

Women in Conservation

CBRM a rural sustainable development model

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) has been noted as possibly the best method to combine the conservation of natural resources with sustainable development in rural areas.

The fundamentals of CBNRM are not new, and most southern African countries are pursuing one or another variant. What makes Namibia unique is the advanced stage of CBNRM (the first conservancies were gazetted in 1998) and the relative success that has been achieved. This success can be attributed to favourable government legislation, good support structures, and, most importantly, willingness of rural communities to conserve and sustainably manage their natural resources. Experts have labelled CBNRM in Namibia as arguably the biggest conservation success story on the African continent and although many complex challenges remain, when measured in terms of wildlife recovery rates, devolution of rights to local communities and an increase in revenue to conservancies, this statement is a true reflection of the situation – and is something that all Namibians can be proud of.

This article is not about the challenges faced in CBNRM, rather it is an acknowledgement of some of the successes of the national CBNRM programme with a specific focus on women working in conservation at conservancy level.

Communal conservancies are officially recognised by the Government of Namibia, have delineated boundaries, and comprise communities that choose to work together to manage wildlife, tourism and other natural resources on their land. A conservancy management committee, elected from among the general conservancy membership, manages conservancies. The management committee operates on a voluntary basis and works with permanent conservancy staff members





devolution of management authority to resource users, thus providing communities with opportunities to benefit financially from the use of their resources. In most cases, conservancies will partner with private sector operators in tourism or trophy hunting ventures. Joint venture partnerships provide jobs for local people at lodges and campsites and also increase income to conservancies through monthly rental or lease-fee payments. These fees mean that the conservancy

to ensure the implementation of work and development plans at the conservancy.

In Namibia at present, there are 82 conservancies covering over 163,182 km². This equates to around 20% of the total land mass of the country. During 2014, community conservation contributed around N\$90 million in returns for local communities and facilitated around 5 800 jobs in the same year (NACSO, 2015).

CBNRM is based on the idea of community participation in the management of the conservancy area. This is achieved through participatory decision-making and



can employ a number of full-time staff such as managers and natural resource monitors.

Over time, the CBNRM programme has attempted to place more and more emphasis on participation by women. To a certain extent, this has helped to provide women with more opportunities in rural areas and increase female involvement in projects like craft production and the harvesting of indigenous natural products (INPs). For example, the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) manages a long-term project that centres on the sustainable harvesting of Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum*) in the Kavango regions of north-eastern Namibia. Once processed, Devil's Claw is exported mainly to Europe where it is sold as a natural analgesic and anti-inflammatory. Namibia is the biggest exporter of Devil's Claw in the world and much of the harvesting is done by rural women, providing a small but important supplement to household income in one of the most economically depressed parts of the country. According to an NNF report to the EU submitted in 2015, out of the 946 registered Devil's Claw harvesters in seven community forests, 530 (56%) are female.



Women have also started to take on more authoritative roles such as conservancy managers, management committee treasurers and chairpersons, and community activators. Women are thus involved in conservation, not only through participation in meetings and projects but also in management and decision-making. Recent data shows that there has been a significant increase in female representation in leadership roles inside Namibia's conservancies. The annual State of Community Conservation report produced by the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO) in 2014 showed the following percentages of female representation in different leadership positions:

Chairpersons	Treasurers and financial managers	Management committee members	Conservancy staff members
15%	39%	35%	30%

Name: Twyfelfontein-Uibasen

Registered: December 1999

Size: 286 km²

Region: Kunene

Members: 81

Annual rainfall: 100 – 150 mm

Landscape: Etendeka Plateau and central-western plains.

Biome: Nama-Karoo.

Vegetation type: Central-western escarpment and inselbergs.

Key wildlife species: Elephant, kudu, oryx, springbok, mountain zebra, ostrich, leopard.

Terrestrial diversity: Low.

Terrestrial endemism: Very high.





**Standing on your own feet
– perspectives from Ūibasen-
Twyfelfontein Conservancy**

Ūibasen - Twyfelfontein conservancy (directly translated from Khoekhoegowab, Ūibasen means 'stand on your own feet') was established in December 1999 with 60 members living inside its boundaries. Situated in the Kunene Region, the conservancy is one of the smallest

in the country, comprising an area of 286 km². Today, there are about 200 members at the conservancy. From inception, members decided that the conservancy would focus on tourism as the primary income-generating option. Consequently, the conservancy does not receive a hunting quota from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). There are five active lodges and campsites inside the conservancy and the conservancy benefits from tourism revenue and employment of its members at the lodges.

Joglinde Touros, of the Ūibasen-Twyfelfontein Conservancy, was elected by her conservancy to study abroad at Taylor's University in Malaysia. There, Joglinde completed her two-year diploma course in Hotel Management. Today, Touros is the manager of the Uibasen Twyfelfontein conservancy.

Touros said: "The CBNRM Programme under the Ministry

of Environment and Tourism has unlocked opportunities within the country; it has allowed people to take ownership of resources within their conservancies. During my studies in Malaysia I learnt and gained a lot as an individual. I was involved in different activities, such as the International Students Council where I served as a treasurer, and I was also active in different groups and societies, which taught me how to work in and with larger groups. This allows me to share my knowledge and experience with the conservancy and my team."

As a member of the conservancy, **Brisetha Hendricks** qualified for bursary funding from the conservancy. This funding helped Brisetha complete her National Diploma and furthered her studies at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) where she studied accounting and finance. Earlier this year, Brisetha was elected to sit on the conservancy management committee as the treasurer of the



conservancy. Her term will last until 2019 and she hopes to use her skills to proactively contribute to her conservancy's continued success.

Hendricks said: "Conservation certainly has employment opportunities for women and enables them to do self-

sustaining jobs. In our conservancy we have seen growth, and in the context of our management, there are five women versus four men on the committee, something that may not have been in the past. A majority of women representation in any management position is certainly

a positive and noticeable change. More areas are opening for women to raise their voices; that is growth and it is important that we promote growth."

Benefit distribution at the conservancy is guided by a benefit distribution plan, which is developed in





a participatory manner and presented at the Annual General Meeting for approval by all members. The conservancy contributes a significant amount of its income to benefit distribution and Brisetha's story is testament to how conservation can be directly linked to positive outcomes for local women. The fact that Brisetha has returned, and is ploughing her knowledge and skills back into the conservancy that helped her obtain her National Diploma and further her studies, is proof that CBNRM in Namibia really does have the potential to make positive changes in people's lives.

Women in Conservation Leadership

As an acknowledgment of the importance of women in conservancies and in a bid to further strengthen their voices at conservancy management level, the NNF in collaboration with the Namibia Development Trust, delivered 'Woman in Conservation Leadership' training to 29 women from 9 different conservancies across the country in 2015. This three-day training course covered several topics, including public speaking, increasing efficacy in committee meetings, and the development of leadership skills. The training was a great success

and in her closing address, the deputy minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Lucia Witbooi, acknowledged the important role conservancies play in fulfilling the national goals of empowering rural communities, especially as these institutions are involved in one of the major contributors to the national economy – tourism.

Andrew Malherbe, CBNRM Co-ordinator at NNF, said: "Some conservancies have made it a focus to uplift women in their communities. Through benefit distribution, women like Brisetha are financially supported to attend tertiary education and other training courses. The last few years have seen an increase in women being elected to management committee positions and being hired as permanent staff members at conservancies. Although there are numerous challenges facing conservancies in Namibia, there are also a number of positive stories and increased gender representation at conservancy management level, giving women a louder voice when it comes to the management of their natural resources" is one of those stories

The Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) is one of the largest non-

governmental organisations (NGO) targeting conservation and sustainable development in Namibia. The primary aims of the NNF are to promote sustainable development, the conservation of biological diversity and natural ecosystems, and the wise and ethical use of natural resources for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future. www.nnf.org.na

The Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Support Organisations (NACSO) is an association comprising nine NGOs and the University of Namibia. The purpose of NACSO is to provide quality services to rural communities seeking to manage and utilise their natural resources in a sustainable manner. <http://www.nacso.org.na/index.php>

The CBNRM programme in Namibia was established in 1992 with the support of USAID and the WWF. CBNRM in Namibia is a collaborative effort. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism, field based NGOs such as NNF and IRDNC have worked together to establish what is now recognised as one of Africa's conservation and rural development success stories. CBNRM and the conservancy programme are an integral part of Namibia's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), National Development Plans and Vision 2030

