

accommodation prices. It is better to be astute than a fool. In certain circumstances, handing over some functions to private operators can be positive. In other circumstances, particularly when it comes to designating some areas as exclusive zones of enterprise, we may be treading on trickier grounds.

The integration of protected areas within local economic development plans, is being mooted under new recommendations by the Municipal Demarcation Board and the proposed land tax system. If these plans go ahead, protected areas like the Kruger National Park, and some of the World Heritage Sites, will be designated Special Management Areas. These areas will be expected to pay local levies and rates like other land users. The rationale perhaps, is to ensure that local districts and municipalities are not saddled with having to subsidize a benefit- through the services they render- to visitors and tourists outside of rural areas, paid for by local taxpayers. Studies show that, in general, protected areas provide greater economic benefits to national and global economies than they do for the local economy and communities, due to a 'leakage' of tourism revenues from rural areas. These new policy and legislative proposals are likely to further shape the role of conservation areas, in terms of their contribution to local and national economic development.

It is clear that conservation is perhaps on a path of no return. The change is a combination of internal and external tensions, impelled into accommodating a changing world scenario, where conservation for its own sake is untenable. In both the developed and developing world, conservation must demonstrate economic value. This applies more so to poor developing countries where expectations are defined and determined by issues of poverty and rural development.

The views expressed here are not that of the IUCN, but the opinion of the author(s)

8 Roper Street
Hatfield
Pretoria
Tel: 012 420-4194
Fax: 012 420-3917
Email: sfakir@icon.co.za.

IUCN
The World Conservation Union
IUCN-South Africa Country Office

PO Box 11536
Hatfield
Pretoria
0028

POLICY THINK TANK SERIES
NO. 6

Is there a paradigm shift in conservation?

Saliem Fakir
February 2001

The mere mention of conservation in South Africa these days, is akin to uttering a swear word. It conjures up images of people being thrown off the land by khaki-clad, gun-toting-game rangers; harkening impressions of colonial style management and practice. Conservation practice is changing though. This change has less to do with the ideology still prevalent in some quarters, but reflects rather the shift in national policy and international trends.

Often conservation practice has passed itself off as a value-free and innocent practice, on the pretext of subscribing to noble environmental goals. On the contrary, it is as intense in ideology and political intrigue as any other field. The boundaries of conservation are shifting, and hopefully it is to an extent to which we may one-day speak of conservation not merely as a fenced off area, but as places of multiple use. Within this framework humanitarian values should preside on the same level as ecological speak. The truth is that one cannot speak of conservation these days, without invoking the element of development. Or worse still, one cannot speak only of development as an overarching framework, while beating the head of conservation.

What are the factors shaping conservation and in which direction is it going? Firstly, on the international level, the Convention on Biological Diversity formulated soon after Rio, embodies in more than one way, the different interests of developed and developing countries. The Convention acknowledges the issues of social equity; that conservation, the use and management of biodiversity, can be a contested political terrain, given that some benefit while others have been denied benefits, due either to class distinction, or race. The Convention articulates a more humanistic and integrated approach to conservation. It attempts to encapsulate the development aspirations of developing countries, with that of the purely environmental interests of developed countries. If you choose, it may be regarded as the developing world's Treaty for good environmental governance. But, then off course the Convention is only as good as the actions that are generated from it.

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In South Africa, conservation has been the bastion of an older paradigm, that was less people friendly, especially with regard to poor people. Within this paradigm, conservation represented the values and principles of an apartheid approach and discourse. As such, conservation history was entrenched in colonial and apartheid ideology. There is a clear, if not stark correlation between the language of conservation and the political order that prevailed at the time in South Africa. In effect, the practice of conservation was dependent on and determined by, the prevailing policies and legal framework, so as to ensure the exclusion of the majority, and benefit a minority. When they enclosed the animals they excluded the poor. Worse still, they provided harsher living conditions for the majority of people, than they did for wildlife.

However, with the emergence of a new political order in 1994, the language of conservation began to change. At the risk of being cynical, this language did not reflect a necessary change of heart, but rather an expedient exploitation of the political language of the new government, or as some would argue, a factor of political force majeure. Indeed, a formerly conservative fraternity now rather suddenly adopted a language, that spoke of community based conservation, social upliftment and rural development. This also serves to demonstrate the effect of general political discourse on shaping the language of conservation, and to a degree its' practice.

Whether this translates into a revolution or paradigm shift in conservation, is dependent on the way in which other cross-sectoral national policies begin to govern conservation practice. To a degree the practice of conservation is being influenced by land reform, rural development, and Spatial development Initiatives (SDIs). This has forced conservation to take on a new nuance.

Conservationists also boast of contributing to community-based development. The assumption is that this has always been a cherished value, ingrained within a conservation paradigm. However, national policy changes such as land reform, have had more to do with determining the nature of these priorities than moral intentions on the part of conservationists.

The Makuleke land claim is a case in point. At the time the South African National Parks was negotiating a way out of the land claim, it had no option but to concede ownership of land to the Makuleke community, and this is despite its resistance to it in the early stages of the Makuleke application. The Makuleke case also illustrates that through negotiation, the interests of communities and conservationists can be secured.

The case also demonstrates how land reform policy has empowered communities to assert their rights, and thus bring into question conventional approaches to conservation. In effect this is achieved by forcing the hand of establishment conservation into a

position of compromise and, if you choose a paradigm shift. A conducive political environment was necessary for creating a window of opening, whereas the new paradigm ached to get through jammed doors during the apartheid era.

The emergence of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs), also resonated with the possibilities of conservation expansionism along a conventional paradigm. Transfrontier conservation areas attempt to connect protected areas across borders between neighbouring states and can potentially boost eco-tourism in the Southern Africa region. If a very narrow neo-liberal economic model for these areas is accepted by both government and the private sector, these areas could also become specialized paid-for experiences, similar to establishing 'Disney Land' fixtures in the savannah.

If it were not for the SDIs and other corridor developments, it is possible that the role of TFCAs, in the overall economic development of the region, would not have been brought into question. It is possible that TFCAs could be just another large tract of land fulfilling the conservation aspirations of privileged communities, in the region and internationally. The SDIs have shaped the discourse on the development approach for TFCAs and its economic value. It has thereby prevented them from creating islands of seclusion and exclusion, into having them integrate into the broader economy and thus becoming more development orientated.

A further trend shaping the outlook on conservation is the commercialization of protected areas in South Africa. Neo-liberal economic influence on protected areas is an international trend, and follows the global trend of privatization, as allocations of funds for protected areas from the State have declined over time.

Whether this amounts to selling off public assets is open to question. However, the major principle of commercialization, as being driven by the South African National Parks, is to enter into public private partnership schemes, where areas that are not core competences of the National parks are outsourced to the private sector. These would include the running of restaurants; marketing of tourist destinations; and the building and operating of tourist facilities. In the case of many of South Africa's parks, there appears to be sound grounds for adopting an outsourcing approach. A good deal of experience has already been gained in similar initiatives with some of our national botanical gardens. The outcomes indicate that a balanced approach and the active management of private operators can produce greater benefits than sorrow.

As the privatization bug catches the conservation sector, new debates emerge on whether this will exclude the poor from enjoying South Africa's biodiversity and natural assets; or whether this will benefit only the elite, who are in a position to afford high gate and