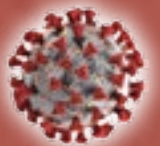




Namibia COVID-19



Conservation Conversations

FIRST EDITION 2020



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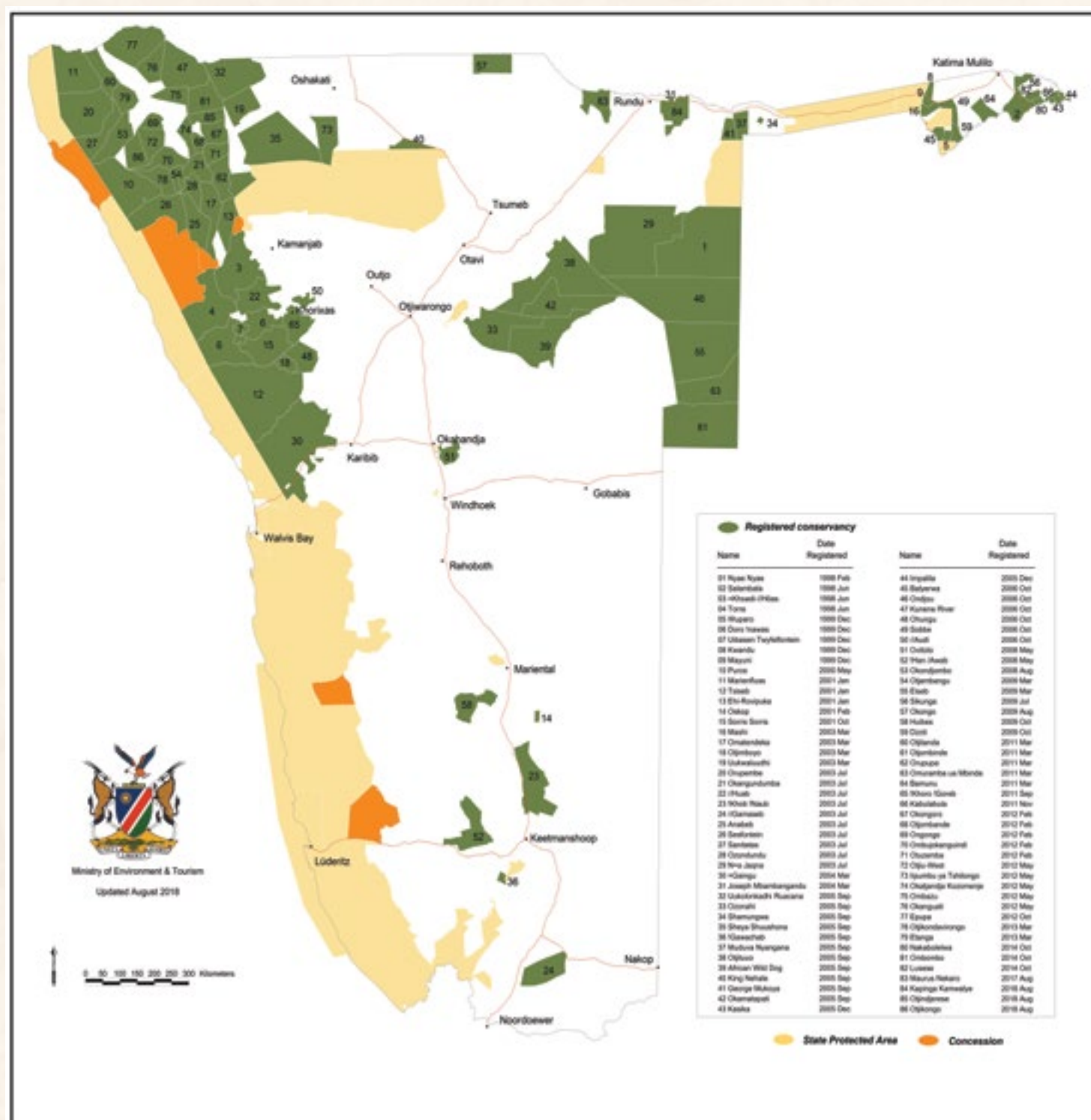
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UNDP NAMIBIA

Environmental Initiatives

Protected areas in Namibia



Source: NACSO, www.nacso.org.na, 2020

Namibia COVID-19 Conservation Conversations

First Edition 2020

"The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all sectors in the country. In view of conservation, which significantly contributes to the national economy, it is vital to capture both the challenges and opportunities that the pandemic has brought to the broader tourism sector."

Namibia COVID-19 Conservation Conversations – shortened to NaCoCoCOP – introduces an intimate view into the interdependence between community conservation, tourism and local livelihoods. Representing communal conservancies, tourism and nature-based enterprises, private businesses and joint ventures, government authorities and development partners, it features conversations with affected individuals throughout the four regions of Kavango East, Kunene, Oshikoto, and Zambezi.

Initiated by UNDP Namibia as a means to document and better understand the widespread impacts of the pandemic on local communities, this publication serves as a platform that enables, empowers and allows community members to openly converse about personal experiences. Presented from the comfort of individual settings and environments, it introduces a balanced selection of voices, with sensitivity towards gender, marginalised communities, cultural diversity and heritage. Conversations touch on various issues, from health, job losses, poverty, functioning of conservancies, poaching, and human-wildlife conflict, to attitudes towards conservation, and sustainable development. While narratives often dwell on environmental and economic costs, it also presents reflections on the emotional and social expense of coping with the pandemic, and highlights how communities are creatively managing challenges, coming up with alternative opportunities and envisioning their collective futures.

Namibia COVID-19 Conservation Conversations 2020 is the first edition of an annual publication that serves to pave the way for a local project called, 'Integrated approach to proactive management of human-wildlife conflict and wildlife crime in hotspot landscapes in Namibia', under the Global Wildlife Programme Phase II.

The UNDP in Namibia

UNDP's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan emphasises the critical links between environmental sustainability, social development and economic prosperity inclusive of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and broader efforts to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement.

As part of the organisation's Nature, Climate and Energy (NCE) team, UNDP Namibia aims to promote and scale up integrated whole-of-governance approaches and nature-based solutions. These solutions cumulatively seek to reduce poverty and inequalities, improve livelihoods and build inclusive growth, while enhancing local and national conditions for resilient governance systems that advance linked peace and security agendas.

UNDP Namibia works with governments, civil society, academia, and private sector partners to integrate natural capital, environment and climate concerns into national and sector planning, and inclusive growth policies, while strengthening Namibia's obligations under the Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

UNDP Namibia implements the UN's largest portfolio of in country programming on the environment, climate change, and energy. Read more about the UNDP in Namibia on pages 14-19 and 96-98.

Preparing, responding, recovering from COVID-19

Community-based natural resource management

Since its inception in the 1990s, Namibia's Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programme has been globally and locally recognised as an innovative social development and conservation strategy. The CBNRM programme aims to devolve environmental governance to community-based institutions that collectively manage and have the right to utilise and benefit from their shared natural resources and wildlife. The goal is to integrate biodiversity conservation and rural development, with this integration meant to simultaneously diversify rural livelihoods, ensure equitable use and access, and enhance environmental protection. A key principle of the CBNRM programme is that as long as communities benefit from, participate in, and are empowered through conservation practice, wildlife and environmental protection can be sustainably achieved.

Communal conservancies have become the cornerstone of Namibia's CBNRM programme, with:

- **86 registered conservancies**
- **Covering 166 045 km² or 20,2% of Namibia's land-surface**
- **And home to approximately 227 941 people**
- **Apart from conservancies, there are 42 community forests, the majority of which overlap with conservancies**

Source: NACSO, www.nacso.org.na, 2020

Support for conservancies and community forests takes place through the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT), yet a network of local and international stakeholders, donor and community-based organisations represented through the Namibian Association for CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO) play a pivotal role in providing technical expertise and community support. The Community Conservation Fund of Namibia (CCFN) was officially launched in 2020 as a Conservation Trust Fund to create sustainable funding mechanisms.

Benefits of community conservation

The CBNRM programme has led to significant wildlife recoveries. Additionally, and in 2018 alone, NACSO and MEFT recorded that conservancies generated N\$ 147 million for local communities.

On a household level income distribution remains limited, with most income fed back into operational costs and staff salaries. Rather, the majority of social and eco-

nomie benefits for households are derived from income and job-creation through conservation hunting and tourism, especially joint venture (JV) tourism enterprises. JVs typically operate as follows: Investors agree to build a lodge or campsite within a conservancy and, depending on contractual agreements, the conservancy receives a percentage of the profits, members are employed at the establishment, and opportunities for rural capacity and skills development are created. In return, the investor gains access to land and game guards protect wildlife and biodiversity that adds touristic value to the site.

Hunting is also a key part of Namibia's wildlife and community conservation strategy. The MEFT allocates both own-use and trophy-hunting quotas to conservancies on a three-year basis, with quotas reviewed annually depending on local and regional game counts, surveys and factors such as drought. Usually, hunting operators are contracted for a fixed quota of animals that must be paid for, whether they are hunted or not. These contracts constitute a key source of income and employment for several conservancies. Namibia acts in full compliance with the CITES agreement, which regulates the international trade in endangered species.

In 2018 there were:

- **61 joint venture tourism enterprises employing 1 175 full-time and 50 part-time staff**
- **48 conservation hunting concessions with 159 full-time and 119 part-time staff**
- **943 conservancy employees, including 25% female staff members**
- **And 890 additional conservancy representatives receiving allowances**

Source: NACSO and MET, 'The State of Community Conservation in Namibia', 2018



Understanding conservation in Namibia

- Namibia's commitment to biodiversity conservation is reflected in its Constitution. Article 95 (1) provides the foundation for legislation and programmes safeguarding the country's biodiversity for current and future generations.
- Namibia has a National Protected Area System – a network of 20 state-run protected areas, managed by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism. It covers an area of 130 000 km² – almost 20% of the country – and includes national parks, game reserves, recreation resorts, conservation areas and tourism concessions. This state-run network interlinks with community-managed and freehold conservancies, community forests and three Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs). When combined, these protected areas cover almost half of the country's land surface.
- The Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1996 embedded communal conservancies in national legislation. This legislation recognises the need to offset the costs of living with wildlife and to transfer user-rights and ownership over natural resources to communities living on Namibia's communal lands.
- In 2008 MEFT expanded their mandate to integrate newly established community forests. Namibia's forest areas are part of southern Africa's Miombo Woodlands. They are culturally and ecologically valued for their rich biodiversity and as an economic resource.
- The Kyaramacan Association (KA) is a unique example of community conservation. The key difference between the KA and communal conservancies is that the association is established within a national park and not on communal land. All of its members live within Bwabwata National Park's Multiple Use Area, with the agreement of MEFT.
- Tourism concessions are state land managed by non-state entities. There are four broad types: lodge-based, campsite based, trophy hunting, and traversing rights. Conservancies to the north and west of Etosha National Park have traversing rights. In other concessions, 75% of the income after costs from a tourism operation will usually go to conservancies operating in a concession, and 25% to government. Current concessions have created over 340 jobs.
- Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) are a mix of parks, game management areas, conservancies, and protected areas, spanning over more than one country. North eastern Namibia is part of the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) TFCA, the largest in the world. Other TFCAs are those connected to South Africa via the /Ai-/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, and to Angola via the Iona-Skeleton Coast Park.

Source: NASCO & MEFT, www.nacso.org.na, www.met.gov.na, 2020

Navigating the pandemic



The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the declaration of a State of Emergency in Namibia on the 17th of March 2020 impacted all sectors of society. State regulations, including the closing of international borders, regional lockdowns and restrictions on social gatherings, had far-reaching consequences. The tourism sector, as one of Namibia's vital economic pillars and the third largest in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was heavily affected.

In May 2020, the Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Honourable Pohamba Shifeta, publicly stated

that conservancies could stand to lose N\$125 million as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 fall out. This amount includes N\$60 million annual income through hunting and lodge operations and a further N\$65 million in household payments, mainly in the form of salaries paid to employees in the tourism and conservation sectors and wages of 600 game guards who protect natural resources and monitor human-wildlife conflict. In a recent research article, Lendelvo et al. (2020) concluded that the eventual impact of COVID-19 on the "web of community-conservation enterprises and concerns will be severe, in both extent and magnitude".

Impacts on conservancies

Socio-economic

- Wide-spread loss of employment in the tourism and hunting sectors
- Reduced income for conservancies to support social development projects
- Reduced possibilities for diversified income-generation, including the sale of crafts and indigenous plant products

Operational

- Disruption to regular management and operational processes
- Community participation forums present high COVID-19 contagion risk
- Lack of adequate telecommunication network coverage and technologies for effective communication between members and management committees
- Inability to pay salaried staff

Environmental

- Reduced wildlife patrolling and monitoring, increasing vulnerability to wildlife crime
- Reduced income to compensate communities for losses incurred due to human-wildlife conflict

Source: Lendelvo, S.M., Pinto, M. and Sullivan, S. 'A perfect storm? The impact of COVID-19 on community-based conservation in Namibia', *Namibian Journal of Environment*, 2020

CRRRF:

The Conservation Relief, Recovery and Resilience Facility

On the 5th of May 2020, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, launched the Conservation Relief, Recovery and Resilience Facility (CRRRF) in response to the need to support conservation initiatives in the country.

"The underlying goal is to ensure that CBNRM entities are able to weather the storm as a result of the pandemic and are in a position to recover as quickly as possible in a post COVID-19 era."

It was further noted that the effects on communal conservancies would be detrimental, if an industry solution is not found: "COVID-19 seriously undermines the significant contribution of CBNRM towards development in Namibia, reversing the gains of the previous 24 years of conservation and sustainable utilisation of natural resources," since the amendment of the Nature Conservation Ordinance in 1996.

In addition, the Namibian tourism industry has been hard hit by COVID-19 responses, which resulted in immediate cancellations of bookings. Industry solutions need to factor in the uncertainty and improbability of future bookings and the possibility that "tourism and tourism establishments will be without any income for the rest of the current financial year," as stated by the Minister.

The CRRRF fund thus assists community conservation by supporting conservancies' operational expenditures, while establishing recovery and resilience measures. Designed as a crowding facility, the CRRRF is meant to enable other development partners to provide further resources and commitment to strengthen the fund's aims.

Source: MEFT, 'Conservation Relief, Recovery and Resilience Facility', 2020

Quick facts:

- Financial relief is provided in equal quarters for a period of one year and aims to cover up to 80% of operational costs
- The first quarter started in May 2020 and the final quarter is set for April 2021
- A total amount of N\$6 576 500 has thus far been contributed towards the first quarter disbursements (May – July 2020)
- 84 conservancies have benefitted from the facility



CRRRF key partners

Task team:

- Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT)
- Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia (EIF)
- Namibian Association for CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO)
- Community Conservation Fund of Namibia (CCFN)
- World Wildlife Fund Namibia (WWF)
- Namibian Chamber of Environment (NCE)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF)
- Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC)



Supporting Partners:

- NedBank Namibia
- B2Gold Namibia
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
- KfW Development Bank
- Tourism Supporting Conservation Trust (TOSCO)



COVID-19 in Namibia

Total population: 2.5 million people
 Total tested: 128 357
 Total confirmed cases: 13 030 (0.5%), of which 9 219 (70.8%) are in the 20-49 years age brackets, and 521 (4.0%) are health workers
 Gender distribution: Male 7 185 (55.1%); Female 5 845 (44.9%)
 Total deaths: 133, of which 104 (78.2%) are COVID-19 deaths and 29 (21.8%) are COVID-19 related deaths
 Recovered: 11 304 (86.8%)
 Active cases: 1 593

All regions have reported cases, with Khomas (45%) and Erongo (30.3%) regions recording the highest. The four regions featured in this publication have recorded cases as follows:

- Kavango East: 190
- Kunene: 35
- Oshikoto: 434
- Zambezi: 81

Source: World Health Organization (WHO), 'Namibia COVID-19 Situation Report No. 229', Cases recorded between 13 March and 2 November 2020

What is at stake?



100 to 120 Million

direct tourism jobs at risk
(UNWTO)



Loss of

US\$910 Billion to US\$1.2 Trillion

in exports from tourism -
international visitors' spending
(UNWTO)



Loss of

1.5% to 2.8% of Global GDP

(UNCTAD)



A lifeline for

SIDS, LDCs and many African Countries

tourism represents over 30% of exports
for the majority of SIDS and 80% for some
(UNWTO)



Critical

Resources for Conservation

of natural and cultural heritage

In conversation

with **Alka Bhatia**

UNDP Namibia Resident Representative



She goes on to say, “Ultimately development is about the people, the beneficiaries, and if we are not telling the story of the beneficiaries – highlighting the challenges they are facing and successes achieved – we can’t come up with new ideas in terms of supporting them.”

In order to find answers to country-specific challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP Namibia recognised the significance of engaging with local communities and starting a conversation, “to document their viewpoint and see how we can tailor our response to further support them, and learn what is it that they actually need to become more resilient.”

This publication serves as a platform where the people, those most affected, can really communicate their stories and talk about the effects of COVID-19 from their own settings. In its digital form, it serves as a tool to be shared amongst the conservation sector, civil societies and NGOs working with them.

“We would like to create widespread awareness in terms of the work that has been done in conservancies, and how critical these are to sustainability, not only to the environment in Namibia, but globally.”

In response to conservation

“With regards to the areas of environment, the conservancies, tourism – with the contribution of about 10-12% of the economy, the sector has been completely demolished – we will have to see how long it takes to build it back to its glorious days.”

At the onset of the pandemic, the UNDP and UN agencies have mobilised its efforts to find means that can best support the Namibian people in need of immediate assistance. “Along with the government, we thought of supporting them by setting up the Conservation Relief Recovery and Resilience Facility (CRRRF).”

As one of the instigating partners, the UNDP has provided initial capital to the facility of over USD 150 000 as a responsibility to empower communities and build resilience. Various other partners have since come on board and supported the facility. “This is where SDG17 – partnerships for the goals – also

comes into effect. It shows how strong and diverse our partnerships are to support the people who are suffering and dependent upon these conservancies,” says Bhatia.

Namibia currently has 86 registered conservancies, with over 200 000 people employed and supported through income generated from conservation activities, people who have been hard hit by the effects of the pandemic. And it doesn’t stop there, but has larger consequences for the overall development of the country.

Broader impacts

“There is no doubt that the widespread impacts of COVID-19 will result in a slowdown on the achievement of SDGs, which has already been noted in terms of economic growth.”

To better measure the impacts of the pandemic on the SDGs, the UNDP in Namibia has done a preliminary analysis through what is called an Integrated SDG Modelling

Exercise, conducted by the Millennium Institute. The results show an impact across all the SDGs, but most worryingly, on climate action, a finding that is currently being prioritised to establish further implications.

“Now what do these vulnerable and most affected communities do? They just get added on to the numbers of people who are being pushed back into poverty, further increasing the inequality in the country. Namibia already had very high unemployment numbers that have now gone up even more and we will also see a regression in other areas: education, health, food availability, and inequality. COVID has just again highlighted how unequal a country we are, illuminating the weak links in our system...”

While the CRRRF has done tremendous work in terms of keeping conservancies operational, it should be noted that its support is, “just a very immediate, short-term solution”. In terms of long-term support, the UNDP finds it vital to look into how it can build the capacity of these conservancy members, and assist them in developing alternative forms of income.

In times of crisis...

Adjust the work plan

“We had to quickly refocus and re-orientate our programming – what we had initially set out to do, we knew we would not be able to do. We have our annual work plan, but we had to shift into crisis or emergency mode.” The results of these operational shifts are clear through the various support and facilities launched over the past six months.

Lead your team

“Having to lead a team within a global pandemic? Stressful, in one word.” As Resident Representative, Bhatia carried the duty to put various crisis management arrangements in place, to ensure for the maximum safety of staff, including an immediate shift to work from home, which presented its own challenges. Apart from the need to provide the necessary infrastructure support to facilitate the process, there has been the aspect of keeping up team spirit when people are working in seclusion – “the psycho-social support, which is very critical”.

Learn lessons

“We are still in the learning process and everyday could bring a new challenge.” What stands out is: the need for emotional resilience; the power of communication – open, regular communication; and the importance of support amongst team members. These aspects not only play a crucial part in testing the strength of a team during crisis, but is equally relevant for partner relations.

Find opportunities

“This crisis has really highlighted the weak spots and brought opportunity in terms of showing us where we really need to focus.” Amongst others, it has been identified that there are needs for an improvement in service delivery; leveraging digital technologies, innovation and finance; and enhancing social protection, especially for those in the informal sectors, who have been the worst hit. Across the board, there’s a necessity to build capacity and skills, “because once communities are empowered, they are also more resilient

Personal perspectives on the future

“It’s very challenging, this work, but it is also very rewarding. Being in the business of development, even if you touch a single life and make a difference in a small way, that is reward enough.

There’s a lot to be done still, but I enjoy my work and am committed to working for the wellbeing and development of the people. It’s definitely not time to give up, not by a long shot.”



“We ask ourselves, what other employment or self-employment opportunities can we help them develop? What kind of skills do they need so they are not dependent, but empowered and resilient to weather any crisis. Today it’s COVID-19, tomorrow it can be anything else. We need to be prepared for any eventuality.”

On doing your bit

“As someone once said, ‘conservation is about the greatest good, for the greatest number of people for the longest possible time’. It’s about saving the planet and it’s about saving life, and what could be more important than that?”

For us it’s a no brainer in the sense that it’s something we should be committed towards. And everybody can work towards that – you don’t need to go out into the forest to do conservation, you can start right here in your garden or your home, where you can pre-preserve your natural resources, even with small actions. It’s about incorporating this awareness in your every day life. Just imagine, if everybody does that little bit, what a difference we would all be making.”

The UNDP and its work in Namibia

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the development arm of the United Nations system.

Present in 170 countries, the organisation’s main work is to support people and countries towards achieving sustainable development. It does so through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it is enshrined in Agenda 2030.

Namibia prioritises a focus on poverty eradication, reducing inequalities, promoting structural transformation, ensuring environmental sustainability and enhancing resilience to climate change and other shocks. Its main focus remains on nature-based solutions, climate resilience, conservation and clean energy – “this is the biggest portfolio for us as a country office”.

“There is no doubt that the widespread impacts of COVID-19 will result in a slowdown on the achievement of SDGs, which has already been noted in terms of economic growth.”

While its work is tailored to support individual countries’ needs and priorities, the UNDPs broad based development paradigm stays in place. “Our aim is to connect the dots across the SDGs, since we are the integrator in the UN system for the SDGs,” explains Bhatia. “Because the SDGs are interlinked, progress or regression in one has an impact on the others as well, and that’s how sustainable development proceeds.”

The Namibian government is committed to achieve the SDGs by 2030 and have done so in various ways, amongst others by mainstreaming the Goals into the Fifth National Development Plan (NDP); and domesticating the Goals with local indicators, by developing a baseline and continuing to monitor local implementation.

Immediate responses to COVID-19 in Namibia

Apart from the rapid enactment of the CRRRF and support to conservation, the UNDP have similarly partnered to curb the impacts on other affected sectors of the economy.

“The idea is to stem the regression of the SDGs.”

Health: “We’ve enhanced our footprint in terms of hygiene.”

- Currently working in four to five regions
- Assisting in sharing knowledge about COVID-19, like risk awareness & the importance of sanitation and hygiene
- Providing tippy-taps to informal communities on unserviced land
- In informal communities where land is serviced, installing regular taps as more permanent solutions
- Supporting the Ministry of Health and Social Services in getting PPEs and other needed equipment
- Paying & recruiting volunteers

Support to micro, small and medium enterprises: “They didn’t have any business and they’ve lost a lot of money, so how do they start off again?”

- Setting up the SDG Impact Facility
- In partnership with the Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade
- And again with the EIF as fund manager – given their experience in terms of distribution of resources

Other responses: “Using innovation and technology wherever possible to move forward.”

- Worked with educational partners like NUST, UNAM and IUM, on a high level research committee set up by government, to monitor behaviour change communication
- Assisted with the development of apps and conducted hackathons “to encourage youngsters to come up with innovative ideas and apps to address the pandemic”
- Launched a local SDG Accelerator Lab, forming part of a network in 90 locations, supporting 114 countries worldwide, “so we can really source home-grown, bottom-up solutions from the communities”
- Conversations underway with government to undertake support for business continuity and digital processes
- Launched a SDG Online Hub just before the pandemic broke, as an information sharing and awareness raising platform – now taken over and managed by the National Statistics Agency
- Going forward, exploring community level work with local participation

The Sustainable Development Goals in Namibia

The Sustainable Development Goals are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the earth’s environment and climate, and ensure that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity. These are the goals the UN is working on in Namibia.



In conversation

with **Martha Talamondjila Naanda**

UNDP Namibia Programme Specialist



what type of activities should be immediately stopped or are at risk of exposure? We had to do analytical work, rather than just continue with implementation. Most activities came to an immediate halt, while many others were postponed.”

While the UNDP as development agency was able to adjust to these new modalities, “because we have what we call a business continuity plan, where we plan and prepare for any type of emergency, not only COVID”, its partners were not necessarily in the same privileged position. “We were able to undock our laptops, get our data and continue with our work from home, but the pandemic really caught us unprepared in terms of our support to government and their capacity to continue with projects by using new modes of implementation. We were ready, but our partners were not.” As a result, the UNDP had to “repurpose and reprogramme” so project teams were able to function from home. Amongst others, it conducted training on how to carry out and arrange virtual meetings and in some cases even had to provide essential equipment to enable work from home. “We tried to be as inclusive as possible and not leave anyone behind – this is really a crucial aspect of any development programme.”

“Yes, COVID-19 has temporarily halted our efforts and we are trying to adjust to it, but this is not the end. As a development agency, our efforts are beyond recovery, towards 2030. We cannot be distracted on our pathway towards achieving the sustainable development goals.”

As programme specialist, Martha Talamondjila Naanda is responsible for managing UNDP Namibia’s largest in-country portfolio, its environmental programme, which includes overseeing a variety of nature-based incentives, covering wildlife and marine resources, community forests, conservancies and environmental governance, amongst others. In addition to these, she also manages the UNDP programme team, which can be a challenging task in the best of times, and even more so during a crisis.

“When you are responding to a pandemic, or any kind of disaster, you need instruments that can react fast. And reacting fast means getting resources to those who most need it.”

In response to the most urgent needs of the environments and communities in which it works, the UNDP initiated various facilities, including the CRRRF. Naanda explains, “When you are responding to a pandemic, or any kind of disaster, you need instruments that can react fast. And reacting fast means getting resources to those who most need it. We believe the

CRRRF was a very good example on how to get to community conservancies in a timely manner, and through an instrument that was welcoming. We’ve invited other partners to come on board and based on what I’m hearing it’s going to develop even further.”

Adjusting to new modalities

“The pandemic required all of us to change the way we deliver business. At the UNDP we now work in shifts of two teams to minimise the threat of exposure. We also had to readjust by creating new modalities of operations, like conducting stakeholder meetings virtually.” In April, the UNDP conducted a survey to analyse the impacts of the current situation on its programme work. “We asked, now that COVID is here, how does it impact our projects,

Further assessments

In addition to providing economic relief to conservancies, the UNDP is also working on a tourism assessment. “The government, through the MEFT, has requested us to conduct an evaluation of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, to present more detail on the impacts and possible recovery and rebuilding initiatives”.



A similar evaluation has been done on the impacts of the pandemic on informal traders. “It revealed to us that there are vulnerable sectors that are important contributors to the GDP, jobs and livelihoods, but these are also the ones who are least protected from outside shocks. These are the people who are really affected. In partnership with our stakeholders, we’re trying to find space for them to continue their operations, and recover from the impacts.”

The need for conversation

While the CRRRF was a financial response to conservancies and nature-based communities, Naanda notes, “We needed a mechanism where we could work with bene-

ficiaries beyond this environment.” As a space to share, this publication was initiated to provide an opportunity to learn from community members who reside in rural areas, where people are often highly dependent on natural resources to eke out a living and sustain themselves.

“The human voice is a very powerful tool – when someone is having a conversation with you, it has a very different impact than collecting data through a survey. Sometimes we want to read statistics, and we tend to make people statistics, but this was not the aim here. We offered the communities a voice to share their stories in a neutral, familiar space. And it’s not only about capturing these stories, most importantly, it’s about adding value to environments, places and communities.”

On COVID-19

Challenges

“In Namibia, we are so used to free movement. Being an environmentalist, I love nature, I love to roam free. So the lack of movement, of being constrained and limited, that really takes you out of your normal range. I know that these measures were in place for our own safety, but it just made me realise how vulnerable we are as people when things we take for granted are suddenly taken away, not by force, but by natural events like COVID.”

Opportunities

“I found the opportunities that presented itself through this crisis to be huge. As a start, through virtual meetings we have learned that we can be much more productive, in terms of higher concentration spans and being more inclined to stick to the allocated time. At the same time, virtual meetings are limited in terms of the wastage that is often associated with physical workshops, like food waste for example. Yes, it definitely challenged us with new ways of working, but the UNDP has created a very supportive environment and our whole team has been able to pull through this crisis. It has strengthened us a UNDP family.

But the biggest opportunity that presented itself to all of us, is that a country like Namibia is actually a safer environment for COVID, because of our small population and access to open spaces, which means that unless you live in a residential area you can still do nature-based interventions without being constrained. There is nature to be explored and Namibia is the place to be: It’s really about the people, the places and the spaces.”

Lessons learnt

“It has been a good learning curve because it enabled me to view our freedom of movement here in Namibia as a blessing – open spaces are a blessing!”

In conversation

with **Teofilus Nghitila**

MEFT Executive Director



“My passion lies in the environment and seeing communities benefit from natural resources. Since high school, I’ve loved working with nature, and have been fortunate to live my passion through various positions that enabled me to contribute to the conservation and preservation of our natural environment. And with the addition of sustainable development, the sector became even more exciting!”

As executive director of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT), Teofilus Nghitila, is no stranger to local environmental development. With an educational background in Chemistry and Geography (BSc), obtained from UNAM, further studies in Environmental Engineering and Sustainable Infrastructure (MA) from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden, and a MBA in Strategic Planning from the University of Maastricht School of Management in the Netherlands, his portfolio attests to personal passion and dedication for the natural world.

An environmental journey

Nghitila started out his professional journey as researcher at the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, where he served the organisation’s mission to “enhance decision making for sustainable development”, before he took on his first position at the ministry – which

soon proved to be a lifetime’s commitment – and where he’s been for the past twenty years. “My very first job at the ministry was as chief development planner on waste management and pollution control under the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA).” Once again focussed on what makes the industry so “exciting” to Nghitila, the DEA has the objective to “promote environmental sustainability across all other ministries, the private sector and non-governmental organisations”. Providing an ideal opportunity to combine a private interest in the environment with a long-term career, Nghitila has worked his way up at the DEA to fill the positions of deputy director, director and finally that of environmental commissioner and head of department. And when the former permanent secretary retired in 2019, Nghitila was appointed to take over this position, under the new title of executive director. “The scale of responsibility has become quite high”, he says. “Upwards movement can be so scary sometimes, because the process of coming down is just as fast.” Regardless of the pressure, Nghitila is as committed as ever as he explains the ministry’s role in setting up the CRRRF and further facilities to support the local tourism and conservation industries on a journey to recovery.

The CRRRF – a combined effort

“The Conservation Relief, Recovery and Resilience Facility (CRRRF) originated because there was clearly a need to curb the impacts of COVID-19 on conservancies and wildlife related industries. As the MEFT, we had to take the lead towards facilitating a collaborative effort. We put our heads and hands together and came up with the CRRRF concept – with a specific focus on providing financial relief to Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) – and the buy-in from partners was fantastic.”

As a combined effort, the facility has managed to raise initial capital of N\$20 million, which were put directly into the CRRRF account and distributed by the Environmental Investment Fund, while other partners, like NedBank, NCE, NNF and IRDNC, have opted for direct disbursements to beneficiaries – but all coordination has been done through the MEFT. The ministry has also established a committee and working group that makes recommendations in terms of disbursement

of funding and oversee the work of the CRRRF, which is overseen by Nghitila.

“The immediate benefits of the facility are marked by a timely disbursement of resources to conservancies to supplement operational costs, and as a result there has been no retrenchments and the possibility to keep patrols and monitoring active – the impacts have certainly been lessened on a conservancy level. The facility has covered all legible and registered conservancies and we’ve done our utmost to cover all of them with the provision of funds as per their usual income activities, or where there were none, supporting the projected expenditures per month. With the approach to distribute funding fairly and equitably, we’ve been further moved to support joint ventures with a direct cash injection so they can retain their workforce.”

Other initiatives

The MEFT also chaired the International Tourism Revival Initiative (TRI), with a focus on putting protocols and regulations for the tourism industry in place through standard operating manuals that guides the industry, as measures to mitigate COVID-19.

The initiative was initially announced in June 2020, “as an effort to spur economic activities and the recovery of the tourism sector, which was negatively impacted by

the COVID-19 pandemic”, as it states in an official press release by the MEFT. Implemented at the beginning of September for a pilot phase of one month, the TRI is now an ongoing effort that is constantly being revised and updated according to circumstance, since the recovery of the sector requires a long-term solution. With the latest updates announced at the end of October, Minister Pohamba Shifeta has reminded role-players in the tourism sector that the initiative “requires now more than before the industry to come up with new and more innovative ideas that speaks to the new normal and maximize on the opportunities that it presents”.

Shifeta however further stated that the reality of the pandemic on global travel should be kept in mind: “The future is not known and we should be cognizant of the fact that tourism is a commodity trade on an international market and is heavily influenced by what is happening globally... As government, we will continue to create an enabling environment and opportunities for the business fraternity to capitalise on. It is for the industry now to provide products and prices that are competitive enough to attract the volume we want and maximise on the holiday season that is looming.”

Supporting documents on the TRI can be downloaded from the Namibia Tourism Board website.

Future possibilities

Lessons learnt

- A rapid disbursement of funds is possible
- We need a long-term mechanism to sustain conservancies
- Our conservancies are really vulnerable to external shocks like COVID-19
- Without tourists and hunters there is no income
- Conservancies need to diversify

“We need to go beyond a community based approach and tourism reliance, and create other possible income generation activities. For example through vegetable gardening, dress making, running a kindergarden, bakery or small shop. There are many other possibilities.”

Grow your own

“We have seen that Namibians can contribute to local food production – even myself, I have started growing carrots, potatoes, mint for tea and even strawberries in my garden at home. I hardly buy vegetables from the shops anymore. It’s become like a wave, the amount of vegetables suddenly being produced. The only thing now is to upscale operations and make sure the production does not go to waste, reorient the product, like changing the processing through drying, for example – let’s simply move on to the next level! This has certainly been a good lesson that COVID has taught us.”

Focus on local

“COVID has taught us that local tourism is a good alternative and should be promoted, despite our small population. South Africa is certainly good at it and we can take much from them. Although we also have to keep in mind there are certain prohibiting factors as to why locals do not travel. Despite the price, which is certainly a factor, there’s the issue of service and hospitality, which is geared at international tourists and not very welcoming to locals. But local money is very valuable, and those in the industry should realise it.”

In conversation

with **Sakeus Shilomboleni**

EIF Task Manager for the CRRRF



- Taking minutes of all meetings and perform all other secretarial related duties
- Keeping record of reports from various funders under this facility
- Publishing, with approval of the MEFT quarterly reports on fund disbursements from the CRRRF and
- Administering the funds in the CRRRF account

CRRRF support from the UNDP

With a specific focus on the CRRRF funds leveraged through the UNDP, Shilomboleni breaks down how these have assisted conservation in Namibia. The funds enabled the Kyaramacan Association in the Bwabwata National Park, and lipumbu ya Tshilongo Conservancy in north-central Namibia to:

- Save the jobs by paying salaries of community game guards (CGGs) and conservancy staff members (CSMs) in: Kyaramacan Association, where 49 CGGs and three CSMs were paid during the first quarter of the grant; while it also paid six CGGs and one CSM at lipumbu ya Tshilongo Conservancy during the same period. “All these jobs could have been lost as a result of COVID-19, but the funding saved them.”
- Continue undertaking anti-poaching patrols and activities thereby reducing poaching of rare and endangered species such as pelicans, flamingos, wildcat, common moorhen, African ground squirrels, and so forth, within conservancy areas. In Kyaramacan Association, four patrols were undertaken involving 28 CGGs for 16 days during the first quarter of the grant period. In lipumbu ya Tshilongo Conservancy, poaching activities are high in areas such as Oponona Lake, Omulunga, Ovenduka Cattle Post, Ondjungulume and Uukanga. “With this funding, monitoring of these activities by the game guards are easier”.
- Continue undertaking natural resource management monitoring patrols on devil’s claw, for example, do event book follow ups and conduct audits and game counts
- Monitor and record all human-wildlife conflict incidences
- Buy COVID-19 Equipment for community game guards and conservancy staff members
- Pay for their operational costs (including water & electricity, airtime)
- Cover field operational costs (food, transport and fuel)

“In a nutshell, the UNDP funding through the CRRRF has made and continues to make significant impacts in the lives of people in the CBNRM institutions in Namibia.”

“The objective of the facility is to ensure the continuation of anti-poaching activities, monitoring and management of wildlife and other natural resources and the mitigation of human wildlife conflicts...”

Sakeus Shilomboleni, who serves as environmental and social safeguard officer at the Environmental Investment Fund (EIF), was recently appointed as task manager to the Conservation Relief, Recovery and Resilience Facility (CRRRF). Shilomboleni provides a brief statement on the EIF’s role as secretariat to the facility and how funds generated till date has contributed to community conservation during the pandemic.

The EIF as secretariat to the CRRRF

To provide financial relief to Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) institutions affected by COVID-19, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) launched the CRRRF in May. The Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia led the initial capitalisation of the Facility with a total amount of N\$6 million, joined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pledging an amount of N\$1,2 million.

“The CRRRF has the aim to facilitate medium to long-term recovery and resilience measures for the CBNRM entities to safeguard the environment, secure their tourism and other natural resource-based enterprises that pay for conservation costs and generate livelihood benefits.”

The MEFT designated the EIF as the secretariat to the CRRRF with the following roles, amongst others:

Effects on the EIF

“The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every country and economy in the world – the pandemic is without a doubt the single biggest event in world history since World War II. As a direct consequence of the outbreak, organisations all over the world have to change how they operate in order to achieve their goals and the EIF is no exception.”

As Certified Expert in Climate and Renewable Energy Finance and Financial and Risk Analyst at the EIF, Pandeni Mwandingi Kapia shares the following:

Mobilising resources

“The core mandate of the Fund is to mobilise adequate resources in support of projects and programmes that promotes sustainable utilisation of natural resources and to procure funds for the maintenance of an endowment that will generate a permanent stream of income. These funds are invested towards the protection and wise management of the environment, sustainable use of natural resources for economic development, and conserving biological diversity and ecological life-support functions.” Resources are obtained as follows:

- 60% is from environmental taxes
- 25% donor funding (management fee of projects)
- 10% government contribution
- 5% loan portfolio

Implications for capital management

“How then does the Fund ensure that the income stream is maintained?” he asks, while further noting that the crisis raises questions around the Fund’s existing risk management frameworks, especially “in terms of their effectiveness and agility”.

Four main risk categories have been significantly impacted and have direct implications for the Funds’ capital management:

- Operational risk
- Liquidity risk
- Market risk
- Credit risk

Mitigating risks

“The Fund’s management has devised a strategy to counter the aforementioned risks, which has been integrated into the existing risk management committee. The committee has the task to monitor the level of impact on the business, periodically and as needed, and report to the Board on the status of key performance indicators for critical business units.” This includes:

- Reviewing the pace of expenditure in relation to the business’s operations
- Re-prioritising the allocation of resources to unaffected business lines or areas
- Maintaining regular contact with debtors – as they are critical to cash flow and are likely to be facing the same challenges
- Developing a six months cash flow forecast to identify stress points, and where changes are required
- Identifying measures for controlling budgets and making cost savings and exploring opportunities for collaboration with new strategic business partners for new market development and to meet customer needs

Going forward

“COVID-19 has shown mankind how interconnected we are to each other, therefore taking care of ourselves is indirectly taking care of the next man. As the Fund navigates its way from the deadly COVID-19 storm, it’s all hands on deck.” The EIF is currently working on implementing the following:

- An adaptive management approach that is flexible, coupled with an upgrade in our work environment with regards to health and safety issues
- Adopting new ways of interacting with stakeholders and generally improve the pace of operations
- The pandemic has highlighted the importance of having a secured revenue stream and the Fund is working towards being 100% self-sustaining
- The pandemic has also proven the importance of incorporating the latest ICT technology

Source: EIF, ‘Sailing through COVID-19 pandemic storm: EIF’s response to the crisis’, 2020



Kavango East



Named after the perennial Okavango River that originates in the Angolan highlands and flows into the Okavango Delta in Botswana, the river forms the lifeblood of this northern region. With woodlands and baobabs, abundant wildlife and rural communities, conservation and tourism are vital sectors of the local economy. Kavango East includes the Khudum National Park, a wilderness sanctuary in the Kalahari Desert. Environmental constraints, such as low soil fertility and variable rainfall, restrict agricultural development.

- Size: 25 576 km²
- Approximate population: 148 466
- Administrative capital: Rundu
- Climate: Semi-arid local steppe climate, average annual rainfall 500–600 mm
- Environment: Flood plains, forest savannah and woodlands
- Land-use practices: Fishing, subsistence agriculture & livestock rearing, conservation, agro-forestry
- Registered communal conservancies: 5
- Conservancy population: 8 550
- Community forests: 11
- National parks: Khudum and Bwabwata national parks
- Transfrontier conservation areas: Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

Rundu Surrounds

A short history of Rundu

Rundu is one of the fastest growing urban settlements in the Kavango East and West Regions and hosts the second largest population after the capital of Windhoek. It served as district capital of the combined Kavango Region between 1936 and 2013, until the Fourth Delimitation Commission of Namibia suggested splitting the region into east and west, with Rundu being the regional capital for Kavango East. Locally known as the gateway to Zambezi, it serves as an important stopover to refuel and restock before continuing onwards through the strip and the next urban centre of Katima Mulilo. Enjoying a high annual rainfall, the area is known for its agricultural potential and dense forests, with the Kavango people enjoying a reputation for their fine woodcarving skills, producing various wooden crafts, utensils and furniture.

Community and state conservation in Kavango East

Discussions with the MEFT in Rundu

“Conservancies in the Kavango region are negatively affected. Their income depend on conservation hunting. Clients from abroad are no longer coming. Natural resource monitors are usually paid through the income generated by these contracts. When people are not receiving salaries they are reluctant to do patrols. This can lead to an increase in poaching,” Karel Ndumba, an environmental and Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) officer at Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) in Rundu, explains.

Apart from being a key income stream for conservancies, hunting operators create employment through training and hiring trackers, skimmers, cooks, cleaners and guides. Luckily, in Kavango East conservancies none of the hunting operators retrenched employees or reduced salaries. Still, the conservancies’ yearly income reduced, making it difficult to pay their own staff. Community projects are also on hold with funds re-directed to operational costs. Human-wildlife conflict, including the destruction of fields by animals, is an everyday reality for conservancies. A lack of benefit distribution makes it difficult to manage the economic and emotional cost of co-habitation. “People are angry,” says Karel.

Although conservation hunting remains the primary income stream for conservancies, the George Mukoya and Muduva Nyangana conservancies in Kavango East border the Khaudum National Park. Here they share a joint

venture agreement with two campsites, Sikereti Camp and Khaudum Camp, and a lodge that is still under construction. All Namibia’s national parks were closed to tourists from 18 April to 5 May and since reopening there has been limited tourist activity, especially for Khaudum, which allows for 4X4 access only.

Sikereti Camp also remains closed for tourists as the MEFT is implementing a UNDP-funded project under the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM). The OKACOM River Basin Organisation was established through the OKACOM Agreement of 1994 between the three states of Angola, Botswana and Namibia, who jointly manage water resources in the Cubango-Okavango River. The aim of the Sikereti Camp project is to transform it into a 100% community-owned establishment – although a company will be contracted to manage it. “It is a special place,” Karel says. “The scenic beauty of the place – you just get this new feeling.” The project hopes to create employment for up to twenty people and improve local livelihoods. Unfortunately, and since the project is managed through OKACOM with its secretariat in Botswana, it has been difficult to meet and finalise the process during COVID-19.

With both tourism and conservation hunting on hold conservancies primarily rely on crop cultivation and livestock for subsistence. Wilburd Nukena, a MEFT warden officer working closely with conservancies, shares that

“When people are not receiving salaries they are reluctant to do patrols. This can lead to an increase in poaching.”



there is a growing awareness of alternative focal areas which can be mobilised to generate income for conservancies. Mutete (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) can be used to produce jam and health-juices. “It could even help with COVID-19,” Karel adds. In the past some community members generated income on a small-scale through selling sour plum jams (*Ximenia americana*). Mangetti nuts, monkey orange, and wild olive oil are other wild products which can be harvested and sold if value is added. The challenge is to find investors willing to construct local production and testing facilities.

As an environmentalist, Karel is passionate about Conservation Agriculture (CA). A CA project was rolled out in all Kavango East conservancies some years before. Karel says that such projects show a promising future both for conservation and rural development. Not only do they increase yields and prevent households from encroaching onto wildlife areas, but in the long-run combat human-wildlife conflict and deforestation. According to Karel and Wilburd, such alternatives need to be seriously considered, especially given the uncertainties generated by the current COVID-19 global pandemic.

Jacob Hamutenya at George Mukoya Conservancy

Moving forward in a changed world

Since March 2020, income from hunting and tourism concessions in the George Mukoya Conservancy drastically decreased. Jacob Haungenda Hamutenya, the conservancy chairperson, explains that this meant that staff allowances were not paid and community benefits, such as meat distribution and an agricultural project, were discontinued. As a farmer, Jacob also struggles to find a market to sell his livestock to provide for his family’s basic needs as the national economic shock continues to reverberate across all sectors and scales.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the conservancy optimistically expanded their tourism income streams. A joint venture lodge in the north of the Kaudum National Park planned to be operational in 2020 and the OKACOM-funded community-owned Sikereti tented camp is nearing completion. “Now we are just praying for tourists

to come back,” Jacob shares. “If COVID-19 is going to end, the future of the conservancy is positive. Once we generate an income again, other projects can take off, including harvesting forest products.”

State-imposed restrictions on social gatherings and fears regarding the spread of COVID-19 means that general meetings, training workshops and planned activities, such as an exchange visit between conservancies, are postponed indefinitely. “People don’t come close together. People are afraid to gather and to share ideas, to talk together, about how to improve the conservancy and to make progress,” Jacob explains. As a person that is passionate about expanding his knowledge and social learning, he finds this part of the ‘new normal’ the hardest to adapt to. It likewise prevents the conservancy from revising their work plan and moving forward in a changed world.

Ncumcara Community Forest and Craft Centre

“We feel forgotten”

The Ncumcara Community Forest was established to manage and utilise forests sustainably and to ensure equitable benefit-distribution. However, over the last few years this has been a challenge for the Forest Management Committee (FMC). Now with COVID-19 “Everything is broken. We are struggling,” Joseph Ndjamba, the chairperson, explains. “It killed everything. Tourists, our best customers, are no longer coming,” treasurer Paulus Kapanza adds.

Any income generated in the Ncumcara Community Forest is divided between Traditional Authorities (25%), the Forest Management Committee (30%), and the Village Development Fund (45%). The community forest’s key income streams are the selling of crafts and furniture. In 2016 additional rooms and a workshop space was added

to their craft shop. This infrastructure expansion was co-funded by the German Development Bank (KfW) and the then Ministry of Water, Agriculture and Forestry for carpentry training and skills development, primarily for the youth. The KfW also donated some carpentry machinery, but it has proven difficult to get this project off the ground due to the shortage of enough work-stations.

“Everything is broken. We are struggling... It killed everything. Tourists, our best customers, are no longer coming.”

Yet Joseph says that their main obstacle is the lack of a block permit or clearance certificate for harvesting and marketing timber. The

block permit, issued by MEFT for a set time period, allows communities to harvest timber species and generate income. Harvesting without such a permit is illegal. As a result, they have not sold any timber or furniture in the last three years. Paulus explains that MEFT officials inspected

the situation and wrote reports, but the FMC is still waiting to hear the outcome. “We used to fight, but later you lose hope,” says Joseph.

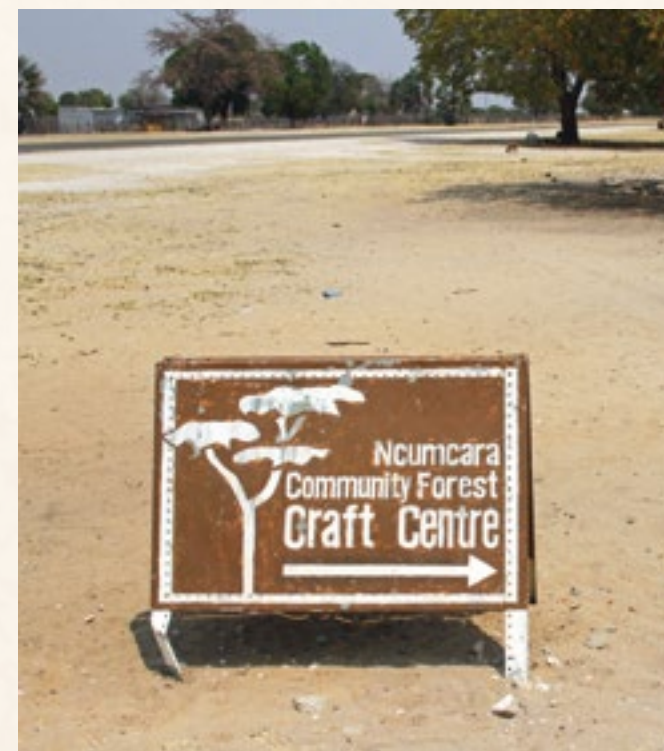
Apart from selling crafts and furniture, Ncumcara’s income is generated through the issuing of harvesting and marketing permits to community members. When community members harvest thatching grass, firewood and timber they need to buy a permit from the FMC. Most people cannot afford this permit and are forced to harvest without one, especially during the past year. Yet without their own vehicle, it is difficult for the FMC to monitor such cases.

The current management committee has never been re-elected. “We are just volunteering ourselves,” Joseph explains, as there is not enough income to pay salaries. “We have children. I have a family I am taking care of. When it is the end of the month, my child tells me, ‘Papa, go buy bread for me’. But you do not even have a cent. I feel like giving up. I am getting nothing. But we are the

founders of this community forest. People are going to blame us. Others gave up, but I must not give up. Maybe one day God will answer my prayers. It has been almost nineteen years, but people are still volunteering,” Joseph continues despairingly.

In volunteering, the FMC battles two major challenges: forest fires and illegal timber harvesting. The last mentioned is usually perpetrated by persons outside their communities and during the night-time. This makes it difficult to monitor, especially without a vehicle, and by the time the case is reported to MEFT the logs have already been removed. Such work can also be dangerous. In 2018 the FMC caught illegal harvesters. “Once you confiscate something, you must be strong. There can be violence,” Paulus says. One positive outcome from the COVID-19 driven international and regional lockdowns is the decrease in illegal harvesting, as loggers have nowhere to take and sell the wood, Joseph shares.

Still, despite this positive impact, Joseph asserts, “If COVID-19 remains like it is, we cannot see something in the future. Everything will be going down. If you are not surviving, you cannot see the future.” The past years, and especially since the onset of COVID-19, there has been no visitations by the governor or regional councillors in Ncumcara. Instead, the FMC says that they feel forgotten.



INFO BOX

Background

- Date gazetted: 2006
- Size: 15 245 hectares
- Management: six committee members

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Crafts, wood carvings and furniture
- Thatching grass and firewood permits

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- Diversification is really needed: “How can we add value to indigenous foods and plants?”

Interesting facts

- The craft shop won the SME Regional Award for ‘Made in Namibia Expo 2011’, hosted by the Ministry of Trade and Industry
- In 2015, Ncumcara Community Forest won the ‘Sustainable Development Award’ for Natural Resource Management and Utilisation, organised and co-funded by the Sustainable Development Advisory Council and the EIF
- The Ncumcara Community Forest protects over 90 different plant and tree species, including Kiaat, Zambezi Teak, Mangetti and Rosewood

Venantius Dinyando

On the importance of growing food

“Food products are very important. Clothes, you buy two or three times a year, but food you need to buy everyday. I can see that our country is lacking food production and especially now while people are struggling. We’re supposed to feed our own people, not buy from somewhere else.”

Venantius Dinyando’s Ngungwe Garden Project has been feeding community members since 2012. Translated into ‘a cool place’, from the local language of Rukwangali, the garden is located right on the banks of the Okavango River, not far from the village of Divundu. It’s a scenic, cool spot, with a large baobab overlooking the garden and family home that sits on the property. The garden provides entrepreneurs at the informal markets in Divundu, Omega and even as far as Rundu with fresh, locally grown produce. Venantius says that he often supplies Tambuti Lodge in Rundu, which prides itself on authentic African cuisine sourced from local ingredients, as much as possible from the Kavango region, “thus reducing food miles and letting the tourist emerge in the traditional food scenery”. He also sees the owner as his personal mentor.

This was Venantius’ life before the arrival of COVID-19. Now his buyers have stopped coming and his cabbages are rotting in the field. “By March I start harvesting my autumn crops, pumpkin, watermelon and maize, but because I wasn’t allowed to sell produce during lockdown, everything was destroyed. I planted some winter crops,

like these cabbages, but had the same problem and I was afraid of marketing. And now, I will not make the same mistake, so I will not be planting any summer crops this year.”

Venantius went through a two-year training at the Mashare Agricultural Development Institute, gaining in-depth knowledge on the benefits of agriculture and growing food for local consumption. He grows his crops on a rotational basis over 0.5 hectares of arable land, which are divided up in six blocks of 25x14 metres each and hosts up to 1 160 head of cabbage per block. “Usually I sell everything in one month, but now it’s

been two months and all my cabbages are still in the field. Customers are not buying in bulk as they used to. People are afraid to buy because of corona, they’re even scared to touch the cabbages.”

“Customers are not buying in bulk as they used to. People are afraid to buy because of corona, they’re even scared to touch the cabbages.”

The profit he used to make is ploughed back into the business, and spent on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and fuel for the water pump – and to assist his five children with school uniforms and stationary. “My kids grew up in this garden,” he says, “They help with irrigation, holding the hosepipe, weeding – they are serious about gardening and will take over from me one day. We work together as a family.”

Venantius believes, “Next year we will get enough support from the local market again, the numbers have started dropping now,” referring to the decrease in COVID-19 cases. “But, I’m not yet sure how to pass this current challenge.”



Kyaramacan Association

Interesting facts

The only community association that falls under the Namibian Association for CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO). The association works to maximise livelihoods of historically marginalised peoples who live within the Bwabwata National Park’s Multiple Use Area, which numbers at about 5 000, mainly Khwe, but also !Xun and Hambukushu.

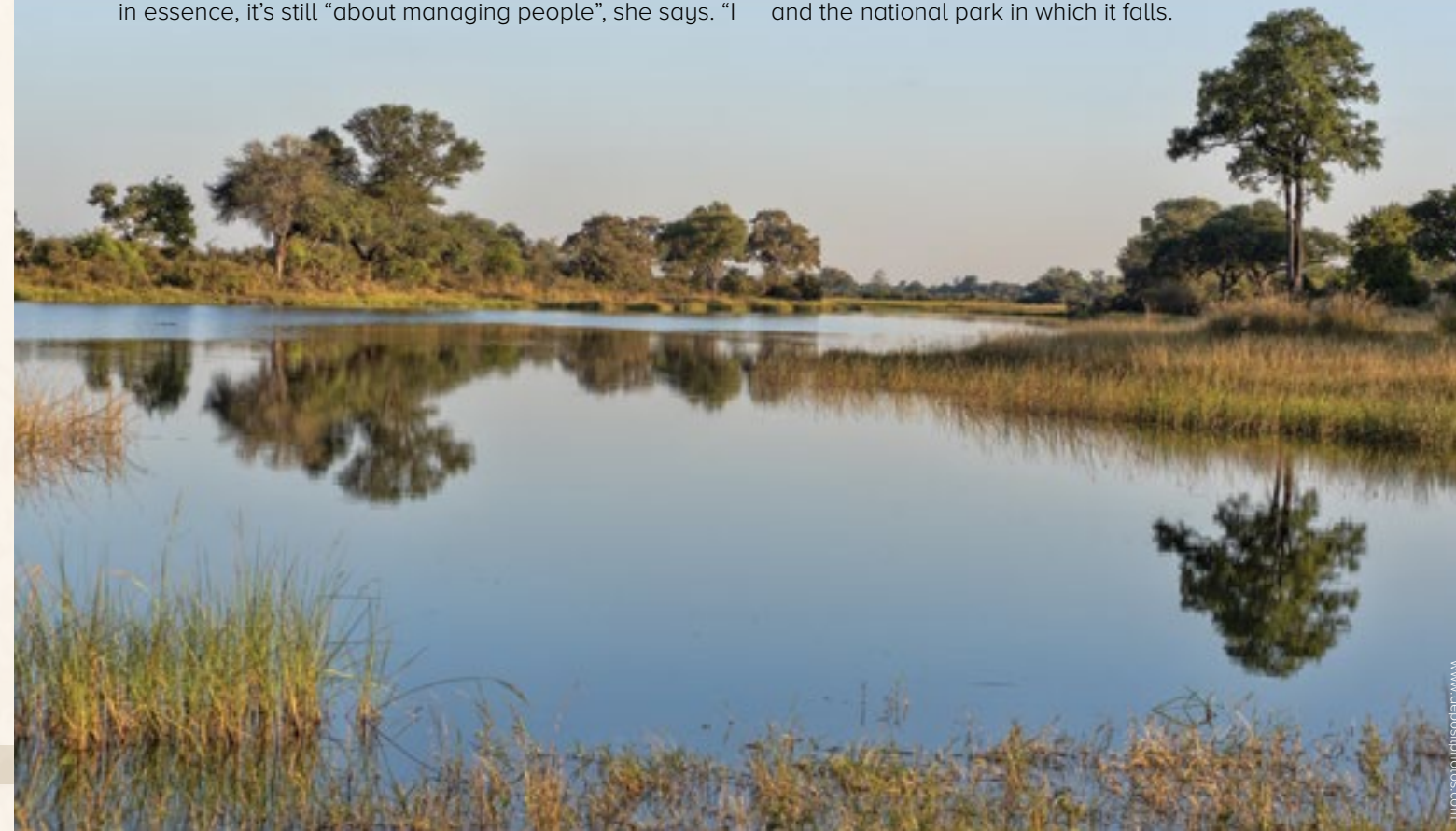
In benefit of people and natural resources

“To be a leader you have to be strong and able to solve problems.” Johanna Mushavanga is the newly appointed operations manager at the Kyaramacan Association (KA). Until September, she was still employed as field officer, a position she experienced as “very nice”, since she’s used to working in the field and found the monthly patrols that formed part of her duties to be most exciting. “My responsibilities included the supervision of juniors, the monitoring of devil’s claw harvesters – to make sure it’s done in a sustainable way, and monthly patrols, which I enjoyed very much.” Since she’s been promoted to operations officer, her tasks have taken on a slightly different flair, but in essence, it’s still “about managing people”, she says. “I

enjoy working with the community at large,” explains Johanna. “When I came to this position it wasn’t my first time to work with larger groups, I still have to direct and monitor others, as I did as field officer.” Her responsibilities now include managing the activities of the KA, supervising staff and overseeing finance, which includes making sure the committee sticks to the planned budget.

“We don’t want young ones to loose their culture and that’s why we play an important role to pass on knowledge and information to protect wildlife from generation to generation.”

Johanna is a San woman who was born and grew up in the Bwabwata National Park. To better understand her role in managing the conservation of natural resources in the area where she resides, it is important to recognise the history of her area, the association and the national park in which it falls.





As it is explained by NACSO, “The relationship between the Kyaramacan Association and Bwabwata National Park is a unique experiment in park management. Rather than create a park without people, the inhabitants of the area have been incorporated into the park.” The history of conservation in the area goes back to 1966, when it was first declared the Caprivi Game Reserve. In 1968 its status was elevated to that of Caprivi Game Park, and finally in 2007 it was proclaimed as Bwabwata National Park. Since historical times, and long before the first proclamation as protected area, various San communities have inhabited the area. Living in an area that during the 1980s became the hot spot for Namibia’s liberation struggle, many San men were recruited to assist the South African Defence Force. When the insurgents withdrew, the local populations were left destitute and heavily dependent on food aid from the newly independent government.

In 2005, with support from Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), the KA was established

and gazetted shortly after, in early 2006, with the aim to represent the indigenous people and assist them in managing and benefitting from natural resources. While their rights to hunting and gathering resources for own consumption have been revoked, since the establishment of the KA, the people now enjoy income from trophy hunting concessions of up to N\$5 million per year, according to the deputy director for Natural Resources Management at the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT), Colgar Sikopo. In addition, on the Zambezi side of the park, communities benefit from income generated through the Mashi, Kwan-do and Mayuni conservancies, while a newly formed joint venture will hopefully also provide a substantial income in the near future. Other income is generated through the sustainable harvesting of devil’s claw, amounting to about N\$1.5 million a year, with profits benefitting more than 500 harvesters, of which the majority are women.

Forin Booysen, vice-chairlady at the KA, adds that the aims of the association are to develop and promote the communities in the park. “We don’t want the young ones to lose their culture and that’s why we play an important role to pass on knowledge and information – to protect wildlife from generation to generation.”

The first ten years after the association has been established prove to be a success, but unfortunately with the onset of COVID-19, life has taken a challenging turn. Johanna explains that there has been no hunting this year, “It’s not easy for the hunting operators because their clients are not from Namibia.” In addition, the harvesting of devil’s claw was delayed. “We usually harvest in May, June and July, but this year we were only allowed to start activities in August.” The construction of a lodge at White Sands – the association’s first joint venture – also didn’t go as expected, with plans for extension currently on hold. “We used to support the community by giving allowances to about 99 students for stationary and cosmetics at about N\$150 000 in total, covered funeral costs of N\$2 000 per family and paid monthly allowances to the 15 headmen at N\$1 000 per headman.” Over the past five years, the association also channelled their income into the construction of five boreholes and used to give cash benefits of N\$270 to all community members between 2015 and 2017, since “these were good years for income”. Before the onset of the pandemic, the association started the process of getting an electricity contractor to set up home connections in all 12 villages, which once completed, will at least be one great benefit to the entire community.

Both Johanna and Forin are grateful to the ministry and supporting partners like the UNDP for assisting their community through the CRRRF. Forin says, “If we didn’t receive this money, we would have run out of funds and not have been able to pay salaries.” Johanna adds, “We are happy about this money. If it was not donated, we don’t think any activities would have been a success, or even possible. All our staff are still working on their day to day activities, so we very much appreciate this fund.”

Lynn Silver at White Sands

“We will get through it”



campsites, since future developments for a luxury lodge had to be put on hold as a result of the pandemic.

Lynn Silver, manager at White Sands, explains that the owners signed an agreement with the KA in 2018, with the promise to employ people from the nearby villagers, mostly Khwe, and pay a set percentage to the association, which in turn holds responsibility to fairly distribute it to the community’s benefit. In addition, they planned to expand the facilities with 14 luxury, river-facing units, as well as a restaurant and sundowner deck, which were meant to be completed by the end of September. They currently employ 14 people, “and will expand with more, once the lodge is up and running”.

During the first months of the pandemic, from March till April, the establishment had to close their operations, send staff home and cut salaries by 50%, but have since brought everyone back, on full salaries, pre-COVID. Lynn says that they’ve received quite a number of walk-in clients since re-opening and have also managed to keep busy with other activities. As part of a bigger future vision, they’ve set up a vegetable garden to supply the restaurant and nearby communities, constructed two wooden chalets “to test the market as a COVID survival strategy”, and created a small curio shop where Pieter Masiliso Axade cries king. There will be no further developments in the near future as Lynn explains, “For now, our purse remains tightly shut and safely locked up until life is a bit more certain.”

“It will take time before Namibia recovers”, says Lynn. “Our country definitely took a big knock. Tourism is crucial to our economy and it will probably still be a struggle for the next two years or so, but we will get through it. We’ll stay hopeful – what else can we do? The decision doesn’t lie with us, but with the Big Man.”



INFO BOX

Background

- Date gazetted: 2006
- Size: 6 100 km² (the size of Bwabwata NP)
- Management: 77 staff & 12 board members, representing 12 communities in the park

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Trophy hunting
- Devil’s claw harvesting
- Tourism

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- Without income there can be no benefits to the people
- Knowledge and information sharing is key to better understand the advantages of conservation
- Support from external partners have been crucial to the survival of the KA during the pandemic

Pieter Masiliso Axade

A link to the local community



"This corona story put us back many steps – schools were standing still and the children didn't have it easy."

A curious man whose name means 'the one who asked many questions', Pieter Masiliso Axade stands in as public relations and cultural officer, as well as general worker at White Sands. As the person who greets guests at the Khwe Info Centre and lodge reception, he explains, "My task here is to introduce the project and partnership with the Kyaramacan Association (KA), and tell visitors about my people's traditional knowledge and culture."

Pieter served as the chairperson at the KA from 2015 to 2018 and is still a member of the custodian committee,

along with five others who work at White Sands. "I'm learning a lot here," he says. "How to interact with stakeholders and individuals and how to approach different people". He is also very grateful for the income he gets as it helps him put food on the table and support his two children with school supplies and uniforms. "This lodge helps a lot and we were very happy to get this partnership," he says.

Apart from creating jobs for community members, Pieter also notes that they receive added benefits through the concession, like food distribution and vegetables from the White Sands garden. Other benefits that the community has enjoyed through the communal fund includes the construction of a borehole and water pump, assistance with the AGM and annual game counts, as well as support for school kids through uniforms, cosmetics and soap.

Unfortunately, as Pieter explains, "This corona story put us back many steps – schools were standing still and the children didn't have it easy." He admits that he's worried the kids won't be able to keep up and remember everything in order to pass their exams this year. "They also tried e-learning here, but many parents don't have smart phones and couldn't get the assignments." He adds that the government did supply them with food parcels, "but not every month and when we did receive something it also wasn't enough for the whole month".

While discussing his community's challenges, Pieter is joined by Botha Muhoka, whose father is the headman of the Khwe Traditional Authority. Botha is employed as a general worker at White Sands and adds as a departing thought, "I'm feeling good about this lodge. Hopefully it will bring a better life for us." Pieter positively agrees, "When the lodge is finished, a lot of people will still get jobs."



Women's voices at Omega 1



Omega 1 community is located within the Bwabwata National Park, 20 kilometres east of Divundu. A former military base under the South African Defence Force, it houses a diversity of people, but predominantly San, as it has been since its founding days. In the past, the San communities used to rely on hunting and gathering for survival, but since the area has been proclaimed a national park, these activities are now illegal. The most recent development was the construction of a police station in 2016, but apart from that, not much growth has happened here in decades.

A San women's group meets at the local community hall to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on their community. "It is affecting us in many ways," explains community leader Margreth Kamba. "Work is a problem, we're just at home and there's nowhere to get food. Before, we could travel to find work in the area, or on farms." Marisa Maruu notes that many of their community assists with farm work, debushing, ploughing, sowing and harvesting of crops, "but now, there's no work, because of corona". To make matters worse, according to Anita Dinyando, they can't afford to buy masks, which means they can't even conduct meetings within the community.

The women's group works to empower San young girls, teaching them their rights "and how to take care of themselves," says Margreth. "The virus delayed many of our programmes as we had to stop all activities for almost three months. Now we're allowed to meet again, but have to do so in smaller groups and in shifts." She explains that COVID-19 information sharing and education now also forms part of their activities, "like washing hands and wearing masks". Unfortunately access to water can also be a challenge, with only one solar pump in

the village, and having to constantly fetch water makes it hard to sanitise as required.

Margreth notes that the community usually benefits from various projects initiated through the Kyaramacan Association, of which they are all members, including beekeeping and gardening, but due to COVID-19, these activities have been put on hold. "The association tries its best, but it's hard if we're not getting much support from the ministry." She adds that they couldn't even apply for the N\$750 social grant from the government because most of them don't possess any official documents, like birth certificates or IDs. And while the Namibia Red Cross Society distributed some food parcels in August, "only some people got it".

"The virus delayed many of our programmes as we had to stop all activities for almost three months. Now we're allowed to meet again, but have to do so in smaller groups and in shifts."

The group also mentions that they face various challenges at Omega 1, regardless of the pandemic. The lack of employment and access to opportunities seems to affect the community and create bitterness amongst those who don't get jobs. "We've requested the Ombudsman to help us find work, like as cleaners, where we don't need qualifications, but they are bringing in people from outside, while there are many people here who are desperate for work and can also do this job." Margreth adds, "They don't respect the people that were found here. We were born and grew up here and others just come in for work and take our jobs." Anita adds, "The good thing about us San is that we help each other. If I get something, I will share it with everyone."

The group works under guidance of the Women's Leadership Centre (WLC), and its programme, 'Speaking for Ourselves: Voices of San Young Women', which was initiated in 2013. "The WLC is helping us and taught us to become better. If we have any problems they will direct us where to go so our voices can be heard," ends Margreth.



Kunene



The Kunene Region inspired the rise of community conservation in Namibia and today tourism and conservation are vital sectors of the local economy. It is a stronghold for the endangered black rhino and desert-adapted species like elephant and lion and hosts a number of significant sites, including Twyfelfontein World Heritage Site. The region derives its name from the Kunene River, which forms the border between Namibia and Angola.

- Size: 115 293 km²
- Approximate population: 97 865
- Administrative capital: Opuwo
- Climate: Arid to semi-arid, average annual rainfall 50–415 mm
- Environment: Mountainous and hilly, mopane savannah and north Namib Desert
- Land-use practices: Mobile pastoralism, seasonal crop production, conservation, mining in the central and northern parts and commercial cattle-ranching in the south
- Registered communal conservancies: 38
- Conservancy population: 65 137
- Tourism concessions: 4
- Community forests: 7
- National parks: Skeleton Coast National Park
- Transfrontier conservation areas: Iona-Skeleton Coast Transfrontier Park

Outjo Surrounds

A brief history of Outjo

Taken from the Otjiherero word for 'small hills', Outjo was founded in 1897 as a military outpost under German colonial rule. A fairly well-developed settlement in the southern reaches of the Kunene Region, the town today is best known as the primary gateway to Etosha National Park, and serves as an essential supply point for travellers en route to the country's most famous wildlife reserve, as well as those progressing through the lesser developed areas of the region.

Lady of The Farmhouse

With a positive attitude



Anastasia (better known as Ansta) Gabathuler emits a force of endless energy as she talks about her professional journey and the effects of COVID-19 on her business. Owner and managing director of The Farmhouse Bed & Breakfast in Outjo – a historical building in the centre of town that's been a local attraction for more than 80 years – Ansta took ownership in September 2010, with the idea to "start a new life and future", after having suffered a great loss just the year before. "I thought to myself: I need to stay busy, why not start in my own community – what does Outjo need and what kind of changes can I implement to make it more attractive for locals and visitors alike?"

Ansta started with upgrades to the kitchen and restaurant – to reflect her personal passion – including the diversification of the menu, where she implemented her skills acquired from previous work experience. "I started my first job as a cleaner at a lodge, but constantly found myself going back to the kitchen, hanging around and watching the chef. Eventually they offered me a position as a vegetable peeler and that's how I slowly expanded my knowledge of cooking." She was taught to prepare cakes, her first being "a very successful cheesecake", and within a few months

was the main chef at the lodge. "I even had the honour of cooking for the then Prime Minister and now President, Honourable Dr Hage Geingob," she smiles with pride.

In later years, Ansta expanded her culinary experience by working as a chef in a hotel pizzeria in Switzerland, her husband's home country, and also improved on her cakes with the help of her Swiss mother-in-law. "As a child, I was very fond of making mud cakes, and my journey from a little girl to the real life reflects my interest in the art of cooking!" As The Farmhouse grew, the menu expanded and now even includes some Chinese dishes (also with descriptions in Mandarin), and *Fassbier*, or beer on tap, favoured by her German clientele – the two nationalities that make up for the majority of her business.

Ansta explains that her income decreased by 98% since March.

"In February we still had two large groups and a few tourists in town, but in March, all bookings were suddenly cancelled." For the first few months she stayed hopeful that business will return to normal, but by July she was forced to cut salaries by 30% and implement a system for her 21 employees to work in shifts.

"I want my town to grow. Tourists must go to Etosha, but stay two or three nights in Outjo, they must feel the blood and experience the life of the locals."

Despite challenges, Ansta has big dreams for the future and before the onset of COVID-19, signed a lease agreement with the Town Council for land where she hoped to set up a campsite, conference facilities and restaurant, but due to circumstances, the expansions have now been put on hold. "I want my town to grow! Tourists must go to Etosha, but stay two or three nights in Outjo, they must feel the blood and experience the life of the locals."

Reflecting on the pandemic, Ansta admits, "Corona is not what I'm scared of. What I am worried about is losing my business because there are no tourists. If I can't do business, then I can't pay my overheads, staff or suppliers. But, we carry on despite of the virus. If I close my doors now, where will I get an income? I need to stay positive!" And with the motto, "Do it or regret it," it comes as little surprise that Ansta's outlook on life steers her towards a bright future.

Katiti Kiosk

Growth in times of crisis



construction was brought to a standstill as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Finally completed in September, the family looks forward to serving customers. "Now the tourists must just return!" says Tanja Praetorius.

Great-granddaughter of old mister Weimann – the family pioneer who started trading as a blacksmith in 1952 – Tanja explains that while both the garage and fuel station suffered a drop in sales of about 70%, none of their 48 employees were retrenched, and are still on full salaries. Highly reliant on the tourism industry – income was mostly generated through the maintenance of game viewing vehicles from surrounding lodges and tourist vehicles struggling with breakdowns and punctured tyres – the family remains hopeful that the industry will recover soon.

A long-serving beacon of hope for all those with car troubles, Weimann's Garage and Service Station has been a family business for over four generations. Currently in the hands of the Praetorius descendants, the enterprise recently celebrated the long-awaited addition of its Katiti Kiosk.

A development planned for conclusion in May, in addition to the reopening of their revamped fuel station,

"Nobody could foresee the onset of this pandemic and how it would change our lives. What we learned from it is that tomorrow is not guaranteed and we can get by with much less. We were living such a rat race and suddenly everything came to a halt, which provided the opportunity to spend more quality time together as a family – and for that we're very grateful."



!Khorro !Goreb Conservancy

Interesting facts

The conservancy houses just over 1 800 people in an area covering 128 300 hectares. It is part of the Khorixas Constituency. The conservancy does not currently have any secure income generating activities.

Make A Turn at Joseph Kamuhake

Along the road to Khorixas, on the communal farm Waterval – shortly after the last hill, as the C39 drops to enter town – a speck of colour and creativity suddenly emerges from the otherwise pale and almost deserted surroundings.

Dotted with painted tyres and scrap material repurposed as artistic beacons, Make A Turn is the brainchild of 76-year-old Joseph Kamuhake, who wakes up at 5am every morning to construct new aspects of his vision, a task he does with a smile and without any outside assistance. “The idea came to me in a dream and I still have a lot of plans for this place,” he proudly states. At the same time, he adds that he’s been working on his goal since 1997, starting out with a Cuca shop and expanding to provide a variety of basic facilities.



“When Corona arrived, it felt like the end of the world, but I decided to continue with whatever I could.”



In 2011, with the gazetting of the !Koro !Goreb Conservancy in which his enterprise is based, Joseph started construction of a campsite as means to attract and host tourists. As additional member of the conservancy, which so far does not generate any income from tourism activities, Joseph mentions that he’s recommended – and drew up plans – to find a partner for a joint venture lodge he’s dubbed Renoster Wraak (translated from Afrikaans as ‘rhino revenge’), with further suggestions for a self-sustaining garden and venue for traditional dancing.

“When Corona arrived, it felt like the end of the world, but I decided to continue with whatever I could. I’ve put every cent of my pension into creating this place and while income is still only a thought, I will not give up.”

While for now all future activities have been cut short, Joseph continues to get up at the crack of dawn and invest his energy into his aspirations for Make A Turn and the greater benefit of his community.



Supporting !Khorro !Goreb

Green Climate Fund

In 2016, the Green Climate Fund (GCF), through its Enhanced Direct Access (EDA) programme, selected Namibia as beneficiary of its US\$10 million grant facility.

In a means to “...Empower rural communities to respond to climate change in terms of awareness, adaptive capacity and low-carbon rural development,” the !Koro !Goreb Conservancy was selected as one of the communal conservancies or community forests to benefit from this grant.

Enabling better access to a precious and much needed natural resource, the !Koro !Goreb project works to serve basic human and wildlife needs for water consumption, and includes the support of small-scale gardens in selected communities. Under the banner, ‘Empower to Adapt: Creating Climate-Change Resilient Livelihoods through Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Namibia’, the !Khorro !Goreb community have benefitted from improved communal water points and boreholes upgraded with solar water pumps. Three more conservancies in the Kunene Region have received support through the fund – amongst others the neighbouring Sorris Sorris Conservancy with the installation of a 150-kilowatt solar plant in February 2020.

Global Environment Facility

Previous support to the !Khorro !Goreb conservancy constitutes financial and technical assistance through the Global Environment Facility’s Small Grants Programme (SGP), which is implemented by the UNDP.

As the driving force and instigator of the project, community member Kenneth /Uiseb mentions that during its emerging years, the conservancy identified the need for assistance with the establishment of a community-based game guard system. The funding received through the SGP were thus used to: identify and train community game guards – not only for the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources, but also as a means to fight stock theft in the area; establish a communication system through the procurement of two-way radios and other infrastructure; pay monthly allowances to the game guards for the duration of the project; and support the conservancy to host community meetings. It was initially proposed to train a large component of females for the positions, but, as Kenneth explains, “It might be a cultural stereotype, but since the work required spending time in the bush and was meant to be carried out complementary to existing farming duties, only males were appointed during the selection process.” The project was successfully completed in 2009.

Funding from the GCF and SGP is disbursed through the Environmental Investment Fund (EIF) of Namibia.

Interesting facts

A multilingual name with a diverse interpretation, the Uibasen Twyfelfontein Conservancy was gazetted in 1999 – Uibasen after the Khoekhoegowab phrase to ‘live for yourself’ and Twyfelfontein meaning ‘doubtful fountain’ in Afrikaans. One of the smallest and least populated, but most visited conservancies, its hosts the Twyfelfontein World Heritage Site with its fascinating and ancient rock engravings and art, as well as the Burnt Mountain and Organ Pipes. Since being declared a World Heritage Site in 2007, Twyfelfontein has seen an increase in tourism activities and developments, and rely heavily on these activities to support the conservancy and its members.

Marchall Hoaeb & Erna Afrikaner

In the heart of heritage

Marchall Hoaeb

Marchall Hoaeb is the food and beverage manager at Twyfelfontein Country Lodge – a twenty-year-old luxury establishment set amongst granite outcrops, with views across the desert plains and mountainous backdrops. Situated in close vicinity to the world-renowned Twyfelfontein National Heritage site and with its own rock paintings, the lodge is popular both with international and local tourists.

Marchall is one of the few who kept his position. In May it became clear that international borders would remain closed and retrenchments would be inevitable. In July 2020, the lodge owners retrenched 80 employees and



"Tomorrow is not guaranteed and we cannot foresee how the economy can be crushed."



those who remained suffered salary cuts of 50%. If the situation improves, the retrenched staff will be rehired. Nevertheless, most were advised that if another work opportunity arises that they should take it. Marchall explains that the owners tried hard to be supportive and find a solution.

Reflecting on his experience during these difficult times, Marchall shares that when you have employment, you need to respect it and be grateful for what you have. "Tomorrow is not guaranteed and we cannot foresee how the economy can be crushed."

Most of the lodge's former and current employees reside in and come from villages within the Uibasen Twyfelfontein and surrounding conservancies. Marchall grew up and went to school in the nearby village of Bergsig, and has been employed at the lodge since 2010. Starting out as scullery, Marchall later became a waiter, receptionist, front office manager, and administrative manager, until being appointed as the food and beverage manager. His ultimate ambition is to become the general manager. He loves working with people – that is what's kept him in the tourism and hospitality industry – making people happy through a simple smile, as it can "unlock even the most difficult client".

It is this attitude that helps him remain positive despite the pressure that the pandemic has placed on him, his family and community. He believes COVID-19 happened for a reason. "It taught people that the world can suddenly change and showed everyone that tourism is the backbone of our economy. But, it also made people realise that it is possible to survive with less."

Still, Marchall looks forward to see the lodge filled with visitors again and for Namibians to regain their jobs and

livelihoods. "It's all about your vision and mission. We have to stay strong. This situation will pass and then we have to be ready for the good things that lie ahead. One day we will stand on our feet again."

Erna Afrikaner

Front office manager, Erna Afrikaner, adds that Corona "got people worried", but believes that the industry will recover and with the lodge's specials in place, exclaims with certainty, "We will get guests, even during off season – the lockdowns have made people want to get out and travel, and we're hungry for guests!" Erna adds that they have all precautionary measures in place at the lodge, including sanitising stations and adhering to social distancing, although she also admits that, "Masks break the whole vibe of being hospitable, as you can't see any of our friendly faces!"

A long-standing devotee of the tourism industry, Erna's journey started in 2001 as receptionist at a lodge in the Sossusvlei area, where she received what she calls, "training-on-the-job". With stints at the coast and Kalahari, she's worked in her current position for three years. "I still wake up every morning thinking, 'Please don't ever let me forget how beautiful this landscape is'."



Twyfelfontein World Heritage Site

The sounds of silence



It is eerily quiet in the reception building, the dust and cobwebs telltale signs of a lack of footfall. A single voice carries across the room: "It has been a difficult time, very difficult".

Nicolene Brandt is the receptionist at the Twyfelfontein National Heritage Site. This site, like all national heritage sites falling under the National Heritage Council of Namibia (NHC), closed its doors from 17 March till 11 June, as per government directives from their line ministry, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. Since reopening, Nicolene estimates that they've received a mere 2% of their usual visitors. Previous years during the high season (June-September) the site easily welcomed 100 visitors per day. Now, they are lucky if there are five, and these are the expected numbers mostly during weekends, as Namibians venture out. Although none of the 17 employees at the Heritage Site were retrenched during the period of closure, or suffered salary cuts, the circum-

stances and ongoing lack of profit generated is reason for concern. Moreover, many felt the direct impacts on their communities.

Nicolene shares that it's been "very tragic" to witness people in Khorixas, where she and her family reside, lose their jobs and livelihoods. Like many others who receive a monthly income, Nicolene supports a number of extended family members. Apart from her own two children, she provides financial support to her mother, sister and her sister's children. With ongoing economic pressures, the few that earn a salary have to stretch their income across a growing number of dependents. Despite these economic hardships, Nicolene notes some positive changes in her community. For one, people are becoming more "health aware" and those who can afford it are making healthier eating choices, while the lockdown period and ban on alcohol sales reduced criminal activity in Khorixas.



Living at Louw's Inn

An uncertain waiting game

Louw's Inn is a small settlement about five kilometres from the Twyfelfontein Country Lodge, surrounded by sparse savannah and rocky hills. Residing here, are most of the staff and guides from the surrounding tourism establishments, heritage site and living museum, many of who recently lost their jobs or had their already meagre salaries reduced.

The settlement was founded 26 years ago, as tourism-related activities expanded in the region. With more or less 110 households, closely hugged together, the mix of mud, corrugated iron and brick homes mirror the diversity of people. Since the retrenchments, many residents have returned to the places across Namibia from where they initially migrated. Others travelled to the nearest town of Khorixas, in the hope of securing piece-meal work or alternative employment until the tourism sector recovers. Yet most remain, with no alternative options or places to go.

For the past ten years Sharon Geingos worked as a guide at the Damara Living Museum, a privately owned heritage enterprise that started in 2010 and is situated close to Louw's Inn on the main gravel road. With the declaration of the State of Emergency in mid-March, all activities at the museum stopped and the income dried up. "It is hard to survive and we are still struggling," Sharon explains. Their visitors were mainly international tourists, although school tours sometimes stopped by on an educational outing.

The loss of livelihoods and the situation worsened when the schools closed down during the initial and extended lockdowns. Usually residents' children reside in school hostels in Khorixas, but during the lockdown, most children were at home and there were more mouths to feed, but less money and food circulating. "People are going hungry," Sharon asserts. Even with schools reopening, there is a lack of money to send the children back to Khorixas and as a result, some children have dropped out of school.

Bianca Aribes, who is originally from Khorixas, used to work as a guide in the area. However, during the last four years she identified a need in the Louw's Inn community and established a local kindergarten, caring for children whose parents are employed at tourism establishments. Since March, her school closed down and she did not receive any income. "If it continues like this, we have no hope," she explains.

But, it was not only the loss of jobs and livelihoods that placed pressure on the Louw's Inn community. Since its establishment, the settlement struggled with adequate water access, with boreholes drilled coming up dry or turning unproductive. Consequently residents rely on the surrounding tourism establishments for their water needs, with those without transport walking up to five kilometres to fetch water, including to the neighbouring Abba-Huab Campsite.

In recent years, the Twyfelfontein Country Lodge brought along filled-up water containers from their borehole when staff were transported to and fro. With the retrenchments the number of trips drastically decreased and so did the supply of water. This illustrates

the multitude of indirect impacts of COVID-19 and its economic fallout. The lack of water access restricts the livelihood options for Louw's Inn residents, leaving no possibility for self-sustaining initiatives like owning livestock or establishing backyard gardens.

"This is a tourism area," Sharon sombrely reflects, driving

home tourism's role in the region's wellbeing. Many of Louw's Inn residents had "nice lives" before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, she says. Despite the hardships, Sharon notes that the past months were instructive. It taught people to appreciate their jobs, to save for unforeseen circumstances, and to support each other during difficult times. In terms of the future, what else is there to do? For now they will wait, with a shared question yet to be answered: "Will our jobs and livelihoods be regained?"

"People are going hungry," Sharon asserts. Even with schools reopening, there is a lack of money to send the children back to Khorixas and as a result, some children have dropped out of school.



Torra Conservancy

Interesting facts

The Torra Conservancy was the first joint partnership between a community and the private sector in Namibia and was formed in 1995. Torra has been the highest earning conservancy for many years and provides one of the largest areas of safe refuge for the endangered black rhino population.

Emil Roman

Managing Torra Conservancy and a family legacy

Emil Roman, the manager of Torra Conservancy for the past 14 years, operates from the offices at Bergsig village. Emil not only manages the conservancy, but a family legacy. His late older brother, Bennie Roman, was one of the conservancy’s founding fathers. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic Emil is under much more pressure. He explains: “Every single move now is very important to us. I have to invest all effort to get some income and to do something for the conservancy. There is no time to lose. I have to concentrate on what matters.”

“When COVID-19 started, we were on track. Income was generated through tourism activities and there was an understanding that we have an obligation to conserve, to look after the wildlife so that the tourists can keep on returning. There were clear benefits for our members.” Six months after the State of Emergency was declared, the conservancy feels like they “are starting all over again”, Emil explains.

“We cannot distribute benefits equally, there are no luxuries,” says Emil. Community projects were put on hold and



funds were channelled to critical conservation activities, such as Torra’s three rhino satellite camps and to keeping game guards and rangers in the field. Restrictions on social gatherings meant the cancellations of general meetings, with necessary communication taking place through the conservancy’s five block representatives.



Future plans in Torra also fell through and many suffered retrenchments and salary cuts. Skeleton Coast Safaris planned to start construction when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The much-anticipated Damaraland Basalt Lodge development was likewise delayed – a joint venture enterprise spearheaded by three Torra conservancy members.

"The people who started the conservancy are still the same ones driving the initiative, it is a legacy. People are committed."

“We started our operations with tourism in mind,” Emil reflects. In 1995 Damaraland Camp was established. Members began as waiters and then qualified to become managers, eventually working in hospitality and tourism across Namibia. Now people are back home in Bergsig and on surrounding farms, looking for ways to survive. “People think three times before spending N\$10,” Emil says.

At the same time, the conservancy is in the grasp of a five-year long drought, which decimated livestock and wildlife herds. Despite these pressures Emil is convinced that local attitudes towards community conservation will not change. “The people who started the conservancy are still the same ones driving the initiative, it is a legacy. People are committed.”

Still, Emil shares that he is ready to hand over the position. He hopes to spend more time with his family and to pursue his other ambitions: to build a museum at his

farm, Spaarwater, and to write a book about his brother, Bennie. The museum is to honour the history of his people, the Riemvasmakers, but also the story of his other brother, Frederick Roman, who was sadly trampled by an elephant close to Spaarwater – a harsh reminder of the everyday sacrifices community conservation entails.

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: The red rocks prevalent in the area
- Date gazetted: 1998
- Size: 3 493km²
- Approximate population: 1333 residents
- Management: Management committee of seven men, one woman; 27 staff members, including five female staff and six game guards.

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Tourism and joint venture agreements
- Rhino tracking
- Conservation hunting

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- Always have reserves and only use these when needed
- How to work with few resources sustainably to carry out essential conservation activities
- As a person you need only food and water, the rest are luxuries

Palmwag Concession

Interesting facts

Palmwag Concession has enjoyed its status as conservation area already before independence, having been identified by traditional authorities as an environment where there should be no agriculture, commercial farming, or hunting, but rather space for endangered species like black rhino, and desert adapted lion, elephants and giraffe to roam freely and undisturbed.

Where the rhinos roam

Effects on rhino conservation

One of Kunene's greatest attractions is undoubtedly its population of black rhino – the last free-roamers on the planet. Very few people know this better than Lesley Karutjaiva, director of field operations at Save the Rhino Trust (SRT).

Lesley, who was born in the nearby village of Warmquelle, has been involved in the organisation since his teenage years, explaining, "My uncle used to work at SRT and I would assist him during school holidays, acting as translator because he couldn't speak English." When he finished school in 1993, one of the founding women of SRT, Blythe Loutit, called Lesley in and asked him to join the team. He did, "without a second thought! SRT is like home to me, I grew up in this job!"

"Our conservation success story is one of the main attractions of Namibia and reasons why tourists visit the Kunene... Tourism is what keeps us alive."

As part of his duties, Lesley oversees the field teams, who patrol and protect a vast area of 25 000km² and covers 13 conservancies. Each team usually consists of two rhino rangers – SRT directly employs 12 teams of rangers, while a further 16 teams are supported through partner organisations – and two officers from the Namibian police, who ensures for the lawful handling of a potential threat. These partnerships are crucial to safeguarding the species.

COVID-19 took its toll on rhino conservation in that some of the organisation's donors reduced their financial support for 2020. As a result, certain operational changes had to be put in place, like temporarily closing the offices in Swakopmund and doing away with staff and rhino-sighting bonuses. Fortunately



no retrenchments or salary cuts were implemented and the field teams are still on the ground, but with reductions in food rations and fuel allocations.

While these changes come with their own challenges, Lesley ensures that, "everybody understood... and since most of us come from this area, we know the importance of preserving and respecting our resources."

"Our conservation success story is one of the main attractions of Namibia and reasons why tourists visit the Kunene. Our operations are strengthened through rhino tracking activities that are offered by operators in the area, and since those have stopped, we became even more aware of the importance of the tourism sector. Tourism is what keeps us alive."

Lesley compares the work of a rhino ranger to that of a goat herder: "If you just leave your livestock in the field, without someone watching over them, they will get eaten, by jackal, hyena or lions. The same rules count for our rhino and losing them to poachers. If people are hungry, problems will come."

While SRT have stuck to their aim of keeping boots on the ground and thus an eye on illegal activities, an unfortunate spin-off from the pandemic was recorded through a sudden increase in poaching. While during the past three years there had been good control over rhino populations – with zero poaching in the area – since the first countrywide lockdown four cases have been reported, one in the Palmwag area and the other two near Puros and Omatendeka.

With so many tourism-related job losses in the area, Lesley notes an increased desperation for survival. "I see how this situation is affecting local communities. My people are really struggling... We're praying that Corona will soon come to an end..."



About Save the Rhino Trust

Founded in 1982 with the mission to protect the desert-adapted black rhino of Kunene, Save the Rhino Trust plays a key role in monitoring and conducting research on the critically endangered *Diceros bicornis bicornis*.

Despite recent challenges, the organisation continues to provide what it calls, "benefits through sustainable eco-tourism on community land... increasing livelihood opportunities and incentives for local people to improve conservation measures."

Save the Rhino Trust works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, and its ranger program is supported by local partners such as IRDNC, NNF, WWF and NACSO, various tourism enterprises and operators, community members and conservancies.

Annietjie Theron

Lodge management in trying times

“In tourism, we’re used to having high and low seasons. We know how to manage those. This pandemic has caused a very long and unexpected low season... and it will be hard to get going again once the crisis blows over.”

Annietjie Theron has been with The Gondwana Collection for 11 years. Starting out as a tour guide, she progressed to admin and later lodge management, through a process she blames on, “getting bored by sitting around, especially during low season, and always looking for something else to do”. She joined Palmwag Lodge as manager in August 2020.

Annietjie believes, “As a leader, you have to stay positive,” but at the same time finds her biggest challenge as manager to keep staff motivated – and busy – especially during these trying times. During the most recent local lockdown, she kept staff occupied with spring-cleaning, fumigating, varnishing decks, and other low-maintenance work, in preparation for future guests.

Other measures involved working in shifts, and the adaptation of menus to suit the amount of guests and ingredients at hand. Annietjie shares that the lodge, like many others, suffered losses of food and beverage – including the usual favourites like beer and water – that went past their expiration dates because there were simply no customers to consume these products.



"Over the last three months, we had almost no guests, no activities, or meals to serve, and therefore generated very little income. Financially, we were under a lot of pressure to stick to a strict budget and make sure we save money in every means possible."

While restrictions were somewhat lifted after the first countrywide lockdown, there were nevertheless very few visitors to the area. “Over the last three months, we had almost no guests, no activities, or meals to serve, and therefore generated very little income. Financially, we were under a lot of pressure to stick to a strict budget and make sure we save money in every means possible.”

Further affected by state restrictions on the movement of goods and subsequent limited supply of building materials, previously planned activities came to a complete standstill. Amongst these was the construction of new guest rooms and self-catering tents, as well as upgrades to staff quarters.

Annietjie explains, “At this point, our main priority is to support our staff to put food on the table and take care of their families’ needs.” Palmwag Lodge employs 31 females and 36 males from the surrounding Torra, Anabeb and Sesfontein conservancies, who in turn do their part to support an extended network of dependents.



“It’s in our DNA” – Gondwana’s story

The Gondwana Collection – like many shareholders in the tourism sector – suffered a great blow due to the restrictions in travel and drastic decrease in visitors to Namibia. Financially, companies have been terribly affected, with Gondwana recording a loss of 95% in revenue between March and September.

In an act of open communication, at the beginning of September Gondwana’s top management sent out an emotional letter to employees, with the challenge to accept salary reductions and other cost saving measures in order to maintain collective livelihoods.

It stated, “If Gondwana collapses, then 1 100 employees (with all their dependents) will lose their livelihoods. Our communities will lose their joint venture partnerships, our shareholders will lose their investments, our suppliers will lose a valued customer, and the world will lose a great company.”

While the company continued to support all of its staff members with full salaries and no retrenchments throughout the crisis, by lack of other alternative, it implemented salary cuts of 25% from October. In addition, the four executive directors have each taken a 40% pay cut.

Amongst these is managing director, Gys Joubert, who in the letter highlights the company’s achievements, “against all odds”, but also lists the setbacks faced over the last six months, and clarifies resulting compromises, including that of salary cuts. Speaking on behalf of the company’s stakeholders, he said, “It is with great sadness and almost a sense of defeat that we have to make this announcement. We will continue to fight for our Gondwana and for each and every one of you.”

Annietjie Theron, manager at Palmwag Lodge contributes this sense of community as one of the company’s greatest virtues. “It’s about how we do things together as one big, supportive family. We call it the Gondwana DNA.” Like her, there’s an air of hope and optimism amongst management and staff at establishments across the company’s vast portfolio. Motivated by their directors, the Gondwana family knows to “weather this storm together as we wait for the rainbows to once again brighten our skies”.

The Gondwana Collection manages 31 properties across Namibia, of which seven are located within conservancies or tourism concessions, operating as joint ventures within the local communities. Etosha King Nehale Lodge, the most recent addition to this portfolio, was officially opened at the end of June 2020.



Anabeb Conservancy

Interesting facts

The Anabeb Conservancy, which is located between Palmwag and Sesfontein, was named after the Ana Tree. The conservancy is home to both Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab-speaking communities, and hosts various natural phenomena, including the 'magical' Ongongo spring. Most conservancy income is derived from tourism and conservation hunting.

Mbetjiha Zatjinda

A garden for the future

In the small settlement of Warmquelle, amongst a few scattered houses, Cuca shops and dusty roads leading into the vast beyond, a field of green protrudes from the surrounding scenery. On closer inspection, specs of colour stand out as watermelon, pumpkin, carrot, beetroot, sweet potato, corn and aubergine, amongst a garden full of other edibles.

A side project of local entrepreneur, Mbetjiha (Betty) Zatjinda – who used to run a bakery that was often frequented by tourists, but unfortunately closed down due to the recent lack of customers – the project has grown to cover about one hectare of land. "I've had the idea of setting up a prof-

itable garden for a very long time now. I started small and with a few basics only, but in April, once I realised that we won't see any visitors for a long time, I put all my energy into tending to and expanding my plot." She says that the surrounding community has been very grateful for her green fingers, especially as she often helps others out with seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. However, she also notes that her garden sometimes falls prey to unwanted visitors with sticky fingers, who seem to favour her onions.

While the garden is currently mainly for own consumption, except for a few sales to locals, Betty has plans

"...but in April, once I realised that we won't see any visitors for a long time, I put all my energy into tending to and expanding my plot."



to expand her operations over an additional eight hectares to start planting for commercial use and supplying schools and tourism establishments in the area. "I have five children and they also have children and wives. None of us are currently employed and it would be ideal if each child could get a small part of the land to grow their own food."

One of her sons, Dayan Swanepoel, who goes by the nickname Mr Cabbage, has experience working on a commercial vegetable farm near Tsumeb and says it was through his doing that Betty first showed an interest in growing vegetables. "I was the one who supplied her with the different seeds and vegetable varieties to expand her garden." While her sons seem to have a strong preference for chillies, Betty says that her favourite will always be the watermelon and proudly states, "I've already harvested twice this year!"



Climate resilient agriculture

Warmquelle is best known for its location next to the natural, warm spring it owes its name to (and also the source of water that feeds Betty's garden), as well as its proximity to the 'magical' waterfall of Ongongo, as it is called in Otjiherero.

Despite its magic, the area is prone to drought and highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, often with devastating results on local livelihoods. In an effort to support climate-resilient agricultural projects, in June 2019, Warmquelle was selected as one of three settlements in the Kunene Region to receive funding from the Green Climate Fund, along with neighbouring Sesfontein, and Fransfontein.

Climate-smart incentives for Warmquelle includes the rehabilitation of a seven hectare green scheme plot, with the aim to be used as a learning centre for small-scale farmers in the surrounding area. Other measures that intend to reduce the vulnerability of local subsistence farmers involve the implementation of drip-irrigation systems; supporting appropriate ecosystem management to improve grazing land; as well as capacity building for farmers' associations on disaster risk management and climate change adaptation.

Once fully implemented, it is expected that these projects will benefit more than 40 000 people from the region, of which 50% will be women.



"The principles of governance"

Ovehi Kasaona on the future of community conservation

When the State of Emergency was declared, Ovehi Kasaona, the chairperson of Anabeb Conservancy and a qualified business administrator, was in Windhoek. He immediately called the conservancy office in Warmquell and instructed the staff to stop operations and to work in rotational shifts. He shifted monthly committee meetings to quarterly meetings, and cancelled general meetings. All resources were redirected to wildlife management. "Luckily corona found us in a good financial position," Ovehi says. This meant no reduction in salaries or retrenchment for the conservancy staff and key conservation activities, such as wildlife monitoring, could continue.

Known for being "tough with finance", Ovehi explains that, "Being the chairperson is not an easy job." In the past months several people came back to him, thankful for the savings that the conservancy could lean on during this time. It is these "principles of governance", which Ovehi believes lie at the heart of Anabeb's resilience during the COVID-19 crisis and the sustainability of community conservation.

In the past ten years Ovehi juggled between his own profession and dedication to his home communities. Born and raised in Warmquell, he pursued education and work in Windhoek. In 2011 Chief Lucky Kasaona, the IRD-NC acting assistant director, told Ovehi "we need your help here". Ovehi returned from Windhoek and attended his first AGM where he was elected as the treasurer. At the same time, between 2011 and 2013, he completed his studies in Business Administration at the International University of Management (IUM). In 2016 he joined the conservancy in an advisory role. At this point he was working both for the conservancy and for the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture as a chief control officer. In 2018



"I feel it. People are hardly cooking, people are starving. When I ask for somebody to cook for the conservancy, people are fighting for the position. People are desperate, just to have something to carry home."

he was elected as conservancy chairperson. Although he accepted this position, he sees it only as a temporary role and a chance to make a larger impact.

Ovehi wants to transform the criteria for appointing management committees to include minimum requirements, such as a Grade 10 qualification, literacy skills and a basic understanding of community conservation and its constitution. He hopes to train managers and to conduct research on their management plans for his MBA, which

he is currently pursuing. His second vision entails implementing key social development projects in Anabeb. This include a women's tailoring business, a computer literacy project for the youth, and a community garden. "The conservancy needs to have an impact. The concept is very good, but the implementation is lacking. Only through hard work can we achieve the goals," says Ovehi.

With the conservancy's main earnings reduced due to COVID-19, a major cutback is on community benefits. Community projects, such as cash benefits for funerals, student grants, and a project supplying homesteads with taps and wildlife water-points, are all on hold. Looking beyond tourism-based activities some ideas are considered, such as investing in a retail business in Opuwo. In the past conservancy members were reluctant to diversify. With the current situation Ovehi hopes that people will change their minds.

Many here, like elsewhere, suffered retrenchments and salary-cuts. "Livelihoods worsened," Ovehi explains. "I feel it. People are hardly cooking, people are starving. When I ask for somebody to cook for the conservancy, people are fighting for the position. People are desperate, just to have something to carry home." In trying to cope with the hard times, new backyard gardens in Warmquell are sprouting and small-scale businesses are popping up: one person started his own barbershop, another is sewing and selling face masks.

The ongoing drought is an extra burden. People not only lost livestock but hunting quotas decreased. Nevertheless, Ovehi is dedicated to manage a recovery period: "I told conservancy members that I don't want to hear a gunshot until we have recovered." The challenge is to "bring back the meaning of conservation to peoples' minds. Our fathers were game guards. That is how we started," says Ovehi.

Despite their efforts, there has been an increase in illegal hunting of kudu and zebra, mainly by intruders who sell the meat in Oshakati. Another key challenge is the lack of adequate compensation for human-wildlife conflict, with MEFT seen as slow to respond and to follow-up. "They are diminishing our efforts. MEFT must be addressed," Ovehi says, frustrated. Still, he is confident that the conservancy will ultimately weather the COVID-19 storm: "Anabeb communities have conservation at heart."

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: The Ana Tree
- Date gazetted: 2003
- Size: 1570 km²
- Approximate population: 1 498
- Management: Management committee of 14 men and three women; executive committee of 29 salaried staff, including nine game guards

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Tourism and joint venture agreements
- Conservation hunting

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- Financial management moved online
- Fuel managed with a fuel card, instead of cash
- Conservancy cannot rely on tourism alone as source of income
- The importance of education. "If the conservancy office closes, you need to be able to be re-hired."



Sesfontein Conservancy

Interesting facts

Sesfontein was named after the Afrikaans word for 'six fountains'. One of the first community game guards, Goliat Kasaona, was appointed here in 1982. Sesfontein Conservancy has been financially independent since 2009 and provides habitat to many of the country's near-endemic bird species and a diversity of wildlife.

Gideon Hambo

Rebuilding the future

The main attraction of Sesfontein is undoubtedly its historical fort, built in 1896 by the German *Schutztruppe* to serve as a control point for illegal activities, like the trade of weapons and poaching of elephant and rhino. When the Germans left their post in 1914, the building was left to nature's devices and fell into disrepair until the early 1990s, when it was decided to reconstruct the fort for tourism purposes.

Local resident, Gideon Hambo, was part of the rebuilding process, which he mentions involved a lot of "clay work". As the initial building was constructed out of clay bricks, and the aim was to renovate the building as close to its origins as possible, the team was required to replicate the brick making process. "It involved digging a large pit and mixing the clay with our feet," explains Gideon. A process that took several years, once the building was finally ready for guests, Gideon was employed as a permanent worker in the maintenance department. Since then, he's worked at Fort Sesfontein in various capacities, including as fuel station attendant, tour guide, waiter and assistant manager, until 2014 when he was appointed to his current position as general manager.

"COVID-19 changed everything," he admits. "We used to employ 28 people on a permanent basis, but due to a lack of guests, we were forced to adjust our working schedule. We didn't want to let any people go, so we created a shift-based system, where each employee gets the chance to work for one week per month." Salaries were reduced



accordingly and Gideon explains that this has had a negative impact on everyone. "You are used to getting a certain amount per month and with that you also make your plans, like setting up loan repayments and other monthly deductions. Those deductions still continue as normal, but suddenly the salary is a quarter of what it used to be..."

For Gideon it has also been a challenge to adapt to the changes at home, since his school-going children, who previously received the bulk of their nutrition via the hostels where they were housed, were now suddenly hungry at home – and that while he still had to continue paying hostel fees. In addition to his own children, Gideon and his wife, as the only breadwinners in the family, also takes care of his wife's sister and her kids, bringing the total number of dependents in their household to 12. As a means to survival, and also to support his community, he started selling sustenance packages (consisting of goods like maize meal, sugar and washing powder) to pensioners on a loan-based system, since most shops in town have stopped providing credit to customers.

While he admits that some of the government's regulations were also beneficial to the community, especially the closing of bars and shebeens, since "we had zero crime and no noise," there are always two sides to consider, because "for the owners of those businesses, it is of course a different story".

Gideon knows how important it is not to lose hope and ends, "As long as we are alive, something good will surely come our way again."

Wilbard Neliwa

Transitioning through the Desert Kingdom



In March of 2008, Wilbard Neliwa relocated to Sesfontein from his hometown of Ruacana, in search of better economic opportunities. "I saw it as a tourist destination, where a lot of people pass through." Soon after, he opened a car and tyre repair shop, dubbed Desert Kingdom, where he serves mainly international travellers on their journey through the region. "Business has been very slow since there are no more tourists, and to make things worse, in February someone opened another repair shop in the same street, so now I also have a competitor."

Wilbard also tries his hand at chicken farming, supplying eggs to nearby tourism establishments like Sesfontein Guesthouse and Natural Selection's remote Hoanib Valley Camp. Unfortunately, COVID-19 had a negative impact on this business too, in that demand suddenly dropped. He

explains that it costs him N\$2.70 per egg in terms of fodder, while he was forced to sell his eggs for only N\$2.00 during the past months. As a result, he couldn't buy as much fodder as usual, which also impacted his hens. "In February I still had 192 layers, now there are only 63 left."

Fortunately for Wilbard, he receives a secure income from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform in Sesfontein, where he is employed as senior agricultural technician. "Tobacco is usually grown for cash sales – which is a very profitable business – but we also produce up to five tonnes of pumpkin per year, which is sold all the way to Outjo." He explains that while crop farming in the area was mostly focussed on own consumption, this year the ministry encouraged local farmers to increase their production for the commercial market in a means to support economic growth.

While opportunities relating to tourism have dwindled over the last months, Wilbard agrees that there is certainly scope for expansion and further development in the agricultural sector and through his role at the ministry hopes to encourage others to look into creating alternative income for themselves.

Mario Namgongo

A chef's tale

"My dream has always been to open up my own sushi restaurant in Windhoek," says Mario Johannes Namgongo, head chef at Sesfontein Guest House. Having trained as a sushi chef at Ocean Basket in Swakopmund, Mario has since worked at various restaurants and lodge's kitchens, most recently at Khwarib Lodge, until he was retrenched in March, as the COVID-19 pandemic started taking its toll on the tourism industry. "But now, I don't even mind what kind of food I make anymore, if a request for pizza or cake comes along, I will make it."

After his retrenchment, Mario was left in dire straits. "I came to Sesfontein Guest House begging for work and willing to do anything, even if it was just an odd job for N\$50 or N\$100." The guesthouse didn't originally have a vacancy for a chef and Mario had to make do with the work that was available. "I started by helping out with construction work, fetching clay and sand for bricks. I even tried welding and grinding, but it was a bit dangerous, so I did brick laying, but my walls came out skew...at least painting was easy!" he laughs.



Mario notes that the pandemic brought him a lot of new ideas out of desperation for survival. First, he thought of selling water pumps to communities in the Oshana region, where he hails from, but realised the start-up capital required would be too much. Then he considered starting a chicken farm, but noted that feeding them and finding buyers in an already crowded market would be tricky.

In the end, Mario was grateful for getting a more stable opportunity in Sesfontein and being able to return to the kitchen. "My motto is to never give up. I'm interested in learning everything now – I see things are changing and that many people are not doing okay. And it's so important to open your mind..."

Mario (in the orange shirt) is featured here with the supportive team at Sesfontein Guest House.

"Drought is another corona"

Navigating an economic and environmental crisis

“Drought has really made our people poor. The whole country received rain, except the Kunene Region. You will not believe the extent of the drought until you see the cattle carcasses. We have not received good rain. COVID-19 impacted those who were retrenched or had their salaries reduced. The drought has affected 80% of the community. Where you had 20 cattle before, now you are left with two,” says Usiel Nuab, the chairperson at Sesfontein Conservancy.

When talking to the Sesfontein conservancy committee members and traditional authority representatives, it is clear that COVID-19’s multifaceted impacts cannot be discussed without considering the ongoing drought. The loss of livelihoods due to the COVID-19 economic fallout dealt a double blow. More than 20 to 30 employees were retrenched from tourism establishments or had their salaries reduced. Other persons working in Windhoek and Walvis Bay returned home after job losses.

“It is a global issue, the world came to a stop,” Pienaar Kasupi, additional member, asserts. “There were negoti-

ations with the tourism and joint-venture establishments. We pleaded with them to keep the employees. But eventually we witnessed the situation ourselves,” Usiel explains. “It is now a time to share. It is a difficult time.”

The lack of tourism activities not only leads to the loss of jobs. In April, two rhinos were poached on the border of Puros and Sesfontein conservancy in the Hoanib River. Usually, “everybody runs to the river, the Hoanib River is like a monument”, Pienaar points out. More tourists and wildlife guides on the ground means more joint surveillance and protection. “Tourism played an important role,” headman Petrus Ganuseb emphasises. In the past, the conservancy worked together with the lodges to protect wildlife.

When the conservancy held their COVID-19 meeting there was an understanding that salaries and expenses would be cut. “But we did not lie down. We realised that the little left in the pot needs to be used carefully. So we are still proceeding,” Usiel asserts. “We had savings, we were lucky,” adds Bernardus Hoeb, the secretary. Their

"But we did not lie down. We realised that the little left in the pot needs to be used carefully. So we are still proceeding."



savings and money received through the CRRRF fund were redirected into key wildlife protection activities and basic operational costs.

Before COVID-19, money was allocated to expand the community gardens, to improve Sesfontein’s graveyard and to implement new water infrastructure, especially the laying of pipes to cattle-posts. Apart from these projects, the conservancy supported 30 students and additional training programmes, including a hospitality training programme hosted in Sesfontein. “But now we first have to see how we will get bread on the table, before we decide how it will be shared,” Bernardus says. The conservancy is already struggling to manage their pending human-wildlife claims. Before, approximately N\$100-200 000 was allocated annually to address such claims. “It is really where we are pressured now,” vice-secretary, Redney Kasupi asserts. “Still we are together with the community. Funeral benefits continue and we are planning how we can distribute Christmas packages to the pensioners as we usually do,” says Usiel.

In response to these difficult times, backyard and community garden activity in Sesfontein is expanding – with many investing in cash crops such as tobacco, which are sold in Opuwo and Oshakati. Bernardus observes: “Our garden was not this green. From April onwards people have been planting and harvesting. The wheat is already harvested. We hope that this stays in peoples’ minds.” Although there is enough spring water in Sesfontein, the problem is its distribution – how to pump water and irrigate the expanding fields. Other challenges include access to tractors, proper fencing and seeds.

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: The Afrikaans word for ‘six fountains’
- Date gazetted: 2003
- Size: 2465 km²
- Approximate population: 1 835
- Management: Management committee of seven men and two women; 14 salaried staff, including five game guards and two rhino rangers.

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Tourism and joint ventures
- Conservation hunting

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- New cost-cutting strategies can be implemented
- Financial management moved online
- There is a shared empathy: “A person will not borrow a friend’s car without asking as he knows the other person also feels the ‘heat’ of COVID-19”
- Things can change in the blink of an eye

Ozondundu Conservancy

Interesting facts

Ozondundu is home to the holy Otjize mountain where Himba women harvest ochre. In Okarumbu, a dry-season cattle-post, households share their solar-powered borehole with multiple elephant herds on a daily basis. In a search for sustenance, a rising trend in gardening has been noted around the Otjapitjapi spring, with several new households hoping to find alternative means of survival.

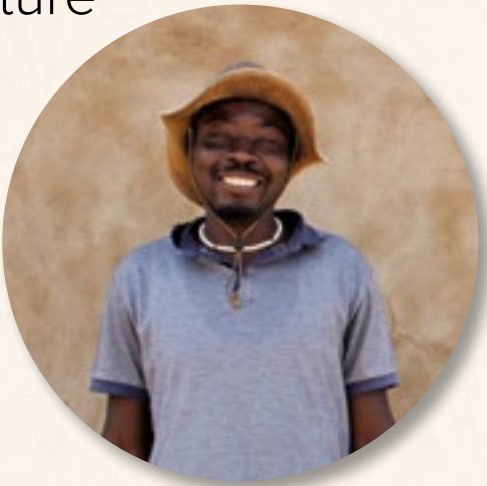
Kavehepuruakuani Katjiku

On the conservancy’s stolen future

Surrounded by tufa cliffs, wild fig trees and lush growth, lies the cooling Otjitaime spring – Ozondundu Conservancy’s beautiful and revered site. 2020 was set to be the year that the conservancy finally embarked upon its first joint-venture enterprise. Chalets and a lodge would sit perched on the upper cliff, overlooking the spring and mountain valleys below. Discussions with a US-based investor and French tour operator Damarana Safaris were finalised at the end of 2019, with construction set to commence at the beginning of 2020.

In March it was clear that a global crisis was unravelling. The investor returned to the US and communication went silent. Economic impacts reverberated globally, making it impossible to foresee future returns in the tourism sector. Some local residents believe that the Otjitaime spring is endowed with bad luck. In the past, there have been multiple investors who showed an interest, yet each time the projects did not materialise. This time around it seemed a sure a thing, and then COVID-19 happened.

According to Eben-Ezer Tjiho, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) Kunene’s cluster



coordinator, “It was a special proposal, you could see a lot of people benefiting from it.” The agreement included plans to source staff from the surrounding communities, to support local production of needed goods and building materials, and to conserve the spring’s ecological integrity. The investor agreed to buy the conservancy’s trophy hunting quotas to support wildlife conservation. “It would have brought a lot of development to the area,” Eben says.



Kavehepuruakuani Katjiku, Ozondundu’s newly elected chairperson, lives in Otjapitjapi village. He explains with great disappointment that, “everything was blocked”. Kavehepuruakuani has been the chairperson since September 2020: “It is very tough to work without payment.” When he was elected the conservancy had N\$79 in their account. The CRRRF fund enabled them to pay some salaries, including to the five game guards.

Eventually, the investors announced that their plans were on hold and advised the conservancy to rather search for a trophy-hunting contract – which remains the conservancy’s main income stream. A potential company in Swakopmund was identified, yet the contract first had to be reviewed by Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT). The company has a contract with multiple neighbouring conservancies and MEFT was concerned that he would be unable to meet his contractual agreements given the current lack of international hunters. Ozondundu petitioned to the MEFT and eventually the contract was approved. Yet the contract signing was again delayed due to regional lockdowns and requirements for all stakeholders to be present.

COVID-19’s larger socio-economic impacts are also felt in Ozondundu. People employed elsewhere no longer send remittances, and some who were employed as security guards in Walvis Bay are back home in the village after being retrenched. Local businesses are likewise crumbling. Ngavahue Katundu, an Otjapitjapi resident, is barely selling anything from her Cuca shop and the chairperson’s brick-making business is at a stand-still. With many short on cash, there are no customers. Here too, the economic fall-out from COVID-19 is just another blow to livelihoods already under pressure due to the drought.

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: local mountains
- Date gazetted: 2003
- Size: 745 km²
- Approximate population: 394
- Management: five men and four women; five game guards

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Conservation hunting

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- New cost-cutting strategies can be implemented
- Trophy hunting alone won’t suffice to sustain the conservancy
- It is important to keep “a shorter budget” and have savings for an uncertain future
- Expand in crop production – and variety – to be more self-sustainable

Opuwo Surrounds

A brief history of Opuwo

Regional capital of the Kunene, Opuwo is a bustling hub that offers insight into a harmonious mix of traditional and modern lifestyles and cultures. While best known as the land of the semi-nomadic Himba people, the area also hosts an intriguing selection of other indigenous peoples, like the Zemba, Tjimba and Twa, making it the ideal destination for a cultural education. The town is also a favoured stopover for those on a mission to explore the rugged geological beauty of the surrounding landscapes and one of the largest waterfalls in Africa, the Epupa Falls.

Quiet times

At Kaoko Tourist Info Centre



At the Kaoko Tourist Information Centre in Opuwo, it is quiet and peaceful, not at all the kind of atmosphere one would expect at the only tourism and culture hub in town. John Jakurama and Tjinginde (Tjingi) Katuritara, two local guides and the centre's assistant manager and secretary respectively, shares that it's been a difficult year. January was the last time people walked through their doors. "We survive through tourism and have been badly affected." Tjingi notes that as an information centre they cannot close their doors, since there might be local travellers in need of assistance. So, they wait.

John is the main breadwinner in his family and although he only has one child of his own, he also takes care of his brother's six children. (His brother, Kemuu Jakurama, was one of the founding members of the centre in 1990, but sadly passed away some years ago). "It's very hard to support the children," he says. "Some days there's something, other days there's nothing," referring to being able to put food on the table. Working at the centre is purely on a voluntary basis and income is only generated through guiding activities and selling crafts. John says that the centre applied for government relief funding, and he even turned to the local radio to air their concerns, but till date they have received no support. The only activity and meagre income they've had this year, was through assisting the Kalahari People's

"It's complicated, because we don't know when the virus will end, so we are still on a very dark road."

Fund to distribute masks, soaps and sanitisers, and share information on the corona virus to local villagers in their indigenous tongues of Ovahimba, Ovatjimba, Ovazemba and Ovatwa. The centre usually works hand in hand with a number of international universities, researchers and organisations, but, as John says, "They only support us when there's work", and this year there's not been much of it.

Tjingi says that despite the hardships, he's not interested in looking for opportunities elsewhere. "I don't want to change. I like to explore and work with people, and I decided to become a tour guide so I can learn more about other cultures and countries. I want to study further in the field and maybe one day even become a lecturer myself." John adds that he also believes tourism is his calling and wants to play his part in training the youth – and keep his brother's legacy alive. And while both admit that the future seems very uncertain – "It's complicated, because we don't know when the virus will end, so we are still on a very dark road," says Tjitji – neither of them are willing to give up on their dreams.

John adds, "Through this crisis, we realised that the tourism industry is very sensitive, and without tourists there will be no income. But, we continue to stay positive. We are African, we are strong and we will survive – we know how to do it."

Kaokoland Restaurant



Annette Redelinghuys – Taking it day by day

The story of Kaokoland Restaurant goes back all the way to a time before Independence, when Annette and Rieme Redelinghuys first came to Namibia. Originally from South Africa, the couple were stationed in Opuwo for official duty and went through various trades in other sectors throughout the country before finally moving back to Opuwo to start their enterprise, "with a toaster and a cooler box for drinks", says Annette.

"In the beginning we catered mainly to locals – tourists were a bonus – but as time went by and economic pressure increased on local populations, our market shifted. And then came COVID-19..." Annette explains that as an essential service, they could cater to locals through take-away meals, and managed to get by since they were one of the only operational restaurants in town. Regardless, the restaurant experienced a 80% drop in income during the first local lockdown, working shifts had to be implemented and salaries were cut by 50%. "We barely managed to keep our doors open." While operations have picked up since the last curfew was lifted and Namibian business people starting frequenting town again, Annette remains careful about making future plans. "I've decided to not think about the future, but rather take every day as it comes."

She admits that the pandemic "opened our minds", as it allowed the opportunity to get out of the stagnant space we so easily fall into as part of everyday life. "All of a sudden we had no clients and then you really have to start thinking out of the box in terms of making an income, even if it's just to keep things going." Pre-packed meals proved to be a great success, and is something that the restaurant will continue making, especially since it caters to an increasing demand for affordable meals to the locals, which has once again become their largest clientele.

In August, when the restaurant was finally able to serve sit-down clients again, Annette could increase staff payments to their full salaries before the crisis, and was even able to offer a position to one of her ex-employees, who lost his job at a tourism establishment.

Jacky Uazunju Usuta – Coming back to the beginning

Jacky Uazunju Usuta, along with his brothers Jimmy and Jackson, forms part of a set of triplets who hail from Warmquelle. While his brothers chose to work in education, Jacky has a passion for the tourism sector, and started his journey with a 6-month training course in hospitality at the Community Skills Development Centre (COSDEC) in Opuwo. His very first job was as waiter at the Kaokoland Restaurant, where he obtained the initial taste for working with guests, before moving on to what he calls, "greener pastures and better pay".

Since leaving the restaurant in 2014, Jacky has worked at various lodges in the area, until he was offered a position at Onguma Tented Camp near Etosha in January this year. "I only worked for two months and then the corona virus came. It was during my off days that they called me and told me not to come back." He still received a basic salary for two more months, but then the cash dried up.

"The pandemic really affected me. I wanted to start with a better life at Onguma – it was a very good salary." Jacky has always been a man with a plan and knows that in life you have to start from scratch and work your way up, a process that can take some time. "My mission is to become a guide. I already know my birds well." His favourites are the secretary bird and crimson-breasted shrike – "They have such nice colours, but really, most birds are beautiful!" Jacky is grateful to Annette for allowing him back and offering him a source of income while the industry recovers. He says, "The virus is here to stay. We can only pray to God and continue with our plans."



Eben-Ezer Tjiho

On balancing COVID-support and community conservation

Eben-Ezer Tjiho is the Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC)'s cluster coordinator in the Kunene Region. He has been working for IRDNC since 2005, initially as the head of Natural Resource Management (NRM).

Originally from Otjinene in the Omaheke Region, Eben fell in love with the Kunene Region on his first IRDNC job attachment while completing his Diploma in Community Development. In reflecting on the past months at IRDNC, Eben admits that it "was not easy for us on a personal level".

With the declaration of the State of Emergency, IRDNC's work activities were recognised as 'essential services'. Still, during the first months their usual activities were put on hold while COVID-support for the conservancies was prioritised. IRDNC convinced donors to be flexible with budget allocations, to include support for communities through information dissemination and sponsoring sanitisers and soaps.



"COVID came like a sharp knife, cutting off all income to conservancies."



"We were afraid the first two months, especially when we ran into tourists," Eben shares. Communities in the region were also difficult to reach. The drought forced many to create cattle-posts far from the villages in search of grazing, while some places are 200 km away yet take up to seven hours to reach due to the state of the roads. "A lot of the days I slept in the veld. It was difficult," Eben recalls, "I had no rest at all." When some communities understood the risks, IRDNC staff were no longer welcomed with open arms, with some fearing that they were "bringing corona". This made their work challenging. "Life was not usual anymore," Eben explains.

He looks forward to be reunited with his wife who works and lives in Windhoek, together with two of his children. Due to regional lockdowns, his workload, and their shared fears of infection, Eben and his wife were separated for over six months. He only managed to return to Otjinene once to check on his livestock. Two of Eben's children also lost their jobs and now rely on him for support. "That is how you feel the weight of the impact," he asserts with a shake of his head. In reflecting on the wider economic situation, he adds, "Now, when you spend N\$500 in the grocery store, you leave the store carrying much less bags than usual."

IRDNC now manages to balance their budget allocations to include COVID-support in every field visit. Yet there are further challenges. "COVID came like a sharp knife, cutting off all income to conservancies," says Eben.

In Purros and Marienfluss up to 80% of the youth were employed on the lodges. "Now you can see the marks of poverty in communities. There is no more food on the table. They have been hit hard." Although the CRRRF fund has helped, it has not relieved the loss of livelihoods. "Something came in uncalled for and people were unprepared. They had to take it. But you can see now how the standard of living is going backwards. Many moved back to the rural area where they can survive with fewer expenses," Eben declares.

These economic and environmental pressures in the Kunene is leading to increased incidences of "poaching for the pot", or illegal hunting. "It is a matter of daily survival," Eben says with sympathy and explains that he was expecting this to happen. What did surprise him was the sudden increase in rhino poaching incidences this year in comparison to the previous two years. He suspects that it is because of "less boots on the ground", less tourists and guides. Yet it could also be related to the fact that many more people are unemployed, causing some to revert to illegal activities.

For Eben the future of community conservation "is a big question mark". He believes, "It just depends on how long COVID-19 will be with us and on the decision-makers, such as the MEFT." However, in terms of wildlife conservation, with the prediction of better rainy seasons to come, Eben has a general positive outlook, "I see a great future..."

Elizabeth Ngombe

Queen of crafts

In 1989, 'Queen' Elizabeth Ngombe started hanging around the local service station with a selection of hand-crafted baskets. "The locals were laughing at me, but the visitors loved it! They always said, 'Look at that one!' and then ended up buying something from me." In 2015, she was allocated an official stand, along with other craft sellers, at the entrance of a local grocery store – a prime spot for catching the attention of visitors. Queen specialises in local, traditional crafts, including Himba dolls and adornments like necklaces, leather cloths, bracelets, shells and containers for cosmetics. She also sells calabashes to the locals, and most recently has started trading in masks.

For the first two months of lockdown, when there was "no-one walking around, only the police, checking up on us", Queen stayed at home, making necklaces. And when she opened up shop again in June, business was very different. "There's no income, no money, nothing to eat. We are just quiet, since there are no customers. The cockroaches and moths have started eating our leather items and we have lost many things during this time of corona."



It's been 31 years and not once has Queen regretted working in her trade as a proud crafter. Not even this year, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Even though I'm suffering, I really enjoy my job," she says. "We heard from the president that the borders are open and tourists are coming, so we have hope that the income will also return soon."

Puros Conservancy

Interesting facts

An arid landscape with hills, plains, wooded river valleys and desert landscapes, Puros Conservancy houses various desert-adapted wildlife, including lions and elephants, and features the cultures of the Ovahimba and Herero people.

Rodney Tjavara

On conservation and human-wildlife conflict



"What if we didn't have tourism? Without tourists, we won't survive - those are the people who keep our country alive."

"COVID-19 has not reached us yet. Here, in the area where I live, I haven't heard of anyone who has gotten ill. It's still clean here." Rodney Tjavara is a lion and elephant ranger who is based in the village of Tomakas and works in the Puros Conservancy, which covers an area of 3 562 km². With a tiny population of only about 600 people and a plethora of desert-adapted wildlife, income in the area is dependent on conservation hunting, tourism and crafts.

In an environment where grazing is becoming increasingly scarce, human-wildlife conflict is of concern to the local people, who are predominantly livestock farmers and often experience attacks on their animals from predators like hyena, lion and jackal. Although there have been recordings of conflict for many years, the conservancy made headlines in 2016, when four of the 'five musketeers' – a pride of young male lions who enjoyed global admiration through the Vanishing Kings documentaries – were killed by local

farmers. Less than a year later, the last musketeer, who had since been relocated to an area more than 400 km south, was found poisoned, along with a lioness and two cubs.

"You always have to consider both sides," says Rodney. On the one hand, livestock serves as a personal asset and ensures for immediate survival, on the other, wildlife conservation is what attracts tourists to Namibia, which leads to income and benefits to the greater community.

"What if we didn't have tourism? Without tourists, we won't survive – those are the people who keep our country alive." Regardless of the fact that there are tourists or not, Rodney also notes that as a person in charge of protecting wildlife, he has to continue with his duties. "We can't stop because of corona," although the past months have proven difficult, with salary reductions because of less support from international donations. "But, it will be okay. This is the African life – we have to struggle – and survive, with the little that we've got."

A recent case of conflict

In March 2020, a lioness was shot dead in the nearby Anabeb Conservancy. She had been running amok amongst livestock in the area, "killing 18 goats and some donkeys", according to Rodney. "Because of the drought, farmers had moved some of their livestock to areas where there were still some grass left, and they came in the way of a hungry lion." Unfortunately, the lioness also had two cubs, which were consequently left orphaned. Not being able to fend for themselves, conservation initiatives in the area tried to assist the pair by providing them with donkey and game meat, but when it became clear that the cubs won't survive, the MEFT decided to relocate them to the N/a'an ku sê wildlife sanctuary. Still in a process of recovery, once ready, they will be moved to the organisation's Zannier Reserve, which also hosts five other desert-adapted lions, similarly rescued from being killed. Despite best efforts and strong partnerships between government, organisations and the private sector, human-wildlife conflict remains a complex matter that requires on-going solutions.

Ombazu Conservancy

Interesting facts

In Otjiherero 'ombazu' refers to custom, tradition and culture. It is one of the newer conservancies, registered in 2012. It is a low-income conservancy, with no joint ventures and limited hunting quotas.

Rimunikavi John Tjipurua

New possibilities at Mungunda camp



"My feeling is that the situation is very bad, we are not earning, we are badly affected."

Rimunikavi John Tjipurua is a heritage tourism entrepreneur and cultural educator based in Ombazu Conservancy. At 32 years, he is the owner and manager of Mungunda Camp and Ovahimba Living Museum. The camp is situated next to a gravel road, more or less 40km north of Opuwo. Conveniently on the way to the Epupa Falls, it is the perfect stopover for tourists and tour groups that want to immerse themselves in a cultural experience.

Yet, in reflecting on the past six to seven months, John says: "I just want corona to be over. I am so tired, so depressed. I want corona to be over and for travellers to return. Everything should come back to life. We are in the darkness, in the middle of nowhere."

John's uncle started the Mungunda campsite in 2006, with John helping him to clear and fence the area during his school holidays. With his uncle pursuing his law degree and career, he decided to hand over the site to John in 2007. For five years John was alone in the bush, trying to build up the campsite with few resources. He created walking trails and discovered what the area had to offer,

including caves and rock paintings. Some of his early clients encouraged him to move forward and friends and family assisted him.

John first got the idea to add a living museum after he visited the Great Lesedi Cultural Village and Lodge – a heritage themed establishment in South Africa – during a tourism exchange trip organised by the Namibian Tourism Board in 2015. Passionate about sharing, documenting and keeping Himba cultural practices and traditions alive, this form of tourism resonated deeply with him. He conducted community consultations and found six women willing to participate. Initially only one homestead was established, but in 2016 it evolved into a fully-fledged "cultural village", with 35 people. John developed different programmes for visitors and generated additional income by selling crafts. To support the project, they invested in livestock for the village.

During peak season (May-September) the cultural village would receive up to 120 people, while the camp had a few visitors or groups passing through. Since the State of Emergency was declared they have had only a few local clients. "My feeling is that the situation is very bad", John observes, "we are not earning, we are badly affected". He explains, "I have to do everything, by all means necessary, to provide food for my community. It is difficult for me." Despite this harsh situation John strongly asserts: "I have to stay positive." In thinking about the future he explains that the current situation has driven them to ask: "What are the possibilities? What can we do beside tourism?"

Fortunately, the village received support from the Living Culture Foundation of Namibia that sponsored food parcels. One friend in Australia also opened an online fund-raising initiative. They managed to raise N\$ 60 000 which was used to purchase a solar panel and water-pumps. "It was really a very beautiful gesture," says John. The production of food is an important element here and with water-access, the camp has managed to expand their vegetable garden, with the aim to become more self-sustainable – a first step towards a future with new possibilities.



Oshikoto



The region is named after the intriguing sinkhole of Lake Otjikoto, located near the former capital, Tsumeb. Its most attractive feature however, is also Namibia's star tourist destination, the Etosha National Park, which stretches across the southwestern part of the Oshikoto Region. The Ondonga name for the pan was Etotha, meaning 'the place where no plants grow', but early European traders were unable to pronounce the word, and it was renamed to 'Etosha'.

- Size: 38,685 km²
- Approximate population: 195 165
- Administrative capital: Omuthiya
- Climate: Semi-arid, average annual rainfall 350–550 mm
- Environment: Mopane, saline desert with dwarf savanna, woodlands, savanna & karstveld
- Land-use practices: Agro-pastoral farming systems & conservation in the north; commercial cattle ranching, agriculture & mining in the south
- Registered communal conservancies: 1
- Conservancy population: 5 069
- Community forests: 2
- National parks: Etosha National Park

Omuthiya Surrounds

A short history of Omuthiya

Omuthiyagwiipundi, or Omithiya in short, was officiated as district capital in August 2008, taking over responsibility from Tsumeb as the former capital. As part of the inauguration, the government invested millions into basic infrastructure during the years following, and Omuthiya now boasts modern amenities, services and facilities found in other larger towns throughout the country. Situated a mere 10 kilometres to the northern gate of the Etosha National Park, the town not only makes for a great refreshment stop along the way, but also acts as an interesting showcase of contemporary developments alongside the traditional. An example of this can be seen at the annual Miss Othithiya event, a locally renowned beauty pageant named after the natural springs where it is held. A favoured water spot situated halfway between the town and park – the spring hosts both thirsty wildlife and local inhabitants who come to cool off and socialise.

Samuel Kamati & Ester Leonard Celebrating heritage in times of crisis

“In our tradition, the cock is a symbol for time. When it crows, we know that it’s time to wake up. It warns, ‘Wake up! Wake up! There’s an enemy amongst us!’” Arts extension officer at Omuthiya Cultural Centre, Samuel Kamati, makes specific reference to the cock’s cry during COVID-19, but quickly adds, “You can choose your own interpretation.”

The artist behind a collection of decorative birds, created from scrap material found in his environment, Samuel notes, “COVID-19 affected me very much, my dear. Even for this exhibition, we expected a lot of people...”

The exhibition he is referring to forms part of a national campaign to highlight heritage, aptly named, Namibian Heritage Week. An initiative by the National Heritage Council, in partnership with the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), this year’s event was financially supported through the National Arts Council of Namibia’s Arts & Culture COVID-19 Relief Fund, and held under the theme, *Ombazu Ndjiritutumuna*, which translates into ‘Building Cultural Resilience – The New Normal’ from Otjiherero. Celebrated annually, the event was hosted across the country, with various events, activities and exhibitions, between 21 and 27 September.

Restricted to a maximum of 100 attendees, the opening ceremony at Omuthiya Cultural Centre was modified to host a limited audience and focussed on producing shareable content for social media, for a wider reach. Samuel and his team arranged for pre-recordings of choirs and other performance groups who were initially planned to perform live, but invited an individual storyteller to create for some personal interaction on the day.



Arts officer, Ester Leonard, adds, “We didn’t feel that *woema* that you normally expect from a launch event, because the group energy was simply not there, so that was a bit of a downer. On the other hand, it was good in that we only had to prepare for a few people and had limited hosting expenses.”

Another initiative in the making at Omuthiya Cultural Centre is that of the Museum of Namibian Music, which forms part of a two-year project by the MAN and is funded

by the European Union, called Museum Development as a Tool for Strengthening Cultural Rights in Namibia. The museum, which was supposed to open in August, was indefinitely postponed until “we can host larger groups again”, according to Ester. Apart from Samuel’s recycled birds and a presentation on the mighty baobab tree, the newly constructed museum currently exhibits a replica of a visual representation on music in Namibia, and hopes to expand to its full capacity soon.



Johanna Amawe Finding happiness in handwork

Johanna Amawe started her own business in 2017, selling crafts, mainly woven baskets, and clothing. She employs two other persons, one that assists with sewing, the other with the weaving-work. Johanna learnt to weave baskets from her grandmother. “It makes me happy to be able to create something,” she shares. She was part of a larger project in Okashana village, aimed at empowering local communities through skills and capacity development. When the project started they were only three and later expanded to ten persons, mostly women. This project is known as Panduleni Crafts. The work they do incorporates the odelela cloth as part of telling the story of their past and present cultural identity. When the nearby Etosha King Nehale lodge opened, much of the décor was sourced from Panduleni Crafts in support of local arts and history.

During the recent National Heritage Week, Johanna displayed and sold her crafts at the Omuthiya Cultural Centre in the hope of gaining some exposure and customers. It has been a difficult year for business. Previously, she lived in Germany for two years, promoting her arts, before returning to Namibia. She was planning to go back again this year, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. Now she

hopes that the borders will open again. Despite everything, Johanna shares that she tries to remain positive and looking towards the future. As she supplies her products through the cooperative, for now, she hopes to find a possibility for Panduleni Crafts to be sold in Windhoek and to access wider markets.



King Nehale Conservancy

Interesting facts

In 2003 the Nehale Iya Mpingana Gate (also known as the King Nehale Gate) between Etosha National Park and King Nehale Conservancy was officially opened. The environment of the King Nehale Conservancy is shaped by the Cuvelai Basin, also referred to as the Owambo Basin.

"I see a better future"

Holding on to hope at King Nehale Conservancy

On a warm Saturday morning in September, Ester Kaleni Petrus, the King Nehale Conservancy manager, is busy studying for her exams in the conservancy offices. She is a final year student in Early Childhood Development, with a long-standing passion to become a teacher. During her first two years of study she worked as the sales assistant in the Tulongeni Craft Shop in order to fund her studies. When the previous conservancy manager left to work as a bartender at the new Etosha King Nehale Lodge, she applied for the manager position and was successful.



"Life is really hard for the community. People are living in such conditions that they cannot meet their basic needs."



Ester stepped into her new post in March, just as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. All meetings were cancelled and the conservancy's work plan was paused. There were plans to construct a hall for the AGM and other community meetings, to create community gardens and to assist in the construction of a clinic, kindergarten and earth dams. Now, decisions cannot be made due to restrictions on social gatherings and with a lack of income, these projects seem unattainable.

A major disappointment suffered by the conservancy and community alike is how COVID-19 affected the new joint venture with the Gondwana Collection's Etosha King Nehale. The opening of the lodge came with great expectations, not only in terms of local employment, but also for small businesses such as the craft shop. Unfortunately, very few travellers arrived since the lodge opening in June, and at the end of October, Gondwana had little alternative but to reduce employees' salaries by 25%.

Future plans to expand the local heritage tourism sector were likewise put on hold. One investor presented an idea in March to construct a traditional homestead and host activities such as dancing and cooking. The conservancy members were enthusiastic. However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions on social gatherings and tourism's uncertain future, no further stakeholder meetings took place.

Although conservancy staff still received their full salaries and none were retrenched, it is a challenge to deal with the lack of benefit distribution, especially in a context where human-wildlife conflict is prevalent. According to Ester, since 2019 the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) has not paid out pending claims. One recent case involved a farmer who killed a leopard after it attacked his livestock. The case was reported to the MEFT, who determined the value of the leopard at N\$150 000. Upon hearing this outcome, the person fled to Angola, knowing that he would be unable to pay the fine.

These difficulties are influencing people's attitudes towards community conservation, Ester says. "People sometimes feel like the conservancy is robbing them," she concludes, adding that the current times are hard and some households have completely lost their "capacity for survival". While conducting game counts earlier this year, the conservancy noted that the number of springbok have decreased. An animal relatively easy to hunt and skin at home, these decreasing numbers reflect the loss of livelihoods in communities. "People lost their jobs – they need something to eat," Ester notes.

"Life is really hard for the community. People are living in such conditions that they cannot meet their basic needs," she continues. Ester lives with her parents and six-year old daughter. Her mother's fish shop, restaurant and bar in Oshivelo also closed down for a period of time.

In an effort to survive, people are selling anything they can at the open market in Omuthiya and are diversifying



their crops. Others are reverting to basket weaving. Still, the stress is contributing to a growing number of social ills, including an increase in domestic abuse.

With the current COVID-19 pressure on the economy and her communities, Ester remains hopeful, but realistic: "I see a better future. In case I do not get a job with the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture I see myself working for the MEFT or Namibian Association for CBNRM Support Organisations, as it is related to what I am already doing. What you plan for is often not what you get. You need to be open for other things."

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: The late Nehale Iya Mpingana, warrior and King of the Ondonga Traditional Authority
- Date gazetted: 2005
- Size: 508 km²
- Approximate population: 20 000
- Management: Executive Committee of 11 members; five staff members, four game guards

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Conservation hunting, mainly shoot and sell
- Tourism and joint ventures

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- Cannot rely on hunting and tourism alone to generate an income
- Savings are important
- Have an alternative plan for when your first choice doesn't work out

Tulongeni Craft Shop

'Let's Work' proves tough during a pandemic



crafters. This action had various negative effects on local livelihoods, as many individuals who rely on income generated through crafts in turn play their part in supporting families and keeping cultural heritage alive.

Some community projects that exhibit and sell their products at the craft shop includes the Ndilimani women's group that operate from the nearby Onenongo village, specialising in traditional pottery made with clay collected from local oshanas (flood plains); and the Onankali Mahangu Paper Making Project, which creates items like cards, bookmarks and writing pads with paper produced from mahangu stalks. Other items in the shop were obtained through "house-to-house marketing" and include wooden sculptures and functional hand-woven baskets made from palm leaves. Ester explains that in recent months, "many women have started basket-making in a hope to survive, but the problem is there are no customers to buy their baskets..."

"The craft shop is like a child to the conservancy," says Ester Petrus, manager at King Nehale Conservancy. Formerly in charge of the Tulongeni Craft Shop, Ester refers to the relations between the two entities, which she compares to a mother financially supporting her child until it is able to fully fend for itself – and then hopefully return the favour.

"The lack of tourists not only affected our conservancy, but also the craft shop, which is highly dependent on income and sales to tourists. We barely made any income through crafts this year." Since March, from the first lockdown, Tulongeni – which means, 'let's work' in Oshiwambo – has not commissioned any new works from local

Johanna Johannes, who took over the position of sales lady at Tulongeni in August this year, says that it's been a very slow start, "I often stay here for the whole day and not a single person stops at the shop. Luckily, since the new lodge opened up, we've been getting a bit more movement." Johanna is referring to Etosha King Nehale Lodge, which not only employs a majority of staff from the area, but also supports the community through various other projects. For Ester and Johanna, the benefits of joint venture partnerships and community conservation are clear and they hope to play their part in sending this message to their communities.



Opinions at Etosha King Nehale



Here, 50% of staff hails from nearby villages, and most have never held any form of formal employment. As part of Gondwana's policy to empower the communities in which it works, candidates were trained on the job, a process that still proves, "difficult", according to Nico. "We have to always keep an eye on them. We have to tell them to take it easy, don't be stressed, you'll get it right". Nico himself went through a long process of training, starting out in 1998 as a gardener at what he calls, "The mother and father of the collection", Gondwana's Canyon Lodge in southern Namibia.

When asked about the future, Nico says, "It's very difficult to say. This type of disease is very hard to control and no one knows until when it will be with us... Hopefully next year we will see a lot of tourists. They are the ones who pay our salaries. We are very sad that they have left. We often cry."

Stefanus Amakali – Benefits of tourism

As bar tender at Etosha King Nehale, Stefanus Amakali receives good benefits from his employer, including pension, medical aid and social security. "I like it here," he says, "even though the salary is a bit less than what I earned at the conservancy." Just seven months earlier, Stefanus had been the manager at King Nehale Conservancy. After serving a term of three years, he was ready for a change and when Stefanus heard that the lodge offered job opportunities, he took the plunge.

"COVID affected me, even here," he says. "Our salaries are getting cut, but at least we're all still on duty and with no retrenchments." Still, he has not regretted the change in direction. "I've been in the industry of communication for many years and can explain things about conservation, the community and the conservancy." With this information, Stefanus believes he is a good fit to promote his conservancy through the tourism industry and hopes to spread this knowledge to guests at the lodge – and what a better place to do so than at the source of cold beverages and liquid refreshments, the bar.



Nico Angola – Room for everyone

It is a busy weekend at Etosha King Nehale. "You won't even understand how it was packed this morning, for breakfast, and again for lunch and dinner. We have 73 reservations for dinner tonight!" At word is Nico Angola, assistant manager at Etosha King Nehale, the latest luxury addition to the Gondwana Collection.

Since opening in June, all of the lodge's customers have been locals, and while they bring less income, Nico doesn't mind. As he says, "We have rooms available, we are here for them and we are here for everyone." A brave decision by the holding company, the lodge was opened amidst the crisis and in between local lockdowns. "COVID is a big challenge!" says Nico. "We started so well and then everything suddenly went down. We had a lot of cancellations when you looked at the computer, but then we also had many walk-in guests. Business is like a snake. It walks like this, up and down..."

Nico says that lodge management has taken all precautionary measures and follow government-approved recommendations to prevent the spread of the virus. In the restaurant, tables are sanitised before every meal, guests are required to follow standard procedure before entering, everyone sticks to social distancing and the large glass doors allow for free movement of fresh air straight from the surrounding Andoni plains.

Tsumeb Surrounds

A brief history of Tsumeb

As the largest town in the Oshikoto region, Tsumeb is also known as the “gateway to the north”. Known for being one of the most fertile mineralogical sites in the world, with at least 170 minerals being recorded, it hosts the country’s only metal smelter. Intriguing natural features in the area includes the Otjikoto and Guías lakes, and the Hoba meteorite, the largest in the world.

Tsumeb Backpackers & Villa Africa Guesthouse

Finding alternative income to stay afloat



After having worked in the hospitality industry for many years, in January 2016, Lizelle and Dean Grassouw started construction of their own establishment, Tsumeb Backpackers. “We’ve always liked the hospitality industry,” says Dean, but the couple also always had the dream to manage their own place. Their first enterprise was such a success that two years later the Grassouw’s expanded with the Villa Africa Guesthouse on the same property.

“2019 was our best year yet,” says Lizelle. “We’ve tried to pay everything in cash and in 2019 we finally managed to settle the last of our debts.” Then 2020 arrived. “January was a good month, February was excellent with many international visitors, but by mid-March, our business was dead.” Since May the guesthouse has been getting guests, only locals, “in dribs and drabs”, while the backpackers has temporarily closed for the public. Dean explains that they had to drop their rates to cater to a local, COVID-affected market, and while they decided not to make any salary cuts, Lizelle adds that since April they’ve been having a hard time motivating their staff. “It’s like they lost all their will to work.” To make matters worse, their beds were completely booked out

until end December 2020, and with the onset of the pandemic, the vast majority got cancelled.

2020 was meant to be the year of growth, and the couple planned to expand with another guesthouse in Okahandja, with everything in place, except for the guests. “The property stood empty for six months, and because we couldn’t travel to keep an eye on it, we suffered many losses, including having all of our solar panels stolen!”

“It was really hard to keep the mast up,” says Dean, and explains that out of pure desperation, they had to look for alternative sources of income in the area. Painting houses, sealing roofs and taking care of others’ gardens became their main activity for a few months, until Dean started welding beds and offering these for sale. At the guesthouse, they tried to fill beds by making some rooms available for long-term rentals, because, “We needed something to pay at least the water and electricity bills,” says Lizelle. “We really had to scratch hard and deep to find solutions.” Another new initiative was born out of the crisis, wood fired pizzas, available to guests and for delivery in town, which has been a great success and is something the couple will continue with.

In terms of the future, Lizelle says, “It’s starting to look a bit better – there were times when the phone didn’t even ring!” Still, the uncertainty around the return of international visitors remains, and with strict measures in place the couple is not so sure that it will create an inviting environment for travellers. “You want to be relaxed on your holiday, communicate and be amongst people, and if you have to distance yourself, be available for tests...I’m not so sure it will work,” ends Dean. “Only the future will tell.”

Helvi Mpingana Kandombolo Cultural Village

“We need the tourists”



especially when it came to tourists – we’ve received zero visitors since lockdown.”

Despite hardships, the village took part in the National Heritage Week, and invited members of the different ethnic groups represented on site, to present something unique about their culture. Amongst others, the renovation and plastering of show-houses was on the programme, as well as demonstrations how to brew beer, weave baskets, press oil and pound wheat. Dancing, singing and story-telling also formed part of the activities, as did cooking and eating of traditional foods, but strictly on a take-away basis. Due to restrictions in numbers, the events were arranged to take place at each individual homestead, with a maximum of 30 people per demonstration.

In addition, the centre showcased a travelling exhibition from the Museums Association of Namibia, featuring various medicinal plants, or muti, including those that are used to prevent and cure “coughs and colds”, which some also believe works for the corona virus.

Wilma notes that attitudes from local Namibians are changing, “In the beginning the locals didn’t have this thing of visiting traditional villages, but now we see the interest is increasing and they also come to visit us.” She is fast to add however, “International visitors were coming more, so we feel we need them. We are not selling like we used to.”

“The aim of this village is to showcase the traditional houses of the different people of Namibia. Our target is the tourism industry.” So explains Wilma Shilamba, sales clerk at the Helvi Mpingana Kandombolo Cultural Village in Tsumeb. Named after the mother of the Founding Father of the Namibian nation, Sam Nujoma, the village hosts not only huts, but also curios and crafts and provides accommodation on-site, with the option of traditional food that needs to be ordered in advance. “Everything changed with COVID,



Ndapandula Nambili

Effects on an informal market vendor

Ndapandula Nambili first came to Tsumeb from her home village in the Ohangwena Region in 2016, to look for work. “I was selling fruit and vegetables when corona came and they told us to pack our things and leave,” she says, referring to the restrictions on selling goods at open markets.

Ndapandula used to sell tomatoes, onions, potatoes, peppers and cabbage, depending on price and season. Since restrictions have been lifted, she’s started selling again, but complains that it’s difficult to get produce because the surrounding farmers reduced their farmer’s hands, cut stock and increased prices.

“I hardly have any customers now,” she says. To make matters worse, she has to personally travel to the farms to get stock. “I go to the farm and then there’s nothing,” adding to her already heavy burden. “It’s very difficult to survive these days,” she says, but is positive that the future will get better, “maybe next year”.



Jolanda Joyce #Itago Gamgaebes

Plight of the San

Jolanda Joyce #Itago Gamgaebes is a Hai//om San community leader in the village of Tsintsabis. “I teach young San women to be proud of themselves, to be strong, to know and stand up for their rights, and appreciate their culture.” She works under guidance of the Women’s Leadership Centre, a feminist organisation based in Windhoek.

Jolanda, whose indigenous name means ‘I am happy’, says that despite initial backlash from men in the community, who said, “You are teaching our women bad things,” she now enjoys respect, even from traditional leaders. “They have come to accept that we are doing good things for our community, and now even the elders have started encouraging women.”

She explains that her community already struggles with discrimination, extreme poverty and lack of access to basic services, but with the onset of COVID-19, matters have become increasingly worse. “There are very few of us who have jobs and those who do mainly work on farms in the area. Many have been let go... My people are suffering.” While there is a community-based campsite in the area, Treesleeper Camp, Jolanda remarks, “The tourists used to come and visit the community, but they don’t bring any real benefits to the people.” And since the onset of the pandemic, there have been no visitors.

Jolanda also notes an increase in alcohol abuse, which in turn has lead to domestic violence. “We are helping a lot of women who are being beaten and raped – we take action!” She mentions a recent case in which a victim was sent to Tsumeb for help, but didn’t receive any assistance from the police since she only spoke her mother tongue and was thus not able to communicate her case, so the community leaders came to town and assisted her so the matter could be handled in a lawful manner.



“There are very few of us who have jobs and those who do mainly work on farms in the area. Many have been let go... My people are suffering.”

“Imagine, people are just at home doing nothing. They don’t even have food to eat, how must they afford sanitisers and masks?” Jolanda mentions that they hardly receive any support from the government, or local town council for that matter. “Even the council is not working for us. The kids are just there, drinking alcohol and smoking dagga. There’s no youth centre, nothing to keep them busy.” While in the past, Tsintsabis has received drought relief food parcels from the government, Jolanda says this year her community has not received any support. “I’m only seeing on television how people are receiving food and help,” and it was recently confirmed that the drought relief programme for Tsintsabis has been suspended as a result of COVID-19. Out of desperation, some mothers have taken up voluntary jobs at the local school kitchen, to at least take some food home to feed their families at the end of the day.

When asked about the future Jolanda states, “I’ll confuse myself – what is my future?” After some thought, she confesses that her dream is to become a social worker, in order to help her people. “Most people here are ‘behind,’” she says. “They don’t know what is happening outside of Tsintsabis. Girls are selling themselves, being beaten, committing suicide. I want to play my part in talking to them about their rights, and educating them to be proud of their culture.”



Zambezi



The Zambezi Region, formerly known as the Caprivi Strip, is Namibia's characteristic 500 km long arm that stretches out and lies nestled between the four neighbouring countries of Angola, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. It is named after the Zambezi River, Africa's fourth largest river system. Namibia's wettest region and the place where four rivers meet – the Kwando, Linyati, Chobe and Zambezi – it boasts a rich biodiversity, with conservation and tourism as major role players in shaping its development trajectory.

- Size: 14 785 km²
- Approximate population: 98 849
- Administrative capital: Katima Mulilo
- Climate: Tropical, average annual rainfall 550–750mm
- Environment: Swamps, floodplains, wetlands, woodlands and forest savannah.
- Land-use practices: Agro-pastoral farming systems, fishing, conservation, commercial agriculture and agro-forestry
- Registered communal conservancies: 15
- Conservancy population: 32 567
- Tourism concessions: 1
- Community forests: 7
- National parks: Bwabwata, Mudumu & Nkasa Rupara national parks
- Transfrontier conservation areas: Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

Mashi Conservancy

Interesting facts

Communities here are multilingual and speak, among others, Sifwe, Mbuku, Silozi and English. Mashi Conservancy's environment is a mix between the Kwando River and its floodplains and Kalahari woodlands to the east. This allows a wide diversity of plant, animal, fish and bird species to thrive.

Community voices

"We depend on conservation"

The day's heat arrives together with committee and community members, including area and traditional authority representatives, filling up the conservancy's community hall. As everyone finds a seat, Richard Mashwaiselo, the conservancy manager, asks if it is true that COVID-19 is man-made in a lab. A discussion follows where another person weighs in, speculating on its metaphysical origins: "Maybe God is angry." Richard responds to this: "The world is confusing people, people are confusing the world. What we are doing is having an effect," explaining that this pandemic could be a consequence of global warming.

"Yes, we are fighting an invisible enemy, but we are strong. The people here are strong."

Saviour Siyora, a young man and area representative, says that people are scared and avoid travelling to Katima Mulilo. "Nature is very important. Here, there is fresh air, Katima is congested from all the cooking in streets and from the restaurants," Richard adds. "Yes, we are fighting an invisible enemy, but we are strong. The people here are strong," Saviour adds.

"Everything is cut because of COVID-19," says Erica Leisebo, an older woman and Traditional Authority representative. She explains: "Tourism was our main income. Tourists are no longer coming. In terms of conservation we work



together with our operators and lodges. When the virus came, workers were retrenched. They lost their income. It affected the conservancy. We cannot afford uniforms for the game guards. There is no money coming in."

The Namushasha Lodge cut employees' salaries by 25% at the end of October and Camp Kwando retrenched more or less 50% of its staff. The hunting operator also retrenched 11 of its 15 workers. According to Richard, in 2019 the total income generated by the conservancy through tourism and conservation hunting was around N\$3 900 000. In 2020, this income dropped to N\$800 000. Apart from the conservancy, local businesses suffered significantly. Before, local shop owners replenished their stock on a weekly basis. Now the stock lasts two to three weeks, one area representative explains.

Richard says, "It affects all our operations. We are in fear. Our economy is going down. Where are we going? What are we going to do? We depend on conservation." Still, in neighbouring the Mudumu National Park, the conservancy is committed to conservation and to keeping up activities. "It is our bank in terms of wildlife," another person adds.

The previous day, on 30 September, the conservancy found 52 heads of buffalo stuck in the mud. It is a challenge to deal with such problems, especially as there are not enough game guards on patrol. Illegal hunting incidents, mainly "poaching for the pot", is another challenge. People resort to what the conservancy calls "silent killing" – hunting by using wire snares or digging traps equipped with sharp sticks and covered with grass so as not to be caught by the game guards. Richard explains that the lack of salaries influences the staff's motivation to work and people's capacity to survive, which will have environmental impacts, such as increase in illegal hunting. Funding received through the CRRRF luckily support the conservancy to remain, for now, on their feet and to continue with key activities.

Still, the past year was testing on many fronts. The lack of communication between communities, management and the executive committee – due to restrictions on social gatherings – made it difficult to implement activities. "How are you going to run the entity? How are you going to update people? They are just kept in the dark," Richard comments. "There are supposed to be benefits. That is the aim of the conservancy: to help the community and promote the social well being of its members. In this way wildlife is protected." In the past the conservancy sponsored student scholarships, hosted sports tournaments for youth development, and funded construction of school buildings. Now all community benefits have been put on hold, indefinitely.

People are adjusting to their new realities, the community attests. Some are cutting reeds from the river to sell, while others expand their fields. Some of those who were retrenched established small businesses. Yet people do not have adequate access to sanitisers, masks and gloves and struggle to protect themselves. The main challenge is social distancing. "It is confusing all minds. Totally. We don't know what to do. The love we have for each other, our culture, it will not allow us to practice social distancing. Even a small distance apart is too far for us," Saviours says with a laugh. In terms of the future and moving forward, "We don't know what will happen. Only God knows," Richard pensively concludes.

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: A tree that produces fruits; also an alternative name for the Kwando River
- Date gazetted: 2003
- Size: 297 km²
- Approximate population: 2 431
- Management: Management committee with 14 committee members, including traditional authority representatives from Mashi's five blocks. An executive committee with 19 staff and 11 game guards. The committees include nine women.
- Mashi is part of the Mudumu North Complex collaborative management forum

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Tourism and joint ventures
- Conservation hunting

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- We need to diversify beyond tourism and hunting
- Securing livelihoods is important: a stronger focus on crop cultivation

Mashi Craft Centre

Back to business despite the lack of tourists



"We are struggling... It's difficult to explain. Imagine for six months you don't get paid, have no income in the family..."

"From mid March to the end of July, we were completely closed, and none of the six employees received any salaries." Petra Muleko, sales woman at Mashi Craft Centre sighs with desperation, "We are struggling... It's difficult to explain. Imagine for six months you don't get paid, have no income in the family..."

The Mashi Craft community is managed under the Mudumu North Complex, a cluster of conservation areas that collaboratively manage natural resources, like wildlife and forests. Operational since 1995, the craft centre has grown and expanded over the years, to host not only a wide selection of local handwork, but also products from devil's claw, camping necessities like wood, and welcome refreshments in the form of cold drinks.

More than 300 crafters rely on income from the centre, a self-sustainable community project. Crafters hail from

the seven surrounding conservancies, villages outside of the gazetted areas, and even villages in Zambia and Zimbabwe, all hoping to sell their handwork via the centre – which serves as a space to present unique local craftsmanship, shaped and created out of wood, reed, beads, clay, cloth and other natural materials. Petra herself makes necklaces from beads and seedpods. Or at least used to, before the global pandemic changed everything.

"If we are not selling crafts, there is no income," continues Petra. The centre decided to reopen its doors in August, despite no promise of international visitors in the near future. "In August, we were very quiet. In September, we started selling a bit more, but only to Namibians. Before corona started the tourists used to buy a lot – in bulk – and the locals only a few."

Petra explains that the producers are in control of much of the sales process. "They bring their work to us, and it's up to them what they make, how many products they bring, and the price they charge." Except for the basket weavers, whose work gets graded according to quality, and priced accordingly. Commission works on a 60/40 basis, where the crafter receives the bulk of the income.

With the lack of her usual salary, Petra managed to put food on the table by planting her own maize, mahangu and beans. She also keeps a few cows for milk. "Before corona we used to slaughter the cattle and sell the meat at the local market. But the markets were closed and there was nowhere to sell the meat."

The last few months have been hard on those who rely on the centre to support their families, but with sales slowly picking up, Petra notes, "Things are becoming a bit better now. I don't know about the future...we will see. Maybe the tourists will come again next year. I think they are still afraid. But we will cater to the locals for now."



Wuparo Conservancy

Interesting facts

Wuparo lies between the Mudumu and Nkasa Rupara National Parks. The landscape originally consisted of a large floodplain, but is now an assortment of woodland and grassland. It is home to a large variety of wildlife, including lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and various species of antelope.

"Our vision was completely disturbed"

Dreaming new futures

Limbo Lambeck is the conservancy's enterprise manager and a self-professed "economist". He explains, "Everything has changed. It is upside down. Previously we earned up to N\$1.3 million a year through trophy hunting. In 2020 this amount decreased to N\$400 000. On top of that we lost 95% of our tourism income. We are doomed."

"There is only a future if there is a vision. If we cannot see through, there is no vision."

"Our lives are totally different", Limbo continues, explaining that in the past a person could buy one bread every two days. Now you have to wait a couple of days and rely rather on maize meal. There is more pressure on households. "A lot of us are town dwellers who were forced to return home from Katima Mulilo,"

says Limbo. "A house which had two persons now has five." This reflects a country-wide trend of urban-rural migration as people struggle to secure their livelihoods in the "new normal".

Growing pressure on rural households create stress in communities and leads to an increase in crime on a local level, including illegal hunting. "When I was growing up,

we use to see impala close to the village. This is disappearing. Our aim is to manage conservation so that the impala can return," Limbo continues, explaining that the impala is a favourite in "poaching for the pot" cases. "We are surviving, but we feel that we are in a bad situation.





The conservancy is ours. We feel the ownership. We feel that the wildlife is ours and we have to protect and conserve it. It is what we do. The natural resource management staff, such as the game guards, are still out in the field as usual. We are still continuing our day-to-day activities as normal, eight hours a day. We are not good with working online or at home. We need to be physically present.”

Still, the conservancy realised that cost-cutting strategies were needed. They cut each budget line by 50%, except salaries and allowances, and community projects were put on hold. These include a planned water installation project in Sangwali, the construction of a kindergarten, student scholarships, and funeral assistance. For instance, and in the past, the conservancy supported a student studying Natural Resource Management in the Kruger National Park’s Wildlife College in South Africa to “plant knowledge back into the community”. Such initiatives have been put on the backburner until their work plan can be revised. However, and in an effort to main-



tain some community benefits, a phased electrification project continues.

Limbo explains: “Our previous plan has killed us. You cannot do any business outside of conservation. Now with COVID-19 we see a different picture. We are considering buying shares in other businesses, for example a fuel station, guesthouse or butchery in Sangwali.” Morgan Nyama, the conservancy chairperson, adds that such ideas would first need to be discussed with conservancy members in the next AGM, which, for now, is postponed.

The conservancy experimented with community projects in the past, from chicken farming to agricultural projects. Many proved to be unsuccessful as the benefits generated were too few or distributed among too few people, according to Morgan. Any new ideas or contracts therefore need to be carefully considered, something that Limbo is well aware of. “We don’t rush for offers in black and white. We rush for commitment and relationship.” Another idea is to petition the MEFT to increase own-use hunting quotas and decrease those allocated to trophy hunting so that the conservancy can sell the meat locally.

In reflecting on the future, Morgan shares: “There is darkness. But it is not really dark. You can see a bit in that darkness. We can survive, but only if the current situation changes and COVID-19 cases do not go up. Looking at that, we can see through a bit. If this darkness goes darker some conservancies will close down. The donors will be unable to keep on providing the relief fund. There will be no payment for game guards, for staff. The pressure will be on wildlife and natural resources.” Echoing Morgan’s sentiment, Limbo says, “There is only a future if there is a vision. If we cannot see through, there is no vision. We are busy thinking of strategy after strategy, plan after plan, to have a vision. Our vision was completely disturbed.”

Chrispin Fwelimbi

“If I could carve money...”



He explains that he started the Big Five Community Skills Development Bush Carving Workshop, because he had no job and wanted to be a good father who supports his children. As a child, Chrispin was not the most creative and shares that his grandfather used to help him with carvings for school projects. “I always got more marks when my grandfather did the work,” he smiles. And when he failed a subject and was not able to proceed with school, he thought what else he could do with his life and the idea of working with wood just came naturally. “I first made a cooking stick, then a knobkierie and finally I moved on to making the more difficult animals.” He even went to Zambia to learn new skills from the woodcarvers there. “Now, I do everything myself.”

At the moment, all of the woodwork in the shop is hand-crafted by him, ranging from fishing spears and walking sticks, to pocket-sized depictions of the wildlife in the area, including the Big Five. His wife makes all the baskets, hand-woven from reed and cloth. “Before, there was a lot of movement and people who stopped to buy crafts,” he says. “In the previous five years I made between N\$500 and N\$1 000 per day.” With a lack of movement in the past six months he says that hunger is troubling his kids, and that makes him even more adamant to continue, in the hope that someone might pass by.

“Life is full of challenges,” Chrispin admits, “but when there was no corona, life was better.”

“If I could carve money, I would, but it’s very difficult. This year is very difficult...” From mid-March until the end of September, not a single person stopped at Chrispin Fwelimbi’s little craft shop near the village of Sangwali. “I come here every morning at eight and knock off at five. I don’t know what day will be a good one and maybe someone will come.” An initiative he started six years ago, with the aim to teach people from the community the valuable skills of traditional woodcarving – as his grandfather had taught him – and simultaneously offer a space to display and sell these items, Chrispin is not planning on giving up soon.

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: Wuparo means ‘life’ in Siyeyi
- Date gazetted: 1999
- Size: 148 km²
- Approximate population: 1 027
- Management: Management committee of two women and eight men. Executive Committee of six staff and 14 game guards.

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Conservation hunting
- Tourism and joint ventures

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- Always have savings
- We need to diversify and buy shares in other businesses



Salambala Conservancy

Interesting facts

The conservancy has a high diversity of bird and fish species, including many that are rare elsewhere in Namibia. Salambala was one of the first conservancies to make use of solar-powered electric bicycles for wildlife patrol. The conservancy hosts a number of transboundary wildlife corridors.

Keeping faith

“God will never destroy all the seeds”

Doreen Saisai, a young woman and the Salambala Conservancy chairperson, explains that when the global COVID-19 pandemic broke out and the conservancy realised its ramifications they were “deeply disappointed”. Continuing, she states, “We thought it had come to kill us, the conservancy, completely.” Staff at Salambala was without salaries for six months and the game guards’ bush allowances were cut by 50% as both the conservancy’s conservation hunting and tourism income streams dried up. Later, Gondwana’s Chobe River Camp announced 25% salary cuts and the conservan-

cy’s hunting operator retrenched three of its five employees, yet another loss for the Salambala communities and their livelihoods.

In an effort to secure some income, there were negotiations with the hunting operator. Eventually an agreement was reached not to end the contract, but to reduce prices for local clients up to 30% and allow payments to be optional rather than guaranteed. In other words, for hunting operators only to pay when a hunt is successful. The conservancy also reduced their rental prices for the

safari camp where the hunters stay during their time in Salambala, and for a conservancy-owned guesthouse in the border town of Ngoma.

At the same time cost-cutting strategies were adopted, including pressing pause on their five-year work plan. This plan included an electrification project, building clinics in the conservancy, and drilling boreholes for wildlife. The conservancy is especially excited about the last mentioned, as it will allow the game guards to better protect and monitor wildlife. Yet for now, most resources and energy, like in other conservancies, are redirected into operational costs.

“We thought it had come to kill us, the conservancy, completely.”

“The game guards are working very hard. I honour that, I owe them,” Botha Sibungo, the vice chairperson, says. The conservancy has 22 game guards working in shifts, including two females, a pioneering move towards gender equality. As a result of their focused efforts, there has been no increase in poaching incidents in Salambala. Still, the night before, Edward Mwauluka, one of the game guards, dealt with a stock theft case – a strong indication of the often-unrecognised work his job entails. In reflecting on the difficulty of the past months, Edward remains unwavering in his commitment: “As long as I am still here, the conservancy will not die.” In support of the game guards, the conservancy plans to buy new sets of uniforms, bicycles, torches and radios once income or external donations are secured.

The Salambala Conservancy works closely with the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) secretariat and is involved with transboundary forums on community conservation. Salambala hosts important wildlife corridors, which connect the east Zambezi flood plain to Botswana and Chobe National Park. In the past, several residents who were required to move out of the corridor areas were supported by KAZA, who drilled boreholes and created fishponds as a livelihood support programme. There were also plans to relocate 35 zebra from Salambala and within KAZA. Yet, as Doreen says, “everything just froze this year”.

Despite taking all necessary precautions and their combined efforts to move forward with community conservation, there is a shared awareness that the future is out of their hands. “The future is not our business. That is God’s business. What is gone is gone. God will never destroy all the seeds,” Botha says with firm belief, emphasising that the conservancy and their communities will survive this unfortunate set back.



INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: The lovers Sala and Bala whose illicit relationship resulted in them being banished to the forest
- Date gazetted: 1998
- Size: 930 km²
- Approximate population: 8,923
- Management: Management committee of 38 persons, including 17 women and 21 men and different area representatives. Executive committee and conservancy staff of 35, including 28 men and seven women. This includes 22 game guards, of which two are women.

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Conservation hunting
- Tourism and joint venture agreements

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- The need to diversify our income streams, for example, producing honey
- Focus more on promoting the craft centre and heritage tourism
- Promote entrepreneurship
- The need to save for disasters: “let us not squander”



Sikunga Conservancy

Interesting facts

The conservancy is home to a large diversity of fish, including the catfish, tilapia, nembwe and tiger fish, and is a hotspot for anglers. Both the Sikunga and Kasaya tributaries are recognised as protected areas by MEFT and Sikunga's fish guards play a key role in protecting the larger Zambezi ecosystem from over-fishing.

"In every pandemic people have to learn"

Managing a conservancy during times of change

"We did not have any money. It was challenging for me, as a manager. I told them that they have to be in the field and assured them that the money will come. Decisions had to be made and it was difficult to communicate," says Steven Muyangwa, the conservancy's manager, as he reflects on the first months after Namibia's closed its international borders and imposed lockdowns. Steven has been the manager for the past ten years. Before that he was the chairperson for three years, attesting to his long-standing commitment to the conservancy.

"The future is still there. In every pandemic people have to learn. We started with HIV/Aids, it is still there, but we survived. We will look for means to overcome this one too."

"People were losing trust, they were losing hope. Game guards were sent to the field without rations," he remembers. Steven emphasises that the CRRRF, from which they received funding in June, restored some degree of normalcy. Brighton Nyema, the secretary, adds that usually the conservancy is mandated to hold two to three general meetings a year, including the AGM. This year all meetings were cancelled and only decisions involving the executive committee members could be made. "Community members are not aware what is happening. They are lost," Steven says, sounding worried.



With all "sources of income blocked", there can be no new opportunities, Steven says. The conservancy signed a new agreement with their hunting operator with reduced prices for local clients and optional rather than guaranteed payment. "Half a bread is better than nothing," Steven reflects. He hopes that the current price reductions will attract local professional hunters, especially given the prominence of elephant, hippo and crocodile on the conservancy's quota profile.

Prior to COVID-19 there were plans to establish a community campsite and to expand the community vegetable garden, in order sell produce in Katima Mulilo. Other planned community projects include the electrification of three villages and the drilling and finalisation of boreholes in all seven villages by the end of 2020. As part of the conservancy's joint venture agreement with the Gondwana Collection, a set amount is allocated to community projects annually. The conservancy already started implementing some of these projects when the COVID-19 pandemic brought everything to a halt.

Local communities are struggling financially due to widespread retrenchments and salary cuts, including at Gondwana's Zambezi Mubala Lodge and Camp, which is situated in the conservancy. Additionally, many persons depend on small-scale businesses – selling vegetables, or as shebeen and Cuca shop owners. With less money circulating, businesses suffer. Steven reports that people do not have money to buy permits from the conservancy to harvest natural resources, such as reeds. Nevertheless, the conservancy is empathic and continues to provide permits. "It is a pandemic," Steven says with resignation.

On a personal level, Steven shares that they have adapted to the "new normal". "Before I would go to town and think 'ah, I forgot my mask!' and then I have to buy another one and I end up with a lot of masks. But now I don't forget anymore, I am used to it. People are adhering to this precaution and wearing masks. It is a healthy intervention. Usually this time of the year many suffer from the flu, but this year I see that it is much better."

Washing hands regularly have also become part of everyday routine, with the conservancy dispensing sanitisers at meetings. Steven sees this as a positive change. "Even the children. They know what is corona. My daughter is responsible for distributing sanitiser when visitors come to our home. When I was out she would dutifully tell me: 'daddy, sanitise!' She is 12 years old and not even trusting her parents," he says, laughing. The main challenge, both Brighton and Steven agrees, is social distancing, especially at funerals. Instead, they believe that, realistically, only masks and hand washing are practiced at such events.

Bringing the conversation to a close, Steven contemplates what lies ahead: "The future is still there. In every pandemic people have to learn. We started with HIV/Aids, it is still there, but we survived. We will look for means to overcome this one too. The clients from abroad will return and there will be means. I will never lose hope." To this Brighton, with his inherently positive name, adds, "Next year the hunters will return and the conservancy will be more productive. We have no doubt about it."

INFO BOX

Background

- Named after: A river channel which 'brings things together'
- Date gazetted: 2009
- Size: 287 km²
- Approximate population: 2 470
- Management: Management committee of 11 members, of which four are women. 30 executive staff members, including 12 fish guards and 10 game guards.

Main income generating activities before COVID-19

- Conservation hunting
- Harvesting natural resources (reeds, poles and thatching grass)
- Tourism and joint ventures

COVID-19 lessons learnt

- We have to learn to survive from less and with what we have
- Never lose hope
- We need to diversify our income

Ernest Liswaniso

Learning to live with hardships



“were supposed to be four, but the last-born died at three months because of pneumonia”. This unfortunate event happened shortly after Ernest himself was in a serious accident – “it was a rough time”, he says.

In reflecting on the past months Ernest shares: “We don’t have guests, and our job is to work with guests. You get bored when you cannot interact with people and might start dozing on the job.” He also found restrictions under curfew to be quite challenging. “In our community we couldn’t roam around or move freely. You couldn’t do things the way you wanted.”

In October, management announced 25% salary cuts, placing additional strain on his household and on him personally. To make matters worse, his cousin, who resided in Walvis Bay, sadly passed away from COVID-19 complications some weeks before. “It is becoming part of life,” he says, reflectively. Soon after there was another death in the family – unrelated to COVID-19. In trying to organise the funerals, he had to adhere to the state-imposed curfew while balancing his time between work and family. “It is not easy. Your mind shuts off and later you don’t know what you are doing anymore...” The only thing that currently keeps Ernest afloat is his job and the prospect of interacting with the guests.

“I’m the first born and have to take care of my mother. That’s why I’m here, working at this lodge.” Ernest Liswaniso resides in Kalimbeza village in the Sikungwa Conservancy. He has been employed at Zambezi Mubala Camp since 2008, mainly in a supervisory role, and has worked under two former owners until the Gondwana Collection took over in 2017, when he was appointed as the bar supervisor. “I’m kind of like the furniture here.” He also takes care of his wife and three children, which

Katima Mulilo Surrounds

A short history of Katima

A tree-lined, riverine paradise, Katima Mulilo lies on the banks of the Zambezi River and is the largest town on the eastern-most edge of the country, serving as gateway to the neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. Apart from its watery vein hosting crocodile, hippo and a plethora of fish, the town itself is frequented by tropical birds, monkeys and from time to time even by herds of elephant. The town owes its name to the nearby rapids, which translates from Silozi into ‘quench the fire’ and refers to the olden days when goods were moved amongst neighbouring countries by barge, and a burning fire was seemingly part of the process. In recent years the town has experienced considerable development as a result of transboundary activities and the increase of tourism in the area.

Mimi Mwiya

Creating a safe space for women in Zambezi

“We come from a culture of silence and I’ve been accused of stirring things up,” says Mimi Mwiya, programme officer for the Women’s Leadership Centre’s Zambezi for Women’s Rights Programme. With an objective to “strengthen feminist transformative leadership among women for the prevention/transformation of harmful cultural practices...” the programme hosts various activities, including regional dialogues with government stakeholders, community meetings, visits to traditional authorities, and radio shows in the local Silozi language. Mimi goes on to explain that the women’s programme has been accused of destroying culture, especially by the older generations, “but as much as we want to preserve culture, we have a responsibility to question it too”.

Since she took on the position and opened offices in Katima Mulilo in 2019, she’s on boarded 16 new community facilitators in the region, an action she is very proud of. However, with the countrywide restrictions imposed on meetings, her work has proved increasingly hard. “Our work is very community and workshop centred. Up until the end of July, I was home based and could only do admin work, because we weren’t allowed to have any physical meetings with the communities.” In addition, the organisation’s budget does not make provision for sanitisers and masks, which are requirements for any meeting to take place.

But, Mimi is not only thinking about the effects of COVID-19 on her own work. “Not everyone is lucky enough to have a home they love. Work is an escape for most women, as it allows them some sort of ‘me’ time. During lockdown these freedoms were taken away from them and in many cases the women were locked up at home with their abusers.” She knows that gender-based violence has increased during lockdown, but notes that its often underreported because



in many cases the perpetrator is either a family member, or someone known to the victim’s family. “Abuse has been normalised...we’re so used to hushing these issues.”

Before the onset of the pandemic, Mimi had planned to pilot girl group meetings for 16-21 year olds, to create a safe environment in which to discuss women’s issues and rights. She had to put it on hold for a few months, but tested the waters with eight girls in July. “I love the idea of women’s spaces and creating space where women can just be women,” she smiles.

“It’s often perceived that African women are so strong, but we all need to think of self-care practices, even if it’s the smallest thing. You can not serve from an empty vessel...” Motivated to make a difference in her community, Mimi looks forward to continuing her work as mentor and role model for women and girls of the Zambezi.

Dominic Muema

On thinking outside the box



"The impact is not only on tourism establishments closing down. It is about everything and everybody in the community."

"We are always there with the communities. IRDNC is committed to helping them adjust to the new normal. Going forward, there is uncertainty. What happens if the COVID-19 restrictions continue? We will need to be more innovative and think outside of the box in order for livelihoods to be sustained, to be resilient and to make progress." This is how Dominic Muema, the Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC)'s regional operations manager, describes their current mandate and future perspective in the Zambezi region.

COVID-19 and the State of Emergency regulations was "something that nobody was prepared for", Dominic reflects. IRDNC had to re-think their role. Usual activities were put on hold and resources were redirected towards COVID-support. This included disseminating information on preventive measures and sanitisers to Zambezi's 15 conservancies, five conservancies not yet officially gazetted, and the Kyaramacan Association in Bwabwata National Park. IRDNC was able to reach communities that other agencies, such as the government, could not. State imposed lockdowns also forced IRDNC to grow as an

organisation. They managed to purchase additional laptops to enable staff to work from home and learnt to rely on email and online meetings for communication.

IRDNC realised early on that conservancies were set to lose their income in 2020. In April and May they worked closely with the MEFT to establish the CRRRF and to convey realities on the ground to stakeholders in Windhoek. Additionally, IRDNC supported conservancies in compiling documents to apply to the CRRRF and to adjust their annual budgets. This included re-negotiating contracts with hunting operators. Directives from the MEFT suggested price reductions up to 40%, yet it was up to each conservancy to decide on this matter. Such price reductions and changing agreements from guaranteed to optional payment kept most hunting operators on board.

With the help of the CRRRF fund, game guards continued their work and poaching in the Zambezi region remained low. Yet Dominic points out that it is a challenge to maintain this standard. "Tourists and hunters played a role in protecting wildlife. They travel around and inadvertently keep an eye on poachers," he explains, echoing similar observations by conservancies themselves. Furthermore, with conservancies generating no to little income, cost-cutting strategies continue. Some try to reduce their fuel expenditure, meaning wildlife patrols do not go as far or as frequent into the field as usual. Dominic shares that human-wildlife conflict is another major challenge in the region. During the last months, and with restrictions on human mobility and social events, wildlife felt less threatened and moved closer to villages, creating opportunities for conflict. Such incidents can fuel illegal hunting activities. On the upside, border closures meant that illegal timber harvesting and fishing decreased, as international markets were difficult to access.

The Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) plays a key role in regional biodiversity and community conservation. Dominic explains that for now trans-

boundary cooperation between Namibia, Botswana, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe have stopped. For example, transboundary game counts could not take place. Border closures also marginalised the Impalila Island communities, whose main access road runs through Botswana.

International border closures also affected Dominic on a personal level. His daughter lives in Kenya, his home country, and it is hard not knowing when they will be reunited. During difficult times "you need to be with your people and children, especially as a parent. It is not a good disease. It is disruptive," Dominic asserts, continuing, "The impact is not only on tourism establishments closing down. It is about everything and everybody in the community." He notes for example, "It has an impact on Shoprite in Katima Mulilo, as tourism establishments no longer rely on them for stock. The whole regional economy is impacted." The COVID-19 driven economic downturn forced conservancies and IRDNC to revisit questions of diversification.

Diversification strategies include establishing ecosystem payment services. KAZA's wildlife corridors protect wildlife and ecological integrity. "Wildlife is not only local and regional goods, but international. Biodiversity conservation in KAZA should be valued as global biodiversity conservation and there can be a system to pay for this service," Dominic explains. Wildlife corridors make lodges more attractive and private sector can pay for such services. The famous Amarula cream liquor brand owner, the Distell group, already participates in such payments, which depend on satellite images showing no cropping or settlement in wildlife corridors. Apart from the private sector, international donors can also play a role.

In the long-term Dominic questions whether lockdowns and the closing of international borders are justifiable, given the social, environmental and economic costs. Still, he is grateful for how the COVID-19 crisis forced conservancies and organisations to find new and innovative ways to transform and grow towards a more sustainable future.





UNDP Namibia

Environmental Initiatives

"Our main donor is a multilateral fund called the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It has funded most of our environmental projects and initiatives, which are largely implemented by ministries and government agencies, and overseen by the UNDP."

As programme specialist for the UNDP's environmental initiatives in Namibia, Martha Talamondjila Naanda breaks down the organisation's current activities into eight focal areas:

1. Integrated Landscape Approaches for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty:

"Because of COVID, this was one of the projects that suffered major delays. The coordination element is in Windhoek, but most of the activities need to be implemented in what we call the five landscapes, so activities in regional levels were delayed." Approved by the GEF in 2019 and meant to run for six years, this project is currently under implementation. Designed to benefit 20 818 people, of whom half will be women, it is one of the largest under the UNDP Namibia environmental portfolio.

Integrated Landscape Approaches for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty (NILALEG) is a multifocal area project funded by the GEF 6, which contributes to various GEF Strategic Objective Programmes:

- BD4: Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors
- CC2: Demonstrate systematic impact of mitigation options
- LD3: Reduce pressures on natural resources by managing competing land uses in broader landscapes
- SFM3: Restored forest ecosystems: Reverse the loss of ecosystem services within degraded forest landscapes
- SFM2: Enhanced forest management: Maintain flows of forest ecosystem services and improve resilience to climate change through SFM

NILALEG operates in five focal landscapes, namely Omaipanga, Ruacana, Okongo, Nkulivere and Zambezi to demonstrate on-the-ground how to achieve the related and overlapping spatial targets of these Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), implementing the Integrated Regional Land Use Plans through fine-scale participatory land use planning and management with communities, businesses, local government and traditional authorities.

Objective: To promote an integrated landscape management approach in key agricultural and forest landscapes, reducing poverty through sustainable nature-based livelihoods, protecting and restoring forests as carbon sinks, and promoting land degradation neutrality.

Outcome 1: Functioning intra-governmental coordination to guide implementation and monitoring of global targets.

Outcome 2: Enhanced sustainable land and forest management, biodiversity conservation and livelihoods in target landscapes.

Outcome 3: Enhanced access to finance, technical assistance and market information to pilot and scale up the integrated landscape management approach and sustainable enterprises.

Outcome 4: Project results are tracked, and impact of interventions evaluated, with learning captured and shared.

Implementing Partner: Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism

Project Duration: 2020 to 2025

2. Namibia Climate Promise:

"The Climate Promise is UNDP's response to the challenge of the urgent action to limit the global temperature increase to a safer 1.5°C." Tackling the climate crisis requires that all countries make bold pledges under the Paris Agreement to reduce emissions of the greenhouse gases (GHG) that cause global warming. The Climate Promise is UNDP's commitment to ensure that countries that are signatory to the Paris Agreement raise their ambition to fight climate change. UNDP's promise support draws upon its extensive portfolio of expertise across priorities such as energy, forests, water, resilience, agriculture, health, youth, finance, governance, gender equality and green jobs.

Objectives: To revise the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and raise ambition to keep within the recommendations of IPCC 1.5 degree above pre-industrial level; and to incorporate new activity data in the IPPU and Waste Sector.

Component 1: Support countries to build political will and strengthen societal ownership.

Component 2: Review, align and update existing NDC targets, policies and measures.

Component 3: Incorporate new sectors and/or greenhouse gases.

Component 4: Assess costs and investment opportunities.

Component 5: Monitor progress and strengthen transparency.

Component 6: Communicate and learn.

Implementing Partners: Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; United Nations Development Programme; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

Project Duration: January 2020 to December 2020

3. Sustainable Environmental Management and Enhanced Resilience

"As an effort to address the environmental challenges that's been experienced in Namibia, the four-year Sustainable Environmental Management and Enhanced Resilience (SEMER) Project seeks to address Namibia's environment and natural resource management challenges, thereby promoting sustainable development." It will ultimately support Namibia to realize its Fifth National Development Plan, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Objective: To address Namibia's environment and natural resource management challenges, while at the same time promoting sustainable development.

Output 1: Sustainable environmental management: Addressing environmental management challenges through capacity building and knowledge management.

Output 2: Climate promise: Supporting Namibia to revise NDCs to the global efforts to address climate change.

Output 3: COVID-19 waste and tourism: Enabling Namibia's COVID-19 response and recovery actions with respect to tourism and waste management interventions.

Output 4: Environmental governance: Strengthening environmental governance and improving health and safety, particularly targeting small-scale miners (SSMs) to meet environmental obligations.

Implementing Partners: Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; Ministry of Mines and Energy

Project Duration: January 2020 to December 2023

4. Environmental Governance for Improved Natural Resources Management Programme

"Namibia's rich mineral resources significantly contribute to national economic growth. While small-scale miners play a significant part in this industry, they are often unprotected from potential risk." A need was therefore identified – to improve safety measures and other challenges associated with small-scale mining, including health hazard risks. In addition, the programme supports the conducting of Environmental Impact Assessments for all mining and quarrying activities, to minimise potential environmental impacts in small-scale mining areas.

Objective: To strengthen environmental governance and improve health and safety, particularly targeting small-scale miners to meet environmental obligations at four critical hotspots in Namibia.

Component 1: Environmental, health and safety guidelines are tailor-made for the Namibian situation and aligned to the relevant laws and policies in place.

Component 2: SSMs are well sensitised and trained on requirements of environmental, mining and other related laws.

Component 3: SSMs attitudes have changed and they are implementing good environmental, health and safety practices.

Component 4: Key small-scale mining hotspots are cleared (through collective EIAs) for ease of mineral rights applications and SSM operations

Component 5: SSMs are empowered to operate and are operating in a safe environment.

Component 6: Stakeholders work together in a synergistic way to optimise support to SSMs and increase the success of initiatives.

Implementing Partner: Ministry of Mines and Energy

Project Duration: May 2020 to December 2020

5. Namibia's Fourth Biennial Update Report to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

"As a party to the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement, Namibia has the obligation to report on measures adopted and implemented to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change." According to its Nationally Determined Contribution, Namibia pledges to reduce 89% of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Objective: To enable Namibia to prepare and submit its fourth biennial update report in line with COP 16 & 17 decisions and guidelines for the preparation of Biennial Update Reports.

Component 1: Existing institutional arrangements strengthened and information on national circumstances updated, with respect to climate change.

Component 2: Constraints and gaps, and related financial, technical and capacity needs identified, and solutions identified

Component 3: Other information considered relevant to the achievement of the objective of the convention reported.

Component 4: National GHG inventory on emissions by sources and removal by sinks prepared for the year 2016 and support to the enhancement of the GHG data collection system.

Component 5: Mitigation actions described, and their effects investigated.

Component 6: Information on domestic Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) included.

Component 7: Fourth Biennial Update Report prepared and submitted to UNFCCC

Component 8: Monitoring and evaluation of the project outcomes and outputs done.

Implementing Partner: Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism

Project Duration: July 2019 to July 2021

6. Integrated Approach to Proactive Management of Human-Wildlife Conflict and Wildlife Crime in Hotspot Landscapes in Namibia

"The Integrated Approach to Proactive Management of Human-Wildlife Conflict and Wildlife Crime in Hotspot Landscapes in Namibia (HWC-WC) project falls under the Global Wildlife Programme (GWP), which is financed under GEF 7." It contributes to two GEF Strategic Objective Programmes: BD-1-2a mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes through GWP to prevent extinction of known threatened species; and BD-1-2b mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes through GWP for sustainable development. Namibia's globally significant biodiversity faces critical threats to its survival, key among these being: (i) escalating Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) – especially involving elephants, feline predators, crocodiles and hippopotamus (through damage to crops and infrastructure, loss of life or injuries to people and livestock mortalities) – creating a strong disincentive among affected people to conserve wild animals; and (ii) the persistent threat posed by wildlife crime (WC) – notably poaching, through organised crime syndicates and incidental illegal killing for subsistence purposes or retaliation resulting from HWC – to populations of high value species, such as elephants, rhinoceros, and pangolins.

Objective: To incentivise wildlife conservation through proactive management of human-wildlife conflict and wildlife crime, and delivery of wildlife-based benefits to rural communities in selected hotspot landscapes.

Outcome 1: Improved capacities to prevent, mitigate and respond to HWC.

Outcome 2: Strengthened anti-poaching capacities, and science-based management and monitoring of high-value/ high-risk species.

Outcome 3: Growth in the wildlife-based economy of the hotspot landscapes

Outcome 4: Enhanced knowledge sharing, monitoring and evaluation of HWC and WC management measures in the hotspot landscapes.

Implementing Partners: United Nations Development Programme; Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism

Project Duration:

- Project Design: August 2019 – December 2020

- Project Implementation: 2021 – 2025

7. Improving Ocean Governance and Integrated Management in the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem:

"A coordinated regional project between Angola, Namibia and South Africa, it builds on earlier GEF support, which assisted the three Parties to the Benguela Current Convention (BCC) to sign a tripartite environmental treaty for integrated ecosystem management of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME)."

Objective: To realise a coordinated regional approach to the long-term conservation, protection, rehabilitation, enhancement and sustainable use of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem in order to provide economic, environmental and social benefits and wellbeing to the region through the implementation of the Benguela Current Convention and accompanying Strategic Action Programme.

Component 1: Improved ocean and coastal governance through implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and delivery at regional, national and local levels.

Component 2: Stakeholder engagement and partnership collaboration to realize sustainable SAP implementation and delivery.

Component 3: Capacity Building and training to support sustainable SAP implementation and domestication of the Convention.

Component 4: Marketing and Resource Mobilisation and Fiscal Sustainability.

Implementing Partner: Benguela Current Convention

Project Duration: 2017 to 2022

8. Enhancing Namibia's Capacity to Establish a Comprehensive Transparency Framework for Monitoring, Reporting and Verification of Climate Actions and Reporting on NDC Implementation:

"In another intervention to address climate change in the country, Namibia has submitted a proposal to the GEF funded Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency, with the aims to ensure institutional arrangements for a National Transparency Framework."

Objective: To enhance Namibia's capacity to establish a comprehensive Transparency Framework for Monitoring, Reporting and Verification of climate actions and reporting on Nationally Determined Contribution implementation under the Paris Agreement.

Component 1: Enhancing and strengthening Namibia's Institutional Arrangements for robust GHG inventories and Transparency MRV System/ Framework for climate actions and NDC.

Component 2: Provision of tools, training and assistance for meeting the transparency provisions established in the Paris Agreement.

Component 3: NDC tracking.

Implementing Partner: Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism

Project Duration: January 2021 to September 2023





UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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