

The history of utilization in South Africa still has a particular bent to it, which is mainly focused on parties involved in tourism, trophy hunting, game ranching and harvesting and breeding of wildlife. They have been in a position to utilise the sustainable use policy to their advantage. It must be noted though that the hunting industry, which remains fairly out of sight from the public domain, has been tainted by incidences of canned lion and cheetah hunting. This emphasises the urgency of introducing a welfare ethic which would strengthen the sustainable use policy.

Both in the scientific and policy discourse, the guardians and presiders of the sustainable use policy played a double agenda, until a new political discourse with its development orientation dictated different terms of engagement. Suddenly, the newspeak of the conservation sector took root as if all the ominous aspects of a dualistic policy approach vanished in thin air.

However, we must not be distracted, by the sudden change of language which now mirrors the new political dispensation. We must accept that the fundamentals remain, that this class or grouping of people who have benefited from the policy continue to do so, while rhetoric is poured over the rights of the poor, and all the hum drum of benefits to rural development in reality seems to be camouflaged by the right political vocabulary.

Benefits from wildlife are much more tangible in a scenario where the beneficiary group own land and are in control of the resource or have rights of use and access over these resources. Namibia's conservancy programme in the Caprivi is interesting to watch, and recent conferring of land rights in conservation areas have enabled community based projects such as the San and Makuleke may bring out new prospects for wider benefit from the policy. This unfortunately, is not the consequence of the sustainable use policy. On the contrary its roots are in our land reform process and the emergence of our democratic system of governance and accountability. In some cases proponents are even cheeky enough to suggest new changes in terms of access and rights is due to the sustainable use policy.

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For the Elephants: A second look at the Sustainable Use Policy

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Recently, Dr John Ledger, Director of EWT, put forward his reflections on the Tuli elephant issue which was published in the Star (16.12.99). Dr Ledger's key points were as follows:

- That the animal rights movement is opposed to the IUCN's sustainable use policy which posits that animals and plants should be used for the benefit of humans as part of a global conservation strategy.
- That the "sustainable use" ideology is pursued by the IUCN and its members.
- He submitted reflections on the controversy surrounding the treatment of the Tuli Elephants by an animal breeder Giazza.
- The Tuli issue also raised questions as to whether animal welfare and animal rights are one and the same thing.

I would like to submit some additional reflections and insights which I hope will promote further critical debate. My views are personal and not those of the IUCN. They reflect on what has not just become policy, but also a key doctrine shaping IUCN's activities in the region.

Recent, political changes in South Africa and the rising impact of the international animal rights movement perhaps requires us to revive the discussion within IUCN circles. The reason being for fear that our doctrine may not rise to the occasion of changing circumstances. For fear as well that where a doctrine is a guiding principle it may become a blind dogma.

Such renewed discussions also are necessary at least to help resolve and develop positions around some pertinent issues. This would help contextualise the sustainable use policy in South Africa and give it more depth. Some of these issues are:

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1. Is the IUCN policy equivalent to the national policy? Or do we assume that if a member is a government institution, by virtue of their membership to the IUCN they reflect government policy? Or do we in fact have a coherent national policy, and if so, what is it other than the abstract words “sustainable use”?
2. Is there an identifiable leadership that is championing the cause of the sustainable use policy and who are they?
3. What version of the sustainable use policy should we adopt, as it would seem that different pundits favour different interpretative narratives on the policy objectives and what their practice should be?
4. Are the vision and practice of sustainable use the same, or should they be different, with the understanding that while the vision is the inspiration and end point, how we get there differs from one context to another?
5. What is the structure the practice of sustainable use and who really benefits from its policy? For instance, the wildlife industry in South Africa is said to be valued at about R400 million, but it is not clear how it is driven, what the ownership and use patterns are, how many people are employed by the sector and what the benefit stream truly is?
6. Is the assumption valid that the sustainable use policy always leads to improvements in conservation?
7. To what extent is South Africa bearing the cost of such a policy to the benefit of external parties who have no interest in the policy or feel that they have to be committed to or own such a policy?
8. Are our management systems, such as CITES, adequate to deal with trade in flora and fauna and thereby make the policy more meaningful in practice?

The Tuli issue emphasised the seriousness of the animal rights lobby as a possible threat to the sustainable use policy. Perhaps for the first time our membership had to think seriously through strategies and positions they have tended to use as finely crafted convention with all its comfort zones. These strategies seem to have backfired with the Tuli Affair resulting in the sacrifice of the value of a doctrine.

Dr Ledger, is correct in asserting that sustainable use is the only reasonable policy that is pragmatic for conserving wildlife in our region. As he notes, ours is a far more complex system of relations. As Dr Ledger has noted, animals and people in many rural areas live both in harmony and conflict depending on location and animal species.

The sustainable use policy thus far is driven more by a conservationist rather than a development focus. A development perspective is lacking precisely because it pays more attention to conservation than human needs. And, if there is human benefit, can such a policy operate against or in a vacuum of broader societal issues of equity, access and sustainable livelihoods? The policy should not be vacuous, as it should be responsive to

social priorities and concerns, which are not in contravention of conservation values. A well instituted sustainable livelihoods strategy that places emphasis on human welfare first should lead to positive conservation outcomes. The political context does influence our outlooks and shapes our practice. The sustainable use policy during the period of Apartheid reflected the political discourse, structure and practice of the time. After Apartheid, institutions that were proponents of the policy were slow to change. At present, we seem to have a policy that is a chimera of the past and present. For a while it speaks the language of the present, while its practice is that of the past which is reflected in the same social and economic networks that have moved only a few inches in the direction of social development.

Why then should disadvantaged and poor communities from a rural or urban area seeking to generate a livelihood, not rightfully accuse us of thinking more about animals than they do about people? I know that some of our members will protest at this remark, but the reality is that the sustainable use policy is not known widely and the general public is ambivalent as only a few people benefit from the policy position.

All recent community based conservation efforts have been spurred on since 1994 by policies such as the land reform, rural development and no thanks to the politics of reluctance and non-committal attitude of the conservation fraternity at the time. The shift of mindset within the conservation fraternity did not occur of its own volition, but required a change in government to make this shift, to force almost the hand of political thinking from the old to the new. As the political thinking spread its wings over society, including the donor community, NGOs from the conservation sector, as a measure of last resort, started to apply their minds to development concerns. It is my impression that while the IUCN policy is a wise one, the IUCN membership in South Africa still has to engage and contextualise the meaning of these words given the context of the current dispensation. If not, we may all speak past each other as I am pretty sure that given our different cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds the sustainable use policy means different things to different people.

Prior to 1994, a dual system of policy existed in South Africa. On the one hand, a sustainable use policy benefited those who owned land and had special access to wildlife, while on the other hand there was either silence or support for a conservation policy that excluded the majority of South Africans from both consumptive and non-consumptive benefits associated with this. I would argue that a strange duplicity existed in the arguments of some of the key proponents who happen to speak a different language today. The sustainable use policy in my opinion was fine as long as the elite could benefit from it, and this means simply the ‘white’ constituency’ but not fine if impoverished masses suddenly wanted access or rights over these resources. In fact in many cases, claims were made that this would lead to the pillage of natural resources.

For the sustainable use policy to be successful in the future, I propose five key principles which should govern the vision and practise of such a policy:

1. It should meet the development objectives and needs of the country and promote sustainable livelihoods for all the users of the resources.
2. Adopt a pragmatic approach that should include animal welfare considerations and engage the animal rights movement in positive dialogue.
3. Policy practise must result in clear benefits to the poor and must engage transformation of what amounts to a skewed economy of use.
4. Policy practise must be monitored and evaluated so as to ensure that it is robust and transparent.
5. That the policy create the framework for the formation of a network of partners by ensuring that it is owned and adopted by all South Africans.