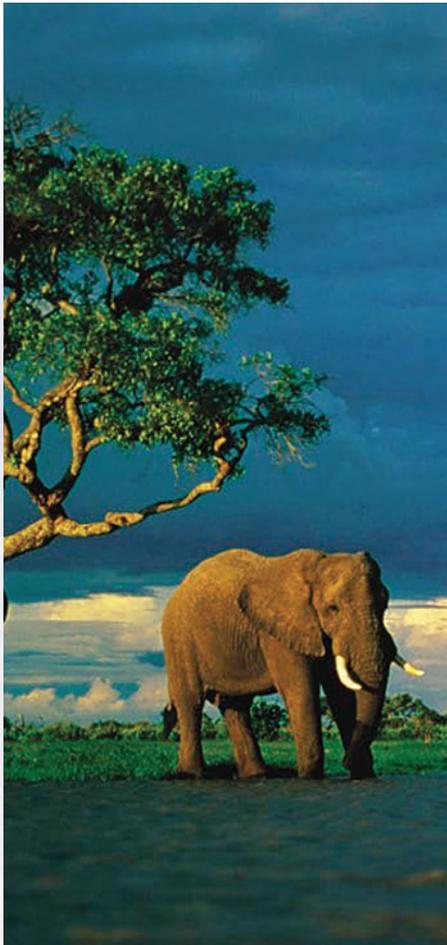




NAMIBIA: Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) Plus Project



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Background

Namibia is an arid country with frequent droughts. Its largely rural population is highly dependent on natural resources, but has little control over land or resources because of current patterns of land distribution and ownership. Because climatic conditions are highly variable, there is a need to diversify economic activities in rural areas. Wildlife-based tourism is proving to be one of the main forms of diversification. While tourism in general is the third highest contributor to GDP, local communities were historically excluded from most of the benefits from tourism, apart from a few menial jobs. In addition, severe droughts and heavy poaching by South African officials and local people caused wildlife numbers to decline dramatically in many communal areas during the 1980s. NGO projects in northwest Namibia demonstrated that community-based approaches to wildlife conservation could improve both livelihoods and wildlife populations, and in 1996, the government of Namibia introduced legislation giving rights over wildlife and tourism to local communities that formed a management body called a conservancy.

Objectives

USAID began funding community-based conservation in Namibia in 1993 through the Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) Project, which is now entering its third phase as the LIFE Plus Project. The project's goal is to support existing government and NGO initiatives to devolve rights over wildlife and tourism to local communities to promote sustainable natural resource management on communal land. The project has focused on three main components:

- **Rural Development:** increasing income and other benefits to local communities through sustainable natural resource management, and in particular through wildlife-based tourism activities.
- **Democracy and Governance:** supporting establishment of representative community-based management institutions called conservancies, which can make decisions on natural resource management and other development activities.
- **Sustainable Natural Resource Management:** conservancies actively manage their land resources, leading to an improved resource base.



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Approach

The LIFE Project has been implemented through a cooperative Agreement with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US) and several local partners. Namibian organizations are assisted to carry out work on the ground with local communities via technical assistance, grants to local organizations, training of partner staff, and support to policy and legislative changes.

Establishment of conservancies has been a primary focus. By forming a legal, registered conservancy, a local community gains the right to hunt certain species of wildlife for their own use, the right to enter into contracts with the private sector for trophy hunting and photographic tourism activities, and can obtain permits from the government for the sale of live game to game ranchers. To form a conservancy, a community must define its membership, define its borders, have a representative committee, develop an equitable benefit distribution plan and have a legal constitution. The project partners assist communities in going through these various steps, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that as many community members as possible are directly involved in the process.

Once conservancies have been established, the project provides capacity building in a number of ways. Support is provided for the institutional development of conservancies, including committee administration, financial management, staff management and accountability and transparency in decision-making. Conservancies also receive considerable capacity building in establishing joint venture partnerships with the private sector for photographic tourism and trophy hunting. The project supports the conservancy in developing its requirements for partners, and then in putting out tenders and negotiating contracts.

One of the most important elements of the LIFE project is helping the conservancy understand the value of its tourism assets. Support is also provided for the development of community-based tourism enterprises, including campsites, traditional villages, and making and marketing crafts.

The project has supported the establishment of the Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA). This NGO is an association representing community-based tourism enterprises that also provides technical support to conservancies and local entrepreneurs.

Achievements

At present there are 44 registered communal area conservancies in Namibia covering more than 10.5 million hectares of land, while an additional 30 conservancies are at various stages of development. The increased community stewardship over wildlife is leading to a recovery of wildlife populations across large portions of Namibia, in particular the northwestern and northeastern parts of the country. Not only are wildlife numbers increasing, but distributions of many rare and/or valuable species are expanding. In particular, the population growth of such endangered species as the black rhino and



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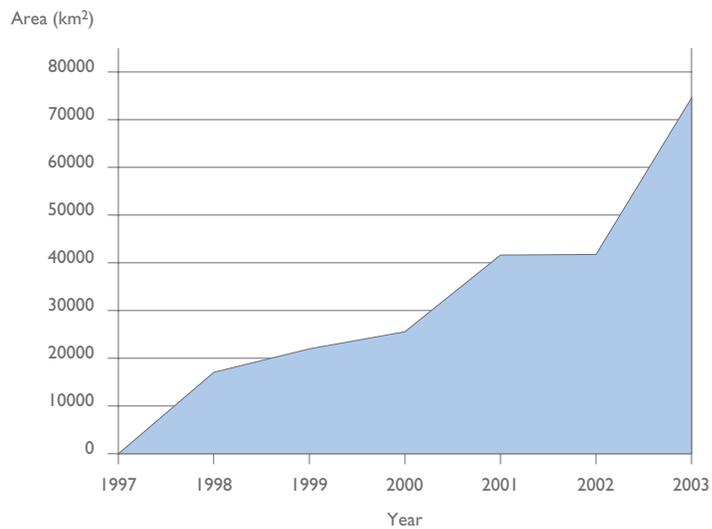


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LIFE Project Successes:

- Maintenance of wildlife habitat is promoted
- Wildlife and tourism are now seen as legitimate land uses
- Game species have been successfully reintroduced
- Poaching losses have been reduced
- Improved stewardship is leading to recovery of wildlife populations

Area Under Conservancies



Hartmann's zebra are well documented in northwest Namibia, while elephant ranges are expanding in both the northwest and north east of Namibia.

The total estimated 2004 direct income and benefits to conservancies and community members amounted to USD 2,263,368, while the projected benefits for 2005 are close to USD 2.8 million. CBNRM-supported enterprises (i.e., joint venture lodges, trophy hunting concessions, thatching grass industry, community-based tourism enterprises, crafts, and live game sales) resulted in the employment of 547 full-time and 3,250 part-time employees.

Community members in the 44 registered conservancies are starting to exercise their devolved rights over wildlife and tourism. This devolution of authority to local conservancies is part of a broader democratization of natural resource management embarked upon by government post independence that includes giving local communities rights over forests and over water.

Conservancy committees are learning to manage funds on behalf of their members and to include members in decisions about how to use these funds. Conservancy members are learning that they can hold their representatives to account and replace them if necessary.





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Significantly, a number of communities that do not have much potential to generate income from wildlife and tourism have formed conservancies. Residents believe that conservancies can provide useful institutional arrangements for managing other resources such as grazing and for gaining a stronger claim over their land.

Lessons Learned

There are many lessons to be derived from the experience gained from implementing the LIFE project. Some highlights:

- The importance of local ownership and partnerships. The LIFE Project has benefited considerably from a strong sense of ownership over the project by the Namibian government and NGOs. This sense of ownership will contribute to the sustainability of the LIFE Project impact.
- Long-term support is required for successful CBNRM projects. It takes many years for a national CBNRM program to evolve and mature and for community institutions to develop the capacity and internal legitimacy to be effective and efficient. The Namibian CBNRM program has benefited from more than 12 years of continuous donor support from USAID which has provided a stable foundation for the program to grow and evolve over time. The current phase of USAID support from October 2004 through 2009 is building and expanding on this foundation.
- The balance between process and product. An important principle that has emerged from implementing the LIFE Project is that implementation needs to be based on process rather than the achievement of pre-determined “products” or “outcomes”. A process approach to CBNRM focuses as much on the way products are produced as on the products themselves. The LIFE Project has successfully balanced getting the process right with meeting the requirements of producing concrete products.

The Namibian CBNRM program supported by the LIFE Project has demonstrated that incentive-based approaches to conservation through sustainable use of wildlife and sustainable tourism can be successful in conserving biodiversity, improving livelihoods and contributing to improved democratic governance. The foundation of this approach has been the devolution of decision-making and the right to benefit from resources to local communities. To increase the existing successes, further policy reform is needed to improve the rights of local communities over their land and prime tourism sites and assets. This will lead to increased benefits to local residents as well a more secure investment environment for communities and the private sector.

For Further Information:

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