With input from its membership, the conservancy committee decided to set aside \$7,000 of its funds to cover a portion of its operating costs, and then distributed its remaining funds among member households. Thus, a total of nearly \$30,000 in direct income was earned by households in Nyae Nyae as a result of conservancy activities. For the residents of Nyae Nyae, a majority of whom have no source of regular income, this has significantly increased their purchasing power. A monitoring of how conservancy income distributions were used revealed that over 60% of the funds were used to purchase food, with remaining funds mainly used for clothes, beads for crafts, and to purchase agricultural and woodworking tools.

conservation practices in much of Namibia's communal areas.

Toward demonstrating the viability of the CBNRM approach in Namibia, the following accomplishments have so far been realized.

**Conservancies are beginning to earn significant income from NRM-related activities:** In 1998, nearly \$200,000 was earned within conservancy areas from NRM-related activities, up from \$35,000 in 1996. This income was earned from the sale of thatching grass (33%), agreements with tourism lodges (24%), from the sale of crafts (17%), and through hunting contracts (15%). The LIFE Project projects that direct conservancy-generated revenue will increase to nearly \$1 million per annum by 2005, with most of the increase coming from the development of tourism lodges. It is expected that the income being earned by conservancies can be indefinitely maintained, and will not be dependent on continued NGO support.

**Structures are being created that will enable conservancies to manage their own finances:** All

conservancies currently have a financial manager/bookkeeper on staff, with support NGOs paying the salaries of these individuals until such time that the conservancy is able to cover the costs. In addition to LIFE-supported financial management workshops, the Namibian Nature Fund has recently committed to provide all members of conservancy management committees intensive financial management and sustainability planning assistance.

**Newly-registered conservancies are proving capable of securing joint-venture business agreements with private sector operators:** Three of the four recently registered communal conservancies already have entered into trophy hunting contracts with private sector operators; a joint-venture tourism lodge currently operates in one of the conservancies; and a second conservancy has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a tour operator that will result in an up-market tourism lodge being built within the next 18 months.

**Toward Sustainability:** Torra Conservancy earned approximately \$28,000 in 1998, which is what is estimated to be necessary to sustain a average conservancy's basic operations. The conservancy recently decided to use some of its self-generated revenue to cover half of its 1999 running costs, which had formerly been paid in full by a support NGO (IRDNC). These costs include the salaries of six community game guards, the running costs of a conservancy vehicle and the costs of committee activities, including a modest allowance to be paid to committee members. Torra Conservancy is expected to be 100% financially self-sufficient within three years.

### **Progress is being made in moving conservancies towards financial self-sufficiency:**

Although it was only last year that Namibia's first four communal area conservancies were formed, two of these conservancies (Torra and Nyae Nyae) are already contributing self-generated funds toward their operations. The LIFE Project encourages conservancies to reach financial self-sufficiency over a period of up to five years, as income earnings increase, and

#### **A New Era for Community**

**Tourism:** Recent joint venture tourism developments in Namibia set a precedent for a new era of cooperation between communities and tourism operators. This new precedent moves away from still common-place informal paternalistic relationships, toward the establishment of formal business partnerships: partnerships that are based on contractual revenue sharing, co-management, and complete business transparency between communities and tourism operators.

in the interim use surplus income for community development activities or household income distributions.

It is expected that most conservancies in Namibia will be able to self-finance their operations as well as earn net revenue to support household-level income distribution or community development projects.

#### **A new and more equitable model of community-private sector tourism partnership is emerging in**

**Namibia:** Also in Torra Conservancy, there is a model joint-venture tourism development co-managed by the conservancy and a private tour operator, Wilderness Safaris. The venture consists of an up-market tented tourism camp, and is managed under an agreement that stipulates: 10% of annual revenue goes to the conservancy, and this contribution is verified through a transparent system of accounts; the current lodge operator will train locally-hired staff to take over the lodge's

management; and, after a ten year period, the ownership of the lodge will be transferred to the community. Within two years of start-up, this joint venture tourism lodge was voted the second best ecotourism destination in the world by the British Guild of Travel Writers. More recently, a tourism developer and the emerging Mayuni Conservancy completed a joint-venture agreement to build an up-market tourism lodge. This agreement is for a period of 20 years, and stipulates that, in addition to annual guaranteed lease income, the tourism operator will share a percentage of annual income with the community -- initially 3%, but climbing to 8% once the lodge is able to average a 60% occupancy rate. Both of these agreements have set-up joint management committees to oversee operations.<sup>10</sup>

### **Constraints Encountered**

In the process of building sustainable conservancies in Namibia, the following constraints have been encountered.

**The Scope of Namibia's Nature Conservation Act is too limited.** Namibia's Conservancy Policy, while certainly one of the best of its kind in the world, is currently limited to providing communities rights over wildlife and tourism, and does not grant communities the right to manage other resources, including grazing land, timber, and fisheries. This causes a certain lack of clarity in regard to conservancy rights, and can undermine conservancy programs when individuals undertake activities that come into conflict with wildlife management, for example timber harvesting or cattle grazing.

**Traditional common property resource management regimes, such as those that operate in Namibia's communal areas, are often at odds with the requirements of building and operating market-driven private sector businesses.** Community norms and resource ownership rules often discourage any individual from becoming too successful, or too

wealthy, and therefore can inhibit individual initiative and undermine a sense of responsibility to the business. These conflicts can also make it difficult to appoint business managers who are the most qualified within a community to run a particular enterprise, or to dismiss those who are not. To overcome this constraint a careful mix of community benefits and individual opportunities must be maintained in all enterprise developments.

**There is a large chasm between the experience of Namibia's communal area communities and the requirements of operating a tourism facility that caters to international tourists.** Traditional subsistence societies do not have the background, experience and skills to be able to understand the expectations and requirements of international tourists. In Namibia's rural communal areas only a very small percentage of the population have had any formal sector work experience. This makes the task of tourism development in many rural areas much more difficult than the challenge faced by typical enterprise development programs, which generally have the advantage of being able to provide assistance to experienced entrepreneurs. Closing the gap between communities and tourism operators requires a long-term effort to increase community knowledge and awareness of tourism, and to build-up skills in marketing, financial management, business management, facility management and the host of other skills required to manage a modern-day tourism business. The target beneficiaries of Namibia's CBNRM program are rural populations who live on some of the country's most marginalized land and practice traditional subsistence-level agriculture. This scenario presents enormous challenges. Yet it is critical to work in these areas in order to conserve the country's remaining wildlife habitat, and to ensure that populations who are already on the edge of survival do not slip into situations that will require permanent and costly emergency aid – as happens when poor communities practice subsistence activities that ultimately deplete the resource base upon which they are dependent.

**Tourism investors can easily become deterred from working in communal areas because of the multitude of actors and organizations with which they must deal. Aside from causing confusion, this situation also increases their transaction costs.** When investors select an area in which they would like to develop tourism facilities they typically begin their development process by opening discussions with local residents. However, often local communities are not organized to respond to investment opportunities, and investors may find themselves dealing with different groups of "representatives" at each subsequent meeting, and often these different sets of community "representatives" propose different rules. Further, as word of investor interest begins to filter out, it is usually not long before NGO and government officials also become involved, and often each brings a new set of conditions and requirements to the negotiations. CBNRM programs need to find ways to reduce investor transaction costs by improving coordination and decision-making among different stakeholders. Otherwise, investors may find it too frustrating, expensive and time consuming to stay the course.

**Communities are short of development capital.** The communities the LIFE Project works with are poor, and do not have funds to initiate any but the smallest of development projects. While communities can sometimes start their own campsites or cultural villages these activities do not show the most promise in terms of generating employment or income (but are still important for productively filling a tourism market niche). Therefore communities must rely on outside investors to cover the capital costs of new tourism facilities. In most cases, this has resulted in uneven partnerships, wherein community opportunities for revenue sharing and decision-making authority are limited. It can be expected that private sector



investors who contribute a majority of a development's capital costs will also insist on taking-out a majority of profit, as well as insist on controlling most management decisions.

**Public sector incentives to encourage increased tourism investment in communal areas have not yet been developed in Namibia.** For a variety of reasons, many investors view tourism development in communal areas to be a more risky and expensive proposition than investing in areas where property is privately owned. In order to help nurture tourism investment in communal areas, the government should provide a set of special financial incentives. Such incentives could include, for example, the provision of tax holidays, tax discounts, or helping to underwrite investment risk insurance. The government should make attempts to fast-track tourism investment in communal areas and, as such, should look for ways to play the role of an investment facilitator, and take care to avoid being viewed as a regulatory constraint.

## **VI. Lessons Learned**

The following are some of the most important lessons learned by the LIFE Project under its efforts to use tourism as a means to sustain community-based conservation.

**It is essential to have a legal policy foundation that allows communities to utilize and manage natural resources, and enables communities to control tourism within their jurisdictions.** Namibia has developed a strong base of legislation that links a devolution of community-level resource use rights to a community's commitment to manage resources sustainably. Namibia's legislation has provided communities an incentive for practicing better conservation, and granted them a legal basis for developing resource-based economic activities. The importance of this policy foundation cannot be overstated.

**A strong base of organizational and financial skills is essential to building sustainable community conservation organizations.** Without this base of skills, it is unlikely a conservancy will be able to sustain itself. Strong organizational skills are necessary for dealing with outside interest groups, as well as for being able to represent the interests of the community. A strong base of financial skills is essential for a conservancy to manage its finances, negotiate with outside investors, and maintain transparent financial accountability to its members. It is important that a conservancy's skills in this area go beyond just being able to account for donor funding, and that such skills include a capability in financial management planning, as this will serve as a basis for making sustainability and business development decisions. In Namibia, the LIFE Project and its partners are supporting financial management sustainability planning training for all conservancies.

**Communities need support in understanding tourism, developing tourism skills, and integrating their activities into the mainstream commercial tourism sector.** The Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA) has been an indispensable resource in working to integrate community tourism into Namibia's commercial tourism sector. Aside from providing training in tourism and business management skills, NACOBTA has also helped to market community tourism, provided grants to improve community tourism facilities, and is undertaking efforts to integrate community tourism enterprises into Namibia's commercial tourism sector. NACOBTA uses a committee of private sector tour operators to approve the grants it makes to improve community tourism

facilities, and this has proved a useful forum for strengthening the interaction between community tourism and commercial tour operators.

**Communities need support to negotiate joint venture agreements with private sector operators.** It is helpful to have an NGO or other entity to assist communities to negotiate contracts with private sector operators. In Namibia training assistance in tourism has been provided by a community-based tourism NGO (NACOBTA); the Legal Assistance Centre, when requested, has reviewed joint venture contracts on behalf of communities and, in particular, advised on clauses relating to dispute resolution, contract termination, bankruptcy, and employee rights; business assistance has been provided from an outside financial advisor; and negotiation assistance has been provided by the on-the-ground NGOs that support conservancy development, so far mostly by IRDNC. The LIFE Project has found that the NGOs who work directly to support conservancy development are in the best position to assist communities with contract negotiation, as this is often an iterative process that may take place over a period of several months, if not longer. These NGOs, however, also need access to a broader set of legal and financial services in order to be able to most effectively advise communities on particular joint venture negotiation issues. This is particularly the case when proposals include complex revenue sharing agreements, for example, profit sharing proposals that involve equity ownership.

**It is useful to develop a mechanism to encourage tourism collaboration between the government, private sector, and communities.** In Namibia, the recently formed Communal Area Investment Review Committee has been beneficial to helping to build increased trust and cooperation between various stakeholders, and for improving the efficiency of stakeholder responses to investment proposals. The government, and to a lesser extent NGOs, are skeptical of private sector objectives, especially given the relationships that have historically existed between private sector tourism operators and communities. Also, both the government and NGOs have relatively little experience in dealing with the private sector, so frequently don't understand how profits are calculated or, for example, the benefits of long-term leases (i.e. improved investment incentive). For this reason, a forum which includes experienced and neutral parties has been quite helpful to bridging misunderstandings and mistrust, and for helping parties reach consensus on investment proposals.

**Communities need to acquire a legal personality to be able to interact with commercial tourism operators on an equal basis, and to ensure joint venture operational and financial transparency.** In Namibia, conservancies are officially approved by and registered with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, and this has turned out to be one of the program's greatest strengths. As legal institutions, conservancies are able to sign contracts, open bank accounts, and challenge the traditional practices of communal area commercial tourism development. Establishing a legal identity has been tremendously important to providing communities the authority to negotiate with private sector operators on issues of profit sharing and co-management. This arrangement also leads to a greater transparency in business dealings, where deals are no longer the purview of traditional elites, but rather are open to public discussion and scrutiny. In the past, it has not only been private operators who have deprived communal residents the right to benefit from business transactions in their areas, but this has also happened as a result of traditional authorities signing offstage deals in which they kept some or all of the proceeds for themselves.

**CBNRM Programs need to be judged more broadly than solely on their ability to generate revenue.** Since community-private sector partnerships are a large feature of many

CBNRM programs, and are foremost a business arrangement, there is a tendency to judge the success of CBNRM programs solely according to an analysis of direct employment creation and financial returns. While these benefits are important, there are numerous other benefits that result from such programs, including the following.

- CBNRM provides an incentive for local communities to practice improved conservation, which of itself is an important benefit, albeit difficult to quantify.
- In turn, improved conservation helps to support a country's tourism industry, with benefits and jobs being spread more widely than just in the area where conservation activities are being implemented.
- Communities are provided an increased ability to control land practices within their areas, which helps to prevent further economic exploitation and economic marginalization of already disadvantaged populations.
- Improved management of local ecological systems can help communities to increase their food security by allowing income diversification, and by building-up a source of food that is not as prone to periodic droughts as is crop and livestock farming.
- Increased income is available to support the next generation's educational needs, thus further improving an area's future development prospects.
- Cultural linkages with wildlife are restored.
- And, perhaps most importantly, communities who are poor and marginalized are able to begin to take control of their own lives, by learning how to interact with the formal sector economy and manage economic development activities for the benefit of their broader communities. Hopefully, an increased ability to manage development will lead to communities being able to diversify their rural economies, as increased business and employment opportunities become available, for example, in the establishment of bakeries, gasoline stations and dry goods stores.

**Partnerships with the private sector are necessary to establish and operate successful high-end tourism facilities in communal areas.** There is an enormous gap between the experiences of rural subsistence cultures and the requirements of providing the services expected by high-end tourists. The establishment of joint venture tourism agreements can lead to on-the-job training opportunities that provide community members the practical skills that are necessary to operate a successful tourism enterprise. Over time, communities can acquire these skills and eventually can increase their role in facility and operations management. To establish a successful high-end tourism facility in a communal area initially requires a great deal of professional outside assistance, particularly in areas such as: guest management, with a focus on understanding the needs and expectations of international tourists; and marketing, to ensure an adequate volume of business, and to offer tourists a package destination that can pair rural community-based tourism locations with well-known tourism draws. In addition, private sector operators can help communities to maintain conservation infrastructure, such as windmills, water pumps and generators, until such time that communities have acquired the skills to take-over these functions as a result of having participated in on-the-job training.

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10. In both of these cases, joint venture agreements were concluded prior to the conservancies having been officially registered. However, both agreements are between the lodge operator and the conservancy committee, and were only possible because the conservancies were well organized, and on the verge of becoming registered. The agreements require the government's approval, in the form of a Permission to Occupy consent, as they are located on state-owned communal lands. The Namibian government has agreed not to provide approval for the construction of new lodges in emerging or established conservancy areas unless conservancy committees are in agreement.