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N≠A JAQNA CONSERVANCY

Namibia

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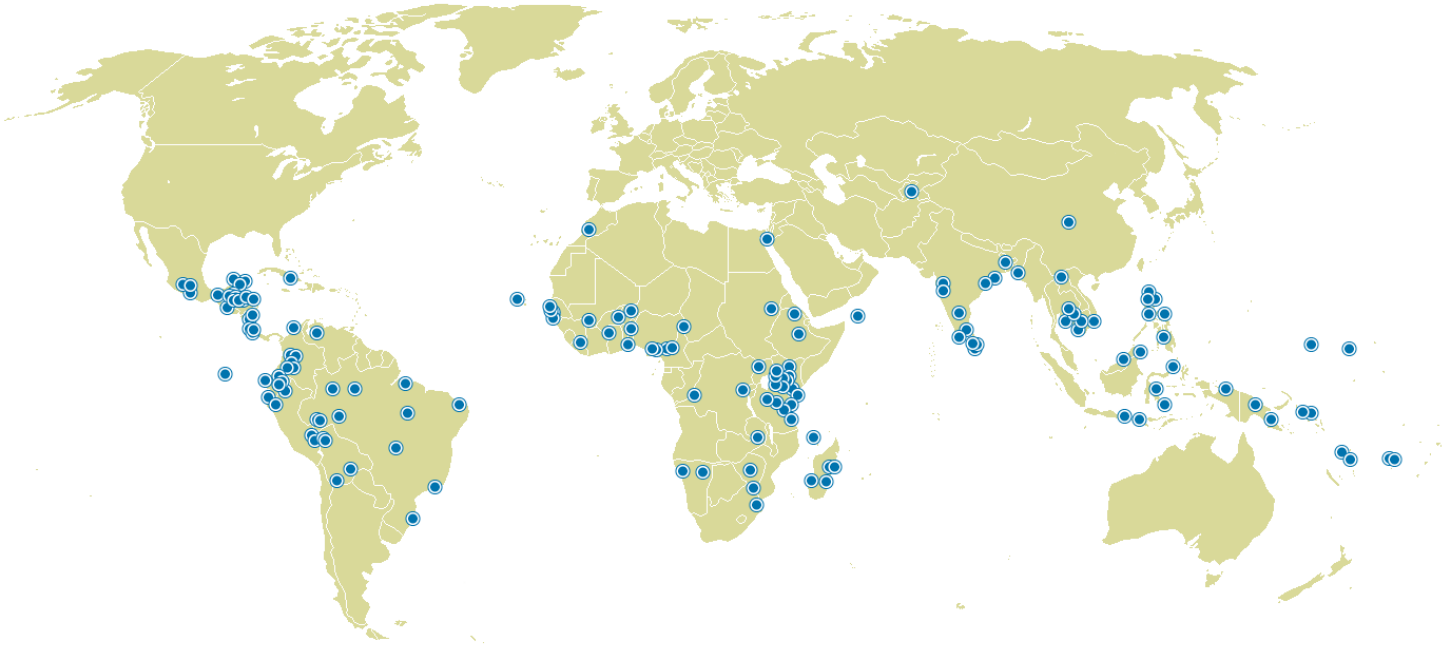
UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative.

To mark its 10-year anniversary, the Equator Initiative aims to fill this gap. The following case study is one in a growing series that details the work of Equator Prize winners – vetted and peer-reviewed best practices in community-based environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods. These cases are intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to take local success to scale, to improve the global knowledge base on local environment and development solutions, and to serve as models for replication. Case studies are best viewed and understood with reference to '*The Power of Local Action: Lessons from 10 Years of the Equator Prize*', a compendium of lessons learned and policy guidance that draws from the case material.



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N≠A JAQNA CONSERVANCY
Namibia

PROJECT SUMMARY

With 912,000 ha of communal land, N≠a Jaqna Conservancy combines the sustainable management of endemic wildlife and natural resources with the empowerment of Namibia's !Kung San people. (Symbols '≠' and '!' represent distinct click sounds unique to Khoisan languages.) Established as a conservancy in 2003, the organization trains local !Kung San as wildlife managers, committee members and game guards. Objectives include re-establishing game populations and sustainable forest management through sound planning, management and monitoring.

The governance structure for the conservancy, is prescribed by Namibian law as part of its successful Community Based Natural Resource Management Programme. In addition, the N≠a Jaqna Conservancy has evolved a highly consultative governance model that matches the unique leadership system of the !Kung San people.

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KEY FACTS

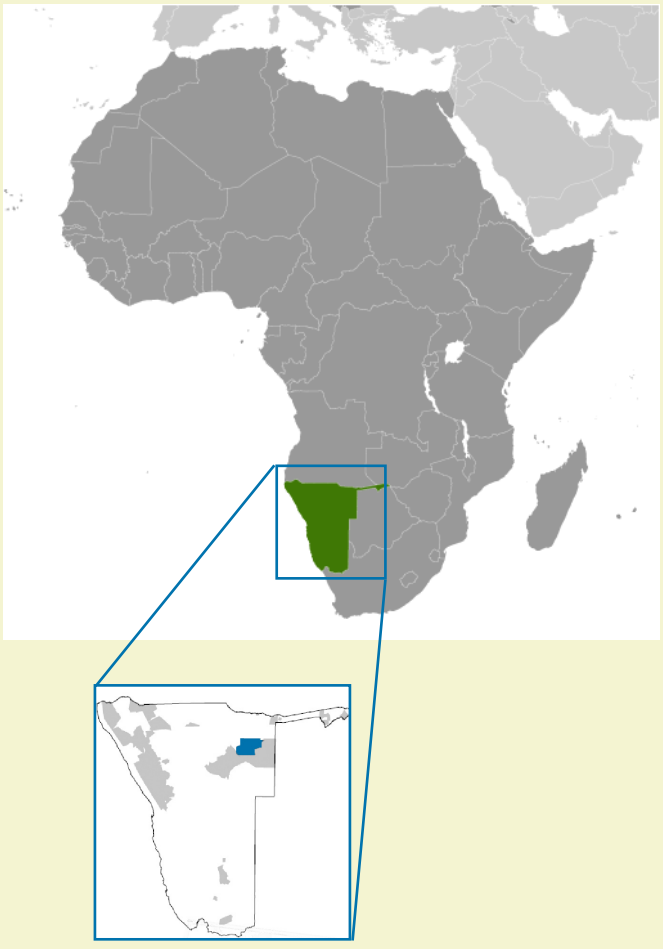
EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2008

FOUNDED: 2003

LOCATION: Otjozondjup, northeastern Namibia

BENEFICIARIES: Over 2,650 community members

BIODIVERSITY: 9,120 sq. km. community conservancy



Background and Context

Namibian land policy allows for the creation of conservancies within existing communal areas in which traditional leaders enter into collaborative land management agreements with the state. The conservancy management structure gives members of the conservancy shared rights to that land, while the government holds the land in trust for the people, who have a say in how the land is managed and how it is used. No others can enter or occupy the land without permission from the local traditional authority and the conservancy.

CBNRM legislation and the history of the N≠a Jaqna

The N≠a Jaqna Conservancy in the north-east region of Otjozondjupa, one of only two San-governed Conservancies in Namibia, was gazetted in December of 2003 under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism's Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Programme as a result of peoples' lack of land rights and fear of lack of ownership. Because of this, the !Kung San people have since been granted management and utilization rights to the natural resources within the Conservancy and exclusive rights to benefit from the development of tourism in the area. While the conservancy was gazetted in 2003, the process began much earlier in 1998 when 1,850 members of the largely San community first applied to the government for conservancy rights. Many of the San living in the area had been relocated during the conflict in the country, some as far as Angola. While this increased the number of San in the area (largely those of the same language group) it did not bring any benefits in terms of land security or investment.

The Conservancy provides the !Kung San people with a degree of land security; it is a way for people to earn income from the land by utilizing natural resources in a sustainable manner. They can engage in trophy hunting if game is plentiful, small-scale agriculture, and other activities with minimal impact on the environment. This arrangement offers an equitable option for people to apply for formal rights to the land – a process not often available to local communities.

Creating a community management plan

Though the Conservancy is a government program, all decisions – from measuring and designating boundaries to the allocation of responsibility within the Conservancy – require the support of the entire community (estimates range from 2,000 to 5,000 people) many of whom are illiterate or minimally educated. The founding of the conservancy required the vast majority of the people to be in favor of the management plan, and though it took nearly five years, the necessary support was eventually procured.

N≠a Jaqna is currently the largest registered conservancy in Namibia to date, with an area of more than 9,120km2. Kalahari sands cover a flat landscape of broadleaf and acacia woodland which receives a paltry 400-450mm of rainfall in an average year. The vast majority of Conservancy inhabitants rely on the land and resources of this environment for bush foods, medicines, grass and wood for building, fuel in the form of firewood, as well as grazing and cropping. The Conservancy is host to a vast amount of biodiversity as well as high-value game species and commercially viable plants utilized for their medicinal value. The large size of the area provides ample areas well suited to wildlife habitat. The large size also means that many villages are isolated and the costs of operating the Conservancy are higher than in other conservancies due to the scattered nature of settlement and resources.

For the purposes of management, the Conservancy has been divided into four districts. A comprehensive participatory planning exercise in all the settlements of the Conservancy has resulted in a resource-zoning scheme that has been agreed to by the Conservancy membership, the local !Kung Traditional Authority, as well as governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. This zoning plan is reflected in the Constitution of the Conservancy and the official Management and Utilization Plan. Business and tourism development strategies are now in place and are being implemented in concert with these guiding community-based management plans.

Key Activities and Innovations

The management and utilization plan of the conservancy, agreed to by the inhabitants of the area, provide for the following central objectives: to re-establish optimum game populations in the Conservancy through sound management and careful, responsible planning; to ensure that the benefits derived by membership through the utilization of wildlife are sustainable and that these benefits are delivered to all members of the Conservancy; to prevent conflict between segments of the Conservancy membership and between the Conservancy membership and wildlife; and to improve the livelihoods of all members of the Conservancy through the distribution of benefits from viable tourism operations in the Conservancy.

Due to poaching and the over-harvesting of local flora within the surrounding areas, plant and wildlife populations had declined in the years leading up to the conservancy's creation. Concerned by the decline in biodiversity, the conservancy, with the help of donors, has been able to reverse this trend to some degree, through the mixed use of careful conservation and sustainable tourism practices. One of the main activities has been the introduction of more wildlife into the area through partner support.

Over 2,650 community members currently belong to the conservancy and hold decision-making power on how their land is developed and managed. Tourism, gaming contracts and the sustainable collection of indigenous plant species (such as the Devil's Claw, or *Harpagophytum procumbens*) are sources of income for the otherwise economically marginalized !Kung San people. Conservation is bolstered by indigenous knowledge and traditional land management practices. In addition to a Community Forest Programme, the group is engaged in tour guide and game guard training, has supported two successful community-run tourism initiatives, and actively pursues partnerships with commercial tour companies and private hunting contractors.

Sustainable wildlife management

Once game animals were brought to the area, the conservancy was able to form an anti-poaching unit—game guards—who run patrols under the employ of the Conservancy. Working not only to secure the safety of the animals, but also to help enhance the health of the ecosystem, the game guards engage in practices such as digging out water holes to increase the volume of water available to both the animals and the human inhabitants.

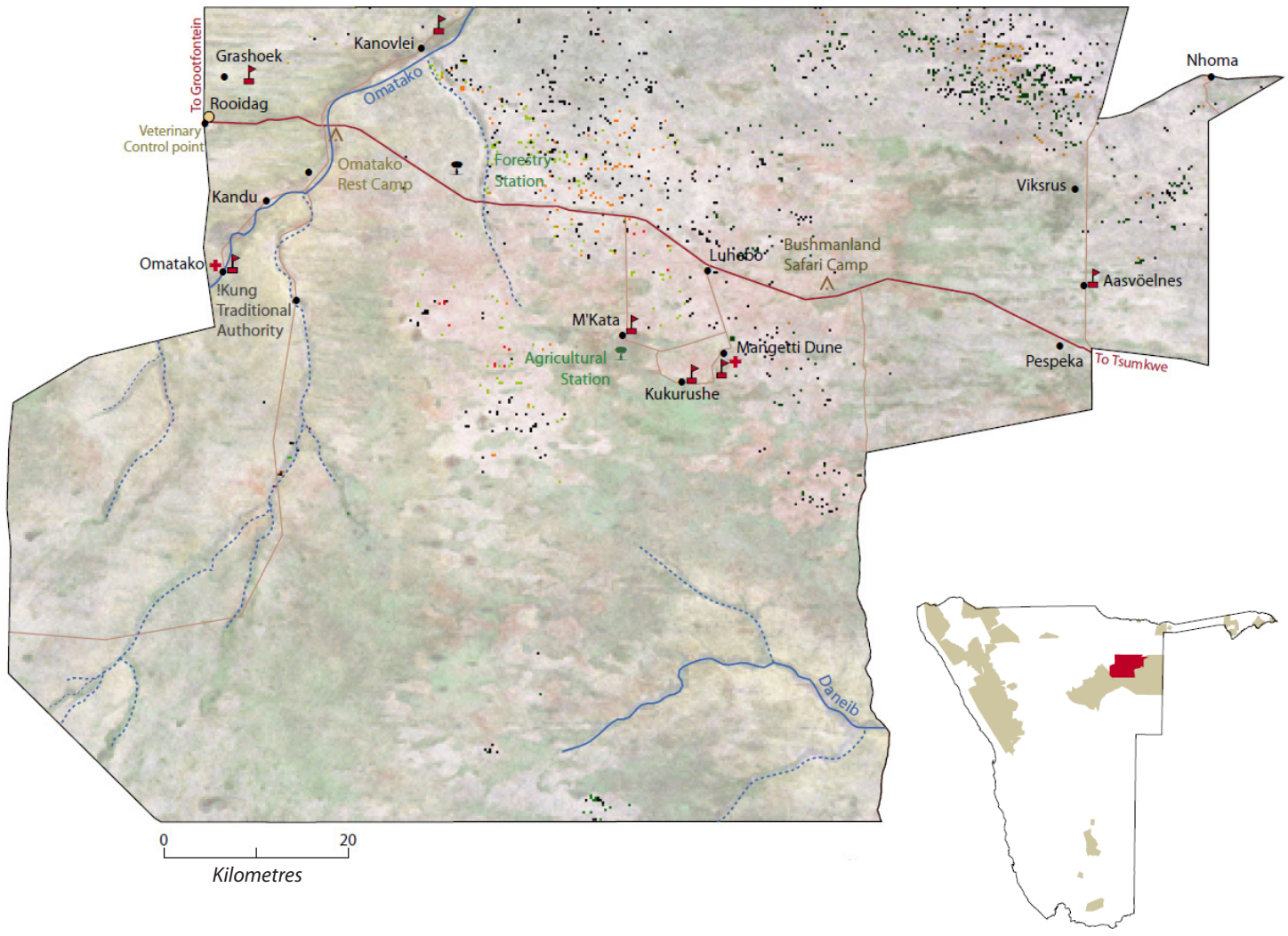
The increased abundance of game animals has given rise to a very successful tourism practice as well. The N≠a Jaqna Conservancy has a contract with a trophy hunting agency that in turn imports game animals each year. The acceptable quota for trophy hunters is quite specific in order to only take what can be easily recovered within the population of animals in the area, and the rules governing the quota are strict: for instance, during breeding periods it is forbidden to shoot near water holes, while pregnant animals may not be killed.

Tourists pay high prices to hunt in the area and a good portion of that money goes back into the conservancy, enabling it to sustain itself in terms of managing the water supply and future generations of game animals. When trophy hunters make a kill, they are not allowed to take the whole animal; the hunter is allowed to remove the head or another small part of the animal (designated by law), but the main part of the animal goes to the conservancy as meat. The people receive not only money, but food from this arrangement as well, and it is also a way of reducing poaching. The !Kung San lack a great deal of food security, so the provision of a regular meat source – one that also provides monetary income – helps to stigmatize and thus reduce instances of poaching.

Use of indigenous plants and traditional knowledge

Another important activity to monitor is plant use. Historically, the conservancy enjoys a substantial income from harvesting Devil's Claw, a plant used for treating arthritis and rheumatism. When the market for Devil's Claw first emerged, there was a drive to harvest as much of the plant as possible and sell it at the highest possible price, potentially limiting or even eliminating a resource necessary to the economy of the area. Devil's Claw takes approximately 2-4 years to grow to maturity, and so the conservancy was motivated to become extremely proactive in the management of harvesting. The harvesting of Devil's Claw is now carefully monitored: the number of harvesters certified by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism is limited and the season available for people to harvest has been reduced substantially. Additionally, the Conservancy's crop of Devil's Claw has been certified organic on a South African regional level, and the area is regularly surveyed to ensure appropriate re-growth and abundance. If the levels of Devil's Claw are insufficient, the organic certification can be revoked. Having the organic certification also raises the price of the produce, giving the people of the conservancy about 15% more in profits than they would otherwise receive.

Fig. 1: N≠a Jaqna Conservancy



Source: NACSO. 2010. Namibia's communal conservancies: a review of progress and challenges in 2009. NACSO, Windhoek. p. 112.

Impacts

BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS

Through the contract with the trophy hunting agency, around 250 new game animals are introduced into the conservancy each year. In addition, there is evidence that the animals currently living within the conservancy are reproducing in good numbers, based on reports from the game guards. This demonstrates the Conservancy's clear net gain in terms of wildlife population.

Increases in key wildlife species

The conservancy has seen resurgences in elephant, giraffe, wild dog and roan antelope populations. Commonly spotted species include eland, caracal, blackback, jackal, kudu, duiker, steenbok, warthog, porcupine, shrub hare, bat-eared fox, brown hyena (listed as vulnerable) and spotted hyena.

Due to the remote location and lack of infrastructure, few large scale reviews have been done. However, the number of game introduced between 2006 and 2009 totaled 399 animals, including blue wildebeest, eland, giraffe, oryx and kudu, as well as a few ostrich.

There have also been camera trap placements at one water hole which shows a very active population, including leopards, wild dogs (listed as endangered), brown hyena and elephants. (Click here to see some of the animals captured by motion-activated camera.)

N≠a Jaqna recently had their community game guards, who carry out anti-poaching patrols over the Conservancy's vast area, rated as one of the best such groups in Namibia by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (who rewarded them with horses to increase the guards' ranges). Alongside this approach is a focus on reducing human-wildlife conflict – for instance by investigating and promoting rangeland management techniques which allow cattle-grazing and wildlife to co-exist.

Sustainable harvesting of Devil's Claw

As for the Devil's Claw harvest, much has been done to manage and sustain this critical component of the area's indigenous genetic diversity. Conservancy leaders go to each village and train individuals within the conservancy on how to harvest the Devil's Claw. After training, a limited number of certified harvesters are registered for the four-month harvest period. During the harvest, the registered individuals continue to be monitored. If conservancy leaders find that they are not practising sustainable harvesting techniques, their permit is cancelled and they are no longer able to harvest. This practice is supported by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, which issues the permit.

Throughout Namibia, there is a clear set of best practices for the Devil's Claw harvest, and N≠a Jaqna conservancy has adapted those best practices to fit the practices of individual and family-based harvesting groups. For example, there are specific measurements in terms of the size of the plants and tubers that people are taking, and as long as harvesters keep the main taproot intact, the plant will regenerate on its own. By adhering to these guidelines, it is clear which plants are damaged and which ones will regenerate, and the conservancy, by controlling the purchase and shipment of Devil's Claw within and outside of the area, has been able to greatly increase the amount of economic and social benefits that the harvesters receive as well.

Participatory land use planning and monitoring

In terms of human interaction with biodiversity, the conservancy engaged in a scheme of participatory resource zoning in each of the 19 villages in the conservancy. The villages were surveyed in order to learn which areas have higher concentrations of various foods (both flora and fauna) and medicines that people are utilizing –the end goal being to protect those areas where biodiversity exists and where it could potentially flourish. The conservancy has set apart ar-

eas for human settlement, for mixed farming, cropping, cattle keeping, and small stock rearing, as well as for undisturbed wildlife. In this way, the !Kung San have made efforts to keep these at times conflicting land uses separate so that the biowealth of the conservancy may continue to exist and expand.

The Conservancy's policies have limited destruction of the fragile ecosystem of N≠a Jaqna, much of which is still untouched wilderness. Specific risks which the Conservancy deals with include overgrazing by the few farmers within the area (and a much bigger risk of farmers from the surrounding area), associated bush clearance, illegal deforestation (especially the cutting and selling of protected hard wood trees), over harvesting and illegal trade in Devils Claw, and poaching. The projects and policies of the Conservancy, and the monitoring provided by community game guards counteract these risks.

Certain plant and animal species are monitored by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, and community game guards keep "event books" which log sightings and activities. Over time it will be possible to build up an assessment of impacts from these records, but in the nine years the Conservancy has been operating this has not yet been collated.

Instead, impacts are measured from feedback by community game guards and the local population. Whilst this might be presumed to be unscientific, the vast experience of most Conservancy members in bush and wildlife knowledge – most of them having lived their lives in wildlife rich areas with very close interactions with the surrounding environment, not to mention the traditional knowledge passed down in San culture – has ensured the collation of a rich body of knowledge on ecosystem management.

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

The target beneficiaries are the residents of N≠a Jaqna Conservancy, the majority of whom (~85%) are indigenous San people, and nearly all of whom are poor rural dwellers with low education, surviving on subsistence farming, wild food collection and drought relief supplies.

Economic benefits from sustainable harvesting

After 2007, when the monitored Devil's Claw harvest began in N≠a Jaqna under the auspices of the conservancy, the membership of the conservancy received approximately N$1.2 million in direct economic benefit from the harvest. Devils Claw harvest generated over N$200,000 in revenue for the community in 2007, with this amount increasing to N$950,000 in 2009. This increase was due not only to a larger harvest, but also from increased prices from organic certification, increased quality and improved negotiations with the supplier.

The conservancy as an institution is also generating some income for people who are members but are not directly involved with the harvesting, thanks to an additional premium from the buyer to the conservancy on each kilo of Devil's Claw harvested. The conservancy is a major worldwide player in the Devil's Claw market, particularly

in the organically certified market; in 2008, N≠a Jaqna was the single largest Namibian producer of organically certified Devil's Claw. The money generated from the Devil's Claw harvest is substantial, and according to the Conservancy's benefit distribution plan, the first priority for its investment is pre-schools.

Improved incomes, food security, and gender equality

There are other sources of jobs and income from the tourism arrangement with the trophy hunting organization, and the resulting meat brings additional food security. In addition, there are further job opportunities in terms of game guards, conservancy staff, and people involved in various projects that the conservancy runs.

Though there is not much in the way of infrastructure in the conservancy area, there have been economic indicators that the jobs and additional income are having a positive effect; for example, there is an increase in cattle ownership – which requires considerable investment on the part of the individual. Trophy hunting partners provide between 20 and 30 carcasses per year from their farm as meat distributed to the community, which is an important addition in an area with low food security.

Though there continues to be an educational disparity between men and women in the conservancy, many of the projects in N≠a Jaqna focus especially on gender inclusion. Women are in charge of the Devil's Claw harvest and the training of new harvesters. Each village has a female team leader for the harvest who is responsible for making sure that the harvest is conducted in a sustainable manner, maintaining a position of authority over all harvesters.

Overall, the role of women in the conservancy is very strong; N≠a Jaqna's constitution guarantees 50/50 representation in the Conservancy's village leadership committee structure—generally a man and a woman from each village. In some cases, there may be two women from one village and two men from another, but the leadership structure is held equal overall. In the management committee, which is comprised of 4 people, there are two women and two men.

Enterprise development, education, and health

Very few people had access to cash income or employment before the Conservancy was established. The Conservancy now employs 12 local people full time, and members enjoy cash incomes from the sale of Devil's Claw, various wood products, craft and increased tourism revenue. A number of conservancy-run projects also provide livelihood opportunities including: chicken and melon growing projects in two villages; vegetable gardens in nine villages; two tourism sites; and a pilot ostrich farm to provide egg shell to craft makers (San jewelry is traditionally made from ostrich eggshell).

The Annual General Meeting decided in 2010 to invest a portion of profits into education, specifically early childhood development in the region. The increased frequency of transport due to the Conservancy activities means that their vehicle frequently serves as an ambulance in the area, providing much needed access to the only operational health clinic.

POLICY IMPACTS

There are now quite a few wildlife conservancies in Namibia, but N≠a Jaqna is one of the most well-known and well-respected, particularly with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. After winning the Equator Prize in 2008, N≠a Jaqna's success lent credibility to the entire conservancy scheme, and promoted environmental awareness within Namibia as a whole. It has also served to strengthen community-based natural resource management; in terms of land security and in terms of the conservancy, members of the !Kung San have earned income, causing both policymakers and the general public to see them as more productive members of Namibian society, which in turn makes it very difficult for them to challenge the legitimacy of the conservancy both in terms of its land area and as a legal body.

Historically, the !Kung San are a very non-combative people, and have generally moved from the area when challenged. Because of this lack of confidence in their land rights, over the last 1,000 years, they have ended up with occupying some of the worst areas of land in Southern Africa. Owning a project and managing the land in which this project operates – and wanting to continue to operate that project – is part of the process of interacting with the state, which requires a confidence and a political voice that had traditionally escaped the !Kung San.

Highly democratic governance processes

The people of N≠a Jaqna are also extremely engaged in the management of their conservancy. Though the area is still fairly lean in terms of infrastructure, conservancy leaders actually drive from village to village to have the management plans discussed with and endorsed by the entire membership of several thousand. In this way, there is a true democracy of management.

> *"Conservancy leaders literally travel village by village to gain the endorsement of the conservancy's membership. They either round everybody up into one place, or work with three or four villages in a day: having one meeting, driving three or four hours, having another meeting. They just carry on - sleeping in the villages and going through the conservancy until they're done with the full consultation."*
>
> *Ben Begbie-Clench, Namibia Support Unit Manager at the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA)*

Because the !Kung San do not have a hierarchically-structured leadership system, their leaders are really more akin to chairmen who oversee debate between the villagers. Each member over the age of 18 is given his or her voice in making conservancy decisions.

Strengthening local rights to land

In some areas of practice, N≠a Jaqna has become a role model for other conservancies, and exchange visits have resulted. However in terms of national policy there has been much less influence, and some of this should be put down the San's marginalized social status within the country and region, which inhibits state interaction. An exception is the defense of land rights in N≠a Jaqna where planned small scale farms which would dispossess the San of land and destroy environmentally sensitive areas have been opposed through N≠a Jaqna Conservancy by the community. Whilst this is not policy change, it has promoted adherence to national law and a respect for democratic processes which was not previously the case. This action vastly strengthened the community's knowledge of their rights and ability to interact with the state.

Sustainability and Replication

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability of the N≠a Jaqna Conservancy depends on the people seeing the benefits of the project and wanting to be a part of it, and the highly democratic nature of its governance is a huge factor in its desirability. This degree of participation is perhaps not the most cost-effective (so much travel requires fuel and vehicle upkeep), but in the end, sacrificing the high level of democracy would prove a greater barrier to sustainability than the increased monetary costs. In addition, the Conservancy's management has worked hard to build lasting relationships with their partners. As an example, the Conservancy does not increase their contract price annually or open a yearly bid for partnership with other trophy hunting companies; though in the short run, this may result in less of a profit for the !Kung San, the mutually beneficial agreement will, over the next ten years, provide a greater and more reliable profit in the long run.

There are certainly challenges to the Conservancy's sustainability, however. Though N≠a Jaqna is becoming more financially independent through its trophy hunting contract and the sale of Devil's Claw, true independence from current donors would bring a level of financial responsibility as yet unseen. The !Kung San, however, are in a unique position for success, owing to the desirability of the pristine quality of their beautiful and remote area as a destination for eco-tourism.

Threats to sustainability will only increase as time goes on; the need for farmland and grazing area only increases with Namibia's growing population, and changes in behavior and migration routes of game animals could occur under the influence of global climate change – a major threat in such an arid region. Luckily, the !Kung San of N≠a Jaqna are strongly committed to success, for they understand the consequences of damaging their fragile ecosystem; they understand that there will likely be no second chance. Community participation and private partnerships have been the key components to N≠a Jaqna's ongoing success, combining a democratic approach with economic benefits. Another contributing factor is the knowledge of the land and environment held by the participants, which has been adapted to new ends.

REPLICATION

There has already been replication and knowledge exchange between N≠a Jaqna and other communities and conservancies throughout Namibia, sharing best practices in tourism activities and land management techniques. N≠a Jaqna is one of the most successful and well-known conservancies in Namibia, lending weight to the conservancy approach. Additionally, there is a great deal of knowledge exchange with not only other communities, but with Namibian society as a whole. Learning about and understanding the needs of tourists and visitors to the Conservancy has enabled the !Kung San of N≠a Jaqna to adapt their methods in ways that are both beneficial to their community and appealing to visitors – further encouraging the sustainability of the project. In exchange, when tourists and non-community members visit the conservancy, they are exposed to an often unseen land of largely undisturbed ecosystem filled with native plants and animal species, rather than cattle or larger-scale agriculture. This exposure further underlines the importance and effectiveness of community land management, encouraging the growth and acceptance of the conservancy scheme on a wider level.

There have been a number of exchange partners, including mutual exchanges with Nyae Nyae Conservancy, other Namibian Conservancies and a San group from Botswana. N≠a Jaqna staff have visited a number of Conservancies in northern Namibia, and even San groups in Angola.

There are barriers to knowledge exchange, primarily in the realm of educational level and the steep learning curve associated with successful conservancy management. However, the !Kung San community members who have a greater degree of education

have been indispensible in the process of adapting and training the community as a whole. They have become essential leaders who possess a cultural and traditional knowledge base lacking in outsiders and the know-how to instruct and manage the Conservancy successfully.

PARTNERS

The N≠a Jaqna Conservancy is a unique partnership between the Namibian government, the World Bank, international NGOs, and private business. This diverse partnership arrangement is critical for the continued success of the project, bringing stakeholders together from many different sectors around the world. In this way, global expertise melds with local on-the-ground knowledge to create a sustainable and replicable initiative.

Most critical in this partnership is the support of the Namibian government, the UNDP GEF-Small Grants Program, international NGOs, and Eden Trophy Hunting (a privately-owned business). Other partners include:

- Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA)
- Ministry of Environment and Tourism
- World Wildlife Fund
- DED (German Development Service; now GIZ)
- Namibian Association of Norway (NAMAS)

FURTHER REFERENCE

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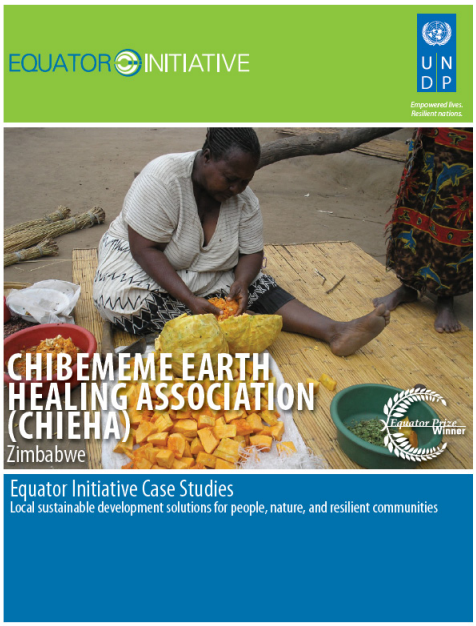

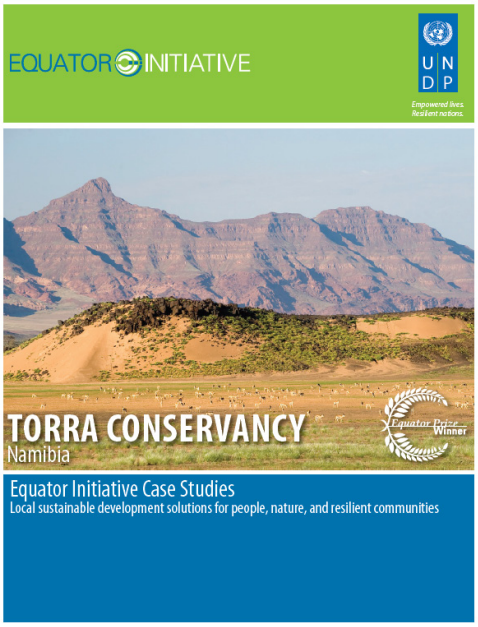

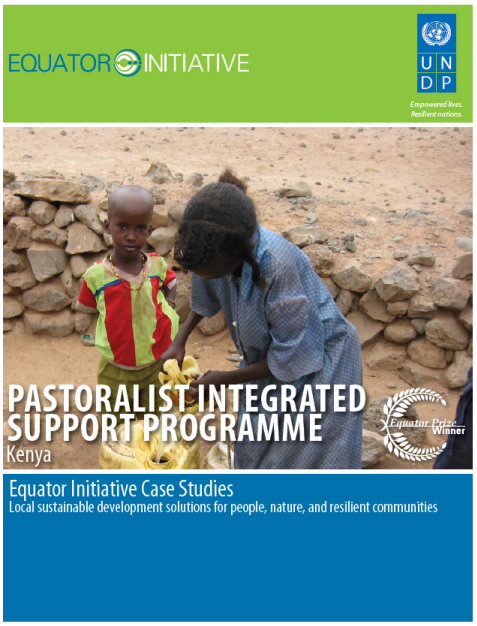

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