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## ***No Boundaries for wildlife C Peace Parks in southern Africa***

by  
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### **Introduction**

The term peace park was adopted by the World Conservation Union in the 1980s to describe a trans-frontier conservation area C a region which embraces the land of more than one nation, unifying fragmented ecological habitats and promoting environmental and political stability. During apartheid years the electric fence forming the national boundary between South Africa and Mozambique delivered a fatal shock to those unfortunate enough to come up against it. This fence, and others in southern Africa, will ultimately be removed or rerouted to consolidate a peace park, currently known as Gaza/Kruger/Gonarezhou or GKG, the greater area being close to ten million hectares in size, stretching northwards and eastwards into Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This overview examines one of the key organisations within the peace parks movement and proceeds to consider some of the practical challenges B mainly human focused B facing peace parks.

### **Peace Parks Foundation**

Amongst many NGOs, the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) is championing this new approach to trans-national resource sharing which is sweeping through the subcontinent. The PPF (not to be confused with the concept >peace parks=, is used interchangeably in this article with Transfrontier Conservation Areas [TFCA]) has access to considerable political, financial and intellectual capital. Established in 1997, PPF is chaired (and partly sponsored) by Dr Anton Rupert, and supported by numerous South African and foreign corporations. Patrons include Nelson Mandela and the leaders of Southern African Development Community (SADC) member countries.

### **The regional context**

Although peace parks are visionary, politically unifying and ecologically sensible, there are challenges that such an initiative faces. Peace parks will be a tough collaborative test for SADC members with not all conservationists being convinced that the concept is appropriate for the proposed areas. Reasons cited are: establishment, infrastructure and management costs, poaching, incorporation of existing communities, political fall-outs, joint management consensus, disease control, resource utilisation and civil war, to name a few. The PPF mission is >to facilitate the establishment of TFCA's in the SADC supporting sustainable economic development, the conservation of biodiversity, and regional peace and stability.

### Scope of PPF activities and underlying support requirements

Globally, over 100 countries have thus far established TFCAs, the earliest dating back to 1925. Eight southern African TFCA zones have been recognised, incorporating land from ten SADC member countries'. The PPF will assist governments and communities with, *inter alia*: land acquisition, financing solutions, lease negotiation, commercialisation of local enterprise, training, capacity building and international awareness.

### Economies of scale

The current philosophy of South African National Parks (SANP) is to create large parks with critical mass, branding, tourism appeal and, importantly, an ability to exist on diminishing subsidies. The concept of wildlife paying its way is not a popular stance amongst ardent preservationists but with pressing social priorities it is in vogue with government, mindful of the probability that in the long term it may be the only answer to protecting habitat from human encroachment. It is here that the human element in conservation areas is relevant.

The estimated cost of one such park, the Kgalagadi Transfontier Park, is budgeted at roughly US\$9 million with a casual US\$7 million allocated to roads development. By comparison the projected cost is slightly less than double the Kruger National Park's recently announced deficit of nearly US\$5 million. These figures exceed in some instances the total budgets that South Africa's *provincial* parks authorities have at their disposal to manage upwards of fifty protected areas per province. If peace parks were funded by government, questions about resource allocation could arise. It is for this reason that organisations like the PPF should be self sufficient in their fund raising.

Besides the political and ecological dividend there is presumably a more quantifiable financial one. Certainly, the two principal consequences assumed in the TFCA models are:

- 1) increased tourism to these parks, and
- 2) improved benefits, financial or otherwise, to local communities (the so-called social dividend), particularly in newly incorporated areas where communities will not be relocated but rather persuaded to change resource utilisation habits or practices.

In the case of GKG, these assumptions are reasonably sound. With a million visitors a year, 40 per cent of them being international, the Kruger Park can afford to share the revenue with its neighbours. South Africa's Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mohammed Valli Moosa, refers to the consolidated GKG reserve as >ten times the value of each component on its own=.

How valid is the assumption that the creation of mega-reserves will bring proportionate increases in tourist numbers or financial economies of scale? From an SADC perspective, the challenge is to increase the gross number of tourists to southern African TFCAs, rather than to reshuffle the travel habits of the existing volumes, which would result in a zero nett gain for the region.

Despite the sanguine approach of individuals like Valli Moosa and Anton Rupert, one suspects that the sub-continent's politicians collectively hold the key to the anticipated tourist cornucopia upon which so many of the scenarios are optimistically based.

A foreign traveller's perception of >peaceful neighbours= hinges less on the known level of co-operation between African states and more on perceptions of personal safety in the region as a whole. Every government sponsored tourism enterprise should be underlined by this caveat.

### Gaza/Kruger Gonarezhou (GKG)

Peace parks will certainly soften national borders for tourists. The GKG-TFCA, the largest proposed reserve in southern Africa, will consolidate an area of close to 100 000 square kilometres of wildlife estate.

For travellers the implications are profound. A tourist renting a car in Nelspruit could drive close to one thousand kilometres inside a park boundary, traversing three countries, enjoying wildlife, botanical, scenic, historic and even cultural experiences, all of this without the usual customs frustrations, detours and expense. Wildlife will

prosper too, particularly predator species like wild dogs, which need large home ranges.

The corollary that more time spent in the area translates to more income for local communities seems a reasonable one and SATOUR=s payoff line >one job created for every eight tourists= is germane with regard to peace parks.

The proposed PPF budget for GKG makes no reference to the total probable financial establishment cost of the new reserve. It appears that these issues may be addressed on an *ad hoc* basis although the process of training 350 staff to manage the reconstituted park has already commenced.

In GKG the greater park area will incorporate sometimes disparate, subsistence based communities, private wildlife conservancies, national parks and hunting concession holders. What are the management options?

Insofar as communities are concerned, the best systems in southern Africa are self policed community participation models subscribing to broad ecological management plans. Although this would be a precedent for SANP in South Africa the success of these systems is dependent on the perceived and actual community or individual benefit derived from proposed alternatives to current land use. Countries like Botswana and Namibia have through acts of parliament, and devolved power structures, created mechanisms for land ownership or secure tenure by communities C but at a price. The communities must strictly observe zonation ranging from cultivation through photographic tourism to consumptive wildlife utilisation. Some of these models are showing promise especially where there are sufficient tourist attractions or alternative opportunities for income generating activities like sport and trophy hunting.

The Makuleke land claim in northern Kruger National Park (KNP), is a case in point. The community has full title to the land but in terms of the agreement it still falls under the KNP/GKG ecological management area. Since the approval of the claim lodge sites have been put out to

tender and funds have been committed to infrastructure development, training and capacity building. They have also profitably auctioned hunting rights in the area B a subject of intense public debate given that it shares its wildlife resources with the KNP.

Many individuals struggle with issues like hunting inside of national parks. As distasteful as the enterprise may be to some, there are community leased tracts of land such as Campfire Wards in Zimbabwe and the Community Multi-purpose Controlled Hunting Areas (CHA=s) in Botswana where 90 to 100 per cent of community revenue from wildlife utilization is derived from hunting levies. This income arguably protects the resource (trophy animals) and hence the habitat. SANP, as one of the dominant agencies in the peace parks process, will have to be careful not to assert its agendas too traditionally when it comes to proposed income options, like hunting.

#### **Incorporation of humans into TFCA**s

TFCA

s face their biggest challenge in adopting satisfactory methods of finding consensus with human populations. The PPF is itself a small organisation but it has to mobilise huge resources to consult with and build capacity in the vast TFCA areas.

The consultative process often involves addressing long-harboured grievances that sometimes date back to colonial dispossession in the 1800s. Central governments draw conservation boundaries leaving NGOs and officials the task of mediating at ground level between TFCA or wildlife authorities, local government and communities B at odds over long-contested boundaries, tribal rights, established resource utilisation protocols or lack thereof. A recent example of this occurred in the Ndumo area on the Mozambique border, which is part of the Lubombo TFCA. By circumventing the land claims process, a land claims commissioner allocated 200 hectares of land within the existing Ndumo Reserve to the Tembe Community. Despite the community=s undeniable right to be compensated in a prescribed manner, it is an actual example and a relatively benign one at this stage, that illustrates

how the process can be derailed by failure to follow the correct legal or consultative channels. With enough of such incidences in one region, whether land claims related or not, a serious brake could be put on specific peace parks initiatives.<sup>ii</sup>

### Community benefit

One of the deliverables mentioned is the ability of TFCAs to raise the standard of living of Recent research indicates that with clear land tenure, skills, management capability, capacity and capital, Community Based Tourism (CBT) captures a healthy percentage of tourists= dollars. CBT also had some remarkable failures, most of them resulting from the >expectation gap= (lower than promised tourist attendance), deadlocks on community trusts, or the human factor. With the best intentions, community endeavours are often short-circuited by powerful community figures who drive separate agendas. New land, wildlife and human relationships often threaten vested interests and the architects of TFCAs should be mindful of injecting new values and land rights patterns which are not being informed by the old, but should also be wary of perpetuating the inequitable.

### Policy Recommendations:

#### 3 Clear land tenure and ownership structures for communities must be established.

If necessary this should be done through special acts of parliament common to neighbouring countries or a formal method of acquiring rights. These rights may be shared with private sector partners in tourism. In the case of local communities, there must be safeguards (independent review panels) to prevent exploitation. This process should be informed by working models in southern Africa.

#### 4 Non-competition.

Parks authorities should not secure the best tourism enterprises for themselves leaving mediocre opportunities for private/ community operators. This creates a marginal product, overcapacity, and unfair competition between the state and the community/private sector. State authorities should aim for tripartite partnerships (community/public/private) or concentrate only on land/wildlife management.

beneficiary communities, especially where sacrifices are expected to be made by these communities. Finding stable and sustainable practices in community based tourism and natural resource management must therefore be a top priority of TFCAs. Attempts to create integrated peace parks will otherwise fail.

5 **Community assistance programmes must be undertaken in a long-term support cycle.** One of the weaknesses of government/aid organisation/NGO sponsorships is the short term approach in the support funding cycle. The projects should therefore be more modest in size (without sacrificing commercial potential) and preferably be endowment funded. Tourism scenarios and other development plans should be scaled accordingly.

6 **Flexible Zonation (for unfenced reserves).** Core wildlife areas should be zoned strictly photographically with buffer regions between human populations zoned for mixed use e.g. natural resource harvesting, hunting etc. but excluding agriculture, followed by settlement areas.

#### 7 Balancing individual and collective benefit in Communities.

Policy makers should clearly understand the relationship between the rewards of enterprise that accrue as a result of collective community ownership and those that arise through individual merit, allocating development funds in such a way as to balance the two.

### Suggested Reading:

- 2) *The Trans-boundary Parks Initiative. The origins and Objectives of the Peace Parks Foundation*, Paper by Prof. Willem van Riet, CEO, Peace Parks Foundation.
- 3) <http://www.peaceparks.org>.

i TFCAs and member countries are Richtersveld/Ai-Ais (South Africa and Namibia, Gariiep (South Africa and Namibia centred on the Orange River= Augrabies Falls), Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (South Africa and Botswana), Dongola/Limpopo/Gonarezhou (South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe), Lubombo (South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique), Maloti/Drakensberg (South Africa and Lesotho), Malawi/Lake Nyasa (Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania).

ii More disturbing, however, is sabotage at a political level. Tracts of land in Zimbabwe= Tuli area (part of the proposed Limpopo Valley-Dongola

TFCA) have been decreed resettlement farms (for stock grazing) by Robert Mugabe, threatening the transformation of the area to a fully constituted TFCA. There is scant comfort to be derived from the fact that Mugabe is at the same time a patron of the Peace Parks Foundation!

- \* **Piers Relly consults in the tourism industry advising on commercialisation of wildlife estate and business planning for Community Public Private partnerships.**