

African Transfrontier Conservation Areas: Real benefits?

For Africa Transfrontier Conservation Areas – TFCAs – are still a relatively new phenomenon. They are not considered merely as good vehicles for biodiversity conservation but rather as drivers for social uplifting. Africa has identified tourism as a priority and in this context recognized TFCAs as worthy ventures with multiple potential benefits. To make this potential become a reality it will need political will combined with major donor assistance.

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As a Community Property Association having full ownership of a significant slice of land slap in the middle of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP), the Makuleke community is a critical partner in this international venture. «We are not neighbours, we are not bystanders, we are a key contributor to this TFCA, and we want to be a full partner with full representation on the Joint Management Board of this TFCA» says a Makuleke spokesman. But the South African government response is «No, the elected government is responsible for international negotiations, and the Makuleke interests will be represented by the mandated Implementing Agencies of the TFCA, which in this case is the South African National Park authorities».

Both sides in this dispute have a legitimate argument, and these tensions are but one reflection of the fact that TFCAs are still a relatively new phenomenon in Africa, and many stakeholders to some extent remain uncertain about issues and processes. But despite these hiccups, the idea of regional linkages has firmly taken hold, and countries in southern Africa engage increasingly in joint initiatives for mutual benefit.

Why Transfrontier Conservation Areas – TFCAs?

Political boundaries that demarcate country borders were historically drawn for reasons based on national security and strategic interests, colonial land claims, geological and other riches, and convenience, never with conscious thought of maintaining ecological integrity. And so today a political map of the world shows continents carved into a jig-saw puzzle of countries, each with its own pattern of land use, political priorities, and management styles. Even so, historical coincidence has often left conservation areas in different countries adjoining each other, separated by fences or varying ideologies, resulting in fragmented ecosystems or disrupted ecosystem processes. We know enough by now to realize that such frag-



mented systems lead to a loss of ecological resilience and a steady attrition of species over time. By jointly managing these natural assets for regional benefit we can overcome many of the disadvantages caused by the sometimes almost arbitrary political lines drawn for historical reasons. Let us take a look at some of these benefits which flow from collaborating across boundaries and adopting a regional approach in natural resource management.

Ecological benefits

Natural systems generally operate over extensive interconnected spaces which allow for cycles of migration by some animal species (e.g. the millions of wildebeest and zebra of Serengeti), dispersion and contraction of ranges depending on environmental conditions (e.g. elephant populations), refuge areas from which pockets of wildlife surviving disease outbreaks can re-colonize outlying regions (e.g. Rinderpest), and create opportunities

Celebrating the creation of a transboundary game reserve between Kenya and Tanzania.



for cycles of rest and recovery in areas subjected to overgrazing, fire, floods, etc. Our natural world is not only a product of, but actually depends on, a continuously shifting mosaic of habitat change brought about by fires, disease, predation, droughts and floods, population rises and falls, all of which contribute to strong healthy populations instead of moribund stagnation. But this can only occur if the ecosystem is essentially intact. By removing fences, harmonizing our often conflicting management patterns across political boundaries (different veld-

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burning regimes, different disease outbreak responses, different approaches to population control of predators and large herbivores, etc.), and having complementary conservation strategies we move away from the historic highly compartmentalized management styles which often were counterproductive to the longer term resilience and viability of a system.

Linking and jointly managing different conservation areas across previous artificial boundaries has clear and obvious benefits when it comes to concepts such as migration routes, disease outbreaks, fire etc., but there are many other advantages as well. Conservation areas are not homogeneous habitats throughout their extent, but usually made up of a patchwork mosaic of different habitat types, each with its own mix of vegetation, mammals, birds etc., based on the underlying soils, topography, rainfall and other factors. Very often there are «tongues» of special habitat that enter a conservation area from outside its proclaimed boundaries, and these patches sometimes hold rare or endangered species which are confined to these habitats. So by jointly managing adjoining conservation areas in an integrated manner such low-density or species with very specific habitat requirements have a better chance of surviving. For example, by linking Kruger Park in South Africa and Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, species such as lungfish, killifish, tsessebe, roan antelope etc. will all have a far better chance of long-term viability.

Socio-economic and cultural benefits

Conservation and wildlife management – especially in Africa – can bring about significant and even major improvement in the lives of rural poor, bringing in more funds and resources than traditional subsistence lifestyles provided. Examples in southern Africa give firm evidence that nature-based tourism – including photographic and hunting safaris – as well as game ranching can provide substantially more jobs and income at both national and local level than subsistence cropping or traditional cattle raising, especially on marginal land. Looking at the bigger picture of a balance of land use and long-term sustainability, the opportunities of larger ecosystems in TFCAs are evident where different zones in pro-

tected area systems can be designed to meet a balanced blend of strict conservation, tourism development and wildlife management goals.

Although tourism opportunities will never be enough to satisfy the needs of each and every neighbouring individual, it is evident that TFCAs will have «add-on values» by attracting more tourists, explore additional market access and outlets on both sides of the border, and create new opportunities for larger, ecosystem-based wildlife management areas, including exclusive hunting areas and game ranching in the neighbourhood. The issue becomes one of not raising unrealistic expectations, to engage in a process of

Capacity Building for TFCAs in Southern and Eastern Africa

InWent (Capacity Building International, Germany) is contributing towards the establishment of partnerships between nations, institutions and the civil sector, assisting in policy development and capacity building for Transboundary Protected Areas – TBPAs – by holding workshops, seminars and tours to expose key people and managers to new concepts and developments. In Southern and Eastern Africa, InWent is collaborating with partner institutions:

- Training courses focus on integrated development and conservation (zonation) planning for protected area systems, including TBPAs;
- Seminars were held on legal and security issues in developing and managing TBPAs, and cross-cutting issues like tourism development and collaborative wildlife management. The Manual on security issues in the planning and management of Transboundary Conservation Areas was produced for TBPA policy-makers and practitioners and will shortly be published with IUCN;
- Regional seminars were held for SADC-countries: Networking and transforming guidance into action, and for East Africa: Guiding approaches and principles with regard to political and institutional arrangements, stakeholder participation, co-operative planning, international treaties and JMP levels, M&E, and security and border control;
- A global TBPA website was launched at the IUCN World Parks Congress in Durban, 2003. InWent, in collaboration with other international partners, assisted the IUCN-WCPA Task Force on Transboundary Protected Areas to develop this global TBPA network: www.tbpa.net

Photo: Petermann



Migratory birds ignore borders.

full stakeholder participation from the earliest stages of planning a Transfrontier Park or any other initiative. So communities and other stakeholders from an early stage understand the limitations, challenges and opportunities, become partners in a decision-making and planning process. It is likely that benefits will have to be mediated and enabled by private sector partners who have the financial resources.

Another social advantage which the «softened» borders of TFCAs hold for communities is easier movement of people across previous political boundaries. Families split by political borders should once again be able to meet more regularly, gain access to cultural sites, heritage sites, engage in cultural practices without tedious border and customs security controls. This is a clear expectation which the planners of TFCAs should keep in mind.

Collaboration and partnerships

The very notion of joint management of adjoining conservation areas implies regular meetings, exchange of ideas, joint decision-making, and collaboration for mutual benefit. TFCAs will not succeed if there is not an underlying commitment for collaboration, mutual support and assistance. And since all countries engaging in such TFCA initiatives do so of their own free will without any coercion, it stands to reason that they see benefits from such a transboundary linkage and want it to work, so they agree to the premise of full collaboration.

The planning and implementation of TFCAs is not without its tensions and suspicions, sometimes with accusations that one country dominates a process or extracts an inequitable amount of benefit from the joint venture. However, the overall process is characterized by a mutual

understanding that cooperation and at least shared benefit must result if the initiative is to succeed, giving rise to the development of a deeper understanding of the capacities of the various partners, and an alliance whereby the strengths of each country are applied to the benefit of the others and the shortfalls are addressed for common good. The dynamics are such that constructive engagement becomes the norm, leading to partnerships at a cascading hierarchy of levels, from Presidents and politicians meeting to discuss higher level principles, to senior government officials collaborating, and then a plethora of stakeholders needing to interact with each other to discuss issues of common interest, including security issues, business interests, financ-

Experts from five Eastern African countries discuss a new transboundary conservation management plan.



Photo: Petermann

ing, legal matters, tourism, and many others. It creates the basis for wider consultation and collaboration, establishes the framework for improved regional planning, integration and joint management.

Contributing to regional peace, harmony and stability

Africa is a continent with an unfortunate history of regular turmoil and persistent conflict, but when countries become involved in joint ventures which have clear benefits to all partners, then partners think twice before jeopardising these processes. Success has a tendency to beget more success, to lay the foundation for follow-up ventures. This has been the trend in TFCAs in Africa as well. When Presidents meet under a blaze of media coverage and hug each other with broad smiles to demonstrate goodwill and joint collaboration, government officials and businessmen take their cue from these signals and it quietly encourages a more positive approach and openness to a neighbouring country. Politicians meet to discuss a TFCA and they bring fellow politicians to explore other opportunities. And so these processes strengthen ties between neighbours, so that officials and businessmen start cementing relationships which reduces the tendency to view each other as foreigners or cultural strangers. All of this contributes in a significant way to reducing tensions and promoting a spirit of regional unity.

What is the potential for TFCAs in Africa?

Almost all countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and East African Community (EAC) have in some way or other indicated their growing interest in the concept of TFCAs, even if only at the initial tentative level of sending delegates to attend workshops designed to expose senior officials to the concept and practice of such transbound-

ary initiatives. But there is a rapid escalation in formal commitment between countries to engage in such regional ventures. After a planning and development process lasting several years, the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park was formally launched by the Presidents of Botswana and South Africa in May 2000, and since then three more have been proclaimed, with at least seven others in development.

The Peace Parks Foundation was contracted by SADC to explore the potential for TFCAs in the region, and in an authoritative study in full collaboration with SADC member state agencies it became clear that there is great potential for the concept. At least 22 potential TFCAs are available, which represents a cumulative total area of 473,652 square kilometres. African leaders recognize that tourism represents an under-utilized sector in SADC and EAC. If planned and developed properly, this tourism potential, especially ecotourism, will have major

benefits in terms of generating revenue to properly conserve the wildlife reserves that lay the golden tourism egg, but also for regional growth and upliftment. Donors and sponsors like the idea of TFCAs because it is not only a good cause but ecotourism also has excellent prospects of being a sustainable and growing industry contributing to regional (SADC), continental (NEPAD) and even global (WSSD Millennium Goals) initiatives.

Conclusion

TFCAs have been around a long time, with the first one established between Canada and the USA way back in 1932. Since then a steady trickle of these collaborative conservation initiatives has emerged in almost all continents, but with Africa only joining the trend in the 1990s. Africa has its own perspectives on TFCAs, seeing them in most cases not merely as good vehicles for biodiversity conservation, but

also as drivers for socio-economic upliftment. Few continents can rival Africa in wildlife-based tourism, but these tourism opportunities often remain underutilized. Africa has now identified tourism as a priority, it has recognized TFCAs as worthy ventures with multiple potential benefits, but it will take political will combined with major donor assistance to make this potential become reality. Several African countries have now demonstrated that political will, and it remains to be seen if donor support will meet the challenge and if the promise held by TFCAs will deliver to the rural poor who still stand sceptically on the sidelines to see if this is not just hollow talk on nature conservation yet again. The German Chancellor, in his speech at the African Union at Addis Ababa (19 January 2004), encouraged the African nations to enhance the processes of regional integration and collaboration to make full use of the rich human and natural resources in Africa to the benefit of all; Germany is prepared to support this process.

KfW support to TFCAs in Southern Africa

With a total of 12 million Euro the German Government via KfW Group has taken a lead role in financing the development of the Limpopo National Park (LNP) in Mozambique as part of the Great Limpopo TFCAs with the SADC secretariat, DNAC of Mozambique and the Peace Parks Foundation as implementing institutions.

During its first development phase that started in 2001 the project has created a well functioning park administration and an effective, well trained and equipped ranger corps. Furthermore, KfW funds have assisted in a major way the activities of the Management Committee of the Great Limpopo TFCAs. Emphasis has been placed on the transboundary joint activities to facilitate easy border crossing for tourists visiting adjoining parks, livestock and wildlife health issues and integration of support zone communities into the planning and decision making process.

The second phase of the project, starting in 2004, concentrates on the re-alignment of the boundaries of the LNP, a program that will be implemented jointly with the support zone communities. Another focal area will be the voluntary resettlement programme of communities and families opting to leave the National Park in favour of enhanced living conditions to be provided in neighbouring areas.

The voluntary re-settlement programme related to the LNP will create favourable social infrastructure and income-generating opportunities outside the park boundaries. KfW is in the process of entering into a co-financing agreement for this critical programme with the French bilateral aid agency AFD. KfW has entered into a cooperative agreement with GTZ to jointly develop and implement Community-Based Natural Resource Management Models in the support zone of the LNP that are expected to enhance the living conditions of the support zone communities. The long-range goal of the cooperative agreement, and also in collaboration with the World Bank and other donors, is to develop the ecological corridor that links the LNP with the Banhine National Park. This will enable restoration of the historic seasonal

movements of large plains animals in a circuit including the Gonarezhou National Park of Zimbabwe and the Kruger National Park to the west of the LNP. The Limpopo National Park and its corridor to Banhine National Park will become the most crucial ecological stepping stone within this circuit, realizing Nelson Mandela's dream of creating one of the world's largest conservation areas.

Key to the development of the LNP is the creation of a tourism industry that will benefit the park and the support zone communities alike. It is expected that the gradual development of the tourism sector will generate much needed income and jobs for the economically less privileged people neighbouring the LNP.



Photo: Petermann

40 experts participated in a workshop on improved tourism in nature and game reserves.