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**Knowing and deciding:  
participation in  
conservation and  
development initiatives in  
Namibia and Argentina**

**PhD Thesis  
March 2007**

## Abstract

This thesis explores how people's knowledge about sustainability affects participation in combined conservation and development initiatives. It focuses principally on two case studies that embody these dual objectives: the 'conservancy programme' in Namibia and the Alto Bermejo Project in Argentina. The concept of sustainability – of living in a way that meets both current and future needs – has led, on a global scale, to a re-casting of the relationship between conservation and development as one of necessary interdependence. Such is the credibility invested in the concept of sustainability that it is found underpinning policy and intervention in countries as distinct as Namibia and Argentina.

These observations set up the two central questions of the thesis. First, what types of participation characterise decision-making processes within these two contexts? Second, how is having knowledge on sustainability one (though not the only) causal determinant of who participates, in what activities and on what basis?

These questions pave the way for analysis of the types of participation found in two Namibian conservancies and specific components of the Alto Bermejo Project in Argentina. A key belief shaping policy and intervention in both contexts is that wider local involvement is a precondition of sustainable natural resource use. Consequently, strong efforts are made in both places to attempt to ensure that local people are key decision-makers. However, talk of local-level, grassroots participation in the Namibian or Argentine context, whilst by no means wholly misplaced, can obscure the high participation levels of NGO, government and specific private-sector actors. This is because both initiatives depend for the achievement of their objectives on a process of knowledge transfer from implementers to beneficiaries. Much of the knowledge deemed necessary for the realisation of these objectives lies with government, NGO and specific private sector actors. Having this knowledge, therefore, renders their participation indispensable. Indeed, the very access of these actors to the resources on which intervention depends is partly a function of the credibility invested in their knowledge. Access to resources is also a means through which the credibility of such knowledge is reinforced. This dynamic I call 'circularity in intervention'.

'Circularity in intervention' entails a variety of advantages and disadvantages relative to context and perspective, which this thesis neither condemns nor condones. It does, nonetheless, seek to clarify one important point. Our account of participation in the Namibian or Argentine examples is incomplete without looking at how having or not having knowledge about sustainability affects participation.

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## **Acknowledgements**

### **Namibia**

I would most like to thank Eric Xaweb and Bruce Howoseb for their invaluable assistance. I would like also to thank the members of both conservancy committees for their contributions to the research. I am deeply indebted to the members and residents of Tsiseb and Sorris-Sorris conservancies for their willing collaboration in focus group, participatory and interview exercises. I extend sincere gratitude to Chiefs Elias //Thaniseb and Abraham !Gariseb for permitting me to conduct my research within their jurisdiction. My research assistants and friends, Iyambo Naruseb and David Eiseb, in their dedication, finely-honed analytical (and navigational) skills, and companionship during long hours in the field, rendered themselves indispensable to the research. Many thanks to the following individuals and organisations:

MRCC: Alfons Mosimane, for broad, rich, helpful insight; to Margaret Angula, Selma Nangula, Kenneth ||Uiseb, Pauline Shivute and Martin Shapi for sweet stress relief

RISE: Don Muroua, Lysias Uusiku, Bryan Gaomab, for valuable insight and a warm welcome into Tsiseb conservancy

NACOBTA: especially Abuid Karongee, Selma, Niseth and Erling for kindly making much time for and answering my numerous questions.

Ministry of Environment & Tourism: Nahor Howoseb, Tsukhoe ||Garoes, John Hazam, Pauline Lindeque

WILD Project: both to Kit Vaughan and Andrew Long for the encouragement, insight, analysis, literature, contacts, and to Kit in particular for the help and the place to crash after the crash.

### **Argentina**

Quiero agradecer a todos los toldeños, lipeños y victoreños que participaron de la investigación, en forma de trabajo en grupo, entrevistas personales o conversaciones informales. Nunca me olvidaré de mis amigas en los varios clubes de madres con los que trabajé, y les deseo mucha suerte con sus proyectos artesanales. En particular, quiero agradecer a Carolina Cibantos, Fernando Dobrotinich, Eloísa Ferro, José García, Ximena Garibaldi por su amistad y por su paciencia y tiempo; han sido siempre muy generosos con ambos a la hora de explicarme cómo ven las cosas en Toldos. Basados en otros lugares, quiero agradecer a: Ricardo Banchs, Raquel Gil Montero (¡gracias por ayudarme a entender lo difícil que es saber en qué país estaba Lipeo antes del 1938!), Carlos Reboratti, Victoria Riobó, Claudia Troncoso, Beatriz Ventura.

Fundación Pro Yungas/LIEY: Alejandro Brown, Ezequiel Araóz, Albane Du Boisgucheneuc, Luciana Cristóbal, Teresita Lomáscolo, Matilde García Moritán, David Monteverde, Mariana Horlent, Rodrigo Ordoñez.

Administración de Parques Nacionales: en Buenos Aires, Cecilia Iriarte, Raúl Romero, Leticia Sarabia, Mario Tomé, Paula Werber; en Salta, Néstor Aguilera, Noemí Cruz, Eloy López, Ricardo Guerra, Raquel Sarabia,

### **UK**

First and foremost I want to thank my supervisors, Alan Barnard and Neil Thin, from whom I simply could not have asked for more in terms of the support, remarkably prescient (if sometimes demoralising!) advice and time made available.

Not all PhD students get to work with such dedicated, decent people as I have. I want to thank my family: mum, for listening to me trying to get my head round what I'd just written or was going to write for any particular day, week or month; dad, for asking me all manner of difficult questions, for coming to visit me in both Namibia and Argentina and for some sterling editing towards the end; and to Sarah for all the moral support and for being unfeasibly lovely. For miscellaneous sources of brilliance, help and inspiration, I thank Kristján Ahronson, Lisa Arensen, David Bloor, Barbara Bompani, Clare Coughlan, Lawrence Dritsas, Dan Hammett, Matt Harsh, Rachel Hayman, Steve Kerr, Laura Mann, Yuki Nakamura, Josipa Petrunic, Rick Rohde, James Smith, Paul Swanepoel, Ben White and Ben Young.

## **Abbreviations**

APN – Administration of National Parks (*Administración de Parques Nacionales*)  
Campfire – Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources  
CBNRM – Community-Based Natural Resource Management  
DBAD – Department of Bantu Administration and Development  
DMG – Daureb Mountain Guides  
FFEM – French Global Environment Fund (*Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial*)  
GRN – Government of the Republic of Namibia  
IBRFP – Indo British Rain-fed Project  
IRDNC – Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation  
MET – Ministry of Environment and Tourism  
MRCC – Multi-Disciplinary Research and Consultancy Centre  
NACOBTA – Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association  
NACSO – The Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations  
NCO – Nature Conservation Ordinance  
PAB – Alto Bermejo Project (*Proyecto Alto Bermejo*)  
TA – Traditional Authority  
FPY – Pro Yungas Foundation (*Fundación Pro Yungas*)  
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation  
PSA – Social Agricultural Programme (*Programa Social Agropecuario*)  
OED – Oxford English Dictionary  
OPC – Ovambo People's Congress  
OPO – Ovambo People's Organisation  
PTO – Permission to Occupy  
RISE – Rural Institute for Social Development & Empowerment  
RSA – Republic of South Africa  
SWAA – South West African Administration  
SWANU – South West African National Union  
Swapo – South West African People's Organisation  
UDF – United Democratic Front  
UNAM – University of Namibia  
UNITA – National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (*Uniao para a Independencia Total de Angola*)  
UNO – United Nations Organisation  
USAid – United States Agency for International Development

WWF – Worldwide Fund for Nature

## **Glossary**

Champa – a ‘roza’ which has been left fallow, usually overgrown with secondary forest

Encomienda – the right of a subject (of the crown) to put ‘indigenous’ inhabitants to work on a piece of land

Merced – the ceding of a piece of land to a subject who would work it or have it worked

Finca – ranch or estate

Intruso – intruder (with no right of occupation within a national park)

Junta – military junta

Latifundio – large ranch or estate

Lipeño – inhabitant of Lipeo

Marquesado – Marquisate, or territory pertaining to a Marques

Minga – the pooling of labour resources among a group of people for activities hard to achieve individually

Organización de base – grass-roots organisation

Partido Justicialista – Justicialist (Peronist) Party

Partido Renovador – Renovation Party

Poblador – settler or inhabitant (with the right of occupation within a national park)

‘Pueblo chico, infierno grande’ – ‘small town, big hell’

Roza – small plot for subsistence cultivation, cleared of forest cover

Toldeño – inhabitant of Los Toldos

Trueque – non-monetary exchange

Vaqueano – cattle herder

Zafra – sugar harvest

## **Notes on the use of acronyms and Spanish terms**

I have tried to keep the use of acronyms to a minimum, by spelling out the whole title of the acronym, or by abbreviating it to one or two words which more easily identify the organisation or process it refers to. There are three circumstances in which I do use them. First, they are employed when the title they abbreviate is excessively unwieldy. For instance, it would not make the text easier to read to refer every time to NACSO by its full title of The Namibian Association of CBNRM (community based natural resource management) Support Organisations. Rather, it would add more than a line of text to every sentence in which it figured. Secondly, I use initiative- or document-specific acronyms when their full title is displayed elsewhere on the same or previous page. Thirdly, acronyms like ‘Swapo’ or ‘Campfire’, which have a valid claim through nationwide usage to be considered proper nouns, are largely treated as such. Using acronyms has obliged me to abandon my initial goal of dispensing with them altogether. As it stands, I hope that the acronyms list has been reduced to an additional, not an essential, tool for understanding the main text.



Although I have also employed some Spanish terms, I have tried to keep these to a minimum also. The names of organisations I have generally translated, but where there is no direct, word-for-word translation I have kept the original term and offered an explanation of it – i.e. *toldeño*, an inhabitant of Los Toldos. People from Los Toldos refer to themselves in this way, and until there is a single English word for ‘*toldeño*’, I shall continue to use the Spanish.

# Chapter I: Introduction

## 1. Sustainability and participation in the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project

### **The importance of the concept of sustainability**

Sustainability has become an extremely important concept in countless spheres of remarkably diverse human activity. The objective of the thesis is to trace the consequences for local participation, in both Namibia's conservancy programme and Argentina's Alto Bermejo Project, of having or not having knowledge deemed necessary to the achievement of sustainability goals.

Finding a way of living sustainably is increasingly believed to be necessary for the avoidance of environmental catastrophe; and in particular the kind of environmental catastrophe that might compromise the future existence of human (and other) life on the planet. Sustainability has come to be viewed as the means through which to reconcile two tendencies that have often been seen as incompatible. One stresses the importance of conserving the environment, be it as a matter of urgent expedience or in lieu of the intrinsic worth of global biodiversity. The other celebrates human abilities to marshal and exploit myriad features of the natural world in the pursuit of continual, collective improvement, as measured (however reductively) in terms of economic growth. Precisely what form this reconciliation should take is a matter that continues to generate hotly-contested and politically-charged debate.

Despite larger controversies over the appropriate global response to the potential dangers of current modes of growth and consumption, many have nonetheless arrived at the conclusion that it *is* possible to realise conservation and development objectives simultaneously. The very existence of the Namibian conservancy programme and the Argentine Alto Bermejo Project confirms this to be the case. Both posit the sustainable management of common-pool resources as the solution and both constitute a set of arrangements formulated for the purpose of setting common-pool resource use on a sustainable footing. That initiatives in such markedly distinct contexts as Namibia and Argentina should do so is a powerful indication of the global reach of the concept of sustainability. Put differently, the privileged character of

knowledge related to the concept of sustainability is evident in the fact that it underpins policy and intervention in these specific initiatives (and others) in both Namibia and Argentina. Viewing sustainability in terms of privileged knowledge is a useful exercise, because it raises the questions of how this status was acquired and how it is maintained. Answering these questions, I contend, is necessary if we are to gain a fuller understanding of who participates and on what basis in either enterprise.

In the literature on achieving conservation and development objectives simultaneously, local participation is commonly taken to be a precondition of sustainable common-pool resource management. Indeed, thinking in conservation and development arenas has led, over the last four decades, to a flattering re-evaluation of the role and capacity of local people, one which has lamented their exclusion from the most important decision-making processes that frame intervention (Chambers 1983, 1997, Freire 1974, Pimbert and Pretty 1995, Richards 1985). Both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project profess strong commitment to the importance of local participation, and claim that local people are central to the decision-making processes through which their interventions are governed. In the Namibian context, for instance, it has been asserted by a longstanding practitioner that the conservancy programme is “the most popular grass-roots movement in the country”<sup>1</sup>. Although no comparably grand claim is made for the Alto Bermejo Project, the policy documents which frame it do make clear that the participation of grass-roots organisations (*organizaciones de base*) is considered fundamental to the success of their combined conservation and development objectives (i.e. Fundación Pro Yungas 2003:25).

There are numerous grounds in both contexts for accepting the argument that provision is made for local people to participate in the most central of decision-making processes. Taking the specific example of Tsiseb conservancy in Northwest Namibia, for instance, we find that it draws upon the tradition of representative democratic decision-making that was established in Namibia following independence in 1990. The agroforestry initiatives of the Alto Bermejo Project in Los Toldos, Northwest Argentina, on which part three of the thesis focuses, are characterised by ‘direct’ participation. That is, the people of Los Toldos themselves – as opposed to representatives – decide what activities they will pursue and how they will be

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Margaret Jacobsohn co-director of Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), 22.1.2004, Windhoek.

pursued, albeit jointly with an employee of the Pro Yungas Foundation, the ‘lead organisation’ in the Alto Bermejo Project, who has the knowledge, skills and access to resources necessary for the pursuance of those activities.

Nonetheless, viewing either the conservancy programme or the Alto Bermejo Project in the light of grass-roots participation leaves our account incomplete. The link between knowing and deciding, and the consequences for local participation of that link, remain unexplored. It is only once these initiatives are seen as exercises in knowledge transfer that a fuller picture can be developed. Essentially, although both stress the importance of local knowledge and skills, objectives are defined more in terms of bodies of knowledge that local people in both places *do not* have, than they are in terms of the knowledge that people *do* have. Such is the centrality of the concept of sustainability to both initiatives that they are in fact unintelligible without prior knowledge of it. There are, to be sure, local ways of using or not using common-pool resources that may be *translated* into the vocabulary of sustainability, but the term itself is not locally employed in the areas in which fieldwork was conducted.

Moreover, the means through which sustainability objectives are to be achieved are not always locally available. From determining the institutional arrangements for sustainable common-pool resource management, to the logistics of bringing people together to make decisions jointly, considerable external assistance is necessary in both contexts. For this reason, in both initiatives, a transfer of knowledge and skills sets is required; indeed, it is the existing consensus that such a transfer is necessary – the identification of a knowledge gap – that *justifies* intervention in the first place. Because the knowledge transfer is seen as justified – in the interests of sustainability objectives, from which positive conservation and development outcomes can be achieved – the participation of actors with those sets of knowledge and skills is rendered indispensable.

### **Circularity in intervention**

Identifying this existing consensus about the need to transfer knowledge and skills related to achieving sustainable conservation and development outcomes is important and fruitful. It leads on to the questions of how it is that consensus on the need for the knowledge transfer was brought about, and how it is that sustainability has come to be such an important goal even in places as different as Namibia and Argentina. By

tracing the process through which the concept of sustainability has acquired its privileged status, it is possible to understand how and why actors who have knowledge relating to it become and remain indispensable participants. That such participants are involved in justifying the knowledge transfer, thereby partially defining in the first place what there is to participate in, and are subsequently involved in the implementation that follows, is a dynamic which I hope to have captured with the notion of ‘circularity in intervention’. There are two senses to the notion of circularity as I employ it in the thesis. Both derive from work by Barry Barnes on the problem of reference (Barnes 1983, 1988). His ideas and their relevance to my research are explored at greater length in chapter two; here a synopsis is offered.

In the first sense, knowledge about sustainability has a circular quality, in the sense that it has a self-referential component (Barnes 1988, chapter 3). That is to say, references to sustainability refer partly to other references to sustainability, and not just to a thing or occurrence independent of that reference. To put it another way, people may come to refer to a thing or occurrence as sustainable because other people already refer to that thing or occurrence as sustainable, and not because, on inspection of that thing or occurrence, they have discovered within it the inherent, empirically verifiable property of ‘sustainability’. What the reference actually specifies is *not* the thing or occurrence itself, but rather the relationship in which it stands to a context of human activity (ibid:49). The source of their reference is another reference. The subject and the object of the reference are thereby collapsed, and this, as Hume would have had it, is to reason in a circle. In this first sense, then, I take ‘circular’ to be synonymous with ‘self-referential’.

To give an example, when a person refers to strictly-controlled trophy hunting as a form of ‘sustainable wildlife management’, s/he is not referring to an empirically verifiable property of trophy hunting, nor directly to the animals which are hunted. ‘Sustainable wildlife management’ here refers to killing only certain quantities and kinds of animals (i.e. older males, not pregnant females). This action can only be said to be sustainable in relation to a context of human activity, namely one of trying to ensure the continual availability of those animals. Following Barnes, crucially, *we* are the context in which designating some ways of killing sustainable and others unsustainable becomes intelligible. An individual will designate an activity

sustainable in a context in which others commonly make the same designation, indeed *partly because* others commonly make the same designation.

If designating a thing or occurrence as sustainable refers not only to a specific empirical attribute, but partly also to other references to it as sustainable, then its status as sustainable or otherwise is, consequently, a matter for negotiation and agreement (cf. Barnes 1983). Accordingly, if agreement on what is and is not sustainable cannot be reached merely by reference to empirical properties, room is left for two individuals to designate the same thing or occurrence as sustainable *or* unsustainable. How is agreement secured on whether a thing or occurrence is or is not sustainable when there is so much scope for negotiation? The answer is frequently that there is no agreement on what is sustainable and what is not: to illustrate the point, one need only compare the opposite conclusions reached about the same phenomena by the *Global 2000 Report to the President* (1980) on the one hand and the contributors to *The Resourceful Earth* on the other (Simon and Kahn 1984). Yet there are still occasions when agreement is reached. On these occasions, such agreement rests partly on what Barnes terms ‘cognitive authority’, that is, on the propensity of people to accept a designation that is already assigned by an individual or a group precisely because it is so designated by that individual or group (Barnes 1983:525-30). In other words, the source of authority for the designation – the reason why others will make the same designation – rests in an individual or a group. Extrapolating from Barnes, I draw the distinction between ‘limited’ (individual) and ‘general’ (group) cognitive authority. The more general the source of cognitive authority, the greater the number of people who can designate a term and have it accepted by other users of that term. The more limited the source of cognitive authority, the fewer are the users who can designate a term and have that designation accepted by others. Whether the source of cognitive authority is limited or general, if it makes others accept the designation of a particular thing or phenomenon as sustainable, a ‘coordination of beliefs’ (Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996), or a consensus, is the end product. To reiterate once more, then, one significant reason why a reference to a thing as sustainable comes to be accepted cannot wholly be explained without recourse to the idea of cognitive authority.

Now I have made the points necessary to explain what I mean by the second sense in which I use the term ‘circular’ in this thesis. I contend that the cognitive authority for the designation of something as sustainable is more likely to be of the limited than

of the general kind. This is because knowledge relating to sustainability is a specialised affair. It requires its holders to acquire proficiency in diffuse bodies of knowledge, ranging from the science of soil conservation, silvi- or aquaculture to theories of collective action, institution-building and governance, to name but a few aspects of sustainability. Because of the sheer amount that it is deemed necessary to know in any attempt to formulate a thoroughgoing definition of sustainability, it is the few rather than the many who will possess sufficient cognitive authority to be able *credibly* to separate the sustainable ‘wheat’ from the unsustainable ‘chaff’.

In terms of participation in initiatives which presuppose the importance of sustainability, then, people with knowledge of this concept are rendered indispensable when their cognitive authority is accepted by the actors with the resources necessary to finance intervention. Whatever sort of intervention follows has to be measured against the yardstick of sustainability. The presence and established acceptance of this criterion is important to recognise because, as noted, it helps us to realise that what there is to participate in is already partially predetermined. *Any* analysis of participation needs must be aware of this factor. Furthermore, it leads to circular forms of involvement: the same actors are involved in all stages of the project cycle. The people whose cognitive authority was instrumental to ensuring that knowledge about sustainability is accepted as a basis for conservation and development policy, the people who implement conservancy programme or Alto Bermejo Project activities and the people who judge whether such activities are sustainable are often one and the same; and precisely because they were successful in getting their knowledge accepted in the first place.

This type of circular involvement has, then, been *self-reinforcing*. Involvement in the early stages of policy change has led to securing the financial, human and other resources required for involvement in implementation. The outcomes of intervention feed back into what is known about sustainability. This in turn influences the policy in terms of which implementation is to be shaped; which in turn serves as the basis on which further funding is secured. Indeed, further funding *has* been secured more than once for both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. This circular dynamic is illustrated below in figure 1.1.

Two points of clarification. First, the notion of ‘circularity in intervention’ might be conflated with the suggestion that people with knowledge about sustainability in the Namibian and Argentine contexts strive to gain acceptance for their knowledge,

merely with a view to securing the funding that is necessary for the survival of their own institutions, and/or that will give them greater control over the direction of these initiatives. Such thinking chimes with the concerns about and critiques of expert knowledge that were central in paving the way for more participatory approaches to development policy and practice. The work of Robert Chambers has long sought to problematise the privileged character of knowledge which for him underpinned the “professional realities” of international development practitioners who had failed to come to terms with the validity of utility of local knowledge (i.e. Chambers 1983, 1997). In their work, scholars such as Emery Roe (1991, 1995), Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns (1996) have similarly sought to demonstrate that the perpetuation of expert knowledge, be it a claim for an orthodox view or a counter claim against it, serves the interests of the experts who seek to perpetuate it.

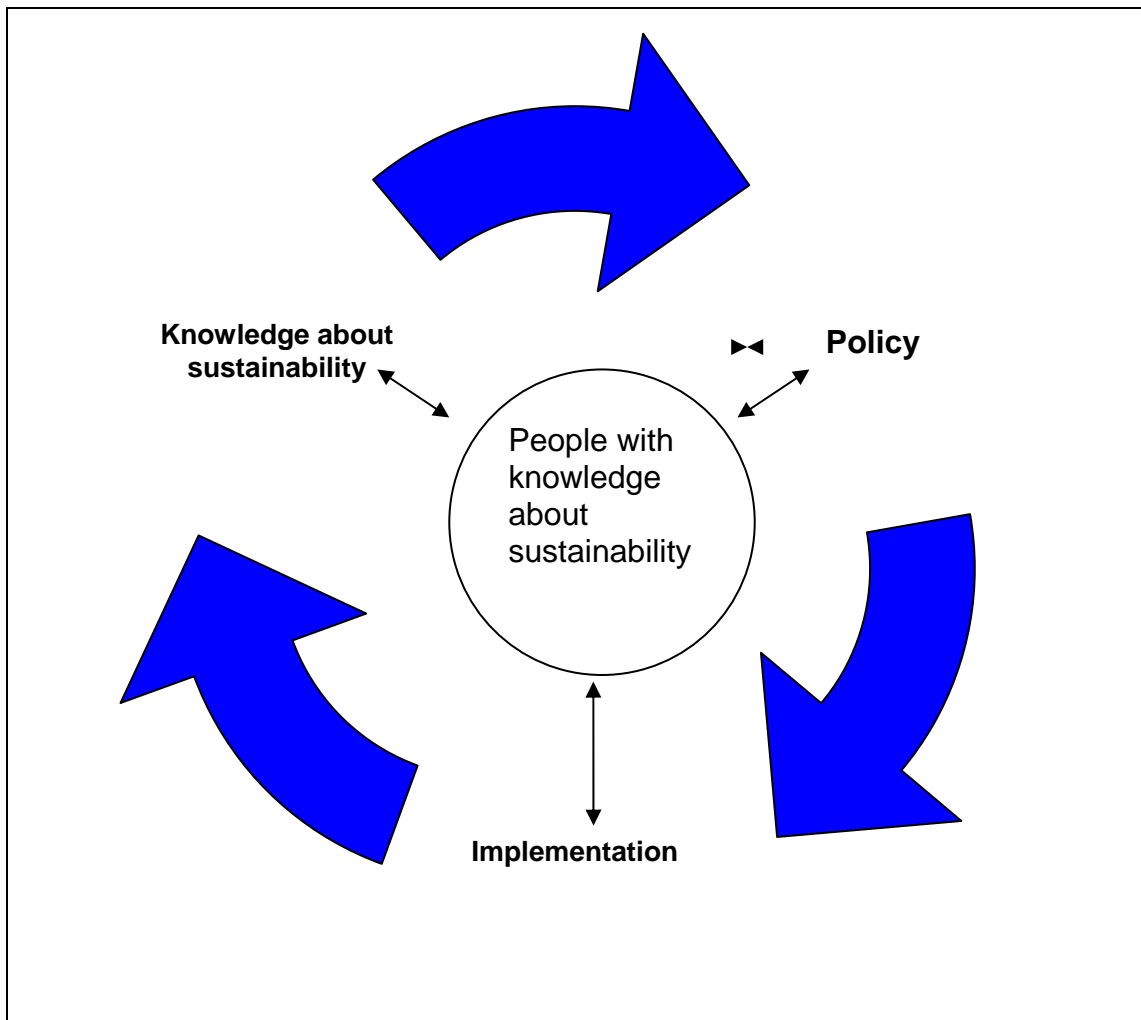
This is not quite what I mean to suggest in relation to my own fieldwork in Namibia or Argentina. I do not think that project actors in either context who have knowledge about sustainability render themselves indispensable solely as part of a ploy to sustain ‘NGO livelihoods’. To be sure, self-interest plays a role, but the roles and motivations which explain the involvement of people with knowledge about sustainability need to be explored in terms of a broader, richer tapestry of goals and interests (cf. Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996). Furthermore, it is my intention with this thesis to demonstrate that, even in initiatives such as the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project which can make plausible claims to featuring high levels of local participation, such participation is still shaped in fundamental ways by the link between knowing and deciding. If the participatory rhetoric used to describe these initiatives does not take as its starting point their essential character as exercises in knowledge transfer, then it will obscure as much about their participatory dynamics as it reveals.

Second, the focus on knowledge about sustainability may at first glance appear to render NGO, government, donor or academic actors as ‘omnipotent’ powers in the situation, casting local people in the role of passive bystanders, or simple recipients of knowledge about sustainability in a one-way transfer process. This is not the case. Both the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, in different ways, view local participation as a precondition of sustainability and see local knowledge as an important part of setting resource use on a sustainable footing. Partly for this reason, local knowledge about common-pool resource use finds its way into policy.



Local people in both contexts are also free to reinterpret, reject or remain ignorant of ‘external’ knowledge deemed necessary for the achievement of sustainability objectives. The transfer works both ways, so to speak, with NGO, donor government and academic actors often extending the cognitive authority of the knowledge of the local people they work with by accepting such knowledge and emphasising its use as necessary to the achievement of sustainability in natural resource use. And yet it remains the case that the definition and achievement of sustainability relies more on what local people do not know, than on what they do know.

**Figure 1.1 – circularity in intervention**



## 2. The thesis structure

The main body of the thesis is divided into three parts, bracketed by this introductory and one concluding chapter. The structure devised has been shaped by two principal factors:

1. As a comparative study, it was necessary to identify the basis for comparison between Namibia and Argentina: namely, the profound influence of the concept of sustainability on conservation and development policy and intervention in Namibia and Argentina.
2. Having identified the concept of sustainability as the basis of the comparison, the thesis then had to trace the consequences of having or not having knowledge about sustainability for participatory dynamics in the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme, using this approach first in Namibia and then repeating it in Argentina.

The reasons for choosing a comparative study are taken up in more depth in section three. The rationale for a three part structure should now be clear: part one deals with the basis for comparison; whilst parts two and three explore how this influence manifests itself in two distinct empirical contexts – especially in respect of the consequences for local participation. Both parts two and three also feature chapters which give historical backgrounds on Namibia and Argentina respectively. These serve to provide an idea of the broader contexts in which to situate the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. This thesis is not principally about Namibia *or* Argentina; it is about the concept of sustainability, and it is for this reason that it is given extensive treatment in the three chapters which comprise part one.

### **Part one – studying sustainability in historical context (and how to go about it)**

In order to establish how it has acquired the status of an imperative that we ignore at our peril, it is necessary to explore the history of the concept of sustainability. In terms of policy and intervention related to conservation and development, ‘sustainability’ is so important that no credible policy, proposal, project or

programme could fail to mention it. It was not always this way: how did it become so, and how did ideas regarding the relationship between conservation and development change as a consequence? Finding answers to these questions is the central task of part one.

In order to achieve this objective, I employ insights from the sociology of knowledge (scientific or otherwise) partly from the work of Barry Barnes on reference, as already mentioned, but also from the approach elaborated by Barry Barnes, David Bloor and John Henry in *Scientific knowledge: a sociological analysis* (1996). These are elaborated in chapter two. Although work on the self-referential components of knowledge is clearly important in understanding how we come to accept certain activity as sustainable, it is not the whole story. Rather, it has to be set within the ‘finitist’ account of knowledge. The finitist account holds that our current ways of knowing are insufficient to determine the truth of one belief or the falsity of another. In essence, finitism requires that the causes of all beliefs – regardless of how true or false they are considered to be, must be investigated *symmetrically* (Bloor 1991 [1976]). That is, they must be investigated by the same method, i.e. with reference to the goals and interests which cause them to be held in preference to others (Barnes 1982b, Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996). This line of argument sets itself up in opposition to the proposition that the cause of some beliefs being held is that they are demonstrably true, whilst the cause of other (false) beliefs is to be found in the realm of social, cultural or psychological explanations. In the case of all beliefs, the goals and interests of those who hold them are to be stated, and the consequences of holding such beliefs traced.

Chapter three proceeds, then, to document the history of the concept of sustainability. As already noted, the term cannot be understood in isolation from concerns, dating back at least as far the nineteenth century, about the potentially adverse environmental effects of ‘progress’ through industrialisation and a global expansion in consumption rates. The emergence and increase in the influence of the concept through the staging of certain events – such as the earth summits – and the creation of certain institutions – such as the World Commission on Environment and Development – is elaborated.

The definition of sustainability that receives most attention here derives from that given in the Brundtland Report for sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to

meet their own needs” (WCED 1987 43). But, of course, there is not just one interpretation of this definition, let alone one single definition of sustainability. Just as multiple definitions exist, so too do approaches to achieving sustainability: a brief list of the best-known ‘perspectives’ includes techno-, anthro- or eco-centric, blue-, red- or deep-green varieties. As a result, there is much consensus on the need for sustainability, but rather less on what that might entail. It remains a broad and perhaps necessarily vague notion, around which gather an unlikely and often mutually antagonistic set of interest groups (Duffy 2000a).

The use of common-pool resources is central to any attempt to realise a sustainable way of living. Within the study of common-pool resources, sustainability has undergone a reappraisal, in terms of how to make common-pool resource use sustainable and indeed whether this aim can actually be achieved through careful management. This re-evaluation has brought about change in ideas about what constitutes necessary knowledge in order for sustainable common-pool resource management to be realised, as well as who holds such knowledge. The value of local knowledge and common-pool resource management regimes has received much more attention, whilst conventional western approaches to common-pool resource management as well as scientific knowledge about common-pool resources, have come under fire (Fairhead and Leach 1998, Holling, Berkes, and Folke 1998, Ostrom 1990, Pottier 2003, Richards 1985). Local knowledge holders have sometimes become cognitive authorities regarding sustainable common-pool resource use. Crucially, this change in attitude has led local participation in common-pool resource management to be viewed as a precondition of sustainability.

These debates prefigure thinking at the core of ‘community conservation’, of which both the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project are examples. ‘Community conservation’, which redefines conservation in terms of the sustainable use of common-pool resources, can be seen as a counter-narrative which has challenged the standard narrative of ‘fortress’ conservation (Adams and Hulme 2001, Roe 1991, Roe 1995). Chapter four deals with thinking on the relationship between the two narratives, changes in ideas about how to go about achieving conservation and development objectives, and the possibility of reconciling conservation and development processes. This exercise paves the way for introducing the six ‘principles of sustainability’ which underpin policy and implementation in both the

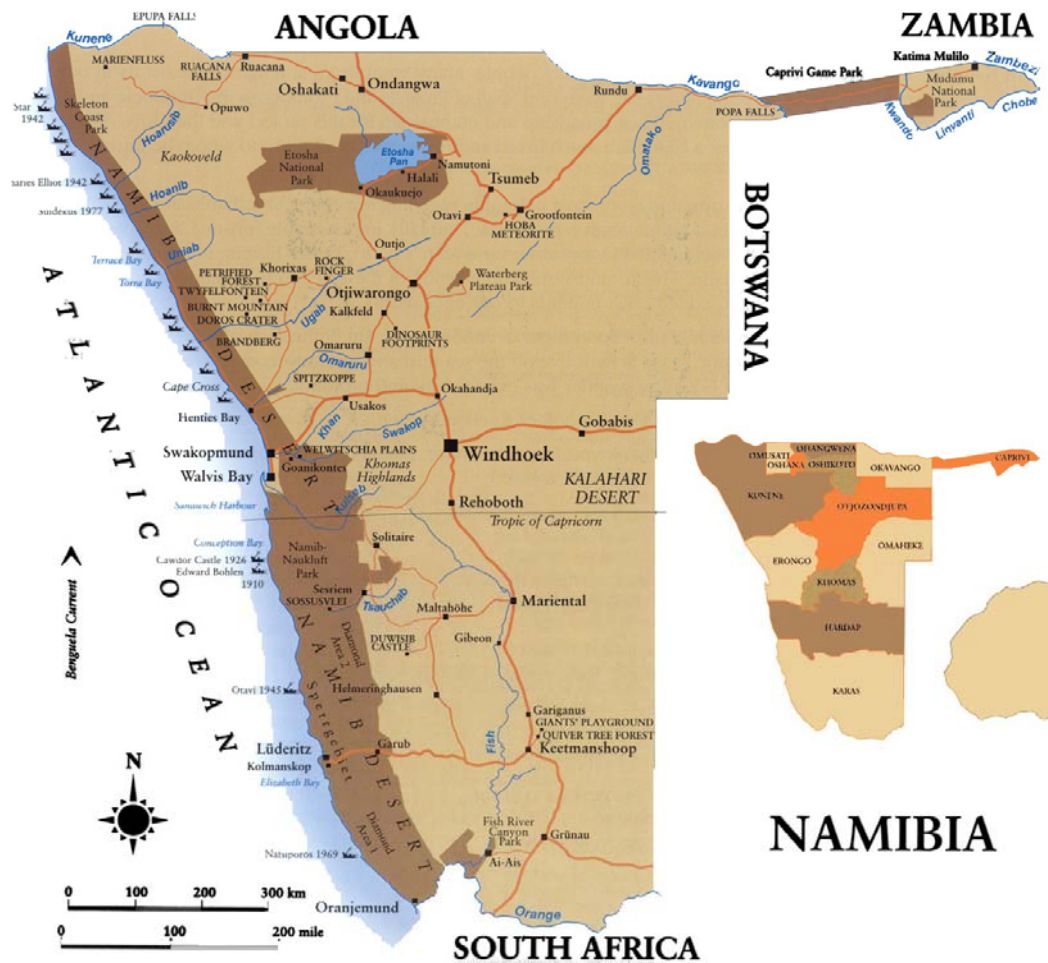
Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. These six principles in turn form the explicit basis for the comparison between the two initiatives.

### **Part two – Namibia’s conservancy programme**

The second part of the thesis examines how the concept of sustainability has found its way into policy and implementation in Namibia’s conservancy programme. Chapter five gives historical background on Namibia, the broader context within which to understand how the conservancy programme emerged. Namibia’s history, for a majority of its inhabitants, has been one of vast structural disadvantage and inequity. From German annexation in 1884 until independence in 1990, government policy was skewed in favour of the white settler minority. We can read Namibian history as one excluded the majority from the processes through which the territory was governed. We can also read much twentieth century Namibian history as one of resistance to such exclusion, as embodied in the quest for self-determination and independence.

Independence created an urgent demand for more inclusive policies that would better serve the black majority. The representative democratic structures established

### **Map 1.1 – Namibia**



Source: FAO

through the political settlement provided models for decision-making which, in view of the struggle to achieve independence, resonated with the legitimacy of a long-denied but just cause. The conservancy programme, which recast poor, black communal area inhabitants in the light of capable protagonists fitted perfectly in the new ‘policy space’ that had opened up.

Chapter six charts the emergence of the conservancy programme, a nationwide initiative which allows communal land inhabitants to apply to central government for limited rights to manage wildlife and benefit from tourism operations. A standard bearer for the ‘community conservation counter-narrative’, it is a manifestation of the changes that conservation and development thinking have undergone as a result of the increasing importance of the concept of sustainability. Conservation is to be taken outside the protected area, squared with local livelihood imperatives and, crucially, must involve local people in decisions about common-pool resource use – especially wildlife – if sustainability objectives are to be achieved. The chapter shows how conservancy policy and legislation can be read in terms of the ‘six principles of

sustainability'. The acceptance of this different way of thinking about conservation would have been unlikely to find any purchase had it not been for the opportunities for change in beliefs about conservation and development opened up by independence.

The actors central to redefining the conservation agenda during policy formulation also led the charge for implementation of the conservancy programme. Their access to considerable financial resources also made them perhaps even more central to implementation than the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

Chapter seven concentrates on Tsiseb conservancy, in the Erongo region. Tsiseb is plays host to a number of tourism ventures which endeavour to generate revenue from consumptive and non-consumptive forms of wildlife use. Principally, these are the Brandberg White Lady Lodge and African Hunting Safaris trophy hunting excursions and the Daureb Mountain Guides.

Like other Namibian conservancies established on (state owned) communal land, Tsiseb is governed through an elected committee system, and decision-making is an extension of the principles of representative democracy which prefigure Namibia's national system of governance. Decision-making is largely carried out not by conservancy residents directly but by the (elected) conservancy executive committee and the conservancy manager, with considerable input and advice from the support organisations which are also involved in the running of Tsiseb. It is important to clarify this link to a wider precedent which, for all its flaws, enjoys broad legitimacy, and is especially pertinent given that the conservancy programme has been criticised on the grounds that conservancy residents lack sufficient opportunities to participate in important decisions (eg. Long 2004, Vaughan pers. com.). How, in an area as large as Tsiseb, participation could be more direct, is hard to fathom, so it is as well to clarify the expectations we can or should hold of representative participation. Do we justify 'committee- (rather than community-) based natural resource management' by endorsing representative participation? Or are we imposing a 'tyranny of participation' (cf. Cooke and Kothari 2001, Mosse 2001) by arguing for more direct decision making in Tsiseb? These are vital questions for people involved in the conservancy programme to tackle, but it is necessary to set them within the wider context of representative democracy in Namibia.

The discussion of representative participation leads into the consideration of circularity in intervention in Tsiseb conservancy through which people with

knowledge about sustainability are rendered indispensable to decision making. Talk of the indispensability of support organisation actors speaks to fractiously controversial issues of power and control within the conservancy programme; but it is not my intention to determine *how* it should speak to these issues. It could be enlisted to support the concern that non-governmental support organisations have too much control over the conservancy agenda and the power to exclude other agendas therein. But it could also support those who feel that the conservancy model is essentially sound, and that flaws in the implementation of conservancy policy notwithstanding, support organisations, either governmental or non-governmental, are offering poor communal land inhabitants necessary, beneficial, welcome knowledge and skills. My reluctance to ‘take sides’ reflects a wish not to exacerbate with my own research the sometimes acrimonious character of the relationship between ‘external’ researchers and some of the conservancy programme’s practitioners. In the interests of frank and comprehensive debate, in this work I take the position that leaving space open for all viewpoints is more important than seeking to adjudicate between them.

### **Part three – Argentina’s Alto Bermejo Project**

The third part of the thesis examines how the concept of sustainability has found its way into policy and implementation in Argentina’s Alto Bermejo Project. Chapter eight serves the same purpose as chapter five, that of giving historical background, and background which is indeed thematically linked to twentieth-century Namibian history through the concept of exclusion, albeit manifest in an empirically very different set of circumstances. When the Argentine-Bolivian border was re-drawn in



**Map 1.2 – Argentina**



**Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas**

1938, the Valley of Los Toldos, in which sits the present day municipality of Los Toldos, became part the province of Salta, Northwest Argentina. Historically, the villages of the modern municipality of Los Toldos are the result of settlement patterns in the Tarija Valley in modern Bolivia.

The municipality’s current situation was forged through the interplay of many factors, including colonisation, migration, war, trade, and the patchy industrialisation of the Argentine Northwest. When taken together, these interwoven processes

constitute a history of geographical isolation, marginalisation and concomitant poverty. This history, in combination with a dependency on the resources of the state, is a disadvantage for toldeños (inhabitants of Los Toldos), when it comes to making decisions about local conservation and development issues. These hinge often on knowledge and skills that toldeños, due largely to their history of isolation and poverty, do not have. It is against this background that toldeño participation in the Alto Bermejo Project is to be understood.

Chapter nine traces the broad outline of the Alto Bermejo Project, an initiative which proposes taking the conservation agenda outside Northwest Argentina's protected areas and squaring it with ongoing natural resource use activities, in the interests of sustainability. The Project operates within the framework of the 'Yungas' Biosphere Reserve, which was created in order to conserve the subtropical mountain forests, or Yungas, which stretch down the eastern slopes of the Andes from Venezuela to Northwest Argentina in discontinuous strips covering 4.5-4.8 million hectares (Brown et al. 2001). The Yungas spread across too large a terrain to be incorporated into a protected area, and it is for this reason that it is deemed necessary to undertake conservation activities across a wider landscape.

In large measure, the Alto Bermejo Project clusters, coordinates and funds a series of pre-established activities and actors. It groups these activities and actors under the four constituent components, which are posited as the means through which to achieve its objectives:

1. The institutionalisation of the Biosphere Reserve and its area of influence
2. The management of protected areas
3. The sustainable management of natural resource utilisation for commercial and farming purposes
4. Environmental monitoring of activities in the Project area (Pro Yungas Foundation 2003:25-29, my translation).

At various points throughout the chapter, which essentially explores Alto Bermejo Project policy documents, the influence of the six 'principles of sustainability' is traced.

Chapter ten focuses more specifically on agroforestry and related activities undertaken by the Pro Yungas Foundation, the lead organisation in the Alto Bermejo

Project, in the municipality of Los Toldos. Once again the influence of the ‘six principles’ of sustainability on policy and implementation is rendered explicit. It looks also at the type of participation that characterises these initiatives. I designate this ‘direct’ participation because, in contrast with the conservancy programme, most decisions concerning the activities to pursue, what resources, financial and natural, to utilise and how are taken directly by the people of Los Toldos, in conjunction with the Pro Yungas Foundation extension worker. It is therefore understandable that some may conclude that participation in the agroforestry initiatives can be designated as ‘grass-roots’.

However, to make this designation, no matter how understandable, does not lead to a fuller understanding of one of the crucial dynamics affecting who participates and how in the Alto Bermejo Project. The workings of circularity in intervention are then expounded.

### **Conclusions**

The concluding chapter briefly reiterates points made about circularity in intervention, before proceeding to outline my own thinking on how we might approach this phenomenon. I argue that whilst there is cause for concern about some of the consequences for local participation of circularity in intervention, there is a danger of missing the benefits that are offered by both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project if it is viewed solely as a negative phenomenon. This is an especially likely scenario if the continuing centrality of having knowledge about sustainability is construed purely in terms of the self-interest of government, non-government, research or private sector actors.

The conclusion also outlines directions for further research, in which I call for a clearer understanding of the ‘mechanics’ of knowledge transfer in both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. What and how do local people come to know about the conservation and development processes in which they participate, how do they incorporate, square or contrast it with what they already know (presuming they understand it or do not choose to ignore it altogether)? These are questions which have fallen outside the scope of this work, with its focus more on what local people do *not* know, as opposed to what they do know. Gaining a fuller understanding of how knowledge about sustainability is changed – or recreated

(Cummings 2003) – by the encounter between local and ‘external’ knowledge may help in the formulation of policy on participation and in its implementation.

The chapter concludes with an attempt to situate the thesis within thinking on the relationship between development policy and intervention. This is done with reference to David Mosse’s recent book, *Cultivating Development*, which challenges the view that policy causes practice in simple and unproblematic fashion (2005). I argue that a better understanding of the factors which affect the outcome of knowledge transfer processes can make a helpful contribution to our understanding of the relationship between policy and practice.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **Why a comparison, and why Namibia and Argentina?**

Comparison is often said to enjoin theory and method (i.e. Barnard 1992); and so it is with this research. It is as well, then, to say a little more on what is being compared, even though the basis for the comparison is laid out at the start of section two. This is not a comparison of Namibia and Argentina *per se*; it would be problematic to take these two very different places as the basic unit of comparison. Rather, the thesis offers a comparison of the consequences for local participation, in a Namibian and an Argentine initiative, stemming from the fact that the concept of sustainability has acquired such privileged status in both contexts that it underpins and justifies policy and intervention. Policy and intervention in both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project is likely to be enriched by a fuller understanding of participatory dynamics. Demonstrating that this approach yields useful insights even in contexts as distinct as Namibia and Argentina, as I hope this thesis does, serves to underline its analytical utility. The comparative angle also provides an indicator of the sheer scope of the influence of the concept: the inroads made by a ‘global value’ (cf. Quarles van Ufford and Giri 2003) in two very different local contexts. In this light, the ostensible lack of commonality between the two countries becomes an asset to the study, not a problem to be explained away. Of course, I did not select Namibia and Argentina solely on the basis of their dissimilarity, but the other reasons for selection are discussed in the section on fieldwork (below).

What should be spelled out from the start is that my comparison leans more towards exploring the striking similarity of the way in which the link between knowing and deciding affects participation in the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme. It was this eventuality which most excited my curiosity, and which is most significant in terms of its contribution to debates around the relationship between policy and practice in development (and conservation) arenas. However, whilst this methodological strategy suits my purposes, it has been necessary to temper it with an awareness of how the vast differences between Namibia and Argentina, as the wider contexts in which research was conducted, shaped the initiatives that formed the focus of fieldwork. Notwithstanding the correspondence in underlying ideas and in overall objectives of the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme, they differ from each other in fundamental ways which cannot be explained without recourse to contextual factors, be they historical, geographical, social, political, ecological or otherwise. At various points throughout chapters 8-10, therefore, such differences – and in particular their impact on local participation – are explored in some detail. Moreover, I do not compare the whole of the Alto Bermejo Project with the whole of the conservancy programme. Instead, I compare arrangements for local participation in one component of the Alto Bermejo Project with those for an established conservancy (Tsiseb), with a view to establishing the impact upon local participation of the link between knowing and deciding.

As already mentioned, the sociology of knowledge provides a very useful framework for investigating processes of knowledge transfer, and the consequences that derive therein. What has not yet been mentioned, however, is that there have been, to the best of my knowledge, few attempts to use the sociology of knowledge as a set of analytical tools in the literature on conservation and development. This is in one sense quite bizarre, given that much development can easily be read as an exercise in knowledge transfer. It is my hope that this thesis can therefore serve as an example of *how* the sociology of knowledge can be a useful framework for analysts of development – and conservation – processes.

### **Fieldwork**

Early on in the research, events beyond my control prompted a change in the choice of one of the countries I would research. Originally, I had hoped to conduct the

Southern African fieldwork in Zimbabwe, and to return to work on Campfire (the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources), which I had studied for my MSc thesis (Newsham 2002). But 2003, the year I started research, was not a good time to be doing rural research in that country. Famine was widespread, petrol shortages were becoming chronic; people had more important things to worry about than another muzungu coming along asking questions about illegal hunting. I was being advised by established Zimbabwe researchers such as JoAnn McGregor and Marshall Murphree that I might get myself and anyone associated with my research into trouble with paranoid local elements of the ruling party, ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front). My supervisors dutifully echoed all these points, and the search for another country commenced. Namibia was the obvious choice, as the conservancy programme in many ways has its roots in Campfire, and indeed is a modified version of it. It was easy to obtain a research permit and offered a stable, welcoming environment in which to conduct rural (and urban) fieldwork.

In all, I spent a total of nine months in Namibia and six months in Argentina, between September 2003 and January 2005. It made sense to devote more time to Namibia than Argentina. I had never before been to Namibia: what I knew of it came almost exclusively from background reading and talks with Alan Barnard, my principal supervisor. By contrast, I speak fluent Spanish and I had lived and worked in Argentina for a year, between 1997-98. Moreover, I had conducted two months of preliminary research in Argentina in 2002, prior to starting the thesis, with a view to establishing the feasibility of a comparative study with a Southern African country, making contacts and scoping out potential fieldsites. It was in this year that I discovered that, although few and far between, there were initiatives being conducted in Argentina, by organisations such as the Pro Yungas Foundation, which had reconfigured conservation in terms of the sustainable use of natural resources. I could see, even then, a surprising parallel with the Campfire programme and with what I had read about the conservancy programme.

In both countries I employed a number of research methods:

- Interviews – semi-structured and informal
- Focus groups with local people, government and NGO actors

- Participant observation in gatherings, meetings, workshops and conferences
- Policy analysis

I also gleaned much vital information, especially in terms of how to interpret some of the events I witnessed or formed part of, from research assistants and key informants/friends. The relative lack of acknowledgment of the contribution research assistants make to the work of social scientists is surprising and remiss, as Molony and Hammett persuasively illustrate (forthcoming). Let my debt to my own research assistants, then, be clear. In Namibia, the logistics of focus group work would have been simply overwhelming without the assistance of my two translators/key informants (and friends), David 'USA' Aiseb and Iyambo Naruseb. Getting to some of the further-flung settlements in Tsiseb conservancy involved coming off well-graded gravel roads and following narrow dirt tracks with endless forks and other turn offs. I mostly saw these as opportunities for getting lost; Iyambo and David thankfully proved far more discerning. Once we arrived and gathered people for the focus groups, they had to be conducted in two or more languages (English, Damara-Nama, Afrikaans and Otjiherero in one case) in order that all participants could contribute; as is the way with most group discussions in Namibia. With so many languages in play and with restrictions on what participants felt free to say in public, it was necessary to triangulate the data provided by focus groups with interviews, policy statements, participant observation; not to mention long analytical discussions with David, Iyambo and others, which would often give the lie to the conclusions that focus groups generated, revealing significant and fascinating differences between public and private knowledge.

In Argentina, language was not so much of an issue. The difference between the Buenos Aires (*porteño*) Spanish I was accustomed to and the dialect spoken in Los Toldos at first seemed akin to the difference between the Queen's English and the Doric; but necessity is the mother of invention, and I needed to listen and talk. It was, in short, possible to do all of my research in Spanish, and to manage logistics without recourse to paid assistants. Nonetheless, triangulation between focus group work and private interviews proved as necessary as it had in Namibia, and my interpretation of data was greatly enriched by the local knowledge and impressive analytical skills of my key informants.

### **A note on policy analysis**

When embarking upon policy analysis, it is vital to bear in mind, as Mosse points out, that “the relationship between policy models and development outcomes is complex and obscure” (2005:230). The policy overviews given of the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, whilst supplemented by interviews and observations acquired during the course of fieldwork, do not provide cast-iron indications therefore, of how events ‘on the ground’ actually unfolded in either context. These were subject to considerable change, reformulation and renegotiation. Some components were quietly dropped, whilst others received greater prominence and attention. In short, policy documents were treated as a starting point, not a set of reliable predictions outlining the causal processes through which objectives would inevitably be brought about. I do not go quite as far as to view policy *solely* as a means by which to mobilise and enlist support, to “legitimise rather than to orientate practice” (ibid:14). As the discussion in the conclusion indicates, I would prefer to leave some space, albeit of constricted and hazy dimensions, for policy to orientate practice. Yet it remains the case that there is no possible way in which this can happen if policy has not legitimised the need for practice in the first place. What the policy documents of the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project do give us is a much clearer sense of are precisely the kinds of ideas, concepts and beliefs which legitimate intervention. It is, clearly, of key importance to the thesis to demonstrate that neither initiative can be understood without recourse to the concept of sustainability, so central is it to their very existence. Moreover, the privileged status which it has acquired is a causal determinant of who participates and on what basis. However, I do not wish to claim that, once the notion of sustainability is subscribed to and written into policy scripts, all action flows simply and unproblematically from there. Ultimately, the thesis does not chart the outcomes of the initiatives in my fieldsites, nor their relationship to the policy documents of the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. It was too soon in either context for these to be clear, and research over a longer timeframe would be required to answer such questions.

### **Research dissemination**

In both Namibia and Argentina, I attempted to feed research findings into local policy processes. In Namibia, I was a research associate with the Multi-Disciplinary



Research Consultancy Centre (MRCC) at the University of Namibia. The Centre insisted, rightly in my view, on the importance of producing research which would be deemed of local relevance. To this end, I gave a presentation at the MRCC, soon after my arrival, on what I intended to do with the fieldwork, and once again at the end of the fieldwork period on preliminary findings. In addition, I produced an MRCC research paper (Newsham 2004), written mainly for a conservancy practitioner and conservancy committee audience, which covered the two conservancies, Tsiseb and Sorris-Sorris, which I had selected as fieldsites.

With respect to fieldsite selections, I took advice from Alfons Mosimane, head of the Life Sciences Division at the Centre. Some conservancies, especially Torra and ≠Khoadi ||Hôas, have received more attention than others, and I concurred with Alfons – and others – that it would be fruitful to bring such considerations into my fieldsite selection criteria. Tsiseb and Sorris-Sorris, both next to each other, had been the subject of some research by Alfons himself (Jones and Mosimane 2000) and also the Wild Project (i.e. Long ed., 2004). This was a mutually beneficial arrangement, in that I would not go into two conservancies ‘cold’, so to speak, but nor would my research be covering old ground needlessly.

Sadly, Sorris-Sorris research does not find its way into the thesis, for two reasons. One is simply for considerations of space: the breadth of the comparison has required strategic decisions to be made about the information covered. The second is because, when I crashed and wrote off my car in March 2004, my research timetable in Sorris-Sorris was affected far more than my timetable for Tsiseb and was inevitably left incomplete.

In Argentina, although I was not formally affiliated to any research institution, I did forge links with the Laboratory for Ecological Investigation in the Yungas (LIEY), and was invited in October 2005 to give a presentation on my work to date in Namibia and Argentina. Moreover, I wrote a report for the Administration of National Parks (Newsham 2005) on one of my fieldsites, Lipeo, located within Baritú National Park, and which figures, again for reasons of space, only fleetingly in the thesis. I had hoped that it would: provide an opportunity for Administration of National Parks staff working in Buenos Aires to gain a better idea of how it is to live inside a national park; to offer recommendations for change that might be of benefit both to the Administration and to inhabitants of Baritú National Park; and finally to convey the opinions and demands of the people of Lipeo to those who might be able to do

something about them. Sadly, my suspicion is that the report does little more than gather dust.

In both Namibia and Argentina, I spent a lot of time wondering what people at the local level would gain directly from my research. I had my doubts that a PhD thesis, product of years of academic training – and at any rate written in English, which was the first language of very few of the people with whom I conducted the research – would serve much locally identifiable purpose. Therefore, I decided to engage in activities that were of local use. In Sorris-Sorris, I wrote their conservancy budget for 2003/4 and identified sources of further funding for maintaining the vehicle that had been donated to the conservancy by the WILD (Wildlife Integration for Livelihoods Diversification) Project. In Tsiseb, I conducted research with the Traditional Authorities at the request of the conservancy manager and executive committee. I also ferried people to and from their homesteads for the (aborted) AGM of 2004. In Los Toldos, Argentina, I took photos of artisans and their wares, for display in the craft shop run by three of the municipality's Mothers' Clubs.

# **PART I**

# Chapter II – self-referential knowledge, cognitive authority and sustainability

## 1. Introduction

This chapter attempts to demonstrate why key insights from the sociology of scientific knowledge are useful in helping us to understand how it is that having – or not having – knowledge about sustainability affects who participates and how in the Conservancy Programme in Namibia and the Alto Bermejo Project in Argentina. Drawing in particular on work by Barry Barnes (1983, 1988), the self-referential component of knowledge about sustainability is ascertained and explained. Crucial to understanding how knowledge about sustainability comes to be accepted, and what effect this has on who can participate and on what basis, is Barnes’s concept of cognitive authority. Having knowledge about sustainability and simultaneously being the source of cognitive authority for such knowledge is what renders indispensable the participation of actors who have – or are deemed to have – relevant knowledge about sustainability. It is this dynamic I refer to by the notion central to this thesis, ‘circularity in intervention’.

In addition to these insights, I set out the reasons why I follow the ‘finitist’ account of knowledge set out by Barry Barnes, David Bloor and John Henry in their book, *Scientific Knowledge: a Sociological Analysis* (1996). Given the variety of conflicting beliefs held about both the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, and the associated difficulties of discerning true from false ones, it makes sense to employ the standard finitist move of setting them all on the ‘same footing’, so to speak (Breslau, 2000). Finitism shapes, then, my preferred methodological approach, which is: to understand and explain why some beliefs are held in preference to others, and investigate the consequences – especially for participation – that follow from privileging some beliefs above others. Understanding the goals and interests of relevant actors when taking one belief in preference to another is central to this task.

Before going any further, it is as well to address an important question, namely, what is the definition of knowledge? Here I accept the one formulated by Barnes,

Bloor & Henry, which views knowledge as “the possession of the members of a culture or subculture, transmitted from generation to generation as a part of their tradition, and dependent for its credibility on their collective authority” (1996 111).

## **2. Knowledge about sustainability: introducing insights from the sociology of scientific knowledge**

### **Knowledge transfer**

An intrinsic feature of the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project is that they require knowledge and skills to be transferred in order to achieve their stated objectives. It is, for example, impossible to establish a conservancy without knowing what it means to do so or how to go about it. Equally, in order to make agroforestry activities in Los Toldos serve both conservation and development objectives, it is necessary to know how to make outcomes comply with criteria for sustainability.

Such observations may appear obvious, but they lead on to the important point that conservation-development initiatives are not self-generating. The knowledge necessary for them has a source. It is developed and worked on by people with knowledge and skills – from government, donor agencies, NGOs or universities, for instance – deemed to be relevant and necessary to the achievement of policy goals. What these people have in common is the role they play in rendering knowledge relevant and conferring authority on beliefs which are to underscore policy. Securing funding for particular initiatives can consolidate the authority of the knowledge deployed in policy design and implementation. Moreover, in order for a conservancy or an agroforestry initiative to be deemed to be ‘working’, the ostensible beneficiaries of conservancies in Namibia or agroforestry initiatives in Argentina have to be able to ‘do it for themselves’. These beneficiaries may then negotiate, change, recast, subvert, ignore or remain ignorant of some or all of the transfer process, thereby changing the perspectives, strategies and expectations of those who are transferring the knowledge. The NGO, government, academic and other actors involved in the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project may in response reformulate their own thoughts on what it means for activities to be considered sustainable and how to go about achieving sustainability. And yet, even before we reach this stage in the analysis, if we are to understand the relationship between knowledge about

sustainability and participation, we need to be aware of that, even if the definition of sustainability is contested and many-splintered, an underlying consensus on its importance has already been achieved. Neither the Conservancy Programme nor the Alto Bermejo Project could exist were the need for sustainability not a settled matter. It is the belief that there *is* a need for sustainability that justifies the transfer of knowledge, skills and resources deemed necessary to allow local resource users to undertake activities that serve conservation and development objectives simultaneously. Both the knowledge to be transferred and the process through which it is transferred significantly affect who participates and on what basis, as well as the consequences that follow from the transfer. The people with knowledge deemed indispensable to the achievement of policy objectives cannot but be heavily involved in its transfer. Therefore, they influence significantly what there is to participate in from the outset *and* what type of participation will characterise decision-making processes. This is the essence of circularity in intervention.

It is not my intention to suggest that *only* the government, NGO, academic, private sector or local actors with specialised knowledge about how to achieve sustainability objectives make *all* the decisions either in the Conservancy Programme or in the Alto Bermejo Project. My aim is to draw attention to the privileged status that the focus on the need for sustainability has acquired, and to argue that the acquisition of this status prefigures and to some extent predetermines participation in the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. This leads us to an important question: how does knowledge about sustainability acquire its privileged status? Or, in other words, how do people in such empirically distinct contexts come to agree that sustainability is an imperative objective whose implications cannot be ignored? Important questions have a habit of leading to other, even more important questions, and so it is in this case. To ask how knowledge about sustainability becomes privileged to enquire into the character of knowledge itself. For the purposes of this enquiry into knowledge about sustainability, I use an approach borrowed largely from the sociology of scientific knowledge.

There are three main concepts in a sociological approach to knowledge which are of relevance and utility for this thesis. The first relates to the self-referential, self-validating character of much knowledge. The second is concerned with how to evaluate competing beliefs or ideas and respond appropriately to the difficulties of establishing the correctness or incorrectness of one belief or idea above another. The

third is connected to the importance of identifying the goals and interests that are furthered when groups of people accept one belief but not another. The rest of the chapter explores these themes, and considers their influence on and methodological implications for my own research. This discussion is at points fairly abstract, and its relevance to participation in conservation and development initiatives in Namibia may not seem immediately obvious. However, I hope with this chapter to establish by degrees the relevance and utility of the analytical devices I have chosen.

### **Knowledge and self-reference**

We may plausibly say that to know something entails classifying it as one kind of thing, as opposed to some other kind of thing (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996, chapter 3). Initially, it seems almost self-evident to say that once a thing's similarities and differences to other things have been established, we can safely refer to it as just that one thing; we know what it *is* and what it *is not*. Beneath these beguilingly simple observations lies an age-old conundrum: the problem of reference. Veteran sociologist of knowledge Barry Barnes has characterised this as "the relationship between our speech and that which is spoken of" (Barnes 1983 524). How can we be sure that what we say about a thing corresponds to what that thing is?

Another characteristic of reference is the tendency of some of the things we talk about to refer only to themselves, to have no point of reference that exists independently of what we say about them (*ibid*). Many of the customs and activities of a society exist because we collectively refer to them. Some things are, therefore, because we say they are; some things consist of other references to them. In this way, they are self-referring and, crucially, self-validating. In clarifying how this is so, I shall focus on the much-debated article by Barry Barnes, 'Social Life as Bootstrapped Induction' (1983), and also one of his books, *The Nature of Power* (1988). An exploration of his work on reference – and especially self reference – lends itself very helpfully to the question of how to think about the concept of sustainability and its widespread acceptance.

In order to make sense of how we apply concepts, he introduces two concepts of his own, the 'N' and the 'S' term. 'N' terms, then, are what Barnes calls natural kind terms, and proceed on the basis of seeing (or otherwise perceiving) an object and attaching a label to it by matching it to a pre-established pattern. Barnes takes the example of a leaf on a tree. In and out of school, we learn by example what leaves

are. If we come across a tree, we may well see small objects upon it that make us think of leaves. Where they are judged to be sufficiently similar, we attach the 'leaf' label. Where they are not considered sufficiently similar, by inference, we do not attach the 'leaf' label. The elements of referring to 'N' term terms are here evident. An object is recognised and matched with the pattern to which its specific empirical properties are thought to correspond. Once designated, the designation is stable: it does not tend to change over time. Leaves today will still be leaves tomorrow.

In contrast, 'S' terms, or social kinds (later to be called social objects; cf. Barnes 1988) are terms which are *not* applied to things as the result of an inspection of their empirical properties. However, with established, routinised usage they come to seem as real to us as any 'N' term. 'S' terms also proceed on the basis of recognition and pattern attachment, but they are often used to mark a distinction between one thing and another where no empirical difference is evident. For example, the difference between a queen and a slave is not marked by one having red hair and the other dark brown, by different eye colour, height, weight or shoe size. Rather, we recognise queens and slaves when they are so recognised by everyone else who applies the term. Whilst 'queen' tells us nothing in itself of the empirical characteristics of the person to whom it is applied, it clearly does have its uses and seems as real to us as the person to whom the pattern is attached. It indicates the sort of behaviour that is expected towards the person we designate 'queen'. One may choose not to be deferential on meeting Queen Elizabeth II, but only against the weight of considerable expectation. We might, then, see 'S' terms as a "target" or a "foci" for dispositions or behaviour (ibid:525), terms which indicate the relationship in which people or things stand to each other.

### **Cognitive authority**

If 'S' terms do not refer to the empirical characteristics of the things to which they are applied, then what their users *do* mean by them must be "a matter for their judgment, their decision" (ibid:526). Here the self-referential, self-validating character of the S type is very clear: something is referred to in one specific way because that is what it is agreed to be. We end up referring to other references to the S type, not to something independent of it. But how might such agreement be brought about? It is at this point that Barnes introduces the notion of 'cognitive authority'. To make the concept more intelligible and pave the way for his wider argument, he entreats us first



to take the case of an individual who, within the context of his or her social grouping, can essentially designate something as 'S' and have it accepted by others as 'S' therein. As an idealised scenario, 'S' could be whatever such an individual referred to as 'S'; this would be the epitome of self-referential knowledge, and the designator would enjoy total cognitive authority. The most illuminating example Barnes gives is that of a subordinate army officer designating a given hill as an 'objective' because it is so designated by his commanding officer (ibid:530). Needless to say, the individuals under the charge of the subordinate commanding officer will likewise designate the hill as the 'the objective'.

Now, the cognitive authority in this case derives from the character of a military institution, one in which deference to authority is a precondition of membership. These conditions are favourable to the acceptance by the many of a designation by the individual, and the 'S' term concept serves to explain the situation very well. However, one might expect it not to be capable of explaining belief and action in situations in which people were not obliged to think or do as they were told. Yet the wider significance of the 'S' term is that it does indeed obtain in such situations. Even where no individual has what s/he designates accepted by others simply because s/he has pronounced it, self-reference characterises many of the things that we treat as 'real'. The example Barnes gives to substantiate this claim is money. Despite its centrality to the organisation of the majority of societies in the world, it does not exist independently of our references to it. We may take it to refer in the last instance to the quantity of precious metal of which it is held to be the equivalent; but this equivalence is established by contingent judgment and agreement, rather than by any inherent property of the precious metal in question. In the case of money, then, we might say that the cognitive authority for its designation resides in all the users of the term. Further, as a collective, to designate metal, plastic or paper as money entails a coordination of belief (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996), that is, a consensus on what constitutes money and what does not. It is because of the existence of this consensus that we know – and continue to know – what counts as money and what does not.

That all instances of referring to money refer actually to other instances of referring to money does not stop us from fixing its meaning, or from organising our lives around the transactions and exchanges that it makes possible. We have no need of challenging the notion on the grounds that it is a self-referential term.

‘N’ and ‘S’ terms, as Barnes is at pains to make clear, are heuristic devices, useful for the purposes of analysis, not absolute categories into which all acts of classification will neatly fit. Acts of reference in everyday speech may be said to have both an ‘S’ and an ‘N’ component; ‘N’ and ‘S’ need not therein be treated as mutually exclusive. Further, following through the logic of ‘S’ terms might lead one to conclude that reference, whether to natural or social kinds, was a wholly self-refuting – and thereby meaningless – enterprise (1983:540-1), for reasons that receive fuller treatment later on in the chapter. Though for Barnes it is not necessary to reach such a conclusion, he sounds a requisite note of caution in the use of the logic of self-reference.

In what way might acts of reference have both an ‘N’ and an ‘S’ component? Self-referential acts of classification are often *related* to – and affected by – physical objects which are a source of reference for speech acts independent of language. It may be as well to talk of S types as describing our *relationship* to such things, as Barnes does in a later work, *The Nature of Power* (1988). Taking the example of a summit, he points out that it is “that part of the mountain which exists in a relationship with all its other parts”. If we want to verify that something is a summit, we will not be able to find it as an empirical property of the mountain itself, but rather in “its relationship with its context” (ibid:47), which turns out to be “a context of human activity” (ibid:49). A summit is only a summit because we treat it as such, because of our actions in relation to it. Of course, the mountain or hill would have to be present in order for there to be talk of a summit in the first place, but that does not make a summit an inherent property of a mountain. Taking up another example, that of the target, Barnes outlines the consequence of this thinking:

We now *are* the context which makes the object what it is. The target is the target because we believe it to be the target...In ceasing to believe that it is a target we dissolve away its nature as a target. In coming to believe that an object is a target, we constitute the context that makes it a target, and hence we constitute it as a target (ibid:49).

The all-important corollary to this observation is that not only is the S term a self-referring phenomenon, but it is also self-validating: “we validate what we believe by referring to what we believe” (ibid:49). It is precisely the way in which self-referring terms stand in relation to physical objects that makes talk of self-reference seem so counter-intuitive. Nonetheless, the self-referring component in our knowledge

becomes apparent once we separate physical objects from the relationship in which we stand to them. In this way, therefore, everyday speech acts can be said to have an ‘N’ and an ‘S’ component.

I hope with this discussion to have teased out of Barnes’s work on self-referential knowledge the ideas and insights that are most pertinent to my own work. What remains is to apply them.

### **3. Self-reference, cognitive authority and sustainability**

#### **‘S’, ‘N’ and sustainability**

If we ask the question of precisely *what* sustainability refers to, it becomes apparent that it comprises both ‘S’ and ‘N’ components. Is it, for instance, an empirically verifiable property of a solar panel? Is that property what we refer to when we talk of sustainability? Following Barnes – or even, perhaps, if we disagreed with his broader argument – we would conclude that no, sustainability does not inhere in solar panels. Rather, it might be suggested that a solar panel is *in itself* a device that converts sunlight into electricity. It only *relates* to the concept of sustainability to the extent that it furthers the achievement of a specific goal, for instance that of meeting the needs of current generations without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their needs (WCED 1987). It is not widely controversial to suggest that the conglomeration and arrangement of physical materials that make up a solar panel have an existence independent of definitions of a solar panel or descriptions of its functions. Nonetheless, its status as a sustainable form of electricity generation derives from how it stands in relation to a context of human activity; and it will only remain sustainable to the extent that we believe it to be so. To paraphrase Barnes, *we are*, then, the context which constitutes sustainability. It is in this sense that sustainability has a self-referring (S) component as well an N component: it refers to a belief about how humans should or should not live, according to the perceived consequences of living in some ways as opposed to others. Whatever meets or undermines the goal of sustainability does so only to the extent that we believe it to do so.

### **Sustainability and cognitive authority**

If talk of sustainability refers to the relationship in which particular things or processes stand to a context of human activity, it follows that it is held up, at least partially, by the cognitive authority invested in them. Without the presence of cognitive authority – i.e. if sustainability were a term no-one accepted – it would not be possible to establish its legitimacy or meaning. This leads me to a question which is central to this thesis: *where does cognitive authority for references to sustainability reside?* In order to address it, I introduce here a distinction between *general* and *limited* cognitive authority.

Clearly, part of the answer to this question is that it depends upon what we refer to by sustainability. For the verb ‘sustain’, for instance, cognitive authority for its correct application resides with a great many users. Given that ‘sustain’ has etymological roots in the Latin term *sustinēre*, in the sense of ‘uphold’, we can infer a great deal of stability in its designation: the concept has been long used to mean the same thing. As with money, we may not know exactly *how* the idea of sustaining something was initiated, but it self-evidently was, and in this case many centuries ago. ‘Sustain’, then, is an example of the source of cognitive authority being *general* – it resides in all of our collective references to it.

However, when it comes to designating as sustainable or unsustainable certain activities, there are rather fewer of us who would be prepared to make the designation by ourselves. There is a *limited* number of people whose designation of a particular thing as sustainable will be accepted as credible. Thus, by *limited* cognitive authority I mean just such occasions when the cognitive authority for a designation lies with the few rather than the many. We might, then, equate a given source of cognitive authority with more familiar terms, such as ‘specialist’ or ‘expert’. It is also helpful to think about the extension of cognitive authority as an act of coordination of beliefs, with ever more people coming to hold a particular belief about a particular thing (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996:121). Coordination may come about either through becoming accepted as a cognitive authority or accepting the statements of those who are already considered to be a source of cognitive authority. We do not, then, need to be specialists ourselves to start designating occurrences as sustainable or otherwise; we can call something sustainable (or not) because we accept the authority of an expert who calls that thing sustainable (or not). And yet, to the extent that a designation of, say, current air travel levels becomes widely accepted as

unsustainable, the cognitive authority upon which its credibility partially depends will change from being *limited* to being *general*.

In making this point, it is not my intention to imply that there is now longstanding stability in the application of terms such as sustainability. On the contrary, in the literature on the concept massive disagreements remain on what the term should or should not refer to (see chapter three). One might say that no one source has a monopoly of cognitive authority for the correct designation of the term, and that therefore it has not reached the sort of stability of designation that use of words like 'sustain' have in everyday, unreflective speech. Indeed, given that stable designation is much more easily achieved when we do not reflect on our grounds for designation, within more specialist contexts in which more attention is paid to what terms do or should refer to, it may not be very realistic to hope for such stability of designation. Nonetheless, enquiring into the source of cognitive authority helps us to understand why it is that terms such as 'sustainable' continues to be employed routinely even when, upon reflection, it may be hard coherently to specify what we refer to.

To recap, then, there are two noteworthy characteristics of knowledge about sustainability, at least as we find it in the context of international donor-funded initiatives with simultaneous conservation and development objectives in Namibia and Argentina. The first is that it can be highly specialised, requiring its holders to have the exposure and capacity to deploy large and diffuse bodies knowledge, ranging from the science of soil conservation, silvi- or aquaculture to theories of collective action, institution-building and governance, to name but a few aspects of sustainability. The wider our definitions of and criteria for sustainability become, the more one has to learn in order to be considered a source of cognitive authority. It is because of how much we think is necessary to take into account that, when it comes to separating what action *is* sustainable from what is *not*, few will have – or be accepted as having – such knowledge and rather more will not.

This is connected to the second characteristic of knowledge about sustainability, its privileged status. It acquires this status in part because not everyone is in possession of such knowledge, and in part because it is widely seen to be extremely useful in the pursuit of the goal of not jeopardising the ability of humans to meet needs both current and future. Crucially, then, within the ambit of conservation and development processes, a range of academic, NGO, donor and government actors constitute the context within which references to sustainability are meaningful. In

generating that context, they also constitute themselves as cognitive authorities. The same logic also applies to many other commonly-used terms, such as conservation, development, participation, decision-making, policy or implementation. This thesis only traces its ramifications through for the concept of sustainability, but clearly, the analysis could be extended to encompass a much broader arena.

### **Self-reference, cognitive authority and participation: circularity in intervention**

The cognitive authority held by people who have – or are deemed to have – knowledge about sustainability may have profound consequences for participation in initiatives attempting to work towards the wider goal of achieving sustainability. In my view, it certainly does have consequences for the initiatives I have studied in Namibia and Argentina which attempt to do precisely that.

It is by virtue of the privileged status of knowledge about sustainability to which NGO, government, donor and research actors lend cognitive authority that the involvement of such actors is rendered indispensable. A core belief which prefigures both the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project is that sustainability has to be put into practice; or rather, practice has to come into line with ideas about the sustainable use of natural resources. This belief is, I argue, commonly accepted by a wide variety of policy, government, NGO, academic, donor and other actors at the local, regional, national and international levels. It is in essence the acceptance of this belief which justifies and requires the process of knowledge transfer in the first place: not everyone is held to know – and therefore not everyone is in a position to do – what is required for sustainable common-pool resource use. In this way, the participation of those actors with sufficient cognitive authority to make such designations is rendered indispensable, and a fundamental determinant of what processes there are to participate in from the outset. This I refer to as circularity in intervention.

As an account of participation, either in Tsiseb conservancy or Alto Bermejo Project initiatives in Los Toldos, I take circularity in intervention to be one amongst other factors. Considered in isolation this thinking could be taken to lead to the conclusion that such NGO, government, donor, academic, etc. actors simply control the implementation of conservation-development initiatives in Namibia and Argentina by virtue of having privileged and, therefore, necessary knowledge about sustainability that local actors or resource users do not have. I do not wish to argue

that this is the case. This would not take into account knowledge and strategies held by people in the local context in which such initiatives were deployed, nor the reaction of project implementers to such knowledge and strategies. It may seem to render NGO, government, donor or academic actors as the only protagonists in the situation, casting local people in the role of passive bystanders, or simple recipients of knowledge about sustainability in a one-way transfer process. Both the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, in different ways, view local participation as a precondition of sustainability and see local knowledge as an important part of setting resource use on a sustainable footing. The traffic travels in two directions, so to speak. NGO, donor government and academic actors often extend the cognitive authority of the knowledge of the local people they work with by accepting such knowledge and emphasising its contribution to sustainable common-pool resource use. Furthermore, NGO, donor or government actors willing to share with people who do not yet have them knowledge, skills and resources that could be of benefit to people in the two, they might be seen as attempting to render themselves, in the long term, wholly dispensable. We might thereby come to see the extension of cognitive authority as in some way analogous to processes of capacity building and empowerment.

This caveat notwithstanding, the cognitive authority generated and possessed within academic, NGO and government spheres is a very important part of the explanation. It *does* support the conclusion that participation in neither context can be understood without understanding the link between knowing and deciding.

In Namibia, the Conservancy Programme is routinely described by terms such as ‘grassroots movement’, as an initiative that works from the ‘bottom up’. Indeed, ‘conservancy’ is used interchangeably with the term ‘community-based natural resource management’, with a view to emphasising the primacy of local people in the conservancy process. Likewise, the language of local, base-level participation is part and parcel of discourse connected to the Alto Bermejo Project. But we should not lose sight of the importance of the self-referential component of knowledge about sustainability and the implications of cognitive authority. If we use terms like ‘bottom-up’ or ‘grassroots’, then we leave unexamined sources of cognitive authority and an entire process of coordination of beliefs and interests, and will fail to understand fully what participation really means or entails. This process of coordination of beliefs, and how people come to share beliefs prefigures and to some

extent predetermines who participates and on what basis in the initiatives studied in this thesis. It is not, after all, as if we can talk about participation as a phenomenon which occurs independently of a predetermined context that consists of a coordination of beliefs which are upheld by specific cognitive authorities.

## **4. Making the case for finitism**

### **Dealing with conflicting beliefs: ‘N’ terms revisited, ostension and finitism**

In both the Namibian and Argentine initiatives, there are various positions, beliefs and preferred know-how which relate to particular circumstances or problems. For instance, how can inhabitants of rural areas gain benefits from tourism, as an incentive to use a given resource base sustainably, if they possess neither the requisite knowledge nor sufficient (access to) finance to start up their own tourism enterprises? In both contexts a range of beliefs, opinions and posited solutions can be canvassed on this and many other issues. In the face of a variety of differing and often conflicting beliefs or perspectives, the question of how to approach them emerges continually.

Following Barnes, Bloor and Henry (1996), the approach that I take is *not* to devise an account of which beliefs about how to make conservation and development processes sustainable hold water and which do not. Rather, I attempt to explain why some beliefs are chosen in preference to others and what the consequences – especially for participation – of such a choice are (cf. Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996 110, Bloor 1991 [1976]).

In order to show why I adopt this approach, it is necessary at this point to pick up once more the previous discussion of self-referential knowledge. If we accept the assertion that knowledge about sustainability is at least partially self-referring, it follows that *to the extent that* such knowledge does self-refer, its truth or falsity status is a matter for contingent judgement. However, if we revisit the idea of the ‘N’ term here, then might we not insist that knowledge about sustainability also refers, albeit partially, to something *independent* of itself? That is to say, its truth or falsity status must surely depend also on how well it *corresponds* to the properties of things and processes which are independent of itself. In this way, we might wish to argue that true beliefs about whether or not a thing or process is sustainable will reliably



correspond to what they describe in a way that false beliefs cannot, and that they can be *shown* to do so. Therefore, why abandon the attempt to separate true beliefs from false, especially when they may prove relevant to the achievement of specific goals, i.e. sustainable common-pool resource use in Argentina and Namibia? To answer this question it is necessary to return to the problem of reference, also known as the problem of *ostension*.

Barnes, Bloor & Henry define ostension as: “any act whereby a direct association is directly displayed or shown or pointed out between an empirical event or state of affairs and a word or term of a language” (ibid:52). With ‘S’ terms, we cannot display what the term is associated with because, as we have seen, they refer only to other words, not to something that exists independent of language. We have to be *told* what ‘S’ terms refer to, we cannot be *shown*. But with an ‘N’ term we can *show* what it refers by pointing to instances of the thing to which it refers. For example, we learn what ducks are by being shown one duck, then another, and so on. The difficulty that arises is that ostension is an indefinite process because no two things are exactly the same as each other. All ducks are the same and yet different, they resemble each other but are not identical. Two ducks stand in a “similarity relationship” to each other (ibid:50). Ostension would establish that they *resemble* each other; but this is not sufficient to establish what they *are*, only what they are *similar to*. We leave open an element of indefiniteness. If no two things are quite the same we always leave space for the notion of difference, and can always classify them as something different. More importantly, if we say only what they are similar to, rather than what they are, then we leave ourselves without a “metric” for weighing up similarity and difference (ibid:51). How so? Establishing similarity is not sufficient to establish the precise value of something, does not say what it actually *is*, and any metric must of necessity be based on a specific, known quantity. Therefore, having been shown what a duck is, we may see something similar to a duck and thereby classify it as one. But we could, if we wanted to, classify as it something else without inconsistency, because “Any thing may be said to be the same as, yet different from, any thing else” (ibid:50).

We might attempt to make the similarities between one thing and another weigh more than the differences by the use of rules, i.e. that ducks must have webbed feet in order to be counted as ducks, and in this way establish what was or was not a duck. However, the rules would have to consist of words from which we had eliminated indefiniteness, if we were not to repeat the problem of establishing a relation of

similarity rather than a fixed identity (ibid:52). The significance of this thinking is that it applies not just to ducks but also to all other things which are analogous to 'N' terms. Even though 'N' terms do have an independent point of reference, we have not as yet managed to eliminate all indefiniteness from our ways of classifying those independent points of reference. We have yet to find a way of showing a direct correspondence between a word and a thing.

It is bizarre and perhaps disconcerting that we can classify without having an unassailable method of say what a thing is and what it is not; but we can and do. More importantly, to acknowledge this problem need not be the same as saying that we cannot classify at all, that the exercise is meaningless or futile. We routinely classify successfully and on this basis formulate beliefs which allow us to comprehend and manipulate our environment, collectively and individually. From a pragmatic point of view, our classification systems still work for countless purposes, even if we cannot give a complete account of how they work (Barnes 1983:539-40).

This reasoning leads Barnes, Bloor & Henry to conclude that "our future use of conventions is underdetermined and indeterminate" (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996:54). This is the basis of the position which they, in common with other sociologists of knowledge, refer to as 'finitism'. Crucially, they go on to make the case for applying finitism to the formation of beliefs, not just our classificatory systems. They argue that to acquire a system of classification "is invariably at one and the same time the acquisition of a system of beliefs" (ibid:69). On that basis, they make the claim that we can have a finitist account of knowledge. Central to the finitist account are the following five premises:

1. the future implications of beliefs are open-ended
2. no statement of belief is ever indefeasibly true or false
3. All existing exemplifications/confirmations/refutations of a statement of a belief are revisable
4. successive applications of a belief are not independent
5. the applications of different beliefs are not independent of each other (ibid:70-73)

What applies to knowledge more generally also holds for scientific knowledge. In this way they put scientific knowledge on “the same footing” as any other form of knowledge (Breslau 2000).

### **Methodological implications of finitism**

The methodological implications of accepting a finitist requires of the researcher a change in focus. It means, as noted, leaving aside the task of establishing what constitutes true or false beliefs. Even though our beliefs and the theories we generate with them are of immense pragmatic value, as mentioned before, but it is as well to heed the following warning from another sociologist of knowledge of longstanding influence, David Bloor:

The danger comes when such talk, of ‘true’ and ‘false’, etc., is taken out of its workaday context and treated as a given in reflective, analytical or philosophical enquiries into the working of science. Then it causes trouble by encouraging simple and misleading pictures, pictures that purport to refer to the causes of the judgements that we make, when really they are the effects of those judgements. (Bloor 1999 90)

Instead, the point of social enquiry becomes twofold. Firstly, it involves the causal explanation of why and how one belief is held in preference to another, which in itself constitutes an act of coordination between individuals. How and why does it come to be that people believe one thing in a coordinated manner and not another? Secondly, it involves tracing the consequences of holding – and applying – beliefs for the social groups that organise themselves with reference to those beliefs (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996).

Adapting for the purposes of this research, the exercise remains fundamentally similar. First, it involves an exploration of beliefs relating to sustainability and why they are held. Second, it entails tracing the consequences for participation of the knowledge about sustainability employed in initiatives which attempt to comply with conservation and development objectives.

To leave to people connected to the Conservancy Programme or the Alto Bermejo Project the task of sorting true from false beliefs about sustainability also suits my purposes very well. Very strong and contradictory beliefs are held both about the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, and it is not always helpful to adjudicate between them. Especially in Namibia, the researcher’s authority to say, for instance, what does or does not work in the Conservancy Programme is frequently

challenged. Advocating or rejecting some of the positions that have been taken on the Conservancy Programme may close the door to other researchers, and this is a potential consequence of my research that I would wish to minimise wherever possible. It could also jeopardise the funding of particular organisations that work within the conservancy programme or the Alto Bermejo Project, another important consideration to reflect upon before endorsing a highly critical or condemnatory line of argument. Conversely, it may also be said that biting one's lip for fear of the consequences is a departure from independent research and a form of self-censorship. Finding the line between these two positions is what has led me to decide to make space for differing interpretations of the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme and focussing on why they are held, as opposed to upholding one or another in particular as the most truthful assessment.

However, whilst my line of enquiry does not separate true from false beliefs about what will or will not lead to the sustainable use of common-pool resources in Namibia or Argentina, it does not require me to refrain from forming and expressing my own views. For instance, as is clear from the first pages of the thesis, I do not agree that the conservancy programme can accurately be classified as a 'grass-roots' initiative. Nor do I agree with scholars that view sustainability as a meaningless term that cannot coherently be defined. There is a prescriptive as well as a descriptive element to this work, which is just as subject to the implications of the finitist account of knowing as are all the other prescriptions, viewpoints or beliefs which feature in this thesis.

It is, then, my hope that tracing the consequences for local participation of the link between knowing and deciding will have useful implications for policy. A better understanding of how knowledge is transferred between actors, contexts and languages is helpful in explaining why anticipated policy outcomes do or do not obtain. For instance, in the conservancy programme, more clearly grasping what conservancy residents come to know from their dealings with the conservancy, be it in a workshop on wildlife management, through an Annual General Meeting or conversations with members of their conservancy committee, could make us more aware of what helps or hinders them in wanting or being able to make decisions. As chapter seven shows, it is very hard for local people to participate if they do not understand what a conservancy is and what it is trying to achieve. For anyone in the position of having to transfer knowledge about, say, using wildlife in one way and not

another, it could be very useful to know what is understood, what is not understood, as well as what constitutes an accessible or inaccessible mode of knowledge transfer. Put differently, by thinking more carefully about the implications of privileging knowledge about sustainability for our understanding of participation, “development policy makers, practitioners and analysts could improve their work, and the way they communicate about it” (Thin 2002 2).

### **Goals and interests**

For Barnes, Bloor & Henry, to understand what causes one belief to be held in preference to another, we need to investigate the goals and interests served therein (1996:119-127; see also Barnes 1982a). Scientific knowledge, they argue, is the product of activity, and activity is in their view purposive by definition; though as noted, this thinking holds for knowledge more generally. Activity is goal-oriented: what we want to do shapes how we come to accept the way of doing it, or understanding how to do it. There is, therefore, no sense in which activity is undertaken in such a way as to serve no purpose. We may not agree with the purpose it serves, we may wonder whether it serves its intended purpose, but it remains purpose-oriented. Bloor, Barnes & Henry view goals and interests as causally significant for changes in knowledge (1996:120). Goals and interests cause knowledge either to be upheld and stay the same or to change, but do not cause knowledge *per se*. Further, although goals and interests can never be the “sufficient causes” of action, we cannot explain action without making reference to them at some point in our account (ibid:120).

Some further points of clarification may soften the objections which might at this juncture understandably arise. Given that using goals and interests to explain action is an important methodological strategy for this thesis – and given the hostile reception this approach has received in some quarters (i.e. Latour 1993, 1999) – it seems best to be explicit about what is meant by the term. First, goals and interests are *not* to be confused with pure self-interest; this is one amongst innumerable goals and interests that motivate action. It may be as well here to nip in the bud one implication that might be drawn from a narrow view of the significance and analytical utility of goals and interests. In the context of the initiatives I studied in Namibia and Argentina, I wish to rule out the possibility of explaining the occurrence of circularity in intervention *purely* in terms of the self-interest of actors whose presence is rendered

indispensable because of the privileged status of the knowledge they hold about sustainability.

Second, if we accept the argument that all activity is goal oriented, are we not missing the rather vital point that much activity is a matter of routine, not followed with any particular goal in mind? Indeed, it may well not be too much of a stretch to classify *most* human activity as routine, automatic. If we accept this argument, if activity is explained by our predisposition toward routine, then is a goals-and-interests focus not deprived, correspondingly, of *most* of its explanatory power? Barnes, Bloor & Henry beg to differ. They argue that routines are the consequence of goals and interests as much as any other type of activity. Habit and authority, the essential components of routines, may be “immediate causes of routine action” (ibid:125), but they are not independent from goals and interests, not able to explain action in and of themselves. This is because, should circumstance require it, routine action would be modified by goals and interests and a new routine established, the continuation of which habit and authority would help to explain. Therefore, “in that it persists unmodified, routine action is itself explained by its relationship to goals and interests” (ibid:126).

Sustainability is explicitly and widely recognised as a goal towards which devoting thought, time, resources and energy is very much worth our while. It is very hard to see how we might conceive of sustainability separate from its status as a goal. It is equally difficult to argue against the proposition that, if we accept current predictions about some of the consequences of existing trends in population growth or consumption, it is in our interests to attempt to devise sustainable modes of production, transport, consumption, curbing the global birth rate etc.

To seek to document and explain such changes in beliefs about sustainability becomes, then, a methodological strategy. It is *my* goal to explore changes to knowledge about sustainability in both Namibia and Argentina, and this objective shapes the structure of the thesis. In parts two and three of the thesis, I attempt first to examine what beliefs were previously held, particularly in relation to conservation, but also with respect to the relationship between conservation and development processes, which were (and in some quarters still are) held to be incompatible. Following this, I explore the processes by which different beliefs about how to achieve conservation and development objectives came to be influential, at the expense of the beliefs held previously. In both Namibia and Argentina, the increasing

importance of the concept of sustainability at a global level has been central in changes to definitions of conservation and development, how policy should respond to such changes and how to go about the sort of conservation and development suggested by these definitions. The influence of knowledge about sustainability in both contexts thereby forms the basis for the comparison between the two countries. The concept of sustainability underpins both the Alto Bermejo Project and the Conservancy Programme: all intervention in both contexts has to contribute to this ultimate goal.

### **Why not other approaches from science and technology studies?**

The sociology of scientific knowledge is one of a number of theoretical starting points within the broader field of Science and Technology Studies; and perhaps a minority one at that. What still remains to be explained is why I chose it and not other approaches which are more prevalent in the field. The short answer is that it seems to me the only approach which fully acknowledges unresolved tensions and problems in our ways of knowing, and calculates the status of what we do know on that basis. The long answer follows below.

A debate of central importance within science and technology studies concerns the role of the world, and the things found within it, in the generation of scientific knowledge about them. The point on which at least some commentators who take otherwise distinct positions can agree is that the world does influence our beliefs about it. For Barnes, Bloor and Henry, “the physical environment can have effects on cognition no less than the social environment: if one makes a distinction between these two environments, then it is arbitrary and unjustified to recognize the role of the one and not the other” (1996 79). For Bruno Latour, things have to be “allowed to make a difference” (1999 117) to our accounts of them and, hence, to social life more generally. The properties of ‘things in themselves’ (ibid) are central to an explanation of our beliefs of them and what we then do with those beliefs. For example, the properties of a wheel or a laptop computer must surely influence both what we claim to know about wheels or laptops and how we make or use them.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the things that are in the world and our reports about them is not at all straightforward. But it is as well, before going any further, to be explicit about one consequence of accepting the existence of a

world independent of our beliefs about it, which is necessary to make the claim that the world does indeed influence our beliefs about it. This proposition puts limits on social explanations of our constructions (or accounts) of the world, in particular the proposition that there is nothing beyond language, a conclusion which, unless carefully formulated, a social constructionist position can lead to, and which I do not accept in this thesis. The world impinges on the society and reality we construct for ourselves (Latour 1999).

The question is, how do we detect and describe the effects that things have on our reports and observations about them? It is in the attempts to answer this question that approaches diverge. I make no attempt here to survey all of the divergent views that stem from this question, such as Andrew Pickering's "Mangle" (1995) or Daniel Breslau's 'anti-humanist' sociology (2000). This is partly for reasons of space, and partly out of a concern not to stray too far from the chief concern of this thesis. Latour's work is central to science and technology studies, as much for those who find his methods for studying science brilliant as for those who find them incoherent, and his ideas give a representative flavour of many of the issues and debates within the field. I hope also to show what in his conception of our relationship to the world I take issue with, and how, following Barnes, Bloor and Henry, we might better understand that relationship.

For Latour, scientists are not the only agents in the construction of scientific knowledge; things are agents *just as much* as scientists are (Latour 1988, Latour 1999). He makes this argument in order to leave space for 'non human' things to play their proper role in determining our accounts of and beliefs about them. In this way, the world affects society, and, therefore, it is not sufficient to investigate solely social phenomena in our accounts of society. However, Latour's proposed manner of understanding the basic relationship between humans and the world is radical and controversial.

In order to comprehend how our relationship with the world generates knowledge, Latour proposes that we abandon the dichotomy of subject/object (Latour, 1999), that is, the idea of a human subject and 'knower' and an object or thing about which something is known. Rather, humans and other agents are all "quasi-objects" and "quasi-subjects". In this way, society and nature are "co-produced" (1988) and can only be fully understood by avoiding explaining either



nature wholly in terms of society or explaining society in terms of nature. This is the basis for his actor-network theory. It is necessary instead to study the “chains of associations” that bring together actors and “actants” (non-human actors), be they human, material, psychological or ideological. The individual actors or actants in a network can only be defined in terms of their relation to each other. In the process of interaction across time between these entities, which is what scientific practice is comprised of, knowledge is continually constructed and reconstructed. In this process, actors and actants make an equal contribution, things are invested with the same capacity for agency and intentionality as are human actors. Dividing the world into knowing subjects and objects about which subjects have knowledge is to split nature itself arbitrarily in two, and does not give a complete account of things in the (re)formation of our knowledge. This is because it focuses only on contributions to knowledge made by our reports about things, and not on the contribution made by things themselves. Thus, unless we abandon the subject/object dichotomy, things are “not allowed to make a difference” to our knowledge of them (1999 125). On these grounds Latour finds sociology – and, in particular, the sociology of scientific knowledge – incapable of explaining society because it is unable to account for the effects of non-human actors upon the network which, presumably, constitutes both society and nature simultaneously.

It would be ungracious and mean-spirited to leave unacknowledged the potential utility and value of much of Latour’s work. Even detractors admire his keen awareness of the political and power dimensions of the production of scientific knowledge (Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996). Moreover, his ideas have been widely used to interesting effect. To take just one example, his work on explaining how knowledge comes to be accepted, in terms of the enrolment of different actors and use of the concept of order as a way to show how different actors with differing agendas will on some level work toward a common purpose, has been used to interesting effect by David Mosse. Mosse deploys them in his account of how development policy and projects are produced and deemed a success or a failure (Latour 1996, Mosse 2005).

Nevertheless, his account leaves fundamental difficulties unresolved. First, talk of material agency raises troublesome problems related to the idea of intentionality. It is hard to see how to define agency without referring to the

intentions actors have when they act. And it is equally hard to see how material objects can have – let alone act upon – intentions. It seems completely counter-intuitive to how we relate to the world. Second, following Collins and Yearly (1992), Dritsas (2005) has pointed out the difficulties for commentators without scientific training – such as Latour and other proponents both of science and technology studies and the sociology of scientific knowledge – to study material agency. It leads to such commentators studying the *reports* made by scientists about material agency, rather than material agency itself (ibid.). Arguably – and it continues to be the subject of intense debate – this deposits Latour back at the subject/object dichotomy because he is left studying our knowledge of things, not the things themselves.

The perception, then, that Latour's metaphysics have not shown how to get beyond accounts of things to the things themselves – and, therefore, to gain direct access to their agency – has even led to the charge of his having raised “obscurantism...to the level of a general methodological principle” (Bloor 1999 97). David Bloor is one of Latour's strongest critics, and the harshness of the observation is better understood in that light. Moreover, he admits that there are parts of Latour's arguments in which he does not “understand what [Latour] is trying to say” (Bloor 1999:135). We may therefore read into Bloor's words a refreshingly honest but potentially damaging admission; after all, how can one claim to refute what one does not understand? A possible reply could be, how can one defend what is unintelligible? Much in Latour's – and Bloor's – work stands or falls on the answers to these questions. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide them. Nor can I claim to have gone beyond Bloor's understanding of Latour's argument. However, despite Latour's adamance that Bloor is simply missing the point (Latour 1999), I would contend that it still remains unclear *how* Latour has justified sufficiently his radically different views on what it means to know about the world. On that basis, it seems expedient to adopt the stance advocated by proponents of the sociology of scientific knowledge.

## 5. Conclusion

I hope with this chapter to have achieved a number of objectives. First, I have explained why two concepts, self-referential knowledge and cognitive authority, contribute to a better understanding of how the specialised character of knowledge about sustainability impacts on local participation in initiatives in Namibia and Argentina. The ‘circularity in intervention’ which, I argue, characterises participation in both contexts is prefigured by considerations of self-referential knowledge and cognitive authority. Second, I have outlined some of the basic tenets of the ‘finitist’ theory of knowledge, and sought to demonstrate both their relevance to my own work and the implications they have for my methodology. By adopting a finitist stance, I leave aside the task of determining true beliefs about sustainability from false ones, and instead seek to explain how beliefs about how to realise conservation and development objectives are predicated on the notion of sustainability, both in the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. This is to be done with recourse to an exploration of the goals and interests which underlie the influence of the concept of sustainability. My overarching focus is on the consequences for local participation in these initiatives of the already-established importance of sustainability and the subsequent need to transfer knowledge and skills necessary to its achievement.

In order to track and trace this influence, it is necessary to explore the history of the use of the term sustainability, within the specific context of conservation and development processes. We need to inspect the wider context in which sustainability became a concept on which an international consensus (or coordination of beliefs) has been built. It is this task to which it is now necessary to turn.

# Chapter III

## Changing beliefs about sustainability

### 1. Introduction

Sustainability is a hugely influential concept in innumerable spheres of thought and activity. This was not always the case; how did it come to be so, and how did beliefs about how to do conservation and development change as a consequence? These are the two central questions that this chapter attempts to address. It starts with a brief historical sketch of how sustainability has come to be such an important and popular idea. Much thinking on the notion can be traced back at least as far as the nineteenth century, to concerns about the potentially adverse consequences of ‘progress’ and global economic expansion. On into the twentieth century, the fear increased that unchecked economic growth, massive consumption and population expansion could threaten the very survival of human beings. This set of concerns prompts the quest for sustainability. The emergence and exponential increase in the influence of this concept through certain events – such as the earth summits – and certain institutions – such as the World Commission on Environment and Development – is, therefore, tracked.

There is not just one definition of sustainability, nor is there a single approach posited for its achievement; on the contrary, a variety, be they techno-, anthro- or eco-centric, blue-, red- or deep-green have emerged. Consequently, clear consensus on precisely what it means or how to bring it about is not the chief characteristic of knowledge about sustainability. Like ‘poverty reduction’ or ‘participation’, this broad, necessarily vague aim accommodates many diverse and often mutually antagonistic interest groups. Consideration is given, then, to this dynamic through which sustainability is as hard to object to as its meaning is to specify. Nonetheless, agreement has been garnered that sustainability has to be an overarching goal, and contrary to the position adopted by some commentators, I contend that it is possible to formulate a definition of ‘sustainable development’ which entails no *logical* contradiction. Non-contradictory definitions are already available: even if it is a

phrase with many different and sometimes opposed meanings, so too are some of our most basic words, but we still employ them meaningfully.

Given that progress and development are inextricably bound up with the consumption of the products of nature, a central part of any attempt to realise a sustainable way of living must be concerned with the use of common-pool resources. Thinking on common-pool resource is, then, the central theme of section two. The following definition of a common-pool resource will serve us here: “a class of resources for which exclusion is difficult and joint use involves subtractability” (Berkes et al. 1989 91). A definition which employed less precise but more accessible terms could be: a type of resource which people cannot easily be stopped from using, and which may be partially or wholly depleted, depending on how it is used. Within the study of common-pool resources, there has been a re-evaluation of what sustainability is, how to go about realising sustainable common-pool resource use and indeed the extent to which sustainability is something that can be orchestrated through careful management. This reappraisal extends in four broad directions.

The first has to do with the theoretical models of common-pool resource management often espoused by governments in various parts of the world. This vein of thinking has attempted to find the explanatory limitations of such models by engaging with the empirical study of a variety of existing common-pool resource regimes. It has been argued that through this engagement it is necessary not only to refine existing models of state or private intervention in common-pool resource management (Ostrom 1990), but also to recognise and learn from the inherently sustainable character of ‘local’, ‘traditional’ or ‘communal’ common-pool resource management regimes that have existed for centuries (Berkes et al. 1989, Feeny et al. 1990, McCay and Acheson 1987).

The second strand brings into question some of the assumptions made by the science of common-pool resource management employed for much of the twentieth century, thereby generating doubts about the extent to which it is possible to establish stable, unvarying, routinely predictable forms of sustainable common-pool resource management.

The third offshoot, linked to the second, has taken up and challenged scientific narratives of environmental crisis, holding that at least in some cases the evidence on which they are based is not as reliable as is sometimes assumed. If the scientific basis for such narratives goes unchallenged *only* because of the glow of the light of

imputed authenticity in which they bathe, some commentators conclude that we must look to the social, political and historical factors which help to explain why they have become invested with credibility over long periods of time (at least in some cases). This is very much a sociological approach to scientific knowledge.

Connected to this attack on the credibility of scientific knowledge is the fourth strand, characterised by an attempt to capture the value of local knowledge more widely which may have been overlooked or discredited as a result of privileging scientific knowledge.

All of these bodies of literature have been instrumental in changing thinking about what needs to be known for sustainable common-pool resource management to be realised, and who holds such knowledge. Such changes in thinking are a consequence of and contribute to the erosion of the cognitive authority that has for much of the twentieth century been invested in the science of common-pool resource management; and indeed in scientific knowledge more generally.

Finally, a note on the use of terminology. With ‘sustainability’ I refer to the a state of affairs that can be continued for a long time or indefinitely. With ‘sustainable development’, I refer to a form of development which can be continued for a long time or indefinitely. The notion of ‘ongoingness’, as it were, is presupposed by the WCED definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (1987 43).

## **2. The origins and rise of the concept of sustainability**

### **Knowledge about sustainability: an introduction**

Concerns about progress, in the form of continual economic growth, are not especially new. In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill posed a question still pertinent in the twenty-first: “Towards what ultimate point is society tending by its industrial progress? When the progress ceases, in what condition are we to expect it will leave mankind?” (1978 [1857]). Connected questions have been very much concerned with the effects of industrial progress on the environment. The increasing importance imputed to the concept of sustainability is inseparable from the ever greater attention paid to whether humankind is a cause – indeed the principal cause –

of environmental change (cf. Mannion 1991 1). If the majority of adverse environmental change is anthropocentric, resulting in the destruction of the natural capital on which progress is based, that form of progress cannot be sustained indefinitely. This linking of progress to environmental limitations, for Glacken, was a consequence of a nineteenth-century re-ordering of humankind's relationship to nature, driven by three factors: "the theory of evolution, specialization in the attainment of knowledge, acceleration in the transformation of nature" (1973 705).

Economic growth driven by the consumption of natural capital was a central characteristic of a century steeped in global colonial expansion. The contrast between landscapes 'transformed' through industrialisation and those encountered by European colonisers served to heighten awareness of the environmental consequences of progress. We can trace back to concerns about such consequences the beginnings of the environmental movement, in the form of early conservationists who wanted to preserve the 'wilderness' they thought lost or tainted in their own countries, a point made in more detail in chapter four.

The environmental movement grew out of, and is often taken to be synonymous with, the international conservation groups and lobbies of the twentieth century. The early conservation aims of protecting wildlife and 'wild' landscapes for their intrinsic value gradually scaled up to wider concerns about the state and fate of the whole planet (Jenkins 2001 5). This global perspective took its cue from the discipline of ecology, whose respectability and credibility as a science was well-established by the 1950s (Redclift 1987). With its emphasis on ecological systems, the delicate balance between system components, ecology posited the link between damaging change to the system and the very survival of humankind (Jenkins 2001:6). The environmentalism of the 1960s subsequently sought to make prominent the notion that establishing a harmonious, enduring relationship between humans and nature was therefore imperative. At the same time, the environmental movement was becoming increasingly international in its reach and organisational structures, due, according to McCormick, to: the expansion of scientific research; much greater ease of national and international travel; population growth and broad socio-economic change (McCormick 1989 1).

Preoccupation with the effects of human consumption on the ecosystems that provided the inputs for economic growth laid the ground in the 1970s for the contention that there were environmental limits to economic growth, a controversial

debate that came to be held on the international stage. The notion of limits was first popularised by the group of academics who met to form the ‘Club of Rome’, led by Aurelio Peccei. The Club’s findings were reflected in and popularised by the book *Limits to Growth*, (Meadows, Randers and Meadows, 1972) which attracted the attention of government, private and civil sector actors and groups the world over. Other publications, such as Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1963) and John Alexander Loraine’s pessimistically-titled *The Death of Tomorrow* (1972) raised similar issues, and all such publications served to earn their authors the moniker of ‘prophets of doom’. The collaborative works of Dennis and Donella Meadows with Jørgen Randers (i.e. 1972, 1992, 2004) serve as a barometer of the change in beliefs about the expediency and the consequences of the type of unrestricted economic growth widely envisaged for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Meadows, Randers and Meadows argued that unrestricted economic growth could become a victim of its own success if population levels and natural resource consumption increased to the point of surpassing the planet’s ecological constraints. Ever greater quantities of manpower and capital intended for the furthering of economic growth would have to be set aside for tackling the consequences of exceeding such constraints, lowering quality of life. Meadows, Randers and Meadows used computer modelling to generate 12 potential scenarios for the ‘end’ of growth, with acceptable consumption and population levels achieved at one end of the scale to catastrophic crash at the other. All twelve scenarios put the end of growth at some point in the twenty-first century. Having set up the contrast between needless catastrophe and the rosy future that humankind could enjoy if shaken from complacency, the aim of the book was to make the case for a global effort to bring human impact on the environment to within the world’s ‘carrying capacity’. In other words, the object of much global policy would be to bring growth within critical ecological boundaries, to facilitate ways of living that could be continued from one generation to the next. *Limits to Growth*, along with other texts, created the context in which calls for sustainability would be made. Without an awareness of limits, there could be no focus on the need for sustainability. Disagreement over the meaning of sustainable development notwithstanding, it is hard to conceive of a definition not prefigured by the idea that there are limits within which (re)productive and consumptive activity must remain.



As the melodramatic implications of the now common term ‘environmental prophets of doom’ would suggest, not all were readily convinced at first of the need to impose limits on growth. For instance, Herman Kahn, formerly a prominent US military strategist and systems theorist, was among those leading the counter-attack, arguing: “With current and near current technology, we can support 15 billion people in the world at twenty thousand dollars per capita for a millennium – and that seems to be a very conservative statement” (cited in Meadows, Randers, and Meadows 2004 ii). Such sceptical views, whilst still in circulation, have lost much ground, whilst concern about the environmental impacts of growth burgeoned in the final thirty years of the twentieth century. By the early 1990s, Meadows, Randers and Meadows argued in *Beyond the Limits* that humans had already exceeded the planet’s capacity to support a form of existence entailing largely unchecked, exponential growth in global population levels and resource consumption (1992). In the twenty-first century, their position remained almost completely unchanged: their initial predictions in *Limits to Growth* had mostly, they felt, stood the test of time (2004), and judged that what had been done to address the threats posed by global climate change was not nearly sufficient. The optimism evident in *Limits to Growth* for a potentially rosy, sustainable future had been by the twenty-first century much diminished, partly by what they saw as a string of wasted opportunities for substantial, proportionate change, and partly perhaps due to the demise in 2001 of Donella Meadows, the most optimistic of the three authors. As preoccupation, then, with potentially irreversible environmental change which, for some, could endanger the survival of the human species has increased (i.e. Clayton and Radcliffe 1996), the influence of and importance attached to the concept of sustainability has grown exponentially.

These days the international media, the global environmental lobby, governments and even multinational companies that have become associated with unwisely destructive forms of resource consumption (i.e. Shell, Toyota or British Airways) all profess the need for sustainable growth. The importance of sustainability is accepted in many, perhaps even most, spheres of economic activity. However, the public legitimacy of the concept and its status in policy documents as an indispensable prefix may lead us to overstate its actual influence on decision-making and priority-setting in government or the private sector. Meadows, Randers and Meadows talk of the failure to sign politicians up to the ‘cause’ of sustainability to anything like the levels of support that economists have garnered for the concept of free trade (2004),

which was itself becoming popular around the time *Limits to Growth* was first published. These remarks may plausibly be borne out by the failure of the world's largest emitter of carbon emissions to sign up to the UN Kyoto protocol in 1999, and also the likelihood that the majority of countries who did sign up will not comply with their emissions reductions targets by 2012. However, in the last couple of years, the issue of climate change has received much greater attention and is rarely out of the news. Take, for instance, the European Union's recent talk of setting itself up as a model for tackling climate change, or the column inches devoted to the publication of the most recent report of the International Panel on Climate Change. Indeed, according to *The Economist*, in the British context at least, "climate change has become as much of a political battleground as health, education or immigration"<sup>2</sup>

### **The emergence of an international consensus on sustainability – actors and institutions**

Victoria Jenkins offers a review of the landmark events, institutions conferences and manifestos which helped to consolidate the place of sustainability on the international political agenda between 1972 and 1992 (2001:49-90), summarised here, supplemented with other sources and extended until 2002.

Although the term 'sustainable development' was not, according to Jenkins, coined until 1980, it was prefigured by a chain of events initiated in 1972. At this point the international community first convened to discuss concern about environmental change of anthropocentric origin. Stockholm hosted the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNHCE). On the back of the establishment of a broad consensus that action would have to be taken to tackle environmental degradation the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was created. Its duties included the facilitation of international cooperation on environmental issues and the coordination of the UN's environment-related activities.

The ten years that followed the Conference on the Human Environment did not pass in a flurry of activity to develop and achieve the objectives it set. Nonetheless, the United Nations Environment Programme received support from two large international organisations, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). They collaboratively

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<sup>2</sup> *The Economist*, March 17<sup>th</sup> 2007, p35 (see also the Bagehot column in the same edition)

published the *World Conservation Strategy* in 1980. Apparently the first document to call for ‘sustainable development’, it sought living resource conservation, but argued that this aim would be dependent upon successfully addressing many development-related problems such as poverty, food security and, of course, population expansion. It may therefore have been the first international publication to reconfigure the relationship between conservation and development processes, seeing it not as one of mutual conflict and antagonism, but of necessary interdependence. To this end, its overarching objective was “the integration of conservation and ‘development’ to ensure that modifications to the planet do indeed secure the survival and well-being of all people” (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980, section 1, introduction, paragraph 8).

In 1982, the first of three anniversary conferences for the one of 1972 was held in Nairobi, out of which emerged two things of lasting significance. First, an agreement known as the *World Charter for Nature* was reached, an attempt to establish general principles of natural resource conservation which linked the success of any such conservation to considerations of human development. Second, at Nairobi the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) was created, leading to the publication in 1987 of *Our Common Future*, which contains the most frequently cited (and contested) definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987 43). The Commission was tasked with devising “A Global Agenda for Change”, which required the realisation of four linked objectives:

1. proposing strategies for the achievement of sustainable development by “2000 and beyond”
2. fostering greater cooperation between countries at different stages of social and economic development in the establishment of “common and mutually supportive objectives” predicated on the “interrelationship” between environment and development
3. finding “ways and means” for international responses to environmental problems
4. defining shared perceptions and aspirational goals for the international community (WCED 1987 ix)

This momentum peaked twenty years later with the holding of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, more commonly known by the more approachable term the 'Earth Summit'. Alternately described as a success and a failure (Grubb et al. 1993, Redclift and Sage 1995), the conference brought together 178 countries, including 120 heads of state, and produced five agreements that were widely held to be "the most comprehensive statement, to date, of a world consensus on the aims and means of achieving 'sustainable development'" (Jenkins 2001 53). These agreements are:

1. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development
2. Agenda 21
3. The Convention on Biological Diversity
4. The Framework Convention on Climate Change
5. The Agreement on Forest Principles (UNEP website)

The Rio Declaration comprised a list of 27 principles on which to base 'sustainable development'. Agenda 21 was essentially a series of documents which constituted a global action plan for sustainable development. Many commentators were impressed by the breadth of consensus that had permitted the production of these agreements (Grubb *et al* 1993:26). Others argued that they placed little in the way of binding legal commitment or obligation upon those party to the agreements (*ibid.*). Another complaint was that no concrete timetable for the actions envisaged under Agenda 21 had been agreed, nor had any specific mechanisms for their implementation been devised. Some concluded that despite the excitement and optimism surrounding the Summit, it amounted to little more than talk, and a failure therein (*ibid.*). Disillusion notwithstanding, the first Earth Summit had produced an international agenda for addressing environment and development concerns, predicated on the logic of sustainability.

The Rio conference was followed in 1997, at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Sustainable Development in New York, by what came to be known as Earth Summit II. Intended as a review of progress on the objectives of Agenda 21 and a re-affirmation of the goals and agreements of the Rio Conference, it generated more disappointment than optimism (Osborn and Bigg 1998).

As a result, expectations mounted for the following global event: the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002. An enormous gathering, it brought together 22,000 people, including, as well as many heads of state, 10,000 delegates, 8,000 representatives from civil society and the private sector and 4,000 journalists – one for every four-to-five of the Summit’s attendees (UN 2002a). Governments in attendance at the Summit tended to declare it a success, as typified by the optimistic response of (former) UK Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Margaret Beckett (2002). The Plan of Implementation was lauded by the UN as a more focussed document than its predecessor Agenda 21, advancing the cause of sustainable development through a clearer identification of the processes by which it could be achieved, and by bringing in a wider range of actors than had been involved in the Rio Summit of 1992 (UN 2002b). As embodied by the Plan, and chiming significantly with the Millennium Development Goals, the priorities for the achievement of sustainable development were:

- Water and sanitation
- Health
- Biodiversity and ecosystem management
- Poverty reduction
- Climate change (ibid)

Other commentators, especially those within the civil society sector, expressed deep disappointment at the outcomes, perhaps most pithily captured by WWF’s response to the UK Government’s celebratory overtures: “which summit did Beckett attend?” (cited in ENDS 2002). Echoing one vein of response to the Rio Summit, the most frequent criticism that emerged was related to the perceived lack of commitment to setting timeframes for unambiguous targets, creating mechanisms for realising stated objectives and little or no mention of dedicated funding for priority activities (cf. Seyfang 2003, Von Frantzius 2004). For some, it was even a “step away” from sustainable development (Coates 2002). Others argued it did not send a “strong political signal” to negotiators in the Doha round of the World Trade Organisation talks to incorporate sustainability criteria into final agreements (Von Frantzius, 2004). These talks were at any rate suspended in July 2006.

Whatever conclusion is arrived at about the merits and disappointments of the Johannesburg Summit and the conferences in Stockholm, Nairobi and Rio that preceded it, the effect they have had on raising the credibility and legitimacy imputed to the concept of sustainability is hard to underestimate. As a part of this process, the notion of broad participation as a cornerstone of sustainability has also gained wide acceptance, its importance frequently stressed, for example in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (UN 2002b).

### **The meaning of ‘sustainability’ – *are we being conned?***

Although a global consensus on the need for sustainable development is often assumed, there is markedly less consensus on what the concept refers to. A number of different positions have emerged regarding priorities for sustainability and how to set about their achievement. The most common complaint made against the notion is that it is held to be contradictory; but I argue that it can be formulated in a variety of ways without entailing any logical contradiction.

In the context of sustainable development, Michael Redclift captures what is commonly taken to be a dilemma for any attempt at a definition of sustainable development: “Like motherhood and God, it is difficult not to approve of it. At the same time, ‘sustainable development’ is fraught with contradiction” (1995 17). Whilst the verb ‘sustain’ conveys a “passive” connotation, the adjective ‘sustainable’ is often used in what Redclift terms an “active” sense, to prescribe a given course of appropriate action (ibid:18). Unfortunately, Redclift sows confusion where he seeks to clarify, because he does not specify the meaning of ‘active’ and ‘passive’. In the strictly grammatical sense, his usage of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ would appear to be inconsistent. Grammatically speaking, ‘sustain’, as a verb, has an active function in a sentence, whereas ‘sustainable’, being an adjective, is neither passive nor active, as it can be neither the subject nor the object of a sentence. If by ‘passive’ he refers not to what a thing is or does, but rather what happens to it, what it merely reacts to, as in an army which sustains casualties, his point is more intelligible. However, we might also talk of a lode-bearing wall that sustains the weight of structures built on top of it, which carries an active connotation, one of continuously resisting pressure. We could argue from there that phrases like ‘sustain casualties’ are figurative, and merely borrow the more standard sense of ‘sustain’, that of resisting pressure. The difference

between active and passive in this other sense, then, is not as clear cut as one might hope.

Nonetheless, Redclift could – and does – still claim that ‘sustainable’ is used in a variety of contradictory ways. This argument is made also by Potter who, in an article entitled ‘Sustainable development: are we being conned?’ (1997 147-148), turns to the *Oxford English Dictionary* to make his point. The O.E.D. defines ‘sustainable’ as “to keep going continuously”, and ‘development’ as ‘growth or evolution’. If we accept those definitions, he argues that the sort of economic growth which is widely held to have taken us ‘beyond the limit’ (Meadows, Randers, and Meadows 1992) could be classified as ‘sustainable development’. However, this dilemma is resolved with the observation that economic growth is a form of sustainable development until it stops being so; to say that it can be sustainable does not oblige us to say that it will *always* be so. The point at which it becomes unsustainable is the point at which it becomes desirable or necessary to search for another mode of economic activity that will be sustainable. There is no logical contradiction in arguing that any form of economic activity could be classed as ‘sustainable development’, as long as it is recognised that it is only sustainable up to a point. The object and means of sustainability are, then, up for renegotiation, and that is the point at which debates concerning sustainable development now stand.

Furthermore, the idea that ‘sustainable development’, defined purely in terms of growth, is *ipso facto* oxymoronic (i.e. Pearce et al. 1989), has been challenged by several authors, including Jørgen Randers (1994). Oluf Langhelle (1999 136) argues that the possibility of sustainable growth depends on whether “economic growth (i.e. growth in the money value of the annual production of goods and services) can be uncoupled from physical growth (the growth in population, energy use, resource use and pollution output)”. Verifying whether economic growth can be sustainable, he states, would be a matter for empirical investigation, not a self-evident truth.

To be fair to commentators such as Redclift, Potter and Pearce, though, the warning that we should be careful in our use of the terms ‘sustainable’ and ‘development’, is well worth heeding. They are indeed too “frequently strung together” (Potter 1997:147) without due care being paid to their many-splintered implications. This concern with usage is also taken up by Rosaleen Duffy, who contends that because sustainability underwrites the rhetoric of so many different groups of actors with diverse or opposed aims and interests, it is in fact rendered

meaningless (2000:4-6). As another prompt for employing due caution in our use of the term, this can be considered a useful observation. Moreover, Duffy's approach reminds us that the varied definitions of the term are formulated to serve varied goals and interests. For instance, it is conspicuous that people from the World Bank and animal rights pressure groups formulate their agendas in terms of sustainability, and indeed its vagueness permits it to be used in the description of a number of objectives very much at odds with each other. But is the concept of sustainability therefore meaningless? I contend that it is not.

Many words have a bewildering number of meanings. If we look up 'take' in the concise OED, even ignoring its idiomatic connotations in phrasal verbs, we find that it can be employed in no less than 35 different senses as a verb, and four as a noun (more than 100 senses are covered in the complete OED). Teachers of English as a second language may understandably worry about how much of the complexity and flexibility of this indispensable word they will be able to convey to their students. But how many of those for whom English is their first language ever give it a second thought? 'Take' is not commonly thought a meaningless word, but we can wonder at the diversity in its usage when we do stop and contemplate it. Furthermore, it has proved possible to document this diversity, although perhaps not definitively; there may be even more senses of the word yet to be identified or accepted, as the *O.E.D.*'s lexicographers would readily admit. We may never know all the meanings of 'take', but we know enough to use it meaningfully. What, then, stops us from adopting the same attitude toward words like 'sustainability'? It would appear to be inconsistent to single out some words for having very different meanings whilst taking for granted the many-sided quality of others. It may therefore be fruitful to take up the lexicographer's challenge of documenting at least some of the more common meanings of sustainability. Granted, given the global span of the notion of sustainability, the sheer numbers of different NGO, activist, lobby, government, donor, media and other groups that use it, one could easily argue that it could come to have more shades of meaning than a single person could ever comprehend. However, we can grasp a good many of them, and there have already been helpful attempts to do just this. As Duffy's work itself may be counted among these, it is all the more peculiar that she should conclude the term to be meaningless.

One way to gain a clearer idea of the numerous ways in which the term is deployed is to break down the ideas most frequently associated with it. In this respect,



the work of Mitchell, May and McDonald (1995) is of considerable utility. It identifies the four principal components of the term ‘sustainability’ common to its varied use across the literature:

1. Futurity
2. Environment
3. Public participation
4. Equity

‘Futurity’, synonymous with ‘future orientation’, refers to the idea, expressed in the definition of sustainable development offered by *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), that the current generation bears to future generations the responsibility of ensuring that the capacity to meet needs continues to be available. ‘Environment’, of course, refers to the classic concerns central to the ‘limits to growth’ thesis, typified by some central demands of the IUCN’s (1980) *World Conservation Strategy*: maintaining vital ecological processes; protecting genetic diversity; the sustainable use of flora, fauna and ecological systems. The focus on environmental issues, with the concerns raised about the limits to growth, is the longest-standing of these four components. Public participation, as noted, has become increasingly seen as a prerequisite of sustainability, especially since the commitment to it indicated in the Rio Declaration. Equity is linked very much, for instance in *Our Common Future*, to the notion of futurity: a more equitable distribution of the spoils of economic growth is deemed to be essential to meeting needs both current and future.

Sustainable development is often held to comprise three connected elements, namely social, environmental and economic. They are seen in UN Agenda 21 documents as objectives towards which development strategies should work (UNEP 1992), and echoed by numerous commentators on debates about sustainability (i.e. Holling, Berkes, and Folke 1998). Not everyone, however, is content to elevate social, environmental and economic factors to such lofty intellectual heights. Neil Thin argues that the ‘three pillars’ framework (social, environmental, economic) clouds rather than clears our thinking about sustainability (2002). His central objections to the framework are twofold. First, he posits that ‘social’ is often poorly defined, referring to things as diverse as the provision of public goods and services (as in the social sector) on the one hand, and social pathologies or problems, such as

poverty or crime, on the other (ibid.:20). Second, he contends that separating society and economy is to set up a “false opposition”, a consequence of the attempt to separate and isolate the discipline of economics from other social sciences perhaps, but not a rigorous analytical tool (ibid.:24-25). He deems these flaws terminal and on that basis calls for the replacement of the ‘three pillars’ approach with a framework of his own, crowned by the memory-friendly acronym, BITE:

- **B**iophysical
- **I**nstitutional
- **T**echnical
- **E**thical<sup>3</sup>

Thin’s framework is an attempt at refining our thinking on sustainable development. Thin *documents* many of the themes and issues related to sustainability, links and arranges them with a view to producing more rigorous analysis. We might, then, see his work as taking up the lexicographer’s challenge, so to speak. Will it replace the ‘three pillars’ approach? Questions of analytical clarity notwithstanding, that the ‘social, environmental and economic’ focus presently *is* accepted and widely drawn upon works in its favour. It would be an interesting sociological task to track the whys and hows of BITE’s progress, but sadly it falls outwith the remit of this thesis.

Another helpful and frequently-employed means of classifying and coming to terms with the varied applications of the concept of sustainability is to put such applications on a scale with opposed values at each end. Perhaps the chief advantage of the scale is that it avoids ‘either/or’ classification, providing instead for a (potentially infinite) range of positions somewhere between polar opposites. However, such scales are not free of disadvantages. Not all positions, groups and actors can be put on just one scale.

The most commonly encountered scale in the literature on sustainable development runs between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ forms of sustainability. Examples of ‘weak’ being synonymous with ‘bad’, and ‘strong’ with ‘good’, are not too hard to find in the literature. Weak forms of sustainability are most often held to be those

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, Thin whittles down the four components of BITE to just two, the biophysical and the social. However, perhaps so as not to sacrifice such a satisfyingly memorable acrostic for one that invites unwanted if amusing associations (BS), he sticks with BITE.

which view human knowledge and technology as the way to secure sustainable development (cf. Buckley 1995). Its proponents might be said to agree to a greater or lesser extent on the proposition that any form of common-pool resource use is acceptable if it does not threaten the survival of humankind. The exhaustion of any type of natural resource, ecological system or region could conceivably be justified in the name of this type of sustainable development (Pearce et al 1989), although few commentators show this level of commitment to the idea. Weak sustainability does therefore impart intrinsic value to human survival, but not necessarily to the survival of biodiversity. Its value is instead measured in terms of its importance to the survival of humankind, which in some scenarios could even be nil (i.e. the quest to find another planet to live on in the event of the conditions for human life on earth becoming too adverse).

Strong sustainability is characterised by the level of commitment to avoiding the destruction of the planet's biodiversity. The extinction of humankind might conceivably be justified in the interests of not damaging biodiversity if the logic is followed to its conclusion, but few commentators profess the need to do so. More popular champions of strong sustainability, such as Herman Daly and Cobb insist on the ecological imperative of imposing limits on economic growth and of the need to establish an equilibrium, or "steady-state economy" (i.e. Daly, Cobb, and Cobb 1990). This requires the survival of much but not all biodiversity.

Although the weak and strong scale gives a flavour for one of the central divides in thinking on sustainability, it is as well to be aware of a tendency on the part of some commentators to assign a moral connotation to the terms. 'Weak' and 'strong' might easily be replaced with 'anthropocentric' and 'ecocentric'; although this may assume that humans and environments can be separated, which has become increasingly contested (see section three). The position taken by *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987) is often characterised as 'anthropocentric' and criticised for not specifying environmental limits to economic growth. Langhelle, though, notes that it does in fact set limits and suggests that many of the criticisms which construe it as a justification of current economic growth may derive from a superficial reading of the text (1999).

Another important scale running in parallel with 'weak' and 'strong' sustainability seeks to chart the political location of actors involved with environmental issues. Therefore, we have 'blue' greens and 'red' greens. Blue greens

occupy the right wing of the political spectrum. Blue-greens are said to draw influence in the formulation of their ideas about sustainability from utilitarianism, liberalism and free market principles (Duffy 2000:5). Accordingly they are often associated 'weak' forms of sustainability (Beckerman 1994).

Red-green refers to a variety of positions on the left (ibid.). That more effort is made to discriminate between the positions on the left than on the right may indicate that environmental politics are associated more frequently with the left (cf. Eckersley 1992). Red greens, like blue-greens, profess their commitment to sustainable development but are more likely to emphasise the need for changes to social, political and economic institutions if development is to be set on a sustainable trajectory (i.e. Bookchin 1991). There is another shade of green which is commonly used for the purposes of classification: 'deep green'. Deep greens seek to distance themselves from positions which draw on either capitalist or socialist notions about society (Duffy 2000). Putting them on the blue-red scale, then, would raise objections, although their commitment to maximum environmental protection explains their association with 'strong' sustainability (ibid). Deep greens may rate James Lovelock above either Adam Smith or Karl Marx. Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis' (1979) challenges the idea that humans should dominate the environment and determine its fate, arguing that we are another part of the wider ecological system and should be subordinate to it therein.

It is possible to locate the underlying emphases of both Namibia's Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project in Argentina within these scales. Both, I would argue, can be classified as blue-green in orientation, principally because neither posits the need for fundamental change to social, political or economic institutions in order to achieve objectives. Both are clearly and explicitly designed to be compatible with a liberal democratic political system and a capitalist economy.

The Conservancy Programme is predicated on the notion that the future for wildlife outwith protected areas, and especially areas also inhabited by humans, depends on the extent to which it can effectively compete with other forms of land use. It is therein utilitarian in its approach to wildlife conservation, and seeks to set up incentive structures which will lead to the sustainable use of a proportion of a given wildlife population, thereby permitting that population as a whole to survive. In accepting controlled hunting for the pot and trophy hunting as generators of sufficient to curb widespread illegal hunting, the Conservancy Programme rests on one of

Bentham's famous principles, that of making decisions which promote the greater good (even where that entails individual sacrifice), in this case the greater good both of human and wildlife populations. This is incompatible with some formulations of the intrinsic value of wildlife, especially those which place animal and human rights on a par; although it is not logically incompatible with the goal of protecting wider ecological systems. Moreover, it configures the market as a conservation strategy.

Likewise, the Alto Bermejo Project takes a utilitarian approach to conservation outwith protected areas. For instance, agroforestry initiatives in the municipality of Los Toldos, in Salta Province, Northwest Argentina, focus on promoting activities which give municipal residents a reason to reduce the amount of subtropical mountain forest (or *Yungas*, as it is known in Argentina) cleared for cultivation. Like the Conservancy Programme, sustainable use is favoured, or rather posited as the only realistic method of conservation. Supplying the means for increased yield on the same amount of land and producing a more diverse and marketable range of crops, is intended to reduce pressure on the *Yungas* whilst enriching livelihood strategies by adding choice and value to existing activities. The market value, not of the *Yungas* as such, but of the produce of land already under the plough, is supposed to serve as an incentive for conservation and an engine of local and (of course) sustainable development.

### **3. Changes to theories of common-pool resource use**

#### **Models of common-pool resource management**

A big part of any drive for sustainability has to be focused on what we do with the planet's resources and how. The most contentious set of issues clusters around the question of what to do about it. Two broad solutions to problems of resource depletion and potential or actual extinction have been offered to policy makers: state control or privatisation of natural resources (Clark 1976, Ostrom 1990). Neither has satisfied the expectations placed upon them.

Both private and state solutions to common-pool resource dilemmas have been highly influenced by two theoretical models in particular: Garret Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) and Mancur Olson's *Logic of Collective Action* (1965). Ostrom's seminal book *Governing the Commons* (1990) sought principally to

undermine the stranglehold of Garret Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' over debates in policy and academic circles about how to manage natural resources. Hardin furnished us with a seductive and enduringly influential application of the prisoner's dilemma game to global natural resource use patterns which would, he argued, eventually cause the destruction of the resource base itself if no external intervention (from the state or the private sector) was forthcoming. Through constructive engagement with rational choice and game theories, and through the empirical study of common-pool resource use regimes which, she contended, had *not* destroyed the natural resources on which they relied, she argued that the logic of tragedy was not inevitable in all the circumstances to which it was applied. She also gave detailed descriptions of *how* some common-pool resource management regimes had escaped the logic of tragedy, in some cases over the course of several centuries. She formulated an oft-cited set of principles identifying eight conditions which, she contended, successful common-pool resource management regimes all appeared to meet. Such regimes also served Ostrom in her advocacy for the idea that the free-rider problem, strongly associated with Mancur Olson's (1965) work on collective action, could be and had been solved, albeit under specific conditions. Her work has been instrumental opening up policy debates to incorporate systems of common-pool resource management other than state or private sector intervention. But her position does not derive from a rejection of the 'tragedy of the commons'. It derives, rather, from a detailed consideration of where it may and may not be applicable, and on what basis (see also Dolsak and Ostrom 2003, Ostrom 1992, Ostrom 2002, Ostrom, Gardner, and Walker 1994).

Challenging and qualifying state and private intervention models has opened up space for much greater recognition of other forms of institutional arrangements, and the impetus for the documentation of other ways of solving commons dilemmas. It has become increasingly common to doubt whether natural resource and other natural scientists have a monopoly on information about ecosystems and how to manage them. It has become more credible to hold that the concentration on state or private intervention may have simply overlooked the pre-existence of vast bodies of local knowledge on the environment in which people lived, and the ways in which this knowledge had been used to construct common pool resource regimes which had proved themselves sustainable over time.

The metaphor of the medieval commons in Hardin's most famous work, construing it as an open access resource, has since been challenged in certain quarters as something of a misnomer. It has been argued that the medieval commons in England was in fact a comprehensively regulated and monitored system which operated successfully over centuries (Feeny et al. 1990 84). Whether the sort of tragedy Hardin describes did in fact occur widely has been disputed (i.e. Dasgupta 1983, Potter 1974, Schumacher 1979). Some hold that the link between social survival and careful resource use had not been sufficiently examined, either (cf. Bromley 1986). Taking evidence from anthropological, sociological, economic and ecological research, Berkes and Farvar conclude:

The truth is that traditional systems....have been the main means by which societies have managed their natural resources over millennia on a sustainable basis. It is only as a result of this that we have any resources to speak of today (1989 6)

Statements such as these feed into debates on participation. They have the effect of de-legitimising the decision-making hegemony of some actors – i.e. resource management scientists with specialist knowledge, whilst legitimising a range of other actors. Chief among these are local, often rural actors who have come to be seen not only as competent 'managers' but as necessary participants in any viable effort to achieve sustainability objectives (Redclift and Sage 1995). Enlisting the support of such actors is also seen as doubly important when their resource use often has little to do with government policy on resource management based on sound, scientific principles (ibid).

### **Challenging assumptions of the science of common-pool resource management**

Not only has scientific knowledge about common-pool resource management been judged not always to be applicable, but a re-appraisal of the science in which conventional definitions of sustainability ground their assumptions has occurred. Some commentators question the notion that it is possible to predict and maintain a sustainable level of common-pool resource use.

Using a given resource in a manner that ensures its continued availability for future generations presupposes that it is possible to predict the level of resource regeneration successfully and stay within it. However, to assume that "a level of sustainable utilisation exists and that it is able to be objectively measured and

identified" may in fact negate "the socio-economic and political dimensions of sustainability" (Brown 1997 86). It may also put "undue emphasis on natural science to define sustainable use where, in reality, the uncertainty of complex processes and dynamics may preclude such definition" (ibid). Ecological systems have a habit of changing (Ludwig, Hilborn, and Walters 1993), and cannot be counted on to be stable or predictable. If environments are unstable, ever changing, and if disequilibria are the rule, not the exception, then once again we are confronted with the question of how coherent the notion of sustainability is.

Since the 1970s, much work has been undertaken on what has been called the 'science of surprise', in which the role of surprise and disturbance in ecosystems has been brought into the foreground. One of the biggest problems with resource management that this work identifies is that management itself can change ecosystem structures (Gunderson, Holling, and Light 1995). A longstanding goal of common-pool resource management science has been to maximise the use of a specific resource unit, i.e. fish or timber, and attempt to stabilise the yield that can be extracted from year to year (Holling, Berkes, and Folke 1998). This, the argument runs, is a huge failing of natural resource management science: it treats such resource units as discrete entities, not integrated parts of a much wider ecosystem: to change one part of it has repercussions for the rest of the system (ibid). Although the reduction of variability – 'freezing' it in one stage of natural change – makes it easier to extract benefits in the short term, feedback about what is happening to the resource is eliminated. This can cause a chain effect: "the accumulation of perturbations, [invites] larger and less predictable feedbacks at a level and scale that threaten the functioning performance of the whole ecosystem." (Berkes and Folke 1998). If there is distinct uncertainty surrounding the science on which assumptions of sustainability are predicated, then what are the consequences for common-pool resource users who may be unable to specify safe levels of resource usage?

Holling, Berkes & Folke describe another 'stream' of science, which is one of "the integration of parts" (Holling, Berkes, and Folke 1998 346) as a result of its interdisciplinary nature. It is characterised by "systems approaches and parts of evolutionary biology that extend to the analysis of populations, ecosystems, landscape structures and dynamics, to include the interactions of social systems with natural systems" (ibid). In this way, advocates of this approach argue that space is left to recognise that these systems are not constant, but are changing over time, in part in



ways we cannot always predict, in part due to the impacts of management (Gunderson, Holling, and Light 1995), and in part because of the continual increase in the scale of human influences (Daly, Cobb, and Cobb 1994). On these grounds, then, it could be argued that the distinction between social and ecological systems is arbitrary and misleading; a supporter of holistic approaches to common-pool resource management might say that they are irreducible.

In light of this holistic perspective, the concept of sustainability and, hence, sustainable development, has also been reinterpreted. If ecosystems are reduced to discrete, isolated entities for the purposes of making usage of the resource more predictable, there is a risk of ignoring their symbiotic relationship with wider social and ecological systems (Ibid). It is this contention that has led some to reach the conclusion that any definition of sustainability, therefore, has to incorporate the following three imperatives:

1. The environmental imperative of living within ecological means
  2. The economic imperative of meeting basic material needs
  3. The social imperative of meeting basic social needs and cultural sustainability.
- (Holling, Berkes & Folke, 1998)

Given the difficulties associated with defining and achieving sustainability and the perceived shortcomings of conventional resource management science, there have been many claims over the last decade or so to seek new approaches and perspectives on the relationship between ecological and social systems.

Adaptive management is the counterpart to more conventional forms of resource management. It attempts to factor in the unpredictability of the interactions between people and ecosystems (Berkes & Folke, 1998). Resource management is to be seen as an ‘experiment’ from which managers can learn (Walters 1986). Just as individuals learn, so too can institutions. Therefore, adaptive management is to be based on social and institutional learning (Lee 1993). It emphasises the importance of feedback from the environment in shaping policy, and is intended to serve as a way to eliminate “the barrier between research and management” (Berkes & Folke, 1998:11).

In so doing, adaptive management seeks to ape ‘traditional’ resource management systems, holding them up as reliable sources of knowledge for alternative models for sustainable common-pool resource use. That it has become commonplace to maintain

that so much can be learned from previously overlooked or discounted knowledge traditions is another indicator of the erosion of cognitive authority which has for so long ensured the privileged status that scientific knowledge, or what passes for it, has enjoyed. Once again, the question of whose knowledge counts arises, and has served, within the study of common-pool resources (but also within wider conservation and development arenas), to reinforce the notion that previously excluded knowledge-holders are to be listened to and learned from. In other words, as the cognitive authority of holders of 'traditional' common-pool resource knowledge has increased, so have demands for their involvement in the quest for sustainability.

### **Unpicking environmental narratives**

The influence on environmental policy and practice of narratives which either describe currently occurring or impending environmental crises has attracted no small amount of attention. Aside from their dissemination at large international gatherings such as the Earth Summits, they are also widely reported in the mass media, and often drawn upon by NGOs and other groups concerned with environmental matters in order to mobilise support for particular courses of action (Leach and Mearns 1996). Having acquired the status of 'received wisdom', these narratives are frequently and widely circulated. But a number of scholars have over the past two decades made the case for subjecting them to keener scrutiny (i.e. Adams 1996, Hoben 1995, Keeley and Scoones 2003, Leach and Mearns 1996, Scoones and Thompson 1994). The tendency to employ inherited methods without verifying their applicability to the context under consideration has come under fire (Keeley and Scoones 2003, Leach and Mearns 1996). The practice of continual adherence to policy based on scientifically questionable grounds has prompted a consideration of other reasons which might explain the perpetuation of narratives of environmental degradation. On this basis, the credibility of crisis narratives relating, among other phenomena, to deforestation (Fairhead and Leach 1998), soil fertility (Keeley and Scoones 2003) and desertification (c.f. Rohde 1997b, Sullivan 2000) has been brought into question; although few, if any, of these commentators would seek to claim that these phenomena simply do not exist.

Emery Roe's notion of narrative and counter narrative (1991, 1995) is an analytical device of choice for scholars looking at the resilience of environmental narratives. It has been taken up by Leach and Mearns (1996), but also by Adams and

Hulme (2001) in relation to wider narratives about conservation. In one sense, narratives are for Roe the means by which policy makers and planners in development (and other) spheres deal with complexity and uncertainty. They are stories with a beginning, middle and an end, which describe how events will – or at least should – unfold when “carried out as described” (1991 288). Narratives serve two basic purposes. First, they attempt to get people to act in one way and not another; and second, they are “the primary means whereby development experts and the institutions for which they work claim rights to stewardship over land and resources they do not own” (1995 1066). On this reading, were there no crisis, there would be no need for expert intervention. Counter narratives operate according to the same logic: they also tell a story, but one which is more compelling than that which it replaces, to the extent that it gains widespread acceptance (1991:290). One might expect the counter narrative to undermine the status of experts along with the expert knowledge they try to debunk, but for Roe, this is to miss the point. Instead, he argues, the underlying purpose of narratives and counter narratives is not to establish definitively the right or wrong way to do things: “whether right or wrong, counter-claims and changing claims of experts serve principally to reinforce and widen the belief that what they, the experts have to say really matters and matters solely by virtue of their expertise” (1995:1066).

For scholars in the field, it is of huge significance that environmental narratives do not persist on the basis of an unassailable truth claim. Leach and Mearns echo Roe when they state that:

the interests of various actors in development – government agents, officials of donor agencies, the staff of Northern and Southern non-governmental organisations, and ‘independent experts’ – are served by the perpetuation of orthodox views, particularly those regarding the destructive role of local inhabitants” (1996 19-20).

By serving these interests, the argument goes, narratives about the environment or about development become institutionalised, entrenched and disseminated internationally (Chambers 1993), even in the face of empirical evidence which would appear to contradict them. If we wish to understand how these narratives persist, it follows that we need to make recourse to an examination of the context in which they are generated, in all of their social, political, institutional and economic dimensions.

Clearly, much analysis of environmental and development narratives is inspired by work within the disparate field of science and technology studies, at times more explicitly and at others less so. It is not surprising, therefore, that the sociology of scientific knowledge approach which I employ – one position amongst many within the crowded and contested field of science and technology studies – has much in common with accounts mentioned above.

### **Local knowledge**

The rediscovered respect for knowledge systems related to often centuries-old common-pool resource management systems as a model of sustainability is part of the wider trend through which local knowledge more widely has been posited as a credible alternative to ‘Western’ scientific knowledge. Over the past couple of decades many anthropologists (and others) have devoted energy and time to the task of ‘rescuing’ local or indigenous forms of knowledge, and analysing the consequences of transferring ‘Western’ knowledge without long-standing analysis of the context in which it is being applied (Warren 1998). This focus influenced and found parallels in some instances of development practice which, to borrow a slightly mischievous turn of phrase from Pottier (2003), had ‘discovered’ the skills, traditions and practices that constituted what came to be known as ‘indigenous technical knowledge’. This concept was popularised through work on the now well-known ‘farmer first’ approach (i.e. Brokensha, Warren, and Werner 1980, Richards 1985). As such, indigenous technical knowledge was set up in contrast to ‘scientific knowledge’, although it was deemed to be complementary or even ‘better’ in terms of its own context than the knowledge carried by scientific experts sent to improve the techniques of local level farmers in developing countries (Richards 1985). It has been used by Robert Chambers to argue for the need to renegotiate the roles between development professionals and the poor people with whom they work. He saw this renegotiation as an antidote to the arrogance and ignorance of ‘top-down’ approaches to development (Chambers 1983, Chambers 1995, Chambers 1997).

As the debate has moved on, the notion of ‘indigenous knowledge’ as used when it originated has seen its own assumptions scrutinised, to the point that ‘local knowledge’ is often used in its place. It is also now more common to talk of ‘knowledges’, in order to evade the charge of reification (c.f. Scoones and Thompson 1994). It has been argued, too, that to think of local knowledge(s) as fixed and

unchanging is inaccurate (Fairhead 1993). Setting up a distinction between scientific and local knowledge in terms of distinct “ontological categories” has been frowned upon (Pottier 2003). Calls for more attention to be paid to how knowledge is produced “within and between societies, groups and regions” (ibid:14) serve to emphasise that knowledge about sustainability has many sources. Such calls also seek to invest agency in holders of local knowledge tradition. They want such knowledge to be brought into analyses of sustainability, and pave the way for the argument that widening the circle of participation is a precondition of sustainable common-pool resource use.

An important corollary of these changing perspectives is that local knowledge bearers have attained in some cases the status of cognitive authorities from whom to learn in order to understand how to manage common-pool resources sustainably. This change in attitude towards local knowledge holders has had clear implications for debates regarding who is capable of participating in the decision-making processes through which sustainable resource use is to be achieved.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how and why knowledge about sustainability became so important and influential at a global level. It has explored the broad changes in issues in and closely related to common-pool resource theory that have had the effect of configuring local participation and local knowledge as prerequisites for the achievement of a sustainable way of living. Here, then, we have an account of the wider background in which the principles which underpin policy and intervention in both the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project have emerged. The focus on the concept of sustainability has prompted calls for a reconciliation of two processes which have often been set up in opposition to each other, those of conservation and development. Whether or not this is possible on a global scale remains to be seen, but both initiatives can be read first and foremost as attempts to foster such reconciliation, at least at the local or national level. Both, too, can be located within broader attempts to redefine both conservation and development in terms of the sustainable use of common-pool resources. This is an exercise to which the next chapter is devoted.

# Chapter IV

## Sustainability, conservation and development

### 1. Introduction

The wider thinking on sustainability discussed in the previous chapter prefigures the type of ‘community conservation’ of which both the Conservancy Programme and constituent components of the Alto Bermejo Project are examples. The increasing prominence of the concept has led to the setting of conservation and development processes in a relationship of necessary interdependence. Against this background the emergence of the ‘community conservation’ counter narrative becomes intelligible.

This chapter explores the ‘community conservation’ counter narrative, which has challenged the previously hegemonic narrative of ‘fortress’ conservation. After a brief discussion of the drawbacks and utility of narratives, section two kicks off the chapter with an outline of the ‘fortress’ and ‘community conservation’ narratives, with two purposes in mind. First, by focussing on the contrasting beliefs and approaches entailed by both, we gain a clearer idea of how knowledge about conservation has changed in light of the increasing importance of the concept of sustainability. Second, the exercise serves to clear the ground for extrapolating the six principles which, I contend, underpin policy and implementation in both the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. These six principles in turn form the basis for the comparison between the two initiatives. The most central characteristic of these narratives, then, is that the former defines conservation in terms of not using biodiversity, whilst the latter defines it in terms of sustainable use. Section three proceeds to locate the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project within the latter of these two narratives.

That local knowledge of common-pool resource management might in fact hold important lessons for the achievement of the goal of sustainable common-pool resource use has influenced debates about participation in conservation and development arenas. However, it remains the case that whether one values scientific or local knowledge(s) about common-pool resource management, or even if the exercise of setting up this distinction is brought into question, the link between

knowing and deciding remains intact. It is necessary to have knowledge deemed relevant to the achievement of sustainability objectives to be able to participate in the processes through which sustainability is to be realised. As knowledge about sustainability is very specialised, not everyone has it and even amongst people who do, not everyone will be accepted as a credible authority when it comes to designating what is or is not sustainable. The chapter concludes, then, by emphasising that when considering local participation in ‘community conservation’ initiatives like the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, the specialised character of knowledge about sustainability must be borne in mind.

## **2. Narrative and counter-narrative: ‘fortress-’ and ‘community’ conservation**

### **Narrative and counter-narrative**

Adams and Hulme (2001), among others, have argued, Roe’s concept of narrative and counter narrative is of great utility for exploring the changes that have taken place in thinking on how to realise conservation objectives, and indeed about what conservation actually is or should be. It is now fairly commonplace to contrast the narrative of ‘fortress conservation’ with the counter narrative of what I follow Adams and Hulme in calling ‘community conservation’ (c.f. Adams and Hulme 2001, Hulme and Murphree 2001a). Terms other than ‘community conservation’ are also employed, a point to which we shall return; suffice it here to clarify the character of ‘community conservation’ as a generic term. If the thinking and methods grouped under community conservation are not all alike, they do have points in common.

One of the offshoot terms of community conservation, community based natural resource management (CBNRM), very clearly embraces the idea of common-pool resource management as conservation. Namibia’s Conservancy Programme is explicitly identified by government, non-government and research actors involved with it as an instance of community based natural resource management. The components of the Alto Bermejo Project that occur in Los Toldos might also be said to correspond to the notion of community based natural resource management; although no direct translation of the term exists in Spanish, and therefore it is never

explicitly referred to as such. Both, though, are underpinned by tenets from this counter narrative.

Before embarking on the task of outlining ‘fortress’ and ‘community’ conservation, a thought on narratives. Narratives cannot but reify a complex intersection of ever-changing beliefs, processes, occurrences and people. This observation would appear to beg the question: if so much simplification is involved, why bother? Is a narrative not an attempt to impose a static, fixed version of reality onto an infinitely complex and disorderly series of events? In trying to make sense of empirical experience, would it be better to think *not* in terms of the stable picture offered by a narrative, but more in terms of a moving, under-specified target of which we catch fleeting and often contradictory glimpses? Talk of complexity, which seems *de rigueur* these days in the social sciences, has much to recommend it, in that it continually reminds us not to conflate narrative description with that which the narrative attempts to describe. It opens up the question of what lies beyond the narrative. It brings attention also to the political implications of reifying narratives, to the extent that they do not invite us to imagine alternatives, but rather to accept the stability of the status quo (Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996).

However, I follow Barnes, Bloor & Henry here in their defence of the necessity of at least some reification. First and foremost, as they point out, we are hardly in a position to dispense with our reifying tendencies. In the vein of Schutz (1964) and Thomason (1982), they warn against underestimating “the extent to which culture and cognition generally are actually constituted by, and dependent for their very existence upon reifications” (1996:84-5). In the face of incomprehensible complexity, simplification is inevitable and indispensable. Second, to accept the need and utility of reified narratives that help us make some sense of reality does not oblige us to render sacred the claims they make: “one way of exposing the constructed character of reality is to criticise it by explicit reference to another” (ibid:86). In this light, Roe’s dual focus on the interplay between narrative and counter narrative, and his insistence not on abandoning the concept of narrative *per se* (1991, 1995) is an intellectually honest and useful approach. From a pragmatic perspective, it makes of reification an advantage, not a disadvantage. It also leaves room for modifying narratives and counter narratives in the face of belief-altering experience, and for investigating the beliefs which constitute narrative and counter narrative



symmetrically (cf. Bloor, 1991). And finally, it provides an interesting, if not universally accepted, model for feeding research into the policy-making process.

### **‘Fortress conservation’**

Conservation has long been bound up with the powerful, enduring concept of wilderness. At the core of the early forms of conservation that first arose, according to Grove (1987), in the British empire of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, lay the conviction that parts of the world were still comprised of wilderness, that is, those parts of nature that had not been touched by human hand (Adams and McShane, 1992). In an age of colonial expansion and industrialisation – in short, of momentous and relatively rapid change – the idea of ‘wilderness’ was taken up and popularised by figures of the Romantic Movement such as David Thoreau (ibid). It symbolised what humans could not, and for some, should not dominate or control. In the nineteenth century, accounts from explorers such as Mungo Park, David Livingstone, Henry Morton Stanley and Richard Burton further whetted the public appetite for tales of ostensibly wild, untamed places (MacKenzie 1989). The accounts of these explorers helped to consolidate the notion of wilderness as untouched, pristine landscapes which were, crucially, free from human presence. The romantic desire to protect wilderness against human incursion and transformation acted as a powerful incentive for the establishment of protected areas, which occurred in Southern Africa from 1892, with the creation of the Sabie Game Reserve in 1892, later to become Kruger National Park (Adams & Hulme 2001).

The flip side to the notion of wilderness was thinking associated with Darwin, with regard to human ability and propensity to dominate the environment (Worster 1987). Some accounts of Darwinian evolutionary theory (although not Darwin himself) famously turned the untamed yet benign and noble wild of Romantic imaginings into a nature ‘red in tooth and claw’. For some commentators, this reinterpretation had the effect of instilling in Victorian science a pressing need for nature to be subordinate to the diktats of rational management (ibid). The twin notions of preserving the untouched character of wilderness and the strategic management of wild nature – the one premised on leaving a landscape as found, the other on intervention and manipulation – make strange bedfellows. Nonetheless, both are inherent to the concept of the protected area.

The basic premise for ensuring the requisite protection of wilderness was to maintain the separation of humans from other species and the environments they inhabited (Adams and McShane 1992, Adams and Hulme 2001, Brockington 2002, Hulme and Murphree 2001b, MacKenzie 1987). Just as humans were not to inhabit the wild, nor were they to consume it. At first, not all consumptive use was prohibited. The legislative origins for conservation derive from European colonial attempts to control hunting of both the local African populations but also by the influx of European hunters. Historian John Mackenzie traces the first such attempts at introducing legislation back to the Cape in 1650s, attributing it to the Dutch East India Company (1989). African methods of hunting were outlawed by fledgling colonial administrations on the grounds that they were barbaric and cruel. In contrast, European hunters who employed rifles and gave their quarry a 'sporting chance' of escape were allowed to continue hunting activity in the game reserves being established at the end of the nineteenth century (ibid). African subsistence hunting was reclassified as 'poaching', and thereby criminalised (ibid). Here, then, were the cornerstone tenets of the model that would come to be known alternately as 'fortress conservation' (cf. Adams & Hulme 2001; Brockington 2002), 'fines and fences conservation' (Wells, Brandon, and Hanna 1992), 'coercive conservation' (Peluso 1993) or 'preservationism' (Adams & McShane 1992).

Because the histories of hunting and conservation are so intertwined, much emphasis has been placed upon the preservation of wildlife. Indeed, the focus on wildlife, not ecological systems as a whole, is one of the basic characteristics of the 'fortress' approach. In the context of wildlife conservation the principal focus for conservationists in Africa, Pimbert & Pretty identify three premises in particular upon which the 'fortress' narrative rests:

- wildlife conservation only works if there is no killing or utilization of wildlife
- wildlife conservation in developing countries can be achieved by military-style enforcement which denies the people who live with wildlife or own the land that supports it the opportunity to derive any benefits from it, be they economic or otherwise
- the aims of conservation and development are mutually exclusive (1995:15)

Conservation movements emerged and solidified in Europe and the US, leading to the formation of institutions specifically for the purpose of the preservation of wilderness towards the end of the nineteenth century (MacKenzie 1989, Nash 1973). An early conservation lobby of some influence, the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire (SPFE), headed by the aristocrat Richard Buxton, brought together hunters, naturalists and colonial officials (Adams & McShane 1992). Their continuous lobbying of the British government to control hunting activity may not have led to greater enforcement of legislation, but it helped to keep conservation in the public arena (ibid). Two international conferences, in 1900 and 1933, were dedicated to conservation in Africa. The second of these produced two important precedents. First, it was the launch pad for the Convention for the Protection of African Flora (Mackenzie 1989). Second, in its call for sufficient land permanently to be set aside to permit wildlife migration, it presaged the age of the national park (ibid).

By the end of the Second World War, conservation was an internationally influential discourse, a standard section in colonial bureaucracies, and increasingly constituted an attempt to apply scientific principles to the management of land (Neumann 1997, Scott 1998). The establishment in 1934 of the International Union for the Protection of Nature (later to become the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, or IUCN), and later the World Wildlife Fund also, was instrumental in projecting conservation into a global arena (Adams & Hulme 2001). Conservation as an issue was picked up by key players in central international staging posts: UNESCO in Paris, the World Bank in Washington, the IUCN in Geneva and the UN in New York (ibid). A rash of national parks were created during this era, either through being converted from the colonial game reserves that had been established from the late nineteenth century, or through extending the conservation remit onto new lands (Adams 2004).

Africa as a continent was central to the global conservation campaign. A sample of the results of this effort would include:

- The Arusha Declaration of 1961, with its focus on wildlife conservation
- The 1963 conference in the Belgian Congo on conservation in Africa
- The numerous IUCN missions to African countries

- The adoption by the Organisation of African Unity in 1968 of the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (Adams and Hulme 2001, Boardman 1981, Fitter and Scott 1978)

These efforts were boosted greatly by the energetic endeavours of conservation writers/lobbyists in the 1950s and 60s, who stoked up fears for the future existence of Africa's wildlife, predicting the mass extinction of much or all of the continent's 'charismatic megafauna'. Chief among these was the towering figure of zoologist Professor Bernhard Grzimek. Considered a master propagandist, he authored the widely-read *Serengeti Shall Not Die* (translated into at least twenty-three languages), in which he declared that wild Africa was dying (1960). He entreated readers to support his cause, namely that of attempting to ensure that the same fate did not befall the Serengeti Plains, the focus of his work and energy. This book became what Adams & McShane have called the "manifesto of preservationism" (1992:52). Grzimek matched his rhetoric with deeds, for instance firmly opposing any moves which might accommodate the Maasai who occupied Serengeti or which might give them legal grazing rights (ibid).

The claims made by *Serengeti Shall Not Die*, from wildlife numbers on the Plains to the magnitude and severity of the threats arrayed against them, have been repeatedly challenged. Grzimek is often accused of falsifying his data in order to support his vision of impending extinction and crisis (ibid). Yet he and others such as Guggisberg (1966), author of *SOS Rhino*, reached wide audiences through books and the big screen. The power of the images that they created has not been diminished over the years; they are still held to underpin western perceptions of Africa (i.e. Gavron 1993). Further, Adams & Hulme argue that, because of the global dominance of western communications media, "International ideas about conservation are...also now genuinely African" (2001:12).

### **'Community conservation'**

The legitimacy of the 'fortress' narrative has since the 1980s been increasingly called into question (Adams and McShane 1992, Adams and Hulme 2001, Brockington 2002, Brockington and Homewood 1996). What Adams and Hulme (2001) term the counter narrative of 'community conservation' became a powerful source of influence in conservation and development circles in the 1990s. 'Community conservation' is in

many ways an offshoot of broader debates about sustainability, drawing heavily upon developments in the field of common-pool resource theory over the past three or four decades. Most centrally, beliefs concerning the existence of pristine, wild landscapes, uninhabited by humans, and therefore unspoilt by their destructive tendencies, have come under sharp and sustained attack. Further, the counter-narrative has dovetailed with the wider changes to beliefs about who should participate in the decision making processes through which development (and conservation) intervention is brought about (i.e. Chambers 1995, Chambers 1997).

As noted, 'fortress' conservation holds the preservation of wilderness to require the exclusion of human settlement within protected areas. Consequently, eviction of inhabitants from places with a history of settlement that precedes the protected area is commonplace across many parts of Africa. The trials and conflicts of the Maasai of the Serengeti with conservationists have become the subject of an exhaustive anthropological literature (i.e. Brockington 2002, Brockington and Homewood 1996), but countless other peoples have been resettled to preserve in 'pristine' state the land and the natural resources from which they make their living (i.e. Oates 1999, Wells, Brandon, and Hanna 1992). In all of these cases, attention is understandably drawn by 'community conservation' proponents to the costs of 'fortress' conservation for those who are directly affected by it. Costs other than eviction include livestock predation, damage to property and even death. These are common for people who share land and resources with large mammals such as elephants or with predators such as lions or jaguars. But preservation is not only costly for those who live in or near protected areas. The costs of 'fortress' conservation are much higher than most governments, (especially Western ones) are willing to pay, more than most can afford (Adams and McShane 1992). The enormous difficulty of effectively enforcing military-style measures without huge cash injections is the story of 'protected' areas all over Africa.

Empirical work conducted by theorists on common-pool resource use by people in Africa and other parts of the world has been used to question the assumed need for the separation of people from wilderness. With significant bodies of literature seeking to demonstrate the successful working of local and regional common-pool resource regimes the world over, and with other scholars challenging the legitimacy and scope of other narratives of environmental crisis, it is not as easy to make the case for eviction as it once was. Over a decade ago, representations of pristine wilderness were deemed the 'myth of wild Africa' (Adams and McShane 1992). Very much in

the vein of common-pool resource theorists such as Fikret Berkes and M. Taghi Farvar, Adams and McShane contend that historically, African societies have used common-pool resources provided by their environment sustainably. They point out that such usage did not lead to the total destruction of the very resources which have become the object of preservation. They challenge the view that African wilderness has to be defended “even against the people who have lived there for thousands of years” (Ibid, xviii).

A now fairly standard response to the separation of people from ecosystem envisaged in the notion of the unspoilt wilderness is to argue that most parts of the world’s landmass have at some point been host to or embroiled in human activity (i.e. Martin 1994a, Pimbert and Pretty 1995). Critiques of ‘fortress’ conservation policy and practice have sought variously to: question the sustainability of interventions made in its name (Reij 1991, Shaxon et al. 1989) (Chambers 1997, Fairhead and Leach 1998); highlight environmental degradation caused by undermining livelihood security (Koch 1994, Roy and Jackson 1993), illustrate its neglect of indigenous or local knowledge and management systems and the often high subsistence value attached by people to wild resources (i.e. Novellino 2003, Sullivan 1998). Instead, it has been argued that the imposition of laws to govern hunting activities and the establishment of protected areas has disrupted and destroyed resource-use regimes that had guaranteed the continued existence of the biodiversity so highly esteemed by advocates of the protected area (Adams and McShane 1992, Brockington 2002, Murombedzi 1992, Pimbert and Pretty 1995).

As a consequence of these critiques, it is less politically correct to brandish local natural resource users living in or near protected areas the “culprits” of environmental degradation. The re-evaluation of the place of humans *within* ecological systems – as opposed to notions of their separation from them – has led to a distinction being drawn between conservation as preservation and conservation as sustainable common-pool resource use. On these grounds, the case for greater participation of local resource users has been made, becoming one of the mainstays of the ‘community conservation’ paradigm (Adams and Hulme 2001, Hulme and Murphree 2001b). By recasting local people less in terms of destroyers and more in terms of ‘custodians’, the counter narrative seeks to render their participation an imperative. Local people should be involved not just because conservation has costs for them but because they are in possession of knowledge necessary to the achievement of the

overarching objective of sustainability. Indeed, following this logic, local people should be included precisely because conservation is intrinsic to the durable common-pool resource use regimes which, historically, have often been engineered at the local level.

It is worth noting here the link between knowledge and participation. Local people, by dint of having knowledge about sustainable common-pool resource use, are cast by the counter narrative in the role of cognitive authorities. This is in diametric opposition to their status in the 'fortress' narrative as inexpert and liable to cause damage without specialist intervention to preserve biodiversity. But for both narrative and counter narrative, knowledge remains the precondition for participation in the decision making processes through which action to curb unsustainable tendencies is to be brought about. The reversal of roles for local people has led to a widening of the definition of conservation to include the sustainable use of common-pool resources. This has contributed to conservation coming to be seen as an activity to be undertaken outwith the protected area.

Another way to approach the sustainability of conservation efforts is through the observation that the designation of protected areas covers only a small percentage of the world's valued biodiversity. The world hardly lacks protected areas: by 1994 they covered around 7.73 million km<sup>2</sup> (Pimbert & Pretty, 1995). By 2003, this figure had increased to approximately 18.8 million km<sup>2</sup> (Roe and Holland 2004). But the logic of sustainability would dictate that what falls outwith the remit of the protected area, which is still the overwhelming majority of the planet's biodiversity, is in greater need of conservation (i.e. Newmark and Hough 2000). Any kind of conservation on a much wider scale must of necessity be reconciled with human use and consumption of biodiversity. Because of the imperative of reconciling the use of biodiversity with its preservation, the notion of sustainable common-pool resource use has come to be accepted, at least in some quarters, as a viable – indeed perhaps the *only* viable – method of conservation on a much broader scale.

In opening up definitions of conservation beyond preservation through prohibition, the sustainable use of common-pool resources can be seen to link conservation and development processes in a relationship of necessary interdependence. On the one hand, the magnitude of resistance to conservation measures which seek to exclude people from an area is likely to be proportional to the amount of land claimed for the exercise. For instance, resistance to the idea of

depopulating half the planet for the purposes of preserving it would most likely be so great as to preclude its realisation were it to be attempted. The incredulity with which such suggestions – earnestly made by some commentators – frequently meet serves to demonstrate the limits of acceptance within which exclusionary forms of conservation operate. Therefore, the logic of sustainability would predict that ‘fortress’ conservation cannot be realised on a general scale, and that any enduring forms of conservation must presuppose human inhabitation and use of valued landscapes and biodiversity. On the other hand, it is questionable whether any form of development which discounts the effects of the way we live currently on the way we will live in the future can be sustained indefinitely.

### **3. The Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project within ‘community conservation’**

#### **Differing types of community conservation**

A plethora of terms have emerged to describe the varied approaches clustered under the banner of ‘community conservation’. Unsurprisingly, some of terms overlap: all are in one way or another prefigured by the concept of linking conservation and development processes through the notion of sustainability. Barrow & Murphree (2001) offer a good starting point in this respect, with their typology of different initiatives, as seen in table 3.1 below.

Protected area outreach is often an attempt to make some reparation for the problems that the establishment of national parks and other types of protected areas can cause to people who live within or adjacent to them. Although the state retains ownership of the area, affected communities, at least in theory, are to be permitted some minimal level of rights to resource use or some form of compensation if usage rights are prohibited or curtailed. They seek to recognise the problems facing people living near protected areas, generate some benefit for them from the protected area, and solve conflicts between people and management/protection authorities (*ibid*). Protected area outreach initiatives are also often known as integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs).



**Table 3.1 – different forms of community conservation**

	<b>Protected Area Outreach</b>	<b>Collaborative management</b>	<b>Community-based conservation</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	Conservation of ecosystems, biodiversity and species	Conservation with some rural livelihood benefit	Sustainable rural livelihoods
<b>Ownership/tenure status</b>	State owned land and resources i.e. national parks	State owned land with mechanisms for collaborative management with community. Complex tenure and ownership arrangements	Local resource users own land and resources either <i>de jure</i> or <i>de facto</i> . State may have 'last resort' control
<b>Management characteristics</b>	State determines all decisions about natural resource management	Agreement between state and user groups about managing some state-owned resources. Management arrangements critical	Conservation as element of land use. Emphasis on rural economic development
<b>Prevalence in Southern Africa*</b>	Low	Middling	High

\*(in comparison with East Africa)

from Barrow & Murphree 2001:32

Collaborative management, entails, ostensibly, the meaningful involvement of all interested parties in management functions and activities related to conservation (Borrini-Feyerabend 1996, cited in Barrow and Murphree 2001). In the Southern African context this translates into something resembling the joint management of resources between state and communities, state and the private sector or communities and the private sector. This category describes rather well the kind of arrangements that are often found – and incorporated into national policy – in, for instance South Africa (see Mahony and Van Zyl 2001, Poultney and Spenceley 2001, Spenceley and Seif 2003, for examples of private-public partnerships and collaborations).

Community-based conservation initiatives are sometimes posited as an alternative to integrated conservation and development projects, on the grounds that they are attempts to devolve ownership and management rights to users of valued biodiversity (i.e. Newmark & Hough 2000). Integrated conservation and development projects have been, by and large, associated with the buffer zones surrounding protected areas, whilst community-based conservation initiatives tend to operate on land which is neither a protected area nor a buffer zone. There is no hard and fast rule here about where either type of approach takes place, though. If ICDPs were limited only to buffer zones and protected areas, one might make a plausible claim to distinguish

them from community-based conservation on the basis of decision-making and authority. At least notionally, community-based conservation puts local biodiversity users in the role of conservation authorities and decision-makers. In contrast, owing to the character of buffer zones, local biodiversity users may be party to decisions about conservation and development processes, but ultimately are not authorities who have the last word in decision-making. However, there is a sense in which the drawing of this distinction is perhaps unnecessary, given that community-based conservation is simply a type of integrated conservation and development, albeit with significant implications for questions of tenure security and control over decision-making processes.

Community-based conservation tends to be defined in terms of four main assumptions. First (and perhaps foremost), local people are by and large to be seen as capable and knowledgeable common-pool resource users who are often as well-placed, if not better-placed, as government or private sector actors to manage the resources on which they depend. The second emphasises the need to offer an incentive, be that economic, social or whatever, to people who live with the costs of conservation. Asking someone to continue to bear existing costs or even increased ones is unlikely to meet with success if they have no incentive to do so (Martin 1994a, Murphree 1997). The third is that devolution of ownership, responsibilities for and ownership over wildlife to local people is the best way to provide this incentive (Murphree, 1997a). The fourth is that communal institutions and management structures need either to be supported, resurrected or created in order to allow communities to benefit from wildlife conservation (Barrow & Murphree 2001).

Namibian conservancies have also been classed as examples of community-based conservation, generally held to be the most prevalent set of arrangements that Southern African initiatives are designed around. Indeed, the Conservancy Programme, as well as its forerunner, Zimbabwe's Campfire Programme, have been seen as flag-bearers for the community conservation counter narrative (i.e. Barrow & Murphree 2001, Jones & Murphree 2001). In Namibia, it is more common to refer to community-based conservation as community based natural resource management; I treat them as synonymous, and employ the latter of the two terms simply to observe usage patterns in Namibia. Further, as stated before, the agroforestry components of the Alto Bermejo Project also correspond to the notion of community based natural resource management. Chapters six and ten, respectively, explore in depth the ways

in which policy and implementation in both contexts view sustainable common-pool resource use as a means through which to serve both conservation and development objectives simultaneously.

### **The six ‘principles of sustainability’ shared by the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project**

The previous chapter discussed wider debates about sustainability, charting how sustainability objectives are closely bound up with the use of common-pool resources. This chapter has traced the influence of recent thinking on sustainable common-pool resource management on the counter narrative of community conservation, and located the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project within it. Having done so, it is now possible to extrapolate six ‘sustainability principles’. It is the underlying influence of these principles on both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project that forms the basis of the comparison, rather than Namibia and Argentina per se, or even the initiatives themselves, which are by no means identical. The principles are:

1. It is more important to address questions of how to ensure the continued existence of biodiversity outwith protected areas (i.e. Adams and Hulme 2001, Cumming 2004).
2. Careful use of common-pool resources is more likely to ensure their continued existence for future generations than is a blanket prohibition on any kind of use (Adams and McShane 1992, Murphree 1997, Pimbert and Pretty 1995).
3. It is not a foregone conclusion that people who use common-pool resources will destroy them whenever no state intervention occurs or individual property rights regime is established; there is much evidence to the contrary (Berkes 1998, Feeny et al. 1990, Ostrom 1990).
4. Conservation often fails when people who have to live with the costs of it have insufficient incentive to do so. Indeed, conservation efforts will fail wherever they beg, rather than answer, the question of sufficient incentive (Jones 2000, Ostrom 1990).
5. Realising the economic value of a common-pool resource and ensuring that resource users benefit economically from the exercise is a crucial part of answering the question of sufficient incentive (Bond 2001, Hulme and

Murphree 2001a, Murphree 1997). That said, other, less tangible benefits are also vital to this exercise, and may be overlooked if the importance of economic incentives in themselves is overstated (Emerton 2001)

6. Conservation efforts will also fail if the resource users most in a position to determine how it is used are not involved in the decision-making processes that attempt to conserve said resource. Involvement in such decision-making processes is likely to make little difference unless users have defined, recognised usage rights (Ostrom 1990, Ostrom 1992, Pimbert and Pretty 1995).

That these principles are drawn upon for the formulation of policy and intervention in such distinct countries is testament to the credibility invested in them at international, national and local levels, and an eye-opening indicator of their sheer reach.

### **The robustness of the community conservation counter-narrative**

The scope of influence of community conservation is all the more remarkable when the criticism to which the counter narrative has increasingly been subjected is taken into account. That said, however, some commentators have recently argued that such influence is on the decline in conservation arenas. Whether or not this is the case, it is still very much worthwhile examining how narratives and counter narratives can and do persist even in the face of strong criticism.

Let us begin the inspection of this criticism by sounding the now obligatory note of caution regarding use of the term ‘community’. From both ‘fortress-’ and ‘community’ conservation perspectives (and more widely), it has been argued that there is a tendency to flatten out the complex, frequently-changing character of the bundled, tangled relationships between a given group of people, moulding them to their allotted role in a given storyline. Assumptions which homogenise or reify ‘communities’, which do not recognise the differences in interest, status, wealth, gender, access to resources, livelihood activity, ethnicity etc are often seen as inherently problematic (i.e. Agrawal and Gibson 1999, Brown 1999, Mosse 1994, 2001). Concerns have been voiced that talk of benefiting communities may gloss over the uneven distribution of benefits between community members owing to ‘elite capture’ (Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner 1998).

Before considering other lines of criticism of community conservation, it may be as well to clarify the implications of rendering problematic terms such as ‘community’. To do so deposits us back at the inevitable trade-off between, on the one hand, a level of complexity that surpasses our capacity fully to comprehend it and, on the other, the need to engage with it as best we can. Clearly, plausible analysis is not derived from a shallow consideration of the object of analysis, be that a community, a narrative, or anything else. Questioning the way in which terms such as ‘community’ are employed helps avoid complacency – as long as it is acknowledged that some simplifying is unavoidable. We may not be able to side-step the reifications that help us to understand our experiences, but we can at least attempt to refine them or use other reifications to remind us of their shortcomings. Given that the term ‘community’ has proven sufficiently resistant to coherent definition in my own field sites both in Namibia and Argentina, I have opted either for the terms ‘local people’ or ‘residents’, which have proved a little more flexible. And yet neither of these terms has escaped criticism (see Neumann 1997 for reservations about use of the term ‘local’ and Brown, 1999 for similar concerns with respect to ‘resident’). Ultimately, to hold out for the term which is in no way problematic is the analytical equivalent of building castles in the sand. From the pragmatic standpoint adopted here, it is better to choose a term, acknowledge and then work with its limitations.

The dependency of some community conservation initiatives on what Emerton has termed ‘benefits-based approach’ to community based natural resource management has been called into question (2001). Benefit distribution may not in itself be sufficient to ensure local engagement in wildlife conservation. Incentives for local people to participate depend not just on benefits received, but also on economic costs incurred, on the livelihood activities which compete with wildlife, on intra and intra-household distribution of benefits and costs and a range of other factors which limit or shape the nature of benefits communities can gain from wildlife (ibid). Adding grist to the mill, Bond analyses the revenues raised by Campfire projects between 1989-1996, and finds that the median benefit per household from wildlife dropped from US\$19.40 to US\$4.49 (2001 33). Income derived from wildlife, he concludes, does not compete significantly with other forms of land use which are often in conflict with Campfire’s conservation brief. Indeed, Fabricius, Koch & Magome argue that “those initiatives that do yield high financial dividends are

unsustainable exactly because the non-financial benefits are secondary” (Fabricius, Koch, and Magome 2002).

Another line of criticism has concluded that community conservation initiatives have simply been a failure on all counts. Research on combined development and conservation projects suggests that their performance in terms of both development and conservation criteria leaves much to be desired (i.e. Barrett and Arcese 1995, da Fonseca et al. 2005, Neumann 1997, Oates 1999). Perhaps inevitably, it has been argued that this counter narrative, launched as an attempt to dispel the myth of wild landscapes free from human presence, is itself simply a myth (Brosius 2004).

The strength of these criticisms is leading some to suggest that, with the emergence of another narrative, the writing may be on the wall for the community conservation counter narrative (i.e. Chapin 2004, Wolmer 2006). Such observations can be traced to the 2003 World Parks Conference, at which the concept of ‘eco-regional’ conservation appears to have figured prominently (Wolmer 2006). Also known as ‘landscape level’, ‘ecosystem’ or ‘transboundary’ conservation, the ecoregional approach envisages conservation areas which extend beyond park, reserve and national boundaries, thereby making the connections between biological ‘hotspots’ through ecological corridors, deemed necessary to the continued existence of biodiversity, and which current protected areas are too small and separated to guarantee (i.e. Cumming 2004). For some, an eco-regional focus may herald a revival of the ‘fortress narrative’, stretched across a much wider landscape, and a desire to return to conservation based on “sound science” (Wolmer 2006). As a result, it has been contended (and angrily rejected by a number of conservation organisations), people have once again dropped out of the landscapes envisioned by ‘eco-regional’ conservation (Chapin 2004).

Reports of the death of the community conservation counter narrative may be premature. Certainly, its influence on Namibia’s Conservancy Programme and in Argentina’s Alto Bermejo Project continues to be very much in evidence. Further, the concept of sustainability, which underpins community conservation, is not likely to diminish in influence very soon. It is, then, perhaps less likely that any narrative so directly and explicitly connected to the overarching goal of sustainability will be easily overturned or forgotten. Nonetheless, it is very plausible to suggest that the counter narrative of community conservation is simply one in a series and likely to be superseded by another at some point. It may from this point of view be more useful to

speak of the 'shelf-life' of one narrative and to investigate the factors and circumstances through which one cedes influence and legitimacy to another.

## **4. Conclusion**

In the context of the counter-narrative of community conservation, representations of conservation and the role of local people within it have changed. No longer is it unproblematic to see them as the cause of the problems which expert conservationists must attempt to resolve, chiefly through the separation of that which is to be conserved from those who will destroy it if left to their own devices. On the contrary, the pronouncements of such experts have experienced a loss of legitimacy and credibility, an erosion of cognitive authority. For proponents of community-based approaches to conservation, it is no longer solely about preservation and protected areas. The logic of sustainability points to the need to focus on the far greater quantities of biodiversity which exist outwith the protected area and to the need to make conservation processes sustainable by making them acceptable to those who bear the costs of them. This is to be done partly by viewing conservation in terms of common-pool resource use and partly through recognising that collective use of resources does not and has not always led to the tragedy of the commons in the absence of state or private intervention. It is now a standard argument that in fact it is precisely because much local knowledge about common-pool resource use is compatible with the notion of sustainability that valued biodiversity continues to exist. Local people are frequently represented as competent and capable common-pool resource users, who must be recognised as such if conservation – as sustainable common-pool resource use – is to be a meaningful exercise outwith the protected area. Indeed, 'fortress' conservation, the narrative against which community conservation sets itself, has been charged with disrupting sustainable forms of common-pool resource use (i.e. Murombedzi 1992, Neumann 1997). It has, therefore, sometimes given current conservation and development practitioners the task of resurrecting the common-pool resource institutions that had existed prior to conservation interventions requiring the establishment of a protected area and the forced eviction of people from the land they had inhabited.

I need now to return to the notion of circularity in intervention. I argued in chapter two that people who have knowledge deemed necessary for the achievement of sustainability goals are simultaneously the source cognitive authority which shores up the credibility of such knowledge. Not everyone has such knowledge and therefore not everyone can be a source of cognitive authority; it tends to be concentrated in certain spheres of actors, such as academia, government, NGOs and donors. It is this dynamic which renders people with knowledge about sustainability indispensable participants in initiatives, such as the Conservancy Programme or the Alto Bermejo Project, which are framed in terms of the overarching goal of sustainability. However, if part of what is believed necessary for the achievement of combined conservation and development objectives is that local people and knowledge are or can become engines of sustainability, it follows that the expert involvement of government, donor non-governmental and academic actors should be or should become less necessary. Indeed, in the specific cases of the Conservancy Programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, it is expected that eventually a scenario of local self-sufficiency will indeed come to pass.

Nonetheless, knowledge about sustainability continues in many ways to be a specialist affair. The debates over what is necessary for sustainable living produce ever more complex prescriptions regarding what should be done and what needs to be taken into account for that goal to be achieved. Multi-disciplinary, holistic approaches are deemed essential simply to understand what is meant by sustainability (notwithstanding how widely contested the term is). Specialists in various fields of operation – academia, policy-making, donor agencies, NGOs – continue to be sources of cognitive authority for knowledge about sustainability, and on that basis continue to render themselves indispensable to the processes through which sustainability is to be brought about. For any given outcome to be designated sustainable, there has to be some specialist input precisely because the efforts of specialists are geared towards constituting the context in which references to sustainability are intelligible. This tendency need not always be purposive or intended; specialists may not always seek to render themselves indispensable, and their actions may not always be explained simply by recourse to a consideration of self-interests served through continued involvement in a given initiative. And yet this indispensability is to some extent at odds with the logic of empowerment, and remains so for as long as specialist



knowledge about sustainability continues to underpin policy and implementation and continues to be concentrated amongst a few project actors.

If the knowledge about sustainability that underpins thinking on combined conservation and development initiatives continues to be a significantly specialist affair, then we cannot be too surprised if policy and intervention predicated on such knowledge in Namibia and Argentina is accordingly dependent at least partially upon the participation of specialists who invest that knowledge with legitimacy and credibility in the first place. What there is to participate in is to a considerable extent pre-defined, and implementation requires the knowledge and skills of a wide variety of actors, some of whom have significantly more cognitive authority than others. In parts II and III of the thesis, then, the consequences for local participation of these considerations are explored.

# **PART II**

# Chapter V: A historical introduction to Namibia

## 1. Introduction

The historical processes through which Namibia was created have led the majority of its inhabitants to experience vast structural disadvantage and inequity. From the establishment of German colonial rule in the 1880s until the declaration of independence in 1990 – the period covered in this chapter – government policy systematically favoured the interests of white settlers, which both German and South African administrations used to consolidate their hold on the territory. Namibian history can, then, be read as one of the exclusion of the majority from some of the most central decision-making processes taken within human societies: where to live, how to make a living, what rules to follow and to which authorities the just enforcement of those rules should be trusted. Concomitantly, the history of the struggle to gain independence from colonial rule can be read as one of resistance to such exclusion.

This chapter offers a broad outline of Namibian history, starting in 1884 with German colonisation and ending in 1990 with the declaration of Namibian independence. It forms the context within which to locate the conservancy programme, and sheds light on the wider structural constraints that affect how local people interact with the programme. Two themes run through the chapter:

1. Land tenure and/or restrictions on access to land, perhaps the most central factor in Namibia's recent history
2. What Laurent Kaela has termed 'the question of Namibia', that is, the violently contested process through which Namibia's status – either territory to be assimilated into South Africa or proclaimed an independent, sovereign nation – would be decided (1996).

Because of Namibia's settler colony origins, access to and ownership of land was the key organising principle for both the German and the South African administrations. Changing land distribution patterns established at the end of the nineteenth century was also one the fundamental goals of the liberation struggle;

distribution has continued since independence to be a bitterly divisive issue and a widely-held source of grievance. Furthermore, it is essential to understand the country's private-communal land tenure split in order to comprehend the genesis of the conservancy concept first on commercial (private, mostly white) farm land and its subsequent extension into Namibia's communal lands (the name for homelands after independence).

The events through which Namibia's future status was determined constitute a vital strand in Namibian historiography. In many ways, the struggle over the country's future was the struggle of establishing the legitimacy of contrasting representations regarding the capability of Namibia's black majority to determine their future in an international political order populated by nation states and colonial powers. On the one hand, the reason why South Africa would be given the mandate to govern South West Africa after World War I was due to the consensus that the territory's inhabitants were incapable of forming and governing a nation. It was expedient for South Africa and other nations to subscribe to that view: they were vying for control over the colonial possessions Germany would forfeit after the War. On the other hand, the reason why South Africa was not permitted immediately to annexe the territory was because of the conviction among some League of Nations members, such as the USA, that its people should have the right to determine their own future and eventually achieve independence.

As the twentieth century progressed, the aspiration of self-determination and independence for colonial territories of all kinds would acquire ever greater legitimacy. The actors resisting South African rule, and especially the South West African People's organisation (Swapo), consistently exploited this tendency: they made independence possible in part by winning the battle of representation. Swapo became expert at persuading the international community that not only was South Africa's rule illegal, but that it was also deliberately impeding Namibians from developing the capability for self-determination. Resistance became symbolic of the capacity of Namibians for self-determination even in spite of South African oppression. South Africa, in contrast, foundered on the rocks of its own intransigence.

However, Swapo's strategy of harnessing international pressure for the cause of self-determination also generated unpalatable consequences. As an exile movement – and owing to South Africa's crackdown on political activity in South West Africa – Swapo never brought to fruition the attempts at resistance that emerged within


Namibia. Its leadership would also leave itself open to the charge of elitism and even authoritarianism in the way in which it dealt with internal dissent. It has also been accused of sidelining all other potential candidates for the role of the sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people. Nonetheless, the victory of the view that Namibians were ready for independence, albeit with some assistance from the United Nations, recast the black majority in the light of capable, willing agents of change freed at last from the yoke of colonial oppression. Therefore, the achievement of independence opened up a policy space in which actors with policies that appeared to reinforce this message enjoyed much room for manoeuvre. Crucially, proponents of the conservancy programme would exploit this opportunity to get change in the conservation agenda on the table.

The chapter divides this thematic history into four further sections. Section two covers the establishment of German colonial rule, from its shaky inception, the establishment of the Police Zone, the German-Herero war of 1904-07 and the subsequent dispossession of the Herero and Nama of their land and livestock. Section three covers the arrival of the South Africans in 1915, charting the administration's consolidation of control over land within the Police Zone, the formalisation of a system of native reserves for the black population, and the co-optation of 'indigenous' political structures. Section four explores the introduction of apartheid-style homelands and other related segregationist legislation. It then moves on to the increasing efficacy and scale of resistance to the South African presence, ending with an account of the factors and events through which an independence settlement was finally brokered.

Within this account, more attention is paid to the experiences of two ethnic groups in particular to German and South African rule, the Damara and the Herero, than it is those of other groups, such as the Ovambo, Basters, Tswana or the San. This is partly because the Damara and Herero constitute the majority of the residents of Tsiseb conservancy, the focus of my fieldwork. It is partly also because more has been written on the role of these groups in the forging of resistance to colonial rule – at least in the early stages of German and then South African occupation.

## 2. German colonisation and the establishment of the settler agricultural economy: 1884-1915

### The underwhelming annexation of German South West Africa<sup>4</sup>

 Although not reducible just to the ‘land question’, from the formal establishment of German rule from 1884 onwards, land dispossession and redistribution nonetheless comprise two central strands in (cf. Werner 1993). It was under German colonial administration that the system of denying land to black ‘indigenous’ inhabitants, whilst distributing it on an ever more inequitable scale to European settlers, was first initiated (Adams, Werner, and Vale 1990 7). This enterprise was set about with a view to removing from blacks the means for self-sufficiency, be that gained through trade, pastoralism, agriculture or hunter-gathering, in order to force them into providing the wage labour necessary for commercial settler agriculture or other sectors such as mining (Riddell 1978 3).

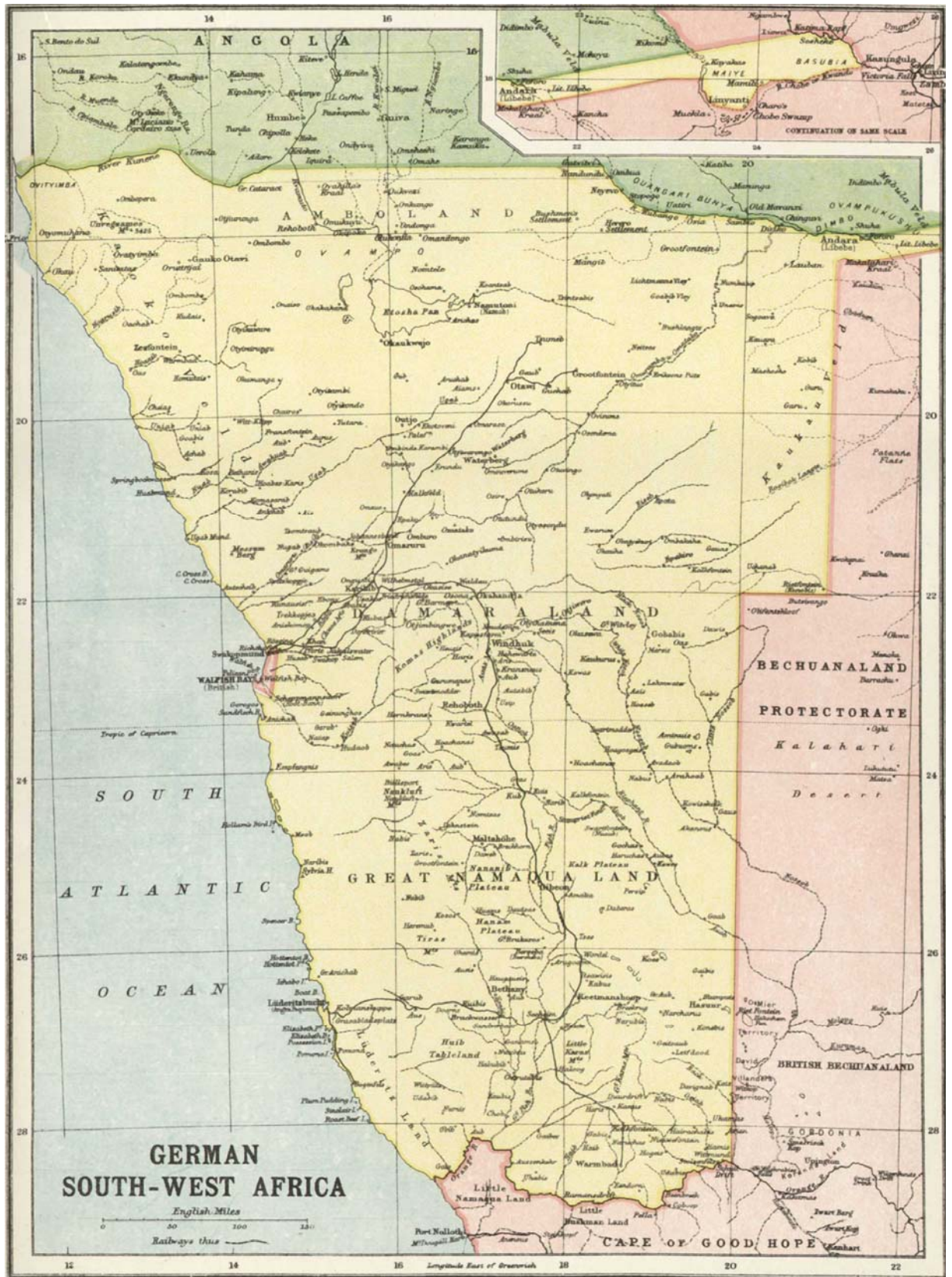
Parts of modern Namibia, then designated German South West Africa, were first annexed by Germany in 1884, although the colony’s notional borders solidified somewhat when agreements were struck with Portugal and Great Britain, in 1886 and 1890 respectively (LAC 2000 6). However, when outlining processes of ‘annexation’ in this context, care must be taken not to gloss over the resistance, sometimes overwhelming, that German colonials encountered. They met with peoples that, throughout the nineteenth century, had become well-armed as a result of the exigencies of livestock and indentured labour trade with the cape colonies, as well as educated and literate through the influence of the Christian missionaries that had been present before the arrival of the German military contingent (Gewald 1999). For instance, initial attempts at negotiating ‘protection’ treaties with formidable Ovambo chiefs, who held significant military advantage over the comparatively small German garrison, were brushed aside (Hailey 1946, cited in Werner 1993:139).

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<sup>4</sup>Original flag for German South West Africa. Source:

<http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Namibia.htm>

Map 5.1 German South West Africa



Source: [http://www.firstworldwar.com/photos/graphics/gw\\_swafrika\\_01.jpg](http://www.firstworldwar.com/photos/graphics/gw_swafrika_01.jpg)

That the German administration made no headway with settling its citizens in the North, because it never enjoyed formal jurisdiction over the Ovambo, Kavango or Caprivi territories, has prompted the observation that colonisation left life largely unchanged for South West Africa's northern inhabitants, who constituted a majority (Harring and Odendaal 2002, Werner 1998). The limitations of German enforcement over the territories and peoples for which it claimed jurisdiction were institutionalised at the start of the twentieth century through the establishment of the Police Zone. In this area, the colonial administration sought to acquire and clear land for settlement and to offer protection to German settlers (see Katjavivi 1988 for a history of the police zone). The boundary of the Police zone stretched in a crooked arc from halfway up the Skeleton Coast (on the Atlantic ocean), pushing northeast through the Namib desert to the level of the Etosha Pan, then eastwards into Kavango before dropping down, close to Grootfontein, on into the Kalahari, ending on the border with Bechuanaland (Botswana), 20-30km North of Mamuno (in modern Botswana). Germans were prohibited from settling in any territory to the North – the Kaokoveld, Ovambo, Kavango, Caprivi (UNDP 1988 50) – whilst residents of these areas could only enter the Police Zone when hired as wage labourers (ibid).

Even others, especially the Herero, Damara and the Nama who, through inhabiting areas which fell within the Police Zone would become ever more subject to German rule, were at first well able to defend land and livestock (Drechsler 1980). However, where German colonials were powerless to conquer, they could still divide. They became very adept at turning intra- and inter-ethnic tensions to their advantage. They played chiefs off against each other, promising protection to one against his adversaries. In return, a chief would consent neither to alienate land to nor enter into treaties with a 'different nation or members thereof' (Werner 1998:42). This diplomatic sleight of hand allowed the German administration to strengthen the chiefs whose support it had enlisted, and pressed them to weaken or destroy the power base of those who were most hostile to the German presence (ibid). It led, for example, to the installation of Samuel Maherero as paramount chief of the Herero in 1891, despite there never having been previously such a position in the Herero political hierarchy (ibid).

It led also to a renegotiation of existing relations between different groups, not least between the Herero and the (Berg) Damara. Jan-Bart Gewald (1999:93-99) charts the process through which the Damara found it expedient to forge alliances



with the colonial administration. In essence, they sought to renegotiate their subordinate position with regard to the Herero, who would often round them up for export, via Walvis Bay, to the Western Cape, where they would work as wage labourers on farms. The Germans saw fit to interpret them as a subjected race and to declare them in need of freeing from oppression. It was an expedient position to take. In Okombahe, the Germans were instrumental in the creation of the first paramount chief of the Damara, thereby altering the balance of power between the Herero and the Damara in favour of the latter, precisely because they were perceived as a more reliable ally. Furthermore, the new chief was obliged to supply wage labour to the German administration. Therefore, the prerequisites of German and South African administrators significantly shaped the structures of what would in the post-independence setting be referred to as 'Traditional Authorities'.

### **Colonial consolidation: rinderpest, malaria and the failed Herero and Nama Revolt, 1904-1907**

Even these tactics did not guarantee the European settlers ownership rights to land. Although German South West Africa's first governor, Theodore Leutwein, had managed in the 1890s to secure access to Herero land, the Herero, viewing land as communally owned, did not want to sell either it or their livestock to settlers (Drechsler 1980). However, in 1897, a rinderpest epidemic decimated an estimated 95 per cent of Herero stock. The effect was compounded in 1898 by a malaria outbreak that was thought to have killed 10,000 Nama and Herero (Werner 1998). These natural disasters affected the balance of power between Europeans and Namibians. Most inoculated settler stock survived the rinderpest outbreak, whilst remaining Herero stock lost much value and was cheaply bought by settlers (ibid). The crisis experienced by the Herero, a predominantly pastoralist group, forced impoverished chiefs such as Maherero to sell land for the first time, and his subjects to seek wage labour (Bley 1971). Such was the extent of the dispossession of the Herero of their land and livestock – by 1903 it was estimated that within the Police Zone they had lost 3.5 million hectares, out of a total of 13 million (Bridgman 1981) – that the

**Box 5.1: A brief historical sketch of Damara and Herero ethnicity**

*The foraging, hunting and herding groups clustered under the term 'Damara' are generally thought to have occupied Central and Western Namibia for a long time, and, like bushmen, to be the aborigines of south-western Africa, predating the arrival of Bantu-speakers like the Herero. They speak a click language commonly known as Damara-Nama (Khoekhoegowab), a name which hints at their interwoven (recent) history with the Nama (but not at their equally interwoven history with the Herero). Their commonalities with the Khoekhoe notwithstanding, they are not traditionally so classified. Nor are the Damara well-researched. Many commentators still rely on early ethnographies dating from the turn of the century onwards. The work, dating from the 1920s and 30s, of Heinrich Vedder, a Rhenish missionary, is therefore still used but often, as Barnard does, with a generous handful of salt at the ready and an awareness of the theories of superior and inferior races evident in Vedder's thinking. Confusingly the term 'Damara' was used by early ethnographers to refer to those people that Namibians now designate as 'Herero'; whilst 'Berg Damara' was reserved for the people now commonly known as Damara. From the nineteenth century or perhaps earlier, they stood in a servant-master relationship with the Herero and to a lesser degree the Nama also. From the 1850s onwards, they were sucked into the new trading relations that accompanied the arrival of the Oorlam Afrikaners, and were often exported by the Herero as wage labour bound for the Western Cape. But they would learn to use the missionary stations and later German colonial rule as a means to redefine their subordinate, low-status relationship to other groups. Prior to 1890, the Damara did not appear to have descent-defined tribal units, nor were there tribal chiefs. In that year, Cornelius Goraseb was appointed the first Paramount Damara Chief, in Okombahe, and was perhaps the last powerful Damara chief.*

*In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the majority of Damara have lived in west-central Namibia, owing to the programme of forced resettlement which obliged thousands to relocate in the 1960s. Sadly, the Damara are still seen stereotypically as 'low status' people who have lost their traditional identity. There is evidence to suggest this is far from the case. Sullivan has vigorously challenged the assertion that the Damara no longer gather veld foods with an impressive study on contemporary food-gathering. In my own fieldwork in the Brandberg area, it was also clear that many Damara maintained small-stock herds and, where possible, vegetable patches. Some also hunted for the pot, sometimes out of poverty, but often 'for the taste'.*

*'Herero' is a term used to refer to people that speak Otjiherero, a Bantu language, and have lived variously as agro-pastoralists when times were good or as hunter-gatherers when required. Speakers of Otjiherero dialects have also variously been called Ovaherero, Ovambanderu, Ovahimba, Ovatjimba, Ovazemba and Vakwandu. Although all of these groups share a number of characteristics, including social organisation, modes of economic activity, cosmology, and spatio-political organisation, it is the Ovaherero which are referred to in this chapter when the term Herero is employed. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Herero were a highly decentralised group, living a transhumant existence. Change occurred as a consequence of the arrival from the south of the Oorlam Kapteins – and in particular Jonker Afrikaner in the 1830s. The Kapteins would raid the herds of Herero and other pastoralists, with a view to trading their acquisitions with the cape colonies; and became very wealthy in the process partly through trading and partly through*

*control of access to trade routes across 'their' territories. Herero who suffered cattle raids would either become raider clients of Jonker Afrikaner, or would become Ovatjimba, hunter-gatherers whose principal subsistence resource was Tjimba (aardvark), sometimes seeking shelter and protection on the Rhenish mission stations. The emergence of the Ovahona, or chiefs, was a result of Herero appropriation of Oorlam centralised authority structures, as well as of the imperative for a powerful leader who could fend off other raiders, be they Afrikaner or Herero. The Herero would eventually appropriate the raiding and trading ways of the Afrikaners so successfully that they were able to break ranks with Jonker Afrikaner. They defeated him in battle in 1861 and established control over much of central Namibia. On the eve of colonisation there were nine recognised Ovahona, but none claimed to be a leader above all others. It was under German colonial rule that this further centralising addition to authority structures was added, when administrators exploited conflict over the succession of Tjamuaha.*

*Sources: (Barnard 1992, Gewalt 1999, Lau 1987, Rohde 1997a, Sullivan 2004, Vedder 1966 [1928])*

Rhenish Mission Society to the colonial administration proposed the establishment of grazing reserves (Werner 1998). Paramount Chief Maherero agreed, and so did many Herero, but the size of the reserves was fiercely contested. Maherero wanted smaller ones, so as to sell more land and gain more revenue, whilst other chiefs thought this unfair and called for them to be extended (Pool 1979).

Tensions over access to land, as well as anger at trade terms considered highly unfavourable and dishonest, were at the heart of the rebellion by the Herero, which was aided by the Nama. Worried that confinement to the grazing reserves of the Police Zone would only bring total subjugation, Samuel Maherero attacked German settlers and soldiers in central Namibia in January 1904 (Bley 1971). For the first six months, the Herero enjoyed success and recovered much of the land which they had ceded since 1897. However, the appointment of General von Trotha led to a complete reversal of all the gains made (Drechsler 1980). After German forces inflicted a heavy defeat upon the Herero at the battle of Waterberg in 1904, they proceeded to drive the remaining Herero into the dry, barren sands of Omaheke. The area was cordoned off and those inside left to a 'slow and agonizing death' (ibid:155). As if uncertain that even this act, accepted by most commentators as one of genocide, would prove sufficient to quash any further chance of a Herero insurrection, Von Trotha issued in October 1904 what became known as the extermination order. It proclaimed that no Herero presence would be tolerated within the Police Zone: all Herero men found inside were to be shot, all Herero women and children driven out (ibid:156-7).

The consequences of this failed rebellion were catastrophic and immeasurably sad beyond even the galling, grim statistical indicators available to us. Up to 80% of the Herero and 50% of the Nama perished as a result of the war (ibid:214). All Herero land and most cattle were confiscated and given over to European settlers (Bley, 1970:171). Remaining Nama land to the south was subsequently seized. On the back of the revolt, a number of new laws were introduced, which:

- obliged Africans to carry identity cards
- restricted them to owning livestock or land only with the (seldom given) permission of the governor
- limited the amount of Africans that could reside on white-owned land (Werner 1998:47).

By 1914, at least within the Police Zone, whites owned 90 per cent of large and 70 percent of small livestock (Goldblatt 1971 173-174). Out of a total of 42.3 million ha available for settlement, white farmers had 13.4 million ha; black Africans – the vast majority – occupied 2.76 million ha (Olivier 1961 47, cited in Werner 1993). This land comprised reserves for groups, such as the Damara, perceived to have been loyal during the revolt of 1904-1907.

### **3. South West Africa under South African rule: the first phase of settlement, 1915-1960**

#### **The changing of the guard<sup>5</sup>**



The outbreak of World War I brought an end to German colonial rule in South West Africa. Germany surrendered on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1915, paving the way for the territory to become a Protectorate of Great Britain (Harring & Odendaal, 2002:22). In accordance with the terms of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, reigning British Monarch George V entrusted

<sup>5</sup> South West African Flag 31<sup>st</sup> May 1928-21<sup>st</sup> March 1990. Source: <http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Namibia.htm>

the Union of South Africa with the mandate obtained from the League of Nations (ibid). At the heart of the negotiations over the mandate system was a tension. Those countries given the mandate over one or another of the territories Germany forfeited at the end of World War I generally wanted to annexe them. South Africa was no exception (Kaela 1996). However, this objective ran counter to the aims expressed within Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which referred to the mandate system. The overarching responsibility entrusted to mandated countries was to ensure “the well-being and development of such peoples” as lived in the territories covered by the mandates (cited in Kaela 1996:4). This was to be achieved through the tutelage of these peoples “for eventual self-determination and independence” (Kaela 1996:2). A compromise was thus reached between mandated countries bent on annexation and actors, such as US president Woodrow Wilson, who favoured self-determination and independence. Mandated countries would not be permitted to annexe territories, but nor would immediate self-determination and independence be an option for those territories (ibid).

Moreover, Article 22 did not explicitly oblige mandated countries to prepare territories for independence, but only implied it. Nor was independence defined as a self-evident corollary of self-determination. This left the door open for the incorporation of those territories at some later point, but closed off the possibility of immediate annexation (ibid). The fight for Namibia’s status for most of the rest of the twentieth century can be traced back to this fudge. The ideal of independence would eventually triumph, but the compromise handed Jan Smut’s South Africa, which would once again pursue annexation at a later date, firm, enduring control.

In the years of military rule from 1915-1919, South West Africa’s black African inhabitants wasted little time in turning the vagaries of *de facto* South African control to their advantage. Pastoralists were quick to abandon their workplaces and reclaim ancestral lands (Werner 1998). Until its mandated country status was confirmed South Africa could only offer its own settlers grazing and occupation licences, but not land ownership. Moreover, the policy of clamping down on ‘squatters’ was undercut by the policy of encouraging urban Africans to resettle in rural areas, to provide wage labour for settler commercial agriculture (ibid). At first, black Africans had welcomed the arrival of the South Africans, hoping for better treatment than that which they had received during their first experience of colonisation. But it became increasingly evident that the monopoly over land that white settlers had enjoyed under German

rule was to be preserved as the basis of economic, social and political control in the South African era. The continuity between one regime and that which replaced it was underlined by the South African policy of continuing to recognise the Police Zone, and indeed of extending it in 1950.

### **Settling in**

From 1920 onwards, the South African administration set out an explicit policy of encouraging poor white South Africans to settle in its newly-acquired territory and of providing financial and logistical support for the enterprise (Union of South Africa 1935, cited in Adams, Werner and Vale 1990). It established a Land Board in 1920 and a Land Bank in 1921 (Werner 1998). Settlement patterns and arrangements for land ownership and access mirrored South African ones, and the 1922 Native Administration Proclamation was therefore based on legislation such as the South African Native Land Act of 1913 (Harring & Odendaal 2002, Werner 1993, 1998). This act had set various precedents, such as the prohibition of land transactions between whites and blacks, and also the separation of black and white settlement areas (Harring and Odendaal 2002), with a view in particular to avoiding black 'islands' amidst white 'seas' (Werner 1993:142). The 1922 Native Administration Proclamation offered laws for creating and administering native reserves. The Native Reserves Commission set about creating them. The Commission recommended that 5 million ha be set aside within the police zone for the establishment of native reserves, but by 1925 only 2,813,741ha had been made available for ten reserves that were to house 11,740 inhabitants (Emmett 1999 103). In contrast, 7,481,371 ha had been made accessible to 1,106 white settlers over the same timeframe (ibid). Little changed the basic settlement pattern over the intervening decades. Only three more reserves were established between 1925 and 1951 (RSA 1964, cited in Werner 1993:143). By 1946, 32 million ha of surveyed farms, all within the Police Zone, were owned or leased by white settlers – 39 per cent of the surface area of South West Africa – whilst native reserves within the Police Zone constituted only 4.1 million ha (ibid). By 1960, white owned land had increased to 39 million ha (UNIN 1987 39).

The people installed in the native reserves received very little assistance from the government, The reserves, stripping people of prime land, putting them in marginal areas and concentrating them in such a way as to aggravate competition for available resources led to what has been called “a parody of pre-colonial herding and

cultivation” (Chambers & Green 1981:231). Until the 1940s, average spending on black agriculture remained at around 4.5%, never exceeding 7% (Dowd 1954, cited in Adams, Werner and Vale 1990:35). Black Africans were obliged to seek wage labour on commercial (white farms) despite the bad working conditions. Even during the drought and the Great Depression of the 1930s the state was not inclined to support native reserve inhabitants, but instead pursued a policy of encouraging ‘self-reliance’ (Werner & Adams 1990:37).

In contrast, white settler agriculture expanded rapidly between the 1920s and the 1960s, precisely because of the massive subsidies received by white farmers from the government. In addition to access to the best land, it was also provided at cheap prices and farmers, through the land bank, had access to cheap finance. Moreover, the infrastructure was built with a view to serving white settlers more than native reserve inhabitants: to this day, for instance, Namibia’s tarmac roads, as well as the frequently-maintained gravel roads, serve commercial farming areas better than they do Namibian communal areas.

### **Black Africans, the South West African Administration and further annexation attempts**

Subject to the consequences of decisions about land distribution in which they had not been invited to participate, black Africans fared little better when it came to representation in South West Africa’s government. The South West Africa Constitution Act No 42 of 1925 created an administrator and (all-white) Legislative Assembly and Executive Committee, which could pass laws and ordinances on all issues that were not ‘reserved’ by Pretoria (Harring & Odendaal 2002:24). Amongst these reserved matters was anything referring to ‘native affairs’, including conservation policy.

The Native Administration Proclamation Act No 15 of 1928, which established the post of ‘chief native commissioner’, was the mechanism through which black African involvement in the South West African Administration was shaped. A (white) supreme chief, resident in South West Africa was presided over and influenced ‘native’ political institutions, and as such had the power to:

- recognise, appoint or remove any headman or chief of an ethnic group, location or native reserve

- remove an ethnic group or a section of it from one part of the country to another
- alter the boundaries of the territory occupied by an ethnic group
- over-rule any customary law or decision taken by chiefs or headmen (Native Administration Proclamation 15 of 1928, cited in Haring and Odendaal 2002:24)

Robert Gordon maintains that it was through the chief native commissioner that the ethnic polities and politics of South West Africa were co-opted and manipulated by the South African authorities (1991). “Chiefs and headmen”, he argued, “had to be kept strong enough to control their own people but weak enough to be controlled by the regime” (Ibid:28).

The aim of establishing some black African involvement in the South West African Administration may have served as a means by which the South African government could claim that it was fulfilling its obligations under its League of Nations mandate to prepare the territory’s peoples for self-determination; though clearly not for independence. On the contrary, it claimed that “there is no prospect of the territory ever existing as a separate state, and the ultimate objective of the mandatory principle [i.e. independence] is therefore impossible of achievement” (cited in Kaela 1996:12). Consequently, with the dissolution of the League of Nations at the end of World War II, the government in Pretoria argued for the incorporation of South West Africa into the union (Dugard 1973). The League’s successor, the United Nations Organisation (UNO), it refused to sanction this proposition. The UNO wanted South West Africa to be placed under the auspices of the trusteeship system, the ostensible replacement of the mandate system, with a view to securing its independence “without delay” (Kaela 1996:12). The Union as a result chose not to recognise the legitimacy of the UNO to rule on the question of what arrangements should follow for South West Africa (ibid:18). The South Africans once again assumed the black majority incapable of self-rule, whilst continuing to ensure that they were not acquiring the capacity for self-governance through offering minimal government services to black. What little was provided to the black population stood in stark contrast to the high levels of support to white settlers. The exclusionary dynamic started under German rule was thereby repeated.



The victory of the Nationalist Party in the 1948 elections ensured that the line of non-recognition of the United Nations would be pushed even harder (ibid:137). The uncompromising South African stance generated long-standing uncertainty surrounding the future status and development of Namibia. It was well into the 1980s before those backing independence gained the upper hand. Throughout the 1950s and on into the 1960s, resistance from within the territory increased, from seasoned opponents such as Hosea Kutako, with the help of activists like Michael Scott, taking the form of petitions and evidence documenting the harsh conditions in the native reserves (First 1963). In 1950 the International Court of Justice ruled that the League of Nations mandate was still in force, that the United Nations General Assembly was the legitimate supervisory body for the mandate and that South Africa was therein required to submit to its authority (Dugard, 1973:115). Although the ruling put the UN in a position of legal strength, it did little to change the balance of power: it was offered as an advisory opinion which South Africa was not obliged to accept (ibid).

#### **4. Apartheid's homelands and the struggle for independence, 1960-1990**

##### **The Nats and the creation of the homelands**

This well-intentioned huffing and puffing within the UN did not stop the South African government from pursuing its objective of the incorporation of Namibia, at least on a *de facto* basis. The Nationalist Party (more commonly known colloquially as 'the Nats'), under the Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd, thereby recommended the adaptation for Namibia of apartheid legislation already in force in South Africa. With respect to land distribution policies, the government produced a Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Affairs of South West Africa, more commonly known as the Odendaal Report (1964). The recommendations set out in the Odendaal Report ushered in the final round of forced removal and resettlement (Werner, 1993:145). The Commission's ostensible brief was to promote "the material and moral welfare and the social progress of the inhabitants of South West Africa, and more particularly its non-white inhabitants" (General Rehabilitation Commission, cited in Adams, Werner, and Vale 1990 1). As in South Africa, 'separate development' was espoused as the best way to achieve this objective. Arguing that

native reserves had failed to permit their residents to meet even minimum subsistence needs, the Odendaal Report proposed the creation of ‘self-governing’ homelands, each with their own Legislative Assembly (1964 85).

In 1968, the Development of Self Government for Native Nations in South West Africa established ten reserves – homelands – and recognised six “native nations” as their occupants: Ovamboland, Hereroland, Kaokoland, Okavangoland, Damaraland and Eastern Caprivi (Harring and Odendaal 2002:26). The establishment of the homelands entailed the consolidation of the seventeen existing native reserves into the ten homelands. ‘Citizens’ of the new ‘nations’ would be obliged to live within their boundaries, paving the way for resettlement, thereby completing the segregation along racial lines that was at the heart of the apartheid system.

Land was also added to the amount covered by existing reserves, with the purchase of an additional 426 farms and the de-proclamation of government land contiguous with existing reserves (Werner and Adams 1990). Consequently, land available to black Namibians rose from 22 million to approximately 32.7 million ha (Werner, 1993:146). However, much of the land was desert or semi desert, often devoid of sufficient water for agricultural or pastoral purposes; according to Werner, fully 87% of Damaraland could only be classified as desert or semi desert (ibid). Although after independence the homelands would be reclassified as ‘communal land’, and subsumed into geographical, not ethnic, regions, land settlement and distribution patterns remain broadly similar to those brought about as a result of the Odendaal Commission’s recommendations.

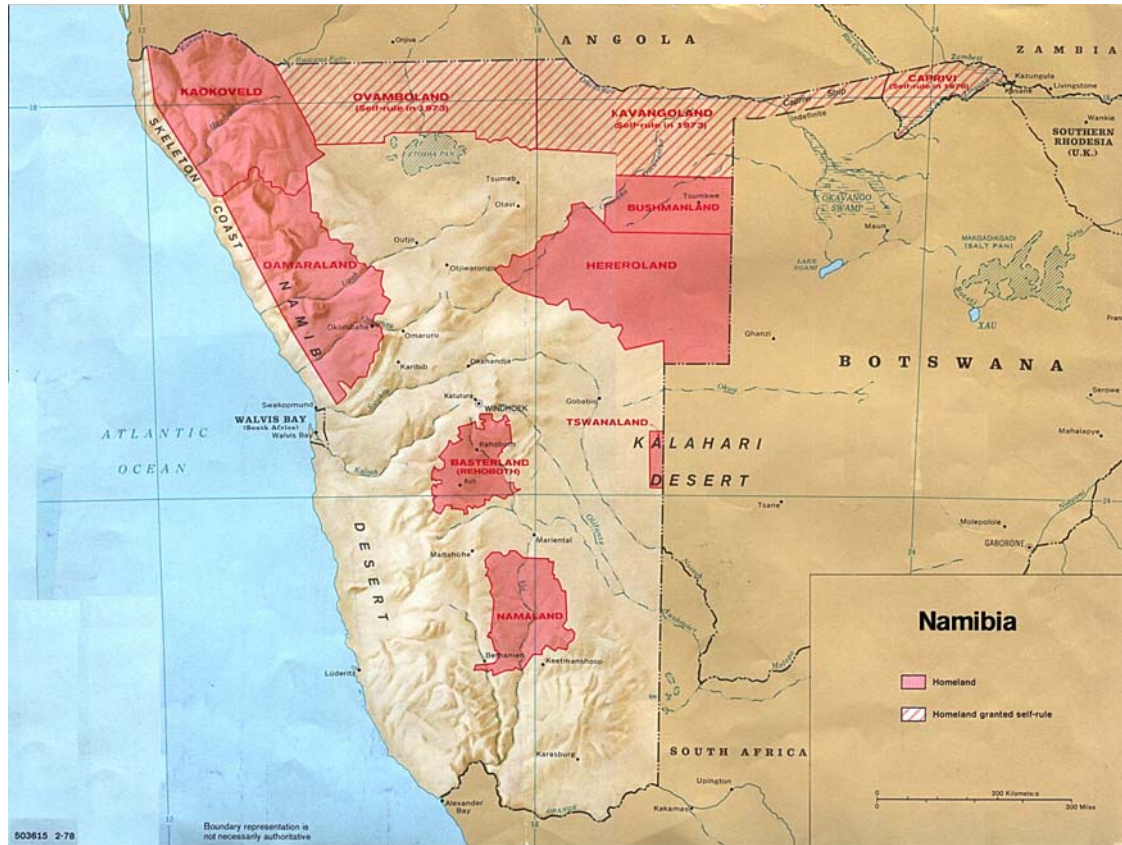
If the aim of creating homelands was to placate their residents, it failed: anger remained at the fact that they did not alter but rather perpetuated the territory’s inequitable land distribution patterns. The desire for land redistribution was one of the core issues at the heart of the liberation struggle, and has continued to be one of the most pressing concerns of Namibian communal land inhabitants ever since independence.

### **The emergence of the South West African People’s Organisation (Swapo)**

Black resistance within South West Africa to South African rule emerged against the explosive backdrop of 1950s African nationalism and the onset of the first wave of independence across the African subcontinent. By 1960, within the South West African context, three principal political groupings had emerged: the Chiefs’ Councils

(in particular the Herero Chiefs' Council led by Hosea Kutako); the South West African National Union (SWANU) and the South West African People's Organisation (Dobell 1998 27).

**Map 5.2 South West African Homelands (1978)**



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas,

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/namibia.html>

Swapo was started by Ovambo migrant workers exposed to the teeming mass of political activity in the Cape Town of the 1950s (ibid:29). From its inception as the Ovambo People's Congress (OPC) in 1957, it was re-launched in South West Africa in April 1959 as the Ovambo People's Organisation when its founder, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, was rumbled by South African authorities and deported from Cape Town (ibid).

The Ovambo People's Organisation (OPO) became Swapo, a national organisation, partly in response to the outcome of resistance to the forced resettlement of residents of Windhoek's Old Location to Katutura. The Council of Chiefs, SWANU and the OPO had jointly organised a boycott of municipal services, which

ended in blood-soaked clashes with the police, in which upwards of sixty protesters lost their lives (see Vigne 1973 for a more detailed chronicle of these events). Prominent leaders, including future Namibian president Sam Nujoma, went at this point into exile in Tanzania. Tellingly, they also made the transition because they thought Ovambo People's Organisation would be better-received at the United Nations if reinvented as a national movement (Dobell, 1998:31). Swapo would prove remarkably effective at monopolising the resources offered by the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity, the Soviet Union and other international sponsors (ibid).

Swapo became increasingly dependent upon its relations with international bodies and actors to achieve its objectives, not least among them the UN, which was very sympathetic to its cause (Kaela 1996). However, events in the 1960s made Swapo alter its plan to seek independence through the application of international pressure. It would continue to do so, but became frustrated with the lack of progress that this strategy initially produced. Liberia and Ethiopia had in 1961 brought before the International Court of Justice a case against South Africa's continuing occupation of South West Africa, but the Court ruled finally in 1966 that neither country had legal standing to bring the case (ibid). This was the final straw for Swapo, which one month after the ruling launched the armed struggle they had been threatening since 1962 (Dobell 1998:35). Their first skirmish with South African forces took place on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1966 when South African forces attacked the base Swapo had established in Omgulumbashe, North-west Ovamboland (Leys & Brown, 2005:2). The odds favoured the South African troops overwhelmingly: they killed two and captured fifty-four (ibid).

Swapo turned its military defeat into a propaganda victory: two months after, the UN General Assembly formally revoked South Africa's mandate and resumed sovereignty over South West Africa (Dobell, 1998). But the conflict prompted a crackdown on Swapo operatives inside Namibia, who were rounded up and mostly given sentences of between 5 years and life in Robben Island (Leys & Brown, 2005:2). This left Swapo with little capacity to conduct operations inside South West Africa, and its decisions and strategies were determined henceforth solely by its leaders in exile, who concentrated on waging their struggle within the international arena. Dobell argues that these owing to these circumstances, Swapo lost contact with its base, with the result that decision-making would become increasingly centralised

(1998:36). The organisation became more pragmatic and less ideologically driven, in order better to exploit the resources available from international sources. It learned to speak a number of “languages” – the UN, East/West Bloc and African idioms – but did so “at the cost, perhaps, of developing a coherent vision of a transformed, independent Namibia” (ibid:37).

### **Internal frustrations and external triumphs in the 1970s**

Despite the crackdowns and heavier surveillance to which black political activists in South West Africa had been subjected in the 1960s, there was a resurgence of popular resistance at the beginning of the 1970s. It occurred in the wake of the 1971 ruling by the International Court of Justice, in which the 1966 ruling against Libya and Ethiopia was reversed. South Africa’s rule over South West Africa was declared illegal, and all UN members were requested to abide by this position and make clear their support of it in any dealings they had with South Africa (Dugard 1973). Although the leadership in exile in Tanzania had very little to do with the orchestration of these largely spontaneous protests, it was quick to claim credit for them and use them to shore up its legitimacy in international diplomatic spheres (Dobell 1998:141). The rapid manner in which the South African government quashed the rebellion soon, though, showed up the lack of Swapo leadership and support for them within South West Africa (ibid). The majority of the Swapo Youth League – which had spearheaded domestic resistance – headed for Angola, as part of a mass exodus of up to 8,000 Namibians, subsequent to the withdrawal of Portugal in 1974 (Leys and Brown 2005). Cutting down on internal activities had its advantages for the Swapo leadership in exile. It left them in greater control of the struggle and reduced to nothing the possibility of the factions of the organisation within the territory emerging with an alternative set of leaders and variant plans (ibid).

Although Swapo did not lose popular support within Namibia, its exiled leadership angered some of the organisation’s members, especially within the Swapo Youth League, and were accused, as early on as the Tanga conference held in Tanzania in 1970, of not fomenting or supporting ‘grass-roots’ resistance within the territory and of being unaccountable. The response from the leadership at the conference was, for Dobell, revelatory:

In his opening address to the Congress [Sam] Nujoma responded to the criticisms by SWAPO members in a way which was to become standard practice among the leadership – by adopting the more militant language of the critics, while turning their charges against them. The speech was to warn officially (and ominously) against the “enemy agents” who would subsequently be found to be at the root of each successive crisis in the movement, thereby providing a convenient explanation for inconvenient manifestations of discontent in the ranks, and evading time and again the need for critical self-examination (1998:38)

“Enemy agents”, once identified by the leadership, were dealt with strictly and quickly. In 1976, in conjunction with Swapo Youth League members, a group of PLAN fighters based in Zambia rebelled, complaining of a lack of supplies and medical care at the front, and of corruption and conspiracy with the South African Defence Forces among their commanders (Dobell 1998:48). In response, the Zambian army, at the behest of the Swapo leadership, arrested 27 Swapo members in Lusaka, including Executive members and Youth League activists, some of whom were sent to be detained in Tanzania for up to two years (ibid; Leys and Brown 2005). Following the arrests, a further 1,600-1,800 people were detained, officially to eliminate from the organisation the spies alleged to be passing on sensitive military information to the South African government. Leys and Brown argue that whilst these tactics probably did reveal some spies, their bigger effect was to generate paranoia within the exiled community (2005). Furthermore, the treatment of detainees would presage concerns regarding Swapo’s human rights record in the post-independence era (cf. Daniels 2003).

Some commentators (i.e. Leys & Brown 2005) maintain that the Swapo leadership should not be judged too harshly for these actions. Dobell argues that they themselves were hostage to “Zambia’s political imperatives”, given that the Zambian president, Kenneth Kaunda, was engaged in Kissinger’s *détente* strategy, along with South Africa and Angola (1998:49). Zambia may well not have been prepared to run the risk of a PLAN rebellion on its soil compromising the *détente*. Moreover, Swapo’s leadership could claim to have made significant headway with its attempts to bring international pressure to bear on South Africa. It had been named the “authentic representative of the Namibian people” by the UN General Assembly in 1973. It had been instrumental in getting the UN to the table (if not immediately to approve) Resolution 435, the most wholehearted condemnation yet of the South African presence in Namibia (Serfontein, 1977). Nonetheless, the perceived reluctance of the leadership to engage in decision-making by consensus, combined with its

unwillingness to pursue mass resistance at home, thereby leaving itself cut off from its base, were sources of long-standing grievance.

South Africa also appeared to be caught on the back foot. It found itself obliged to counter the barrage of international criticism against its rule by speeding up its development programmes for the homelands, and convened the Turnhalle conference, which offered South West Africans the possibility of ‘total autonomy’ (Kaela, 1996:89). Kaela argues that this was offered because the South African government had accepted that it would have to leave the territory, and had decided instead to attempt “to control the process of change to ensure that the outcome was to its liking” (ibid:138). He goes on to argue that one of the principal factors which sank the process was Swapo’s absence from it. This contributed to ensuring that Turnhalle was not legitimate in the eyes of the UN, and also meant that any internal independence settlement would not end the guerrilla war that Swapo had continued throughout the 1970s.

### **Endgame: Independence<sup>6</sup>**



The events of the 1980s made it increasingly difficult for South Africa to maintain its intransigent position of refusing to allow Namibians to determine their future. Zimbabwe’s independence constituted a source of optimism for Swapo and consternation for the South African government. The Transitional Government of National Unity that South Africa had set up for Namibia at no point acquired legitimacy, domestically or internationally (Wood 1988). Ultimately, though, it was the sea-change in the international environment which forced South Africa to adjust its policy within the region and which would bring about Namibian independence (Saunders 1992).

When even the superpowers displayed an increasing appetite for *détente*, it is no surprise that South Africa became less convinced that the benefits of support for UNITA rebels in the Angolan civil war outweighed the costs (ibid). Those costs increased yet further, as Cuba sent 15,000 troops to reinforce the Angolan government, in a final push to secure a convincing victory. When neither side could

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<sup>6</sup> Namibian Flag, adopted 21<sup>st</sup> March 1990. Source <http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Namibia.htm>

gain the upper hand in the battle of Cuito Canavale without incurring heavier human and economic costs than they were willing to bear (Wood, 1998), one of the most important conditions for Namibian independence was in place. As well as its military difficulties, South Africa was also being squeezed by economic sanctions, which helped to persuade it that it had no choice but to seek military disengagement. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1988, South Africa acceded to talks in Brazzaville at which Swapo was conspicuous by its absence, having not been invited (Dobell 1998). The talks resulted in the signing, 9 days later in New York, of an agreement to implement UN Resolution 435, which called for the holding of elections for a constituent assembly and, of course, full independence for Namibia. The New York agreement linked the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola with the withdrawal of the South African Defence force from both Angola and Namibia (Leys & Brown 2005:12), thereby paving the way for the return of the exiled Swapo leadership. Elections were held in 1989, in which Swapo won a 57% majority, in spite of the efforts of the South African government to subsidise political parties which it stood a better chance of manipulating (Saunders, 1992). Independence was officially declared on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1990.

## **5. Conclusion**

The achievement of independence signalled, then, the end of the exclusion of the majority of Namibia's inhabitants from the political processes overseen by the state. By the 1960s onwards, opponents of South African rule – and Swapo in particular – had won the argument, in the international arena, about whether or not the territory should become an independent nation. Of course, that independence had come about was not just because the United Nations accepted the case for it: the costs of holding on to Namibia had become too high for South Africa. The enthusiasm to wage the cold war had sagged on both sides of the Iron Curtain, with implications for all allies of the super powers, South Africa included. South Africa had ever-increasing trouble at home to contend with, was faced with international sanctions and a regional war it could not afford. Swapo was at the heart of the campaign to delegitimise South African rule in Namibia and to persuade the international community that Namibians were capable of self-rule. It had turned that belief into political reality, and profited



handsomely from the establishment of representative democracy in Namibia. For it would not just win the first elections with a convincing majority, but would go on to increase its share of the vote, from 57% in 1991 to 74% in 1994, 76% in 1999 and 74% in 2004 (Directorate of Elections 2004), headed in the first three of those four elections by its charismatic and controversial but enduringly popular leader, Sam Nujoma. He will be remembered not just for dominating 'his' party but also for stepping down from office, even when a majority of Namibians would have supported the necessary amendment of the constitution required for him to stand in the 2004 elections. This act means that Namibia's first statesman is more likely to be remembered as another Mandela, rather than as another Mugabe.

The declaration of independence was accompanied by a hunger for new and different policies that would better reflect the needs and demands of the black majority. The representative democratic structures through which these policies were to be pursued would, moreover, provide models for decision-making which, in view of the struggle to achieve independence, resonated with the legitimacy of a long-denied but just cause. It is against this background that the introduction of the conservancy programme and the representative form of participation in conservancy decision-making processes are more fully understood. The implications of this background are explored further in the following two chapters.

However, the legacy of independence was also one of vast inequity, one indeed that had left Namibia as one of the most inequitable countries in the world (UNDP 1998 9). The political order had experienced radical change, but the economic order remained largely intact. Land ownership has proved an extremely thorny issue, not amenable to swift resolution (see Haring & Odendaal 2002 for a review of the resettlement programme from 1990-2001). Much comment has been made on the provisions in Namibia's constitution for the protection of private property, and the obligation on the part of the government to proceed with land reform on the basis of the 'willing buyer, willing seller' principle (Dobell 1998, Haring and Odendaal 2002, Nujoma 2001, Saunders 1992). The constitution also provides for government expropriation of land (and a guarantee of compensation for any expropriated land), which offers another avenue for land redistribution and one that since 2004 the government has looked upon as a way to quicken the land reform process. But the challenge remains immense and the pace of reform is as yet too slow to sate the clamour for redistribution.

The majority of black Namibians continue to live on state-owned communal land and, despite the efforts of government to improve conditions and access to basic infrastructure and services such as health and education, they still compare badly with white Namibians. Crucially, in terms of the resources, knowledge and skills that are required for national development objectives, Namibians in communal areas are fairly poor, and much intervention is justified on the basis of the provision of such resources, knowledge and skills. Those resources, knowledge and skills available to communal area inhabitants – or lack of therein – constitute important factors which determine the basis on which poor, black Namibians participate in development (and conservation) initiatives. They affect also the extent to which these Namibians can define what development is or needs to take place in the first place. Namibia's conservancy programme must be located within this broader national context of knowledge transfer.

# Chapter VI: Namibia's conservancy programme

## 1. Introduction

Namibia's conservancy programme is a nationwide initiative which permits communal land inhabitants to request the devolution from central government of limited rights to manage wildlife and benefit from tourism operations. It is the product of a rupture in thinking on *how* and *where* to go about achieving conservation objectives, *who* should go about their achievement and, crucially, the basis on which they would be inclined to do so. In the context of the conservancy programme, conservation is an activity to be pursued outside the protected area. It is to depend on the efforts of local people who, instead of being characterised as a threat, become instead protagonists in the conservation process. Any conservation activities must therefore involve local people in the important decision-making processes and offset the costs incurred by those people; they must coincide, not conflict with, local livelihood strategies.

Put differently, the conservancy programme is a nationwide attempt to set conservation and development processes in a relationship of necessary interdependence. The acceptance of this different way of thinking about conservation came about largely as a result of Namibia's hard-earned independence from South Africa in 1990. A 'policy space' opened up, into which the notion of 'community based natural resource management' fitted hand-in-glove.

This chapter starts, in section two, with a consideration of conservation policy in Namibia prior to independence. Essentially, the concept of achieving conservation outside the protected area by fostering sustainable natural resource use was part of conservation policy in South West Africa: the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1975 sought to give some resource users an incentive to conserve the wildlife resources to which they had access. But it applied only on privately-owned land and only in relation to white people. The policy context that emerged after Independence permitted the extension of the Nature Conservation Ordinance to communal land, from 1996 onwards.

This exercise leads, in section three to an analysis of the influence of the six ‘principles of sustainability’ on conservancy policy and legislation. So central is the concept of sustainability that it is, I contend, impossible to understand the emergence and continuation of the conservancy programme without some prior knowledge of it. The post-independence discussion ends with the establishment of the first communal area conservancies in 1998, and the rapid pace at which people, mostly in the Erongo, Kunene and Caprivi regions, took to the idea of establishing one in their own area.

Section four explores the ‘rolling out’ of the conservancy programme on a national scale, the mechanisms through which this process occurred and the funding framework which made it possible. From 1998 onwards, the programme expanded quickly. The rapid pace was in large part down to a concerted effort of coordination on the part of the organisations (governmental and non-governmental) that supported communal area inhabitants with conservancy formation. These activities were financed as part of the Living in a Finite Environment programme, a Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) initiative for which funds were secured from the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

The chapter concludes with a summary of the extent of change that conservation thinking had undergone post independence. Attention is drawn to the fact that the actors who had been central to pressing the community conservation agenda during the formulation were also, logically enough, leading the charge for implementation of the conservancy programme. By dint of the financial resources they commanded, NGOs became very important to the implementation of the programme, perhaps even more so than the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, which had enacted the legislation but lacked funding. The actors with sufficient cognitive authority to install new ideas in the conservation policy process were the obvious choice when it came to implementing the new policy.

## **2. A brief history of conservation policy change in Namibia**

### **Contextualising historiography**

The following account presents, in broad brush strokes, a historiography of the events leading up to the emergence of Namibia’s conservancy policy and legislation. The account leans heavily on structured and semi-structured interviews with some of the

central actors in the creation of conservancy policy and legislation who drove the process, and who have left their imprint on the development of the programme. Although I also cite written sources, at least two of these are written by one of these actors. These people continue to work in and exert influence upon the conservancy programme. They remain key actors with vested interests, as much related to emotional considerations as to ones of power or economics. Whilst it is true that all depend for their livelihood on their earnings from involvement in the programme, they have also devoted a significant part of their lives to it. I do not want to eulogise these actors and render their responses to my questions about the history of the conservancy as some 'definitive' version of events. Nor do I wish to discredit them even before the story I have weaved from their words has begun. I wish, rather, to contextualise the account, to give a reminder of the necessity of attending to the goals and interests (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996) connected to it.

During the interviews, whilst some differences emerged, there was a notable consensus on which had been the principal events and what factors had constituted the most important causes of policy change. The point on which most consensus exists about the conservancy programme is that it has been a radical and successful approach to conservation and development. Terms such as "visionary" and "pioneering" cropped up repeatedly, and in two interviews grand claims were made for the importance of the conservancy model. For instance, one interviewee stated, "I'd challenge anyone to find a development programme anywhere in the world that delivers the same conservation and economic value over the same time period as the conservancy programme has"<sup>7</sup>.

It is probable that the positive character of the account given of the emergence of the conservancy programme is motivated at least partially by considerations of the necessity and expediency of presenting in highly favourable terms a programme which is considered worthy of continued funding despite its flaws. Moreover, I had heard, previous to the interviews, the opinions that three of these four candidates held on the validity of research conducted by people who were not from Namibia. Among the common points made were:

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Chris Brown, director of the Namibia Nature Foundation, 3.12.2003, Windhoek.

- an annoyance with the perceived tendency of ‘external’ researchers to make sweeping claims on the basis of superficial acquaintance with a highly dynamic and complex set of interlinked empirical contexts
- a fear that unjust criticism based on poor understanding might affect the programme’s ability to attract funding

Given the strength of such perceptions, it would not be surprising for those interviewed to feel it necessary to project an image of conservancy success when talking to me, a complete ‘outsider’. Feeling the need to project ‘success’ is not automatically an attempt to hide a lack of it ‘on the ground’; this interpretation, I think, would be a shallow reading of the goals and interests motivating these key conservancy actors. But it seems probable nonetheless that concerns about what might be done with the information they offered me affected both the manner in which it was given and how much of it was given. In this light, the account below (especially the section on getting policy and legislation change ‘on the table’) is best read.

### **Beginnings, precedents and problems**

The events that would culminate in the creation of the conservancy programme are commonly traced back to the end of the 1970s, locating them in the Kunene region in the Northwest, at that point divided into the homelands of Damaraland and Kaokoland (Jones 2001 162-164, Long and Jones 2004b 25-31, Sullivan 2003a). At the beginning of that decade, wildlife levels were held locally to be fairly high (Vaughan et al. 2003). By the end of it, the picture had changed, largely as a result of the outbreak of the Angolan civil war and the Swapo guerrilla incursions in Northern Namibia (Jones 2001, Long and Jones 2004b, WWF 1995). High levels of illegal hunting were reportedly engaged in partly because of the easy availability of firearms during the liberation struggle, partly due the commercial value of ivory and rhino horn, and partly for reasons of subsistence, after the deaths of many cattle as a consequence of drought (WWF, 1995). Especially affected by these circumstances were big game animals – elephant, black rhino and zebra – of high commercial value (Gibson 2001). The South African Government apparently did little to remedy this situation, perhaps because the most frequent illegal hunting was allegedly conducted

by South African Defence Force Personnel in their counter-insurgency operations in Northern Namibia (Jones 2001).

By way of response to a seemingly open access situation, Garth Owen-Smith and Chris Eyre, of the government's Directorate of Nature Conservation, started speaking with traditional leaders to gauge their opinions on what might be done (Long & Jones 2004). Continued contact with the traditional authorities raised suspicions within the ministry over the political motivations of these communications, and Owen-Smith found it expedient to quit the Directorate. He established, along with Blythe Loutit and Ina Britz, the Namibian Wildlife Trust in 1982. The Namibian Wildlife Trust suggested to the headmen that they appoint their own "community game guards", to monitor the situation rather than to apprehend illegal hunters (Jones 2001). The game guards were perceived by the NWT, amongst others, to be instrumental in reducing illegal hunting, and enjoyed high levels of local support. For this reason, it is often held by conservancy commentators that long before there was any economic incentive on offer, people in the Kunene region wanted to conserve wildlife for posterity (Jones 1999a, 2001, Long and Jones 2004b).

Later in the 1980s, Owen-Smith started to work with anthropologist Margaret Jacobsohn, who was studying the adverse effects that the beginnings of tourism were having on the Himba living in Purros, Northern Kunene. Begging from safari tourists was becoming a livelihood activity for Purros inhabitants. Competition for tourist revenue increased, social tensions arose and tourists were not made happy by the begging (Jones 2001). After discussing the matter with residents at Purros, an agreement was made with two safari operators who regularly took tourists through Purros that they would levy US\$5 per tourist, and give this money to the residents. The consequences are said to have set influential precedents on two levels. First, according to Jones, the begging was reduced; second, local people made a link between the much-welcomed cash income and the wildlife the tourists came to see, becoming less likely to kill potentially dangerous animals like elephant and lion (ibid). By 1991 the community game guard scheme was well-established. Jacobsohn and Owen Smith started another game guard scheme in the north-eastern region of Caprivi, and went on to set up another NGO, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC). The Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism, (predecessor to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism) asked Jacobsohn and Owen-Smith for assistance in drafting new policy on wildlife conservation. Integrated

Rural Development and Nature Conservation went on in the 1990s to become the biggest of all of the NGOs in the support network for emerging and established conservancies known by its acronym, NACSO (The Namibian Association of CBNRM – community based natural resource management – Support Organisations).

### **Conservation policy prior to Independence**

As noted in chapter five, when under South African rule, white Namibia was administered from Windhoek through the South West African Administration (SWAA). Black Namibia was, in contrast, administered from largely from Pretoria, through the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (DBAD). According to Long and Jones, a consequence of this divide was that conservation policy, implemented by the SWAA, concentrated on protected areas, game reserves and wildlife management on privately-owned, commercial farms (2004:28). It was not until 1975 that conservation legislation covering the homelands came under the remit of the South West African Administration. The legislation that came out of the administrative divisions reflected this skewed focus, which is more than evident in the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1975 (GRN 1975a, GRN 1975b, GRN 1975c).

Under the Ordinance, much greater rights to manage wildlife – including hunting and selling it – and also to keep any financial proceeds from management arrangements they set up, were given to private land owners. The objective was to increase numbers of wildlife outside of protected areas through stacking the incentives in favour of keeping, not hunting to extinction, wildlife living on commercial farm land. Up until that point, big game had provided unwelcome competition for grazing resources that farmers wanted to reserve for their livestock. By allowing farmers to keep the gains from trophy hunting and other tourism activities, the Nature Conservation Ordinance helped wildlife to become a resource that could, in financial terms, compete with – and even outperform – livestock. It encouraged private land owners to pool land and other resources to establish conservancies, areas large enough for the purposes of wildlife management. The legislation met with spectacular success: between 1972 and 1992, according to the Directorate of Environmental Affairs, combined wildlife numbers on private farmland rose by 80% (Barnes and Jager 1996). It also generated significant wealth for the land owners.



The Ordinance proved central to the future of Namibian conservation outside protected areas in the 1970s. It had resonance for the future because it was very much in tune with a wider sustainability agenda and consonant with a number of the six ‘principles of sustainability’. It accepted controlled consumptive use of wildlife as a form of conservation, which accords with the second principle (i.e. careful use may prove a more effective conservation method than blanket prohibition). Predicated on the notion that conservation on private farm land could be achieved if farmers had financial reasons to do so, it corresponded to principle five, which recognises the role of financial rewards in providing sufficient incentive for those who bear the costs of conservation to continue to live with them.

However, The Nature Conservation Ordinance was also a product of its time, because it was applied only on private land, and therefore comprised another example of rights and privileges being accorded to white but not black South West Africans. The decision not to enact the same legislation in the homelands perhaps reflected the lack of will on the part of the Directorate of Nature Conservation to work with the chiefs and headmen in the homelands, who were responsible for wildlife in their area and enforcers of customs governing its use (cf. Hinz 2003). It indicates the extent to which conservation in South West Africa was done both *by* whites and *for* whites within spheres of exclusively white political and economic dominance.

In giving use rights over wildlife to private land-owning farmers, but not to black farmers living on homelands, the Nature Conservation Ordinance echoed legislation in other parts of Southern Africa. Chief amongst them was the Parks & Wildlife Act, passed in Rhodesia in 1975. Taken together, they indicate a consensus on the effectiveness of introducing structures from which financial rewards could be gained from the conservation of wildlife on privately-owned land. When Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980, the newly-elected Zimbabwean African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) developed considerable interest in extending the remit of the Parks & Wildlife Act to cover the former homelands in which lived the vast majority of Zimbabwe’s peoples. The new government did not object to the aims or objectives of the Bill *per se*, only to the discriminatory basis on which it was applied.

An administration intent on representing and furthering the interests of the black majority proved amenable to suggestions that what had been done for white farmers could and should also be done for black farmers. This reasoning would give rise, in the mid-to late 1980s, to the Communal Areas Management Programme for

Indigenous Resources, better known by its refreshingly snappy acronym, Campfire<sup>8</sup>. All people who lived with the costs of Zimbabwe's wildlife were to be given sufficient (financial) incentive in order to be willing to continue living with such costs.

It was this extension of the logic underpinning legislation designed with privately-owned land in mind that caught the eye of South West African conservationists such as Garth Owen-Smith and Chris Eyre. But the South African government was also aware of the Zimbabwean experiment. The black empowerment objectives so explicitly part of Campfire's *raison d'être* were not to be encouraged in the South West African setting. Involving a new, low-status constituency in a decision-making process traditionally the preserve of white South African males was, under the circumstances, a subversive and provocative course of action. It implied devolution, albeit limited, of responsibility and power down to a level that had largely been disenfranchised from political processes connected to the state. Pre-Independence attempts made from within government to draw attention to Campfire were, then, "shot down by Pretoria"<sup>9</sup>. For the work that they had done together Chris Eyre, Garth Owen-Smith and Margaret Jacobsohn apparently came to be regarded as "loony lefties", even as "dangerous terrorists"<sup>10</sup>. As a result there were, allegedly, even attempts on the part of the South African administration to remove Owen-Smith from South West Africa<sup>11</sup>.

It was apparently not, though, solely the potential for what were ostensibly conservation-related activities to provide a front for black political resistance which prompted a prickly response from Pretoria (and Windhoek). All candidates interviewed, as well as various written sources (i.e. Long & Jones 2004, Jones 2001), concurred that white conservation authorities did not consider black homeland inhabitants capable of managing wildlife or other common-pool resources on a sustainable basis. The community game guard system was premised on the opposite assumption that homeland inhabitants were not only capable of managing wildlife,

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<sup>8</sup> Marshall Murphree, one of Zimbabwe's best-known social scientists, an important actor in the formulation of Campfire policy and legislation in the 1980s and much involved in monitoring evaluating the programme in the 1990s and into the 2000s, has written several accounts of the beginnings of the Campfire programme (i.e. 1997, 2001). For anyone interested in more than the brief overview I give here, these are a good place to start.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Chris Brown, Director of NNF (Namibia Nature Foundation), Windhoek, 3.12.2003

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Margaret Jacobsohn, co-director of IRDNC, Windhoek, 22.1.2004.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

but desirous of doing so under favourable circumstances. Far from being a threat against which wildlife should receive as much protection as possible, poor black farmers, headmen and chiefs were being called upon to guarantee the continuing existence of wildlife outwith the protected area. In twenty-first century Namibian conservation, such thinking is often held to be self-evident. However, South West African conservation has to be read against the background of white minority rule. The ethos to ‘save’ wilderness from humans had yet to suffer the crisis of legitimacy that would develop as a result of the growing influence of the ‘community conservation’ counter narrative. Therefore, vesting even limited agency in local people, believing them competent to manage wildlife was a proposal that probably stuck in the craw of those administration officials who continued to see conservation as the domain of specialists.

Of course, in other countries such as Kenya or Tanzania – and indeed within South West Africa in relation to conservation policy for protected areas – the ‘fortress’ narrative was still predominant. Nevertheless, challenges to its hegemony would be mounted on the back of the passing of laws such as the Ordinance or Zimbabwe’s Parks and Wildlife Act, and the underlying changes in perception of who could ‘do’ conservation, where and how, of which such legislation was the product.

### **3. Independence and ‘policy spaces’**

#### **Getting policy change on the table in post-Independence Namibia**

Before there could be a conservancy programme, there had to be fundamental change in the government’s conservation agencies. In large measure, the political support that has been given to the conservancy concept, and the unlikely consensus that was generated over a new and, at that point, relatively untried approach to conservation, are the result of Namibia’s independence in 1990. The ‘changing of the guard’ quickly opened up a ‘policy space’ in which previously marginalised suggestions and ideas could be heard and discussed; especially if they appeared to chime with the broader agenda of change that the recently-elected SWAPO government had in mind. The new national policy context broadly espoused, amongst a plethora of affirmations, the need to:

- restore agency and freedom to all the peoples oppressed, impoverished and politically marginalised under the South African rule
- put the instruments of government at the disposition of all Namibia's citizens, not just the white minority
- redress the balance of historical injustice and inequity by giving all Namibians equal rights and equal access to opportunities

From these aims, the integrated conservation and development approach and its proponents gained credibility and influence over a remarkably rapid period. It focused on wildlife management as a livelihood activity that could compete with others. It envisioned a process of empowerment through granting rights to those previously denied them. Many of the aspects that formerly had made it appear suspicious and subversive appealed to a new, predominantly black political order; its credibility may even have been reinforced by the rogue status accorded to it by the previous regime. Against this background of reaction and change, “you could come in with technical approaches which broadly fitted a wider government agenda without too much direct political interference” (Jones, pers. com.). The ideas that would be brought together to formulate the policy and legislation behind the conservancy programme found patrons higher up in the political hierarchy, a factor which would become highly important in pressing the case for moving from the drawing board into the realm of implementation.

It is important to nuance the extent to which this policy space led all resistance to Campfire-style conservation to crumble. As in so many other aspects of the country's governance, Independence undermined, without necessarily replacing, ‘the rules of the game’ and opened up the process of establishing a new set. The reconstituted ambit of the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation & Tourism (soon to be re-branded the Ministry of Environment and Tourism) was characterised chiefly by a dynamic of continuity and change. The political masters had been replaced, but many bureaucrats remained in their positions, perhaps more than anything for reasons of pragmatic expediency. They were, after all, qualified “conservation professionals”, there was not yet a post-South West Africa generation with a different work ethic to take their

places<sup>12</sup>, and the Government of Namibia had adopted a policy of national reconciliation between ethnic groups. A purge of government employees on a racial basis would be difficult to justify and could conceivably have backfired. As a consequence there remained a considerable professional cadre who objected to a redefinition of their job description.

Therefore, the key proponents of community-based conservation approaches, mostly concentrated in the Directorate of Environmental Affairs, constituted a minority view within their Ministry (of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism) even after the changes to the political landscape ushered in by Independence. Being so heavily outnumbered, the question within the Directorate became one of how to overcome resistance<sup>13</sup>. The answer appears to have come not through attempting to win over the sceptics, but rather to circumvent them. Ideas were taken straight to the new Minister, Nico Bessinger, who had previously been an architect, and therefore unconnected to the conservation movements of the time<sup>14</sup>. The principal advocates of what would become the conservancy programme found a powerful sponsor in Bessinger who, sympathetic to their aims, successfully presented their case favourably to the cabinet and pushed down reform in quarters that would not have adopted it of their own volition.

There was another factor which mitigated in favour of the would-be reformers. The employees in the Ministry that had been present under the apartheid regime were in a much less secure position after Independence<sup>15</sup>. It was not clear what treatment they would receive from the new government, especially if they were to act in a way which could be construed as racist. With the minister behind the “community based natural resource management” orientation of the Directorate of Environmental Affairs, it was harder to make overt objections, and inadvisable to express in public the view that poor, black communal land farmers were not capable of managing wildlife. Nevertheless, other forms of resistance did appear to emerge, for example the bogging down of requests for hunting quotas and permit applications made by

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Chris Brown, Director of NNF (Namibia Nature Foundation), Windhoek, 3.12.2003

<sup>13</sup> In our first interview of 9.12.2003, Brian Jones wondered whether “resistance” was too strong a term to describe the reaction of some employees of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. However, we did not settle on a more appropriate word. As it had not been challenged by Chris Brown in our interview on 3.12.2003, and with this objection duly noted, I let it stand.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

conservancies. Some field staff, geographically distanced from the debates occurring in Windhoek, and a little more autonomous in their actions, would apparently later refuse to acknowledge inhabitants' rights to manage wildlife in areas where a conservancy had been established, interpreting legislation inconsistently and on some occasions obstructively.

In 1992, a series of socio-ecological surveys were conducted in different parts of the country, to establish the views and needs of communal area inhabitants with respect to wildlife conservation (Brown 1993). The results of the survey were interpreted as providing a popular mandate for the idea of bringing local people much more centrally into decision-making processes concerning natural resource management. The demands that were being made at the local level "coincided with approaches that technicians favoured", resulting in an "overlap of agendas and interests"<sup>16</sup>. At the same time, some pilot projects were initiated which, along with work being done by IRDNC (Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation), were interpreted within the Ministry as suitable precedents to inform policy and legislation<sup>17</sup>.

### **Post-independence policy and legislation: tracing the influence of the six principles of sustainability**

The formulation of the policy in terms of which conservancy legislation would be framed indicated that the proponents of community conservation had won the ideological battle. The Ministry's official perceptions of conservation had changed significantly. No longer was it an activity to be confined to protected areas, game reserves and private land; there was a need to address conservation within the ambit of the communal lands ('communal' replacing 'home' shortly after independence). Nor was it solely down to white (male) conservationists to 'save' Namibia's wildlife; the people who lived with it had to participate as much more central actors in wildlife management in communal areas. They had come to be seen as perfectly capable of assuming this role. But if they were to be persuaded to do so, then the grievances they had with regard to the costs of living with wildlife had of necessity to be addressed. A key factor in making conservation more palatable, then, was to ensure that it was

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Brian Jones, (then) Senior CBNRM Technical Advisor to USAID in Namibia, 3.12.2003, Windhoek

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

defined sufficiently flexibly to allow controlled wildlife consumption, and also to minimise where possible the difficulties of accommodating big game such as elephant or rhino, which could trample crops, destroy property or present a threat even to life and limb. In other words, conservation and development processes had to be reconciled if they were to achieve their objectives over the long term. This reconciliation, then, is the link to sustainability, which is at the heart of thinking on communal area conservancies.

The way to achieve these aims was by tackling an issue of historical injustice: giving white farmers rights to manage and benefit from the wildlife on the land they owned, whilst denying these same rights to black farmers, could not be perpetuated in the newly-independent Namibia. The majority of people must also be allowed to form conservancies if they so desired. Therefore, the influence on policy formulation of the six ‘principles of sustainability’ that I set out in the previous chapter is abundantly clear, and is illustrated below in box 6.1. This exercise is done with reference to the core policy document which captured the core vision for the extension of conservancy formation to communal areas.

Once all these aims had been established, policy makers then faced the challenge of implementation. If communal land inhabitants were to be the recipients of such rights, through what mechanisms or institutions was wildlife to be managed? In the search for answers to these questions, and for models that might serve government and NGO staff turned both to other community conservation initiatives occurring in Southern Africa and to the literature on theories of common-pool resource management. Campfire, as previously noted, was the biggest inspiration; though perhaps as much because of its perceived flaws as its strengths. Of course, in many ways Campfire had ‘broken the mould’. However, some, perhaps even the majority, of Campfire’s practitioners were concerned by the programme’s institutional arrangements for wildlife management. Because black farmers in the (newly-renamed) communal areas did not have individual titles, the (legally recognised) ‘appropriate authority’ to manage wildlife was delegated not to specific individuals or groups, but rather to Rural District Councils within communal areas.

This arrangement was held to have a number of disadvantages, from the point of view of practitioners who argued that sustainable wildlife management would correlate positively with the full devolution to the local level of rights to manage wildlife. First, it meant that Rural District Councils could take up to half of the

revenues generated from the activities, such as controlled trophy hunting. These were deemed central to providing the incentives necessary for resource users to place a more positive value on the presence of wildlife their area and, thereby, to stop seeing it as incompatible with other locally important land uses such as livestock grazing. Second, it introduced an element of dependency upon the probity of rural district councils, who in the Zimbabwean context could not always be relied upon to deliver the full share of revenues owing to the inhabitants of a Campfire area (cf. Duffy 2000b, Murombedzi 1992, 1997, 2001). Therefore, giving rural district councils such a central role had, some argued, contributed to a process not of decentralisation, but rather of ‘recentralisation’ of the rights to manage wildlife (Murombedzi, 1992). Namibian government and NGO staff liaising with Campfire practitioners saw this as a lesson from which they could learn, and determined that policy and legislation should allow rights over wildlife management to be devolved directly to Namibia’s communal land inhabitants<sup>18</sup>.

Common-pool resource management theory plugged implementation gaps in the model offered by Campfire; although it should be noted that this programme had also drawn heavily on this literature in its inception (see Murphree 1997 for more detail). Interviews make clear the extent to which policy makers such Brian Jones and Chris Brown were aware of this body of literature. For instance, Brian Jones made explicit reference to authors such as Elinor Ostrom – and in particular her best-known work, *Governing the Commons* (1990), as well as Bromley and Cernea (1989). He posited a correlation between the conservancy programme and Ostrom’s 8 principles for enduringly sustainable common-pool resource management (Jones 1999b); though in later work he sought to qualify this appraisal somewhat, with a more nuanced account of the fit between the theory of common-pool resource management and the conservancy programme (Jones 2003).

Policy makers endeavoured to fit combined conservation and development objectives in communal areas within the overarching framework of sustainable common-pool resource management not by the state or privatisation-led initiatives, but rather by local actors. The message drawn from this literature in the early 1990s, though, by policy makers and those they consulted was that if communal area

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<sup>18</sup> This point was made in interviews with Chris Brown, Margaret Jacobsohn and Brian Jones, but see also Jones (2001).



residents were to be successful in the management of common-pool resources, the institutions they employed would have to:

- specify geographic boundaries in which resource use would take place
- identify set of eligible resource users
- devise generally-agreed rules on resource use
- make arrangements for monitoring and ensuring compliance with those rules
- enjoy the legitimacy in the eyes of resources users, not just from the state

(Long & Jones 2004:31)

### **The 1996 amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance**

All of the above stipulations would in one way or another be reflected in the 1996 amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance that would permit the establishment of conservancies on communal land. The core objective of the new legislation was to:

amend the Nature Conservation Ordinance, 1975, so as to provide for an *economically based system of sustainable management and utilisation of game* in communal areas (GRN 1996a, emphasis added)

The centrality, then, of the concept of sustainability to the legislation could hardly have been more explicit.

The amendment made provision for communal area residents to apply to the Minister of Environment and Tourism (the new name for the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism) to grant permission to establish a conservancy. An ‘application for declaration of a conservancy’ form (GRN 1996b) was to be sent to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, accompanied by:

- a list of the names of the conservancy committee members
- the conservancy’s constitution
- the boundaries of the geographic area to be covered by the conservancy
- any other documents the Minister might require (GRN 1996a:4)

**Box 6.1 – The influence of the six ‘principles of sustainability’ on the MET’s Wildlife Management, Utilisation and Tourism in Communal Areas Policy of 1995**

There are various Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) policy documents which relate to the conservancy programme and in which the overarching influence of the concept of sustainability can be discerned clearly. Among these are the ‘White Paper on Tourism’ (MET 1994) and ‘Promotion of Community-Based Tourism’ (MET 1995a). The policy document which most explicitly deals with the conservancy programme, though, is the Wildlife Management, Utilisation and Tourism in Communal Areas Policy (MET 1995b). By way of recapping, below are listed the six ‘principles of sustainability’, extrapolated in the previous chapter, which underpin thinking and policy in both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, and form the basis of comparison between the two initiatives. Following this, the ways in which they have influenced the central objectives of Wildlife Management, Utilisation and Tourism in Communal Areas Policy are explored.

1. It is more important to address questions of how to ensure the continued existence of biodiversity outwith protected areas (i.e. Adams and Hulme 2001, Cumming 2004).
2. Careful use of common-pool resources is more likely to ensure their continued existence for future generations than is a blanket prohibition on any kind of use (Adams and McShane 1992, Murphree 1997, Pimbert and Pretty 1995).
3. It is not a foregone conclusion that people who use common-pool resources will destroy them whenever no state intervention occurs or individual property rights regime is established; there is much evidence to the contrary (Berkes 1998, Feeny et al. 1990, Ostrom 1990).
4. Conservation often fails when people who have to live with the costs of it have insufficient incentive to do so. Indeed, conservation efforts will fail wherever they beg, rather than answer, the question of sufficient incentive (Jones 2000, Ostrom 1990).
5. Realising the economic value of a common-pool resource and ensuring that resource users benefit economically from the exercise is a crucial part of answering the question of sufficient incentive (Bond 2001, Hulme and Murphree 2001a, Murphree 1997). That said, other, less tangible benefits are also vital to this exercise, and may be overlooked if the importance of economic incentives in themselves is overstated (Emerton 2001)
6. Conservation efforts will also fail if the resource users most in a position to determine how it is used are not involved in the decision-making processes that attempt to conserve said resource. Involvement in such decision-making processes is likely to make little difference unless users have defined, recognised usage rights (Ostrom 1990, Ostrom 1992, Pimbert and Pretty 1995).

**Box 6.1 (cont)**

**The Ministry of Environment and Tourism's Wildlife Management, Utilisation and Tourism in Communal Areas Policy (1995b)**

<b>Policy objective</b>	<b>Correspondence with six 'principles sustainability'</b>
<p><b>A.</b> To establish ... an economically-based system for the management and utilisation of wildlife and other renewable living resources on communal land so that rural communities can:</p> <p>a) participate on a partnership basis with this (MET) and other Ministries in the management of, and benefits from, natural resources;</p> <p>b) benefit from rural development based on wildlife, tourism and other NRM; and</p> <p>c) improve the conservation of natural resources by wise and sustainable resource management and the protection of biodiversity.</p>	<p><b>A.</b> The reference to an 'economically-based system' for wildlife management demonstrates the influence of principles 4 and 5, the perceived need for wildlife to 'pay its way' in order to be considered worthy of conservation.</p> <p>a) setting rural communities on a 'partnership basis' chimes with principles 3 and 6: it implies they are sufficiently competent to enter into partnership and that their involvement is crucial to the success of any management efforts</p> <p>c) again, this is an affirmation of principle 5, assuming that economic incentives offer a way to achieve conservation and resource management objectives</p>
<p><b>B.</b> To redress the past discriminatory policies and practices which gave substantial rights over wildlife to commercial farmers, but which ignored communal farmers.</p>	<p><b>B.</b> The need to give communal farmers rights is prefigured by a re-evaluation of their capacity to manage wildlife sustainably, in line with principle 3.</p>
<p><b>C.</b> To amend the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1975 so that the same principles that govern rights to wildlife utilisation on commercial land are extended to communal land.</p>	<p><b>C.</b> This objective essentially advocates an extension of the domain in which conservation activities are undertaken, thereby echoing principle 1.</p>
<p><b>D.</b> To allow rural communities on state land to undertake tourism ventures, and to enter into cooperative agreements with commercial tourism organisations to develop tourism activities on state land.</p>	<p><b>D.</b> This objective sees non- or low-consumptive uses of wildlife such as tourism and controlled trophy hunting as the sort of careful use of wildlife envisioned in principle 2 which would provide the incentives for conservation envisaged in principles four and five.</p>

Any application had to convince the Minister that:

- the relevant committee was *representative* of the community residing in the area to which the application related
- the constitution of such committees provided for the sustainable management and utilisation of game in such area
- such committee had the ability to manage funds and an appropriate method for the equitable distribution, to members of the community, of benefits derived from the consumptive and non-consumptive use of game in such area
- the geographic area to which the application related had been sufficiently identified, taking into account also the views of the Regional Council of that area
- the area concerned was not subject to any lease or was not a proclaimed game park or nature reserve (Ibid, emphasis added.)

This legislation was an exercise in devolving management rights – albeit limited ones – down to the people who shared land, water and other resources with wildlife and bore the costs entailed. It consciously avoided transferring these rights to Namibia’s regional councils, for fear that it would recreate the same problems of benefits capture that Campfire-related legislation had permitted, whereby the revenue generated from wildlife-related tourism activities remained at the discretion of district councils whose interests could not unproblematically be conflated with those of the people they purported to represent. But rather than abandoning the idea of representatives – which in effect was the role allocated to Rural District Councils – the 1996 amendment enshrined it, setting up the conservancy committees as the conduit for representation.

However, the logic behind devolution was that ownership of wildlife or other common-pool resources should be at the local level in order to be enduringly sustainable, and it was against this measure that the gains and constraints produced by the legislation would ultimately come to be judged. The amendment of 1996 was not just, of course, an attempt to steer clear of what Campfire had ‘got wrong’; the thinking that underscored Campfire policy, if not always the practice. It continued to be in many ways a source of inspiration, and indeed the benchmark to aim for in the

midst of the negotiations and compromises that would characterise the process of turning policy into legislation.

As in Zimbabwe, Namibia's communal area inhabitants did not legally own wildlife or, more importantly, the land on which the wildlife was found; these remained government property. The 1996 amendment to Namibia's Nature Conservation Ordinance did not attempt to change this; nor could it have done, enacted as it was prior to wider legislation, the Communal Lands Act (GRN 2002), which would reform the country's communal land tenure arrangements. Moreover, the idea of full devolution of ownership and management rights over wildlife to communal area inhabitants did not command universal support within the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (Jones and Murphree 2001, Long and Jones 2004b, Brown pers. com., Jones pers. com.). The amendment did go further towards this aim than its counterpart Zimbabwean legislation, with the consequence that the conservancy committee, not the regional council, would be invested with legal rights to manage wildlife. Some rights, though, remained with central government. For instance, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism would still be responsible for issuing permits for trophy hunting operations, and would still be responsible for the issuing of the Permission to Occupy (PTO) Licences (changed into 'leaseholds' with the Communal Lands Act) which were needed by any tourism operator seeking to secure a concession within communal areas.

That not all agreed on the need for full devolution is in part an indication of the differences of opinion over what the role of the government within the conservancy programme should be, an issue which has continued to be the subject of much debate. Many of the background events that happened during my fieldwork can be interpreted in the light of ongoing negotiations and renegotiations of the role of government within the programme, vis-a-vis the role of non-governmental support actors. Although these partly related to the allocation of funds for the programme, they can also be traced back to the processes through which conservancy policy and legislation were first generated.

Compromise and caveats regarding the role of government notwithstanding, the legislation can in many ways be said to be a 'victory' for the actors, especially within the Directorate of Environment Affairs, who advocated 'community conservation'. In partially achieving their aim of devolving rights to manage wildlife down to the level

of communal area inhabitants, they committed to making local resource users central to a set of resource use decisions which could benefit them.

## **4. Implementation of the conservancy programme**

### **A quick start**

Once the 1996 amendment was passed, conservancy formation was quickly initiated and in high profile fashion. The first conservancies – Torra, Nyae Nyae, ≠Khoadi //Hôas, and Salambala – were established in 1998, with the (then) Namibian President himself, Sam Nujoma, on hand to issue the registration certificates at a glitzy opening ceremony held in Okapuka Lodge, near Windhoek<sup>19</sup>. Nujoma was on this occasion presented by WWF US – the programme’s principal funder, in tandem with USAid – with the Gift To The Earth Award, part of the WWF's Living Planet Campaign, which declared the conservancy programme to be ‘globally important’ and acclaimed it in particular for its people-centred approach to conservation<sup>20</sup>. By the time of this official launching of the programme, there were sixteen areas in various stages of applying for conservancy status<sup>21</sup>. Between then and October 2005, these and another twenty six conservancies would be ‘gazetted’, that is, their status as legal entities was established through publishing the date of their creation in the Government Gazette. A further thirteen areas would by this point have started the process of applying for conservancy status. Map 6.1 (below), charts the whereabouts and status of ‘gazetted’ conservancies and areas hoping to acquire conservancy status as of October 2005. What is immediately apparent from the map is that the majority of conservancies are found either in the Kunene region, in the North West, or in the Caprivi region, in the North East. This mirrors partly the areas of greatest wildlife prevalence within Namibia, but also the fact that the forerunners to the conservancy programme, the community game guard schemes were first piloted in the Kunene region and subsequently in Caprivi.

Conservancies do not establish themselves. In order for this rapid growth to be possible, the people wishing to form conservancies in their area needed to be given

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<sup>19</sup> The Namibian newspaper, 28.9.1998, <http://www.namibian.com.na/Netstories/Environ8-98/topaward.html>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

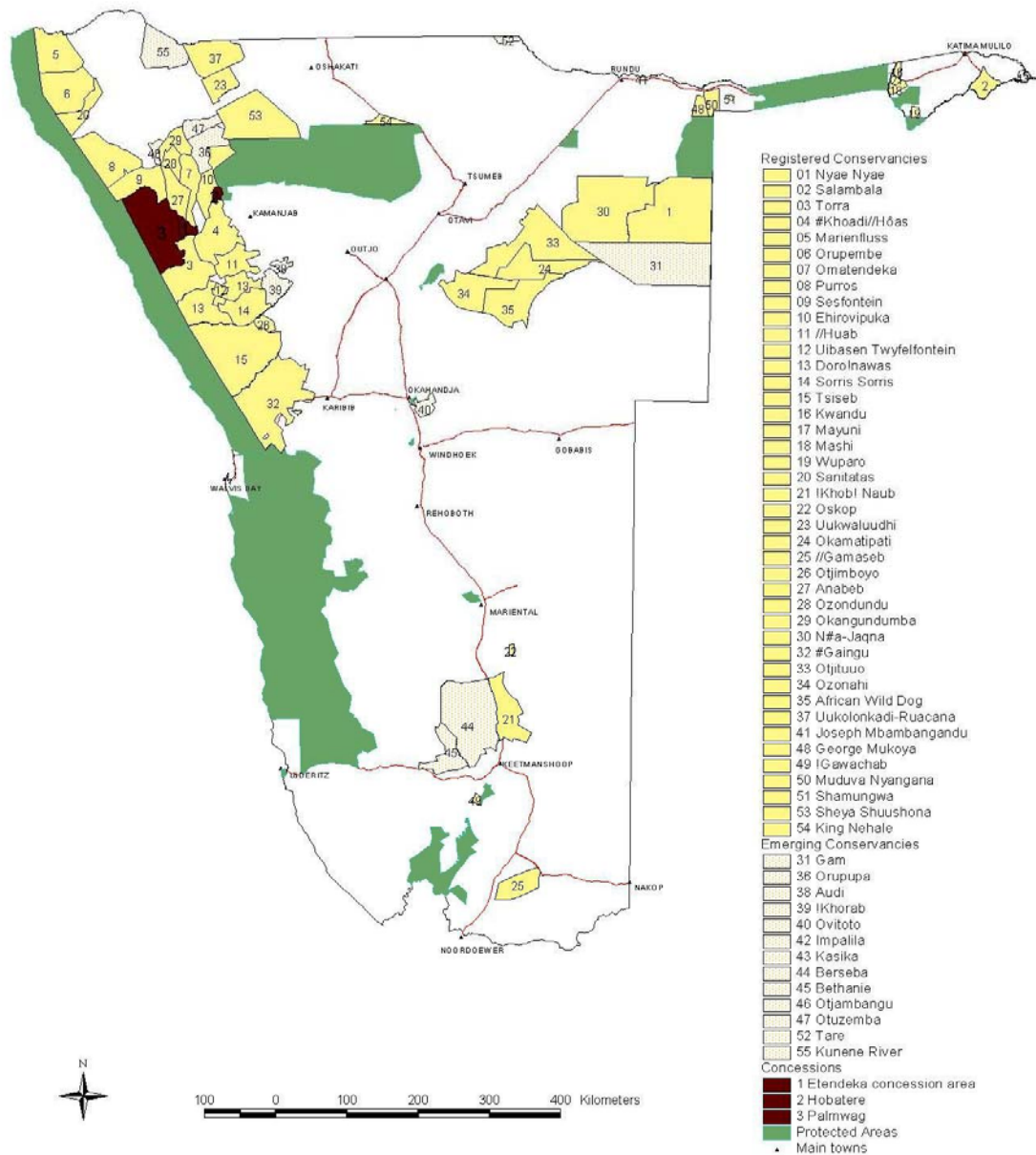
significant and enduring assistance from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and a raft of non-governmental organisations. Moreover, a stable source of funding for the provision of such assistance needed to be secured. The Worldwide Fund for Nature's Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) programme was designed with these needs in mind. Starting in 1994 and funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAid), Living in a Finite Environment financed the precursors to the conservancy programme and, following its launch, those organisations involved in its implementation. With funding in place, it was necessary to make the most of the available knowledge and skills that would be of use first of all in the process of formulating conservancy policy and legislation. For this reason, a 'collaborative group' was formed in 1994, with a view to coordinating the activities of those stakeholders who shared the idea of linking conservation and development through sustainable natural resource management (Long and Jones 2004b). This was replaced by the LIFE steering committee, which performed the same coordinating functions. The LIFE steering committee was itself shortly to undergo transformation into another body, that which continues to be responsible for the overall coordination of assistance to communal area inhabitants trying to establish a conservancy or run an established one. This is known as NACSO, the Namibian Association of CBNRM (community-based natural resource management) Support Organisations<sup>22</sup>. Although the Living in a Finite Environment programme funding has been extended, once until 2004 and again until 2010 more recently, establishing NACSO was borne partly of the perceived need to have a coordinating body that would have, as it were, a life after LIFE (Long 2004). It was also a consequence of debate and dissatisfaction regarding the existing roles and distribution of responsibilities within the steering committee, as well as of a perceived need to 'Namibianise' – i.e. bring more black Namibian actors into – the decision-making processes which determined *what* needed to be coordinated and *how* to go about implementation (ibid)<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Due to its length when fully unfurled, 'NACSO' is the only acronym in the thesis which is *not* subjected to the rule of being used either not at all, or as little as possible (and if used, then only within one page of an instance of use of the broader title it abbreviates).

<sup>23</sup> Also interview with Alfons Mosimane, Head of Life Sciences, Multi Disciplinary Research Consultancy Centre, University of Namibia, 24.3.04

**Map 6.1, established & ‘emerging’ communal area conservancies in Namibia as of October 2005**



(Source: MET)

It acquired a constitution and a fixed structure in 2001, which established its core functions as:

- the coordination and supporting of both conservancies and implementing organisations
- lobbying for policy and legislation change wherever the need for it is identified



- monitoring and evaluating the conservancy formation process nationwide (ibid.)

One might add to this list the disbursement of funds to the conservancies. Each year, conservancies can submit a budget proposal, with a view to securing funds to cover running costs.

The founding members of NACSO include:

1. Integrated Rural Development & Nature Conservation
2. Legal Assistance Centre
3. Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association
4. Namibia Development Trust
5. Namibia Nature Foundation
6. Nyae Nyae Development Foundation
7. Rössing Foundation
8. Rural Institute for Social development & Empowerment
9. Multi-Disciplinary Research & Consultancy Centre/University of Namibia
10. Directorates of Environmental Affairs, within the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET)
11. Directorate of Tourism, (MET)
12. Directorate of Forestry (MET)
13. Directorate of Parks & Wildlife Management, (MET) (ibid).

Owing to the demands placed on funds and capacity, NACSO determines the amount of assistance to be given to a conservancy according to the revenue-generating potential and conservation value of its natural resources, with special reference to wildlife resources. The conservancy is then classified in terms of one of three categories:

1. Fast-track conservancies: estimated to be able to pay for their own running costs within five years or less
2. Medium-track conservancies: estimated to be able to pay for their own running costs in five or more years

3. Slow-track conservancies: might never generate sufficient revenue to cover costs, but deserve support on account of possessing biodiversity of high conservation value (Long 2004:42)

In all three scenarios, conservancies would be assigned a principal support organisation. That is, one support organisation in particular (almost always one of the NGOs) would assume responsibility for assistance with guiding local people first through the process of conservancy formation and then with the task of becoming self-sustaining. Further assistance from other NGOs with expertise in specific fields, such as establishing tourism ventures within conservancy boundaries or training in wildlife management, would then be enlisted through the principal support organisation. In the case of Tsiseb conservancy, to which the following chapter is devoted, the principal support organisation is the Rural Institute for Social Development & Empowerment (RISE). Other organisations, such as the Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association are often in and around the conservancy, on account of it playing host to three tourism ventures which depend to varying degrees on Tsiseb's wildlife and other natural resources.

It is worth noting the withdrawal of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism from the membership of NACSO, though its staff continued to attend NACSO meetings and to coordinate activities with NACSO partners during the fieldwork. The official reason given for withdrawing are bureaucratic concerns raised about the extent to which the Government, "can legitimately be subsumed as a part of an independent organisation that spearheads a national programme to support community-based natural resource management" (Ibid:42). Privately numerous actors speculated (or asserted) that the Ministry of Environment and Tourism was concerned at the amount of power that NACSO conferred upon non-governmental organisations in its decision-making processes, and also at the prospect of its own suggestions or preferences being out-voted by other members. These comments are better understood in light of the following two observations. First, the conservancy programme was originally a government initiative from which key early proponents of the programme left to work in the NGO or consultancy sectors. Second, the lion's share of the Living in a Finite Environment funding was channelled to non-governmental organisations, giving them much more scope to implement conservancy policy than the government.

## 5. Conclusion

The increasing credibility invested, at the global level, in the concept of sustainability led to changes in thinking on conservation and development in Namibia from the 1970s onwards. The notions of using natural resources carefully as a way of conserving, of seeing all manner of people as capable of conserving biodiversity, of tackling the question of sufficient incentive for conservation outside the protected areas are all found, as has been shown in chapters three and four, in global debates about sustainability. They underscore policy and legislation for the conservancy programme, from the mid 1970s onwards on private land and the mid 1990s in Namibia's communal areas. Communal land inhabitants, from being viewed as incapable and excluded from conservation efforts therein, are now seen as actors of vital importance; without their participation in the decisions most central to the management of wildlife, conservancies are, it is commonly accepted, unlikely to achieve their objectives.

From the late 1990s, the conservancy programme expanded considerably as a result of its popularity in the communal lands. By 2004, communal area conservancies covered a combined total of 78,708km<sup>2</sup>, land on which up to 100,000 people were thought to live (NNF 2004). As a consequence of such rapid growth, it has proved necessary to coordinate and offer considerable support to would-be conservancy residents. It is precisely this need for support that most clearly demonstrates the character of the conservancy programme as an exercise in knowledge transfer. As the following chapter explores in relation to the specific example of Tsiseb conservancy, it is no mean feat to start and then run a conservancy. In terms of forming conservancy institutions, devising zones within a conservancy for different land uses, training community game guards, negotiating contracts with tourism operators or setting off-take quota for trophy hunting, the support organisations that have much more relevant knowledge than do conservancy residents. Were this not the case – if the relevant knowledge and skills were already available in the areas where efforts were being made to start conservancies – then there would presumably be no need to such support activities. However, the support is legitimised by the fact that the case for knowledge transfer – in the form of capacity

building to help people run conservancies sustainably – has already been made. It is rendered necessary by the requirements of conservancy policy and legislation, and especially by the stipulation that resource use is to be set on a sustainable basis.

It is interesting at this point to reflect on a certain continuity of involvement of a set of actors in the conservancy programme. As noted, some of the principal actors in the conservation experiments of the 1980s, such as the game guard scheme, were important and influential actors in the process of reconfiguring the conservation agenda. They were so successful at re-defining conservation in terms of sustainability criteria that these are now enshrined in Namibian legislation. Commanding such influence over this process established the cognitive authority of the proponents of ‘community conservation’. Securing funding for the implementation of the conservancy programme had the effect of consolidating this authority. It helped them set the agenda for implementation, especially in view of the disparity between the funds available to non-governmental organisations and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism for conservancy-related activities. With this financial clout came the suspicion, on the part of some government (and research) actors, that non-governmental support organisations had too much control (cf. Long and Jones 2004b, Sullivan 2003a, Sullivan 2004). Precisely what constitutes ‘too much control’ is a question that this thesis does not attempt to answer. But issues of control – and, thereby, participation – are bound up with the privileged status accorded to knowledge about sustainability. It is against this wider background that the analysis of participation in Tsiseb conservancy in particular is to be considered.

# **Chapter VII: knowing and deciding in Tsiseb conservancy**

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter explores the ramifications for implementation of having – or not having – the sort of knowledge deemed necessary for achieving the overarching goal of sustainable common-pool resource use. It seeks to demonstrate the importance of the link between knowing and deciding, and the consequences for who participates and on what basis in key conservancy decision-making processes. This is done with reference to the specific example of Tsiseb conservancy, in Namibia's Erongo region.

Section two offers a profile of Tsiseb conservancy and its numerous activities, chiefly the Brandberg White Lady Lodge, the African Hunting Safaris trophy hunting venture, the Daureb Mountain Guides Association and the conservancy information centre. It also seeks to analyse how these activities relate back to conservancy policy and legislation, establishing therein the influence of the six principles of sustainability on the implementation of conservancy policy and legislation.

This introduction to Tsiseb conservancy paves the way for a discussion, in section three, of the arrangements for local participation in the conservancy's decision-making processes. Like other Namibian conservancies established on (state-owned) communal land, Tsiseb is governed through an elected committee system. During the course of fieldwork, a new set of institutional arrangements was being introduced, with a view to allowing the conservancy's members to make greater input into the conservancy's decisions. Both before and after the new measures, decision-making has been characterised by 'representative' participation. The conservancy members themselves transfer the right to make most decisions to their elected representatives on the conservancy executive committee, rather than directly making the decisions themselves. Decision-making in Tsiseb therefore is based on – and is an extension of – the principles of representative democracy which prefigure Namibia's national system of governance. The strengths and weaknesses of Tsiseb's 'representative participation' are therefore roughly those of representative democracy in Namibia more widely.

Putting Tsiseb in this wider context is especially pertinent given that the legitimacy of participation in the conservancy programme has been challenged, on the basis that conservancy residents lack sufficient opportunities to participate in important decisions (Long and Jones 2004a). The question is raised of what sorts of expectations it is legitimate to hold of representative participation: do we merely end up justifying ‘committee-based natural resource management’ by endorsing representative participation; or, conversely, are we imposing a ‘tyranny of participation’ (cf. Cooke and Kothari 2001) by insisting that the decision-making in Tsiseb be more direct, even when to make it so might even require the break-up of the conservancy into several, smaller ones? These are vital questions for people involved in the conservancy programme to tackle, be they policy makers, fieldworkers, conservancy committee members or residents. I suggest that it will be easier to do so once conservancy governance institutions are put within the wider context of representative democracy in Namibia.

Section four explores the extent to which Tsiseb conservancy can be considered, as it is by some conservancy programme actors, as a ‘grass-roots’ initiative. The section examines why it may plausibly be so described in the case of Tsiseb. However, it then goes on to make the point that to designate Tsiseb as coming from the ‘grassroots’ obscures the necessarily heavy involvement of – and dependency on – support organisations from the governmental, non governmental and private sectors in the running and upkeep of the conservancy. This high level of involvement is necessary because Tsiseb depends for the realisation of its objectives upon a process of knowledge transfer, and subsequently on having – or not having – the necessary knowledge. The processes through which support actors are rendered indispensable are illustrated with the examples of the adoption of the new institutional arrangements for decision-making in Tsiseb, and also of the contractually-bound relationship between the conservancy and the investors of the Brandberg White Lady Lodge, one of Tsiseb’s joint venture agreements. In the course of the research, it was unclear how long the indispensability of support actors would continue. The final aim of this section, then, is to turn to an account of the goals and interests which might account for this situation.

It is left to the conclusion to emphasise that circularity in intervention is not *ipso facto* a negative or pernicious phenomenon. It has advantages and disadvantages according to perspective and context. Vilifying it may lead us to miss the many

aspects of Tsiseb conservancy – and the conservancy programme more generally – which understandably have commanded considerable praise. But to ignore it leaves our account of participation incomplete.

## **2. A profile of Tsiseb conservancy's activities<sup>24</sup>**

### **Background information**

Tsiseb conservancy lies in the Erongo region, north-west Namibia. After introductory meetings in 1998, it began to coalesce over a period of three years and was 'gazetted' in February 2001. That is, its status as a legally recognised entity was established through publishing the date of its creation in the Government Gazette. Spanning a vast area of 808,300ha, it had 504 registered members in 2004 (RISE 2004). Its principal support organisation is the Rural Institute for Social Development and Empowerment (RISE), although owing to the number of tourist activities that occur within its boundaries, frequent assistance is also provided by the Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association. Included within the conservancy's boundaries are the Daureb (Damara name) or Brandberg (Afrikaans name, though the word is German in origin) Mountain, which features some of the most important rock art in Africa, and a stretch of the Namib Desert, host to a significant population of springbok. It shares borders with neighbouring Doro !Nawas and Sorris-Sorris conservancies to the north, with the Skeleton Coast Park to the west, the Motet Reserves to the north east, Spitzkoppe Reserves to the east and commercial farms to the east and south. It lies within an arid ecological zone of semi desert, yet supports a significant amount of flora and fauna. Of most interest to the conservancy itself is the quantity and variety of wildlife in the area, which includes desert adapted elephant, mountain zebra, kudu, springbok, oryx and ostrich, among other species (RISE 2004).

It is estimated that there are between 1,000 (Mosimane 2000) and 1,240 people living within the conservancy's boundaries, who are engaged in various livelihood activities (RISE 2004). Many are subsistence farmers who keep livestock and some of whom practice small scale crop production. Others are engaged in tin or semi-precious stone mining activities as a primary or supplementary form of income. In the conservancy's biggest population centre, however, many people are unemployed.

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<sup>24</sup> This section is derived largely from Newsham (2004:9-18)

Subsequent to the closing of the tin mine in 1993, the number of jobs available dropped sharply, and although some have found jobs in local government positions, retail outlets or in a domestic capacity, 32% of households listed pensions as a primary source of income (Mosimane, 2000). Use of natural resources in the area forms part of most people's livelihood strategies, as several types of tree, stone and plant are employed in the construction of homesteads, livestock pens and as a source of income. The predominant ethnic group in the area is Damara, but Oshivambo and Otjiherero speaking peoples also reside within the conservancy.

### **Activities in Tsiseb**

Tsiseb has come to be seen by some observers as a conservancy 'to watch', mostly due to the sheer amount of activities to which it plays host. This section covers the principal activities for which the conservancy is best known, namely:

- Community Game Guard scheme
- African Hunting Safaris trophy hunting
- Brandberg White Lady Lodge and Campsite
- Daureb Mountain Guides Association
- Daureb Crafts Co-operative
- Conservancy Information Centre

What all these activities have in common is the common objective of making the link between conserving wildlife and gaining development benefits. The majority of these benefits are economic in nature, consisting of employment opportunities or revenues paid to the conservancy, to be spent, at some point in the future, on whatever the Tsiseb's residents collectively decide.

### **Community game guard scheme**

In terms of wildlife management, Tsiseb conservancy's most central activity is the community game guard scheme, one of the defining characteristics of communal area conservancies across Namibia. During the field research period, there were nine game guards employed by the conservancy, whilst the conservancy itself was divided up into eleven areas in which game guard patrols were to be conducted. Paying the



salaries of the game guards is one of Tsiseb's biggest running costs and a significant source of local employment, given the dearth of jobs in Uis following the closure of the tin mine. The responsibilities of the game guards were broadly similar to those held by game guards in other communal area conservancies, consisting largely in mounting regular patrols to monitor both the status of Tsiseb's wildlife populations and also illegal hunting activities. If hunting activities were encountered, game guards were to report details to the Ministry of Environment and tourism. Both illegal hunting and the animals spotted on patrol were to be registered in the 'event book', which comprised a means of generating useful data for the annual game count that took place across a number of conservancies. The game count is one of the principal indicators used to evaluate the performance of individual conservancies and, of course, the conservancy programme as a whole. Aside from the 'event book' data, the game guards also took part in the activities organised specifically for the purposes of the annual game count. In Tsiseb conservancy, this takes the form of driving along eight roads or paths, registering which species had been seen and taking note of the numbers. For 2002 and 2003, the annual game count produced the following figures:

**Table 7.2 – Wildlife numbers in Tsiseb conservancy 2002 and 2003 (principal species recorded)**

<b>Species</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
Elephant	-	25
Kudu	150	60
Ostrich	200	300
Springbok	4500	6000
Zebra	150	300

**Source: MET**

Although they paint a picture which would appear at first sight to leave space for optimism, these numbers were approached by their compilers with due caution. They were calculated on the basis of a road count which was conducted along only 8 roads in an area spanning 8,093km<sup>2</sup> and with observations from the game guards themselves. Moreover, as only two years' worth of data were available at this stage, it was not considered wise to extrapolate trends.

### **African Hunting Safaris trophy hunting**

Tsiseb has a quota for huntable game, issued by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), which determines how many game animals can be harvested. This quota, then, is one of the rights over wildlife management that is made possible by the 1996 amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance. On the basis of this quota, Tsiseb conservancy has entered into an agreement with African Hunting Safaris, a trophy hunting outfit. The remit of African Hunting Safaris (AHS) to operate in the area is specified by a legally binding contract. Tsiseb conservancy undertakes to provide a quota of two oryx and ten springbok for the company, in return for which they must pay, annually, a concession fee of N\$16,680, which must be paid even if African Hunting Safaris does not hunt the full quota.

The contract also includes an “empowerment clause”, which refers to the benefits to Tsiseb conservancy residents that AHS is obliged to provide. These benefits take two forms:

1. Local employment – African Hunting Safaris is required to employ locally, wherever possible
2. A transfer of the knowledge and skills necessary for the conservancy to run its own trophy hunting concession.

As well as selecting, wherever possible, employees from Tsiseb conservancy, AHS is required to train employees by sponsoring them to attend the Hunting Assistant course run by the Namibian Professional Hunters Association. This course provides general skills for people working in the tourism industry, as well as preparing them for the role of hunting assistant. African Hunting Safaris must also pay the costs of a suitable employee to be trained as a professional hunter. In August 2004, African Hunting Safaris planned to send off two existing conservancy employees to qualify as professional hunters<sup>25</sup>. The intention, then, is not only to provide employment. Rather, in training a conservancy resident to become a trophy hunter, there is potential for the conservancy to offer the quota locally, as opposed to bringing in expertise from elsewhere. A consequence, it was hoped, of having a local, professionally trained hunter would be to capture a much higher proportion of the

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<sup>25</sup> Telephone interview from Edinburgh with Eric Xaweb in Uis, Namibia, 2.7.2004

revenue that can be made from trophy hunting, as well as to increase the sense of “ownership” over the hunting process felt by conservancy residents. The character of the venture as an exercise in knowledge transfer which depends not on what Tsiseb conservancy residents do know but rather on what they do not is, then, clear. Equally clear, though, is that in principle at least, African Hunting Safaris is contractually required ultimately to render its own presence within the conservancy dispensable. The extent to which it was in the process of doing so and over what timeframe was as yet unclear by the end of field research.

### **The Brandberg White Lady Lodge and Campsite**

What is now the Brandberg White Lady Lodge has experienced a number of managers and management styles over the last few years. It started in 1998 as a privately-run enterprise known as the Ugab Wilderness Camp, set up on the Ugab River and lying within 25km of the Brandberg Mountain. However, the owner seemingly disappeared, and over time the conservancy assumed control over it. A couple of managers were put in place by the Namibian Community Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA), with the intention of having the campsite run by the conservancy itself as soon as the requisite skills base had been acquired. However, when this strategy did not consistently turn a profit, it was decided to enter the site into a tendering process run by the Namibian Community Based Tourism Association. The purpose was to invite private investors to start up in a number of conservancies across Namibia, and to enter into a joint venture with the conservancy in which they chose to work. Within the tendering process, out of the five sites in conservancies that were offered, only Tsiseb attracted an investor, Kobus de Jager, owner of a construction company, who planned to upgrade the existing campsite structure by constructing a lodge and up to 60 chalets. The lodge was completed in May 2004.

As with the trophy hunting initiative, the Brandberg White Lady Lodge joint venture is governed by a contract. A vast, comprehensive document, the contract covers all aspects of the establishment of the lodge, from the projections of revenue for the next twenty years to the application for the leasehold necessary for the enterprise to exist on communal land. It guarantees the conservancy a 10% share in the business itself and a role in making “business decisions” relating to the lodge, as well as 10% of the profits after tax. On a yearly basis, the investors are required to

pay the conservancy a minimum of N\$250,000 (£17,850 approx<sup>26</sup>), in revenue from both the campsite and the lodge. Moreover, as with the contract governing trophy hunting activities in the conservancy, it has an “empowerment clause”. This clause specifies the wage levels of permanent staff, N\$500 (£35.71) per month and increasing to N\$1000 (£71.43) per month for the manager. These rates are significantly above the local average of N\$200-300 (£14.29-21.43), as calculated by Mosimane (2000). All staff are required to be residents of Tsiseb conservancy. As from the second year of operation, N\$20,000 has to be put aside each year for the purposes of training. 80% of management staff has to be locally employed by the third year of operations, and there is the option for the conservancy to take over the running of the venture at the end of the twenty year lease period. In a poor area which boasts so few employment opportunities, these potential benefits are highly significant.

Evidently, the principal attraction which renders the site on which the lodge stands is the White Lady rock art, in conjunction with the Brandberg itself. But, as the Brandberg White Lady Lodge’s slogan, “home of the desert elephant” explicitly indicates, one of the area’s best-known – and locally most troublesome – wildlife resources is a fundamental component of the tourism product the lodge offers. That the site is located within an elephant migration route is, of course, no coincidence. Elephants, much loved generally by people who do not have to live within at least a 60km radius of them, are feared and loathed by people in Tsiseb conservancy for three principal reasons:

1. Ripping up pipes and breaking pumps, they leave water points unusable for people, damage livestock kraals and other forms of property
2. They are seen as a risk to life and limb
3. They are one of the principal factors which render agricultural activities impracticable, on account of their tendency to eat or trample crops.

In theory, the Brandberg White Lady Lodge has the potential to change people’s attitudes towards elephants, *to the extent that* the considerable benefits the Lodge offers are linked explicitly by those people to the continued existence of this

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<sup>26</sup> All conversions are done at average exchange rates for 2007 of N\$14 to the pound.

unpopular animal, *and* that people receive those benefits. Recruiting the private sector, moreover, to bring in the necessary expertise and capital better to realise the site's economic potential, through a contract which obliges them to transfer this expertise to some conservancy residents, is an attempt to offer a solution to questions of how poor people with little or no education, skills or experience in the tourism industry are supposed to create and run a successful tourism venture.

### **Daureb Mountain Guides Association**

At the Brandberg Mountain operates one of Namibia's best-known "community-based tourism enterprises", the Daureb Mountain Guides. The guides started in large measure as a response to the closing of the Uis tin mine, which brought widespread unemployment to the local population. The guides came together as a loose, wholly informal association in 1993, known then as the Brandberg Mountain Guides, in order to give some of the town's unemployed young men the opportunity to earn an income. An Irish teacher, Colm Moore, working at Petrus !Ganeb Secondary School in Uis, had started an environmental club, in which school students who would later become mountain guides started to learn not just about the environment, but also about the Brandberg Mountain specifically. It was at the environmental club that the idea of the potential for deriving income from tourism was first mooted. Through the club, students learned the tracks and trails of the Brandberg, and were taken to see the White Lady rock art. In 1993, the six founding members of the group started to offer tours. At first operations occurred on a very informal basis, and guides had little knowledge or experience of what was required of a tour guide, or of the tourism industry more generally. Between 1993 and 1998 the guides underwent a process which was intended to allow them to solidify into a more clearly-defined, structured entity. They received assistance from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA) with enterprise development, formal guiding training, devising a code of conduct, accounting and acquiring a corporate identity, among other things.

At present they offer a number of different tours, ranging from a trip to see the White Lady rock art alone, a tour which takes in a wider variety of sites of artistic and archaeological interest, to expeditions to the Königstein (meaning King's stone), the highest peak of the Brandberg Mountain.

The Daureb Mountain Guides Association's links to the conservancy are different from those of African Hunting Safaris or the Brandberg White Lady Lodge. They are not a product of the conservancy's legal powers to negotiate benefits from tourism operators or to initiate tourism ventures, having existed prior to the creation of the conservancy itself. However, of all the tourism-related businesses in the area that predate the formation of the conservancy, it is the only one which has entered into an agreement to make a financial contribution to it. The Memorandum of Understanding drawn up with Tsiseb stipulates that 10% of the Association's profits are to be paid to the conservancy's Community Fund. As well as this formal link, during the fieldwork period, two of the executive committee's members were Daureb Mountain Guides. In conjunction with their government-recognised responsibility to conserve the rock art and biodiversity at the Brandberg Mountain, they conform to and are part of the conservancy's objectives. They were locally the most widely-known of all of the initiatives operating within Tsiseb and, generally speaking, the best-received in the eyes of its residents (notwithstanding their reputation for decadence and debauchery amongst the more strictly religious conservancy residents). As a source of employment which causes minimal environmental damage, created and run by local people, its *raison d'être* can be said to make the link, albeit indirectly, between the level of conservation of a set of potentially valuable natural resources and the magnitude of development benefits.

### **Daureb Crafts**

Daureb Crafts is a local crafts co-operative which, although run and principally utilised by one woman, provides an outlet for local inhabitants to sell their wares. At present there appear to be few crafts makers involved in the cooperative, but this may change over time. Previously Daureb Crafts occupied smaller, rather less prominent premises, but has since moved to the Conservancy Information Centre, where sales are reported to have risen markedly.

### **Conservancy Information Centre**

On Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2004, Tsiseb opened its Conservancy Information Centre in Uis. The land on which the information centre stands is being paid for by the conservancy, in the form of a loan from Standard Bank. The building itself was paid

for by funds sourced by NACOBTA from the European Union. The centre was, at the end of the fieldwork period, intended to house:

- the conservancy's office
- a venue for meetings – the conservancy chambers
- a kiosk
- a tourism information centre which incorporates the Daureb Mountain Guide Association's office
- a retail outlet for Daureb Crafts
- a soon-to-be-launched internet café run by local entrepreneurs.

The information centre, located in Uis, may be in a good position to benefit from Namibia's growing share of the international tourism market. Uis is situated between a couple of major tourist routes used for travelling either to or from north Namibia. It is the only town for a considerable distance with a petrol station and supermarket. In and of itself it is not a tourist attraction, but it is a very practical place to break up a journey between Namibia's capital, Windhoek, and various North-western destinations such as the Twyfelfontein rock art site. Moreover, for tourists coming from the south or the east and travelling west or North West, the information centre is the first building to be encountered when entering Uis. There is, therefore, potential for attracting the custom of tourists passing through.

### **3. Actors and institutions: 'representative' participation in Tsiseb conservancy**

#### **Representative participation, spaces and institutional structures**

As noted in the previous chapter, local participation in wildlife management is a central tenet of conservancy policy and legislation. Without it, the chances of achieving sustainability objectives are not considered to be very high. The extent to which the 1996 amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance corresponded to what had originally been envisaged of it was evaluated essentially in terms of how many rights to make decisions about wildlife use it granted (or denied) communal area inhabitants. It would be odd, therefore, to find the conservancy programme

wanting in its commitment to local participation, when it is widely taken to be indispensable to sustainable wildlife management. But how is this commitment translated into mechanisms and institutions for making decisions within Tsiseb conservancy?

It is helpful at this juncture to make recourse to the concept of 'space', developed in relation to participation in the work of Andrea Cornwall, amongst others (2002, 2004). Cornwall points out that thinking about participation in terms of space obliges us to pay attention to its 'situated' character. Participation takes place in specific physical locations, an observation which is as important to heed as it is glaringly obvious in hindsight, as this account of conservancy resident participation in Tsiseb should make abundantly clear. Space is also a useful concept for a number of other reasons, not least because it guides our thinking towards a consideration of the "ways in which particular sites come to be populated, appropriated or designated by particular actors for particular kinds of purposes" (ibid:75). Put differently, we might suggest that talk of space encourages us to be aware of four related factors:

1. How the goals and interests of different actors explain their reasons for participation
2. Why they prefer to participate according to one set of 'rules' as opposed to another
3. What they are prepared to do to ensure one set of 'rules' is accepted in place of another (and how likely there are to achieve this goal)
4. Who participates more and who less according to the accepted set of 'rules'

Furthermore, we can distinguish between different types of spaces: closed, invited and claimed spaces are the three which most frequently appear in the literature (i.e. Brock, Cornwall, and Gaventa 2004, Cornwall 2002, 2004), and are commonly set along a continuum, i.e. from closed spaces as 'least' to claimed spaces as 'most' participatory (Gaventa 2004 35). Other types of space, such as within or outwith the state, formal or informal, physical or psychological might also be added to the list. The most useful to the discussion of Tsiseb conservancy, as I hope to demonstrate, are invited and claimed spaces.

The diverse and numerous activities that take place within Tsiseb require the involvement of numerous actors from different backgrounds and with different



knowledge and skills sets. There are, too, fundamental demographic and geographic factors which place constraints on who can participate in the conservancy's decision-making processes more generally. Tsiseb had during the fieldwork period over 500 registered members and over 1000 residents, an amount of people which would be difficult enough to accommodate into an institution which has to make operational decisions on a daily basis even if all members were easily reachable. The sheer size of Tsiseb conservancy makes it much more difficult to involve residents. The conservancy information centre, the hub of conservancy activities, is based in Uis and constitutes the physical space in which the majority of conservancy-related decisions are taken. However, Tsiseb's members and residents are scattered across the conservancy, often in remote places which do not have telecommunications infrastructure and that are difficult to access even with a 4x4 vehicle. The practical difficulties of trying to involve all of its members and residents in decision-making processes derive, therefore, from getting people together in one physical space in which decisions can be made; and doing so on a budget which limits the amount of transport options that can be provided. These considerations have very much shaped the mechanisms and institutions through which decisions are made.

Owing in large measure to these intimidating logistics, the participation of conservancy residents in the day-to-day running of Tsiseb has been delegated to representatives. The number and functions of representatives have changed over time, but the principle of decision-making by representatives has not. The most important space in which residents have the opportunity to make decisions is the Annual General Meeting. The meeting can be seen as somewhere between an invited and a claimed space. It is invited in the sense that holding it is required by the conservancy's constitution and organised by the conservancy committee; but it is claimed by different interest groups as a space in which a number of purposes may be served. Perhaps the chief official goal of the Annual General Meeting is to allow the conservancy residents to vote on the most important decisions regarding the running of the conservancy, both present and future. To give examples, the AGM has been the space in which:

- elections for conservancy committee members are held
- Tsiseb's constitution was adopted

- The annual budget is approved
- changes were made to the constitution: they could only be done with the support of a majority of the residents who attended the AGM
- the private investors behind African Hunting Safaris and the Brandberg White Lady Lodge sought permission to start operations in the area
- the decision to build the conservancy information centre (and commit to the financial obligations entailed therein) was made
- changes were made to the institutional structures through which Tsiseb is governed

The Annual General Meeting serves other purposes too, in particular the dissemination of information. Progress reports are offered to the residents, on the various conservancy activities, and suggestions are made for future activities, for people to be thinking about. Time is spent on clarifying the purposes and status of current activities to those who have not heard about them or do not understand them. Feedback is also sought, and residents have the opportunity to air their views on the performance (or perceived lack therein) of the conservancy over the course of the year.

We can, then, see the Annual General Meeting as the space in which the overarching priorities and medium-to-long term goals of the conservancy are to be agreed upon. But given the amount of activities that take place within the conservancy, it is not possible for decision-making to be left to a once-yearly occasion. Even if it were, it would be necessary to carry out the actions about which decisions were taken. For instance, the annual budget has to be prepared, meetings with the community game guards have to be held in order to monitor wildlife movements and illegal hunting, training workshops on all manner of conservancy-related activities must be attended, liaison with the Brandberg White Lady Lodge and African Hunting Safaris must be maintained, and so on. These are overseen by the conservancy's committees.

When the conservancy was first established, it had one committee, comprised of 40 members, many of whom were representatives of the various areas into which the conservancy can be subdivided. This approach was abandoned, though, as it came to be seen as too cumbersome, as a drag on quick and effective decision-making.

Subsequently the 'executive' committee was formed to take its place, its members cut to the more manageable number of six elected members, and one (non-voting) Traditional Authority representative (the role of the Traditional Authority in the conservancy is considered separately in the following section). At the same time, the position of conservancy manager was created. This is a salaried post, its holder responsible for ensuring that decisions taken either at the AGM or under the auspices of the conservancy committee are executed. The salary was intended to address questions of incentive to be involved in the execution of decisions. Tsiseb conservancy is a busy place, with many meetings, training sessions and workshops to attend. The committee members have their own concerns to attend to, and the more commitments they have, the more difficult and tiresome it becomes to comply with all of them. The committee operates on a voluntary basis, although (somewhat modest) sitting allowances are provided as an incentive for attendance. The result is that, the greater the commitment required of executive committee members, the less incentive for involvement there is. From this viewpoint it made sense to offer sufficient financial incentive for the level of involvement required for the conservancy to progress. It was also an easy sell to donors as a tangible development benefit. The position of conservancy manager was taken up by Eric Xaweb, a former committee chair and one of the people who had been involved from the beginning in the setting up of the conservancy, and who continued to be manager well beyond the end of the field research period in June 2004.

Despite these efforts to make the decision-making process more efficient and effective, there were complaints that conservancy residents were not well-informed of the committee's activities<sup>27</sup>. It was not sufficient to provide updates at the Annual General Meeting; nor was the occasion seen to allow sufficient input of the views and desires of conservancy residents into the decisions that were taken in their name. For this reason, further changes to the committee were proposed. To the executive committee was added an overall management committee, which would resuscitate the position of area representatives, but with some changes. The conservancy management committee would comprise 25 members in total: 16 of these were area representatives, 6 were the conservancy executive committee, 2 were Traditional Authority representatives and, finally, one was the conservancy manager. The

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Don Muroua, CBNRM (community-based natural resource management) Program Manager for RISE, Windhoek, 25.3.04

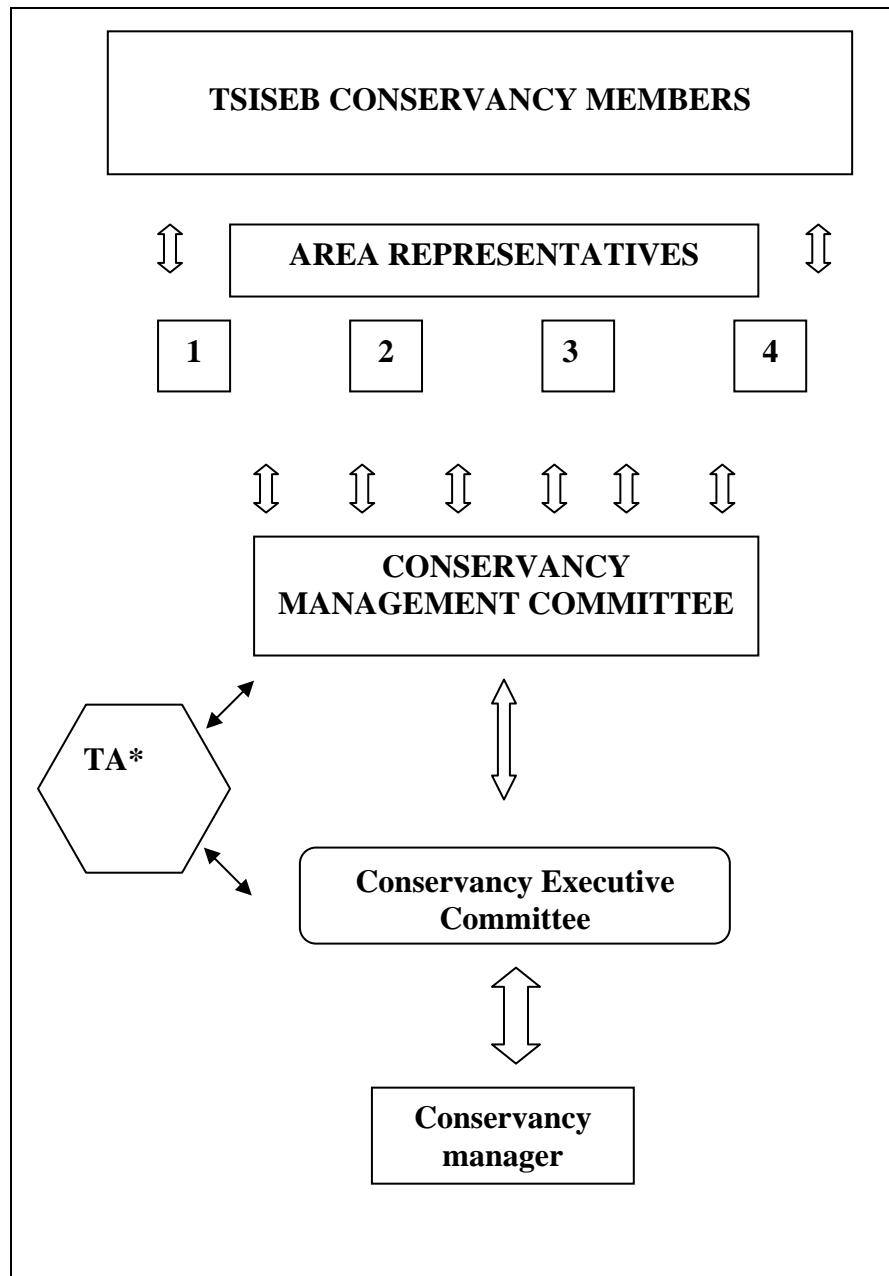
conservancy was subdivided into four distinct areas, each area being assigned four representatives. These representatives were to talk locally with people and take their feedback and concerns to the conservancy management committee meetings that were to be held every three months. In this way, it was hoped that decisions would be better informed by the opinions and preferences of conservancy residents. Feedback on what had been decided in the management committee meeting could then be taken back, through the area representatives, to the people they represented. The management committee would exist, then, to guide the executive committee, which in turn was to oversee the work of the conservancy manager. But it avoided a situation in which all decisions had to be taken always by 25 people: the executive committee and the conservancy manager retained this role, allowing issues that arose on a daily or monthly basis to be dealt with quickly, but overseen by the management committee.

The relationship in which decision-makers ostensibly stand to each other is captured in figure 7.1, on the following page. It should be noted that the conservancy management committee was not fully functioning during the research period. It is not, therefore, possible to comment on the consequences of its introduction or on how it was perceived by conservancy residents.

The institutional arrangements for decision-making in Tsiseb conservancy are, then, manifestations of and critical engagements with the principle of representative democracy. It is within this wider knowledge tradition that these arrangements are to be located if we want to understand the reasons why they are assumed not just to be *legitimate* but also *appropriate* for the context in which they are applied. Independence ushered in representative democracy for a majority, not solely a minority, of Namibia's inhabitants; its installation is one of the bases on which the legitimacy of Namibia's sovereignty is internationally recognised. The institutional structures are based on ones which can commonly be found in representative democracy more widely – i.e. committees whose members are chosen by election. That these structures are intended to reflect the will of the majority of Tsiseb's residents is also intelligible in view of the widespread credibility that the notion of majority governance enjoys in Namibia (as in many other countries). If the 'set rules' for wildlife management in Tsiseb are based on the idea that elected representatives sit in committees and take decisions by majority consensus, it is because there is an

available knowledge tradition which provides widely-accepted models and precedents for legitimate decision-making.

**Figure 7.1, Conservancy committee structures**



Adapted from NACSO Institutional Working Group 'Organigram'  
 \*TA is short for Traditional Authority

If it is accepted that the goal is to make decisions by consensus of the majority, then models of representative-democratic decision, the logic runs, are in the interests of the people of Tsiseb.

### **Tensions between ‘representative-democratic’ and ‘Traditional-Authority’ decision-making models**

However, for a proposition to be widely-accepted is not to be accepted *universally* as the most legitimate model for decision-making. Indeed, in the case of Tsiseb there is another knowledge tradition which we might also call upon in the quest for legitimate models for decision-making. The alternative model is that embodied by the Traditional Authority structures in Tsiseb conservancy, headed up by Chief Elias //Thaniseb. It has lost considerable ground to the ‘representative-democratic’ model, partly because of the preference in conservancy policy and legislation for representative-democratic decision making.

As the previous chapter made clear, the Damara proved adept at using the German presence as a means to re-negotiate their status vis a vis other ethnic groups, and in particular with the Herero and the Nama (Gewald 1999:93-99). But their strategy also led to changes in Damara society, most significantly the introduction of a much more clearly-defined hierarchy. Before the German colonial administration invented the position of Paramount Chief of the Damara in 1890, there were no known tribal chiefs (Barnard 1992:198). But after the death of Goraseb in 1910, none of his successors enjoyed quite the same authority (ibid). Perhaps, given the lack of leadership structures in pre-colonial times, this should come as no great surprise. And yet it should not be forgotten that the institution of the chief was also utilised (and re-shaped) under South African rule as a form of cheap governance in the native reserves, and on into the replacement of the native reserves with homelands. Chiefs, including those in Damara areas, were given functions and responsibilities and allowed to retain powers held either before German colonisation or accrued therein; including powers over wildlife use (Hinz 2003). Independence conferred much legitimacy on a unified central government. The abandonment of the administrative split, in which part of South West Africa’s administration was done in Windhoek and part of it in Pretoria, has made it much more powerful than the South West African Administration which it replaced.

As an initiative heavily-sponsored by and dependent for its existence on the Namibian government, it is easy to see Tsiseb conservancy as having the effect of taking away – or at least substantially diminishing – the wildlife custodian role played by the chief prior to its establishment. This, at least, is similar to how it is seen by

Chief Elias //Thaniseb, the Damara Traditional Authority in Tsiseb conservancy. It is easy to see him as the embodiment of a weakened authority figure. To a certain extent, it remains the case that when decisions are to be made, for instance about moving onto land under Chief //Thaniseb's jurisdiction, his approval is sought and followed. Precedents still exist, then for giving his preferences more weight than those of actors lower down the hierarchy, both by himself and by the people he governs. Yet with the emergence of rival governance institutions – the local, regional and central organs of the state – whose members are elected on the basis of universal suffrage, there can be little question that his powers have been reduced. Commensurately, so too has been the weight given to his preferences. In focus group work with the Traditional Council, consisting of Chief //Thaniseb and four of its members, the claim was made that prior to the establishment of the conservancy, the Traditional Authority was more active in enforcing customary law governing wildlife use. The question of who should take decisions, and on what basis – especially with respect to wildlife use – has become less clear. Following independence, the precedent of decision-making by consensus, either by local people themselves or by their elected representatives, has become increasingly accepted. Of significant consequence to the chief, it is at odds with the idea of the consultation of and deference to his authority<sup>28</sup>.

Such, then, in crude broad-brush strokes is the legacy of the erosion of Chief Elias //Thaniseb's authority. Again, it is necessary to qualify this argument. Chief //Thaniseb continues to command not just considerable respect locally, but also considerable discretion over important issues of local governance. Nonetheless, he enjoys these powers on a *de facto*, not a *de jure* basis. Chief //Thaniseb faces a further challenge to his legitimacy because he is not legally recognised, under the Traditional Authorities Act (GRN 2000) by Namibia's government.

The establishment of Tsiseb conservancy is an instance of a reduction in the chief's powers, owing to the introduction of a rival decision-making model. Despite their previous importance to making decisions about wildlife, the 1996 amendment to

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<sup>28</sup>It should be recognised when making this argument that the amount of power ceded by Traditional Authorities varies from region to region. Chiefs in Caprivi, for instance, continue to command more respect than their counterparts in Southern – though perhaps not Northern – Kunene (for examples of this trend, at least in respect of wildlife management functions, see Long & Jones 2004b). Nonetheless, whilst debate still exists with regard to how much power has been ceded and where, it is treated as a settled matter that chiefs no longer command as much power as they used to.

the Nature Conservation Ordinance does not specify the role that should be assumed by the Traditional Authorities. Detractors claim that this lack of specification has excluded and further weakened the Traditional Authorities, thereby marginalising an important cultural resource from which too little is being learned. Defenders claim that first, given the regional variations between the roles and responsibilities of Traditional Authorities, it is better not to prescribe in legal terms one role, but rather to let it be negotiated according to local custom; and second, that there is nothing in the amendment to stop local Traditional Authority institutions from being designated as the conservancy committee<sup>29</sup>. Whatever view one takes on the merits or failings of not specifying the basis for involvement of the Traditional Authority in the running of conservancies, in the case of Tsiseb, the Traditional Authority – for better or for worse – has become less important in setting the rules for wildlife use.

Although deference to the authority of the chief is not the accepted model for decision-making used by the conservancy, it still vies for attention and legitimacy within the contested spaces of the conservancy executive committee and the Annual General Meeting. It has its place within the most recent conservancy institutional structures shown in Figure 7.1. However, the end result of the negotiations over the role of the Traditional Authority was that a member of the Traditional Council was to be on the conservancy executive committee, but in a non-voting capacity. The committee was to inform the Traditional Authority of all conservancy activities and to take on board any advice offered. The Traditional Authority was also invited to fill the role of dispute resolution within the conservancy.

This redefinition of what he perceived to be his legitimate role, as well as the delegation of functions to other actors, was not well-received by Chief //Thaniseb. All the objections he and other members of the council put to me in the Focus Group stem from the belief that the chief's legitimate authority to lead the conservancy decision-making process has not been duly recognised by the conservancy committee. He argued that the conservancy committee only consulted him or brought him into the decision-making process when it was unavoidable. He cited his role in determining the boundaries of Tsiseb conservancy. These were created through a process of negotiation with other chiefs in the region, in which agreement was reached over respective claims to areas of jurisdiction. He argued that locally, it was

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Brian Jones, (then) Senior CBNRM Technical Advisor to USAID in Namibia, Windhoek, 22.1.2004



recognised that he had powers over land use. The conservancy was, to his mind operating on his land, and should on that basis be subject to his jurisdiction, but was not. In addition, Tuban Goseb, one of the members of the Traditional Council, maintained that the government had given chiefs the right to lead conservancies, but that as soon as Tsiseb was 'gazetted', the conservancy committee had shut out Chief //Thaniseb, thereby putting itself above the Traditional Authority.

The same argument was made with respect to the establishment of the Brandberg White Lady Lodge and Campsite. In order to build the lodge and erect the campsite on communal land, the investors had to secure a Permission To Occupy (PTO) document. Permission To Occupy was a product of Namibia's land tenure arrangements. It was originally a means under South African rule by which to offer investors something approximating private ownership in the homelands. As fencing off land or appropriating it for private purposes was illegal in the homelands, the government deemed it necessary to have the fall-back option of the PTO. However, it could not be granted without the chief's consent, and could be tapped as a source of income therein. With the advent of communal area conservancy legislation, however, conservancies were supposed to be able to use the PTO as a bargaining chip, a way to secure concessions from private investors looking to establish tourism activities within the conservancy boundaries. In other parts of Namibia's Northwest, chiefs have seen this stipulation as a threat and have felt excluded from decisions that had formerly, as they saw it, been theirs to make (Jones 2003, Vaughan and Katjiua 2002). In none of my encounters with Chief //Thaniseb did he mention revenues from the Permission to Occupy process, but this may have been another power, albeit of ambiguous legal status, which the establishment of Tsiseb conservancy removed from him.

In response to these points, the conservancy manager, some (though not all) members of the conservancy executive committee and also staff at RISE concurred on the following responses. First and foremost, it was observed repeatedly that whereas the conservancy had a standing in law, the chief had not been recognised by the government. The conservancy committee could therefore legitimately have chosen not to invite the Traditional Authority into any of its meetings or activities. It could have demarcated the boundaries of the conservancy without his assistance. But it had not done so; on the contrary, it had negotiated with the chief the role he was to play, and he himself, it was claimed, had chosen not to sit on the committee, and had

acquiesced in foregoing his voting rights. The reason for not giving voting rights to the Traditional Authority was borne of concern that the committee would then not make decisions by consensus, but rather would reflect simply the chief's preferences. This would defeat the point of members being elected by conservancy residents as their representatives. It was also argued by RISE staff that Traditional Authority had been kept much better-informed than had the headmen of other conservancies in Erongo and Kunene in which the organisation worked. In their commitment to the principle of elected representatives making decisions by consensus, the conservancy manager, executive committee and RISE staff were effectively putting this decision-making model 'above' that offered by the Traditional Authority. That they were in a position to do so and that the chief could not stop them reflected a wider national situation in which representative-democratic institutions for decision-making trump those associated with the Traditional Authority.

### **Traditional Authority, the conservancy and party politics**

Arguments about the role of the Traditional Authority within Tsiseb may be connected to local party-political issues. These are best understood against the background of concerns that conservancies may become used as a 'campaigning tool' for local politicians, who either heap praise on them and claim credit for success when seeking re-election, or heavily criticise them and blame an incumbent for their failures<sup>30</sup>. A linked concern, especially in view of the financial resources conservancies command, is the misappropriation of funds. Both the conservancy committee and the Annual General meeting have been used as spaces within which political contests unfold, and there have been attempts to unseat central conservancy actors from their positions.

Within Tsiseb conservancy, accusations of corruption have been made. Conservancy manager Eric Xaweb became in 2003 the subject of a whispering (and then a shouting) campaign which claimed that he had been siphoning off money provided for the conservancy by the Rural Institute for Social Development & Empowerment. One committee member made public claims to have evidence of financial mismanagement of conservancy funds, and even suggested that Mr. Xaweb had been in the pay of the private investors chosen to run the Brandberg White Lady

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Don Muroua, CBNRM (community-based natural resource management) Program Manager for RISE, 25.3.04

Lodge. These declarations prompted the conservancy executive committee to call a public meeting to deal with the dispute, to be mediated by Chief //Thaniseb and attended also by a regional official from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. The committee member who had made the allegations was invited to present this case, as well as the evidence accumulated for it. When the individual declined to make an appearance and RISE declared itself to be satisfied that all funds given to the conservancy had been accounted for, no further action was taken. Because the individual making the allegations was not prepared to defend them at the meeting, the question as to why they had been made public was raised.

The counter claim asserted that Mr Xaweb had been singled out for this treatment because of his political affiliations. There can be few secrets in Uis, and Mr Xaweb's status as a strong supporter of Swapo is widely known. Damara voters tend to prefer the United Democratic Front (UDF) to Swapo, a tendency which is reflected in the balance of political power in Uis Village Council, which has since independence played host to a UDF majority. In this context, then, it was seen by some as suspicious that from 2002 onwards, there was a majority of known Swapo supporters on the conservancy executive committee. It was suggested, therefore, that the corruption allegations had become so widespread not because of an abundance of evidence to support them, but rather because of the fear, on the part of UDF supporters, that local Swapo operatives, with an eye on forthcoming elections, would establish a monopoly over the use of conservancy resources and would be able to convert the conservancy's perceived success into political capital. The allegations were, from this viewpoint, an attempt to sabotage any such plans.

Intriguingly, the UDF's default status as the party of local government in Uis *was* challenged in the local elections of 2004. Local SWAPO activists mounted an energetic and highly visible campaign, which led to two of their candidates being returned as councillors on the Village Council, out of an overall total of five, their best result in the post-independence elections period. One of these candidates was conservancy manager Eric Xaweb. The concern was raised that his election to local government, had provoked a conflict of interest: if the conservancy was supposed to be separate from local politics, then it was inappropriate for its manager also to hold the position of village councillor. Moreover, concerns about allegations corruption, checked by the conservancy's public meeting to deal with them the previous year, were starting to re-emerge, and were a contentious issue at the 2004 conservancy

Annual General Meeting in June. By that point a ‘concerned group’ (reportedly spearheaded by United Democratic Front supporters) had loosely coalesced, and wanted to use the AGM as a platform at which to hold the conservancy manager and committee to account. Eric Xaweb, who had started to threaten to sue anyone who continued to level charges of corruption against him which they could not substantiate, was not ‘ousted’ by these events.

Where does the Traditional Authority fit into these party-political clashes? Traditional Authorities in Namibia are not supposed to align themselves politically. Chief //Thaniseb’s public position is one of non affiliation. He once joked during focus group work that support for political parties in Namibia was akin to support for football clubs. I took this as a wry suggestion that loyalty to the ‘team’ might be put above the ‘team’s’ performance, implying that it might for that reason be better to steer clear of the ‘game’ altogether. In practice, though, there is no clear separation of state and traditional politics. For instance, Justus //Garob, Paramount Chief of the Damara, is President the United Democratic Front one of Namibia’s parliamentary opposition parties. Kuaima Riruako, Paramount Chief of the Herero, forced an acrimonious split in 2003 from the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) to form his own parliamentary party, the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO). Therefore, even with a fervent desire for impartiality, it might prove difficult for a chief to be a politically disinterested party in all disputes.

However one views the relationship between Traditional Authorities and state politics, against this tangled backdrop the suspicion of partisanship on the part of Chief //Thaniseb towards UDF supporters in conservancy-related disputes becomes more intelligible. This allegation was made particularly with reference to the handling of the allegations of corruption by the conservancy manager. Criticism was levelled at Chief //Thaniseb by the MET official who had been present at the public meeting of 2003 called to deal with allegations of corruption. He was charged with giving credence to allegations that had not been substantiated. Another charge (though not by the conservancy manager, whom the allegation most favoured) was that the Chief had allowed himself to be associated with the ‘concerned group’ who were seen by some actors to be making accusations of corruption for which compelling evidence was lacking. In short, the fear was expressed that the chief was backing one ‘side’ over the other, not arbitrating neutrally between the two. Moreover, we might even speculate that it would be in the chief’s interests to support the UDF, in the face of

actors and processes that have limited his own role in decision-making processes concerning wildlife and even land use. It should be reiterated, though, that Chief //Thaniseb would simply reject this analysis outright, and it was beyond the scope of my research to confirm or refute it.

Fascinating though the political struggles connected to who participates in Tsiseb conservancy's decision-making processes are, I do not wish to accord them too much explanatory power in understanding who participates and on what basis in Tsiseb's decision-making process. Focus groups, interviews, discussions with key informants and participant observation at conservancy-related meetings and events did not produce evidence that anyone was included or excluded on the basis of party-political affiliation. Conservancy committee members, including those known to be Swapo supporters, were voted in at the Annual General Meeting, not handpicked by a shadowy political commissar lurking behind the scenes. A more important factor is who has, or does not have, the knowledge deemed necessary to ensuring that the conservancy is run in such a way as to achieve its sustainability objectives. It is to an exploration of this factor that we now turn.

## **4. Circularity in intervention**

### **'Representative' and 'grass-roots' participation**

The implications of the 'representative' arrangements for participation in Tsiseb conservancy should now be clear. First and foremost, they constitute a response to a classic dilemma of collective action that stems from:

1. the number of people (over 1000) who, by dint of being resident within the conservancy boundaries, are accepted as having a legitimate right to participate in decisions about how to manage wildlife;
2. the geographical dispersedness of those people across an area in excess of 800,000ha, with few communication aids through which to overcome the difficulties entailed by such distance, and;
3. the quantity of decisions that need to be made, which often need to be taken on a daily basis, ruling out the possibility of limiting all decision-making to Annual General Meetings

The (re)introduction of the area representative system is an attempt to provide more frequent opportunities for local feedback to find its way into the decision-making processes presided over by the executive committee and the conservancy manager. It is a response to shortcomings often associated with the representative model, but essentially an acceptance of it. The legitimacy or lack therein of the committee and management structures derives from two principle sources:

1. acceptance or rejection of the knowledge tradition of representative democracy, in terms of which Namibia's institutions for national governance are also conceived, as providing the best model for decision making in the circumstances which Tsiseb faces
2. the extent to which the representatives are perceived either to be using their positions to the greater benefit of conservancy residents, or to be abusing their positions to advance party-political interests and failing to keep in check an allegedly corrupt conservancy manager

It is in the wider context of representative democracy as a model for decision-making that claims by influential conservancy actors, such as Margaret Jacobsohn, that the conservancy programme – and by implication Tsiseb conservancy – is a 'grass-roots' movement, are to be understood. It is common to talk about grass-roots activists in political parties within a representative democracy; indeed the respect given to a party is sometimes measured according the extent to which it is seen to be driven by the concerns that surface at the grass-roots level. An analogy could be made with Tsiseb's representative structures. The conservancy management and executive committees can only be occupied by local people from the area Tsiseb covers. They operate locally, within the conservancy and they exist for the purpose of addressing local issues of wildlife management. It is also helpful to bring out here another aspect of the meaning of 'grass roots', in the (OED) sense of 'fundamental level; the source or origin'. Commentators such as Jacobsohn may well perceive no difficulty in accommodating this definition with their own view, given that it was the people living in the area that is now Tsiseb conservancy applied for the establishment of the conservancy.

However, I contend that to see the residents as the 'source' of the conservancy is to obscure the conservancy programme's essential character as an exercise in

knowledge transfer. I suggest that it is more accurate to locate the source of the conservancy programme in the concept of sustainability. Indeed, the stated objectives of the programme are unintelligible without prior knowledge of sustainability, or indeed of the debates and processes through which it has come to be seen as essential to organise countless human activities in accordance with sustainability criteria. Chapter six has shown how this concept underlines conservancy policy and legislation. Any implementation of such policy and legislation, then, requires of its implementers knowledge about how to set about using local wildlife resources in such a way as to serve conservation and development objectives. This leads to the following basic dynamic. In terms of the requirements for legal recognition, as well as the requirements for being able to use the rights to benefit from tourism in ways that will generate revenue from wildlife resources, conservancies depend more on what communal area inhabitants do *not* know than what they *do* know. And it is this knowledge gap which renders indispensable the participation of conservancy support organisations. The very history of the conservancy programme is testament to fact that the participation of communal area inhabitants only became *feasible* once they were recast as competent resource users, not threats to conservation, by the people who had specialised knowledge about sustainability and the ability to attract the resources necessary to try to put their ideas into practice. But these causally important processes disappear from sight if we view the conservancy programme in the light of a grass roots initiative. It *is* a very popular initiative. It *is* based on ideas on which important consensuses have been generated at local, regional, national and international levels; and this *is* (at least in my view) an exciting prospect. But if we are to understand who participates and on what basis, making recourse to the concept of a grass-roots movement is, I think, the wrong way to go about it.

Linked to these observations is the factor of length of involvement in the conservancy programme. Some of the most consistent proponents of redefining conservation in terms of sustainability were involved in the precedents for the conservancy programme in the 1980s, in getting these ideas accepted within the post-independence government, in implementing them and from there in the monitoring and evaluation of implementation. For instance, the directors of IRDNC and NNF in 2004 (and still in 2007), two of the biggest conservancy support organisations, are considered ‘pioneers’ precisely because of their centrality to so many of the events from which the conservancy programme emerged. They have been influential in

bringing about a situation in which sustainability is the overarching goal of conservation policy and legislation; in other words, they have been instrumental in the process through which sustainable use of natural resources has become more generally accepted as a means through which to achieve conservation and development objectives. They have been successful in getting potential funders such as the Worldwide Fund for Nature and the US Agency for International Development to accept such ideas and on that basis have secured the financial resources necessary for implementation. They have then been involved in the move from policy formulation to implementation. It is therefore possible to see these actors in the light of (limited) cognitive authorities.

This last point will benefit from elaboration. Recall the argument made in chapter two that sustainability is a concept with a self-referring component. It refers partly to empirical states of affairs, such as the numbers of kudu in Kunene or elephant in Caprivi, of course; but ‘sustainable wildlife management’ is not an empirically verifiable property of elephants or kudu. In the annual game count, there have been more kudu or elephant counted year on year, but the designation of this occurrence as ‘sustainable’ describes not the animals themselves, but rather the relationship in which they stand to a context of human activity (cf. Barnes 1988:49). In the example given, this context may be constituted by activities such as killing or not killing animals. The limit at which killing stops being sustainable and becomes unsustainable is not just determined by reference to empirical states of affairs, such as how many animals there are, but also by the cognitive authority of the people who designate such activity sustainable or unsustainable. The credibility of the designation of a given activity as sustainable wildlife management therefore has to be reinforced partly by cognitive authority. In other words, there is a point at which a particular form of wildlife management is accepted as sustainable because it is said to be so, because others – and sometimes because specific individuals – refer to it as sustainable. The designation is therefore circular, in the sense of being self-referential. This is the essence of ‘circularity in intervention’.

Recall also remarks in chapter four about the specialised character of much knowledge about sustainability, of the myriad and diverse things it is necessary to know in order to be able credibly to designate activity sustainable or otherwise. As a result, not everyone will be able to make such designations credibly. When it comes to designating what is and what is not sustainable, cognitive authority is often limited



to the few and not to the many. So, I think, it has been with the conservancy programme. Some actors have been able to designate credibly what is necessary for the advancement of sustainability objectives, and part of the reason why their designations are accepted is because such actors have sufficient cognitive authority to effect change in ideas about the value of this new knowledge. Recognising who has cognitive authority can help us, then, to understand why their participation is indispensable to the continuance of the conservancy programme and also to make more visible a factor – that of having or not having knowledge about sustainability – which is an important determinant of participation in the programme. It obliges us to bring into our account of participation the processes through which what there is to participate in was defined, and how it was defined. On this basis, I argue that if knowledge about sustainability – specifically the six ‘principles’ I have identified – has come to underpin the conservancy programme, then its validity is upheld by the cognitive authority of specific organisation and individuals. As a consequence, the people whose cognitive authority was instrumental to getting knowledge about sustainability accepted as a basis for conservation and development policy, the people who implement conservancy activities and the people who judge whether activities are sustainable are often one and the same; and precisely because they were successful in getting their knowledge accepted in the first place. In the case of the conservancy programme, so far, this type of circular involvement has been *self-reinforcing*: involvement in the early stages of policy change has led to involvement in implementation, which has fed back into what is known about sustainability, which then in turn influences the policy in terms of which implementation is to be shaped, and so on.

### **Examples of the link between knowing and deciding**

The meaning and point of all this dense talk about cognitive authority and circularity in intervention will hopefully be easier to understand with reference to specific examples.

Let us return, therefore, to the area representative system, and specifically to its introduction. It is instructive to ask *how* the system was introduced and by *whom*. The source of the ‘organigram’ in figure 7.1 provides us with a clue here: it was devised largely by NACSO’s Institutional Working Group, in response to the aforementioned concerns that current arrangements were not conducive to effective communication

with conservancy residents who, as a result, were not sufficiently informed about conservancy activities. Staff at the Rural Institute for Social Development & Empowerment (RISE), Tsiseb's principal support organisation, had been worried that if residents did not understand the functioning and the goals of the conservancy, and did not see therein the benefits it could generate for them, their ability to participate effectively (as opposed to turning up to the Annual General Meeting, enjoying the free food and going home again) would be compromised. Therefore, they deemed it appropriate and helpful to request assistance from the Institutional Working Group.

The Working Group produced a document entitled 'Tsiseb Conservancy: Proposed institutional and communications framework' (Nott 2003). This document suggested the changes explored earlier, and effectively offered a framework for discussion on who should be involved in what, at what stage and how. After identifying the main activities of the conservancy, it split up the decision-making processes related to those activities into the following stages:

- Who must initiate the activity
- Who must be consulted to develop the way forward
- Who takes the final decision based on the consultation process
- Who must be informed of the decision taken and progress
- To who [sic] has the board/conservancy committee delegated responsibility to ensure that it happens (ibid:6)

Subsequently, a workshop in Tsiseb was arranged for 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> July 2003, to discuss whether these arrangements were an acceptable vehicle for improving resident participation in the conservancy's decision-making processes. If they were found acceptable to the group, they would be put to the conservancy residents at the Annual General Meeting.

The workshop was facilitated by the document's author, the conservancy manager, a RISE employee, and attended also by conservancy executive committee members and a Traditional Authority representative. 'Facilitation' commonly implies a low-key role, of assembling the relevant people, encouraging them to interact with each other. Facilitators intervene only insofar as is necessary for certain helpful questions to be posed, or to clarify the objectives of interaction, but otherwise letting

those people determine the course of that interaction and then working with whatever they come up with. The facilitators of this workshop might well have seen themselves in this light; other participants might also have done so. Nonetheless, the workshop was first and foremost an exercise in knowledge transfer, partly from the group to the facilitators, but more from the Institutional Working Group employee to the rest of the group. What the group would participate in was a discussion about whether to adopt a model for decision-making that an authority on institutional structures was proposing, and that a respected and trusted member of the support organisation appeared to endorse. Therefore, the agenda for the workshop was already in large measure pre-defined. What is likely to get overlooked by the above conception of facilitation is that one of the facilitators was also responsible for much of the content that would be facilitated. He had come with what he thought was a good set of recommendations for decision-making. This is not to say that his interaction with the group members could not have changed his opinion about these recommendations, or that he gave the group members no choice but to accept them; far from it. But his knowledge of what he was proposing rendered his participation indispensable and formed the basis of what there was to participate in. As it happened, the model was adopted with minimal adjustments. Either the group came to share the opinions of the Institutional Work Group employee, or at least saw fit not to contest them. There was a process of coordination of belief (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996), or at least acquiescence, in relation to what constituted valid knowledge about decision-making models.

A second example (reworking material drawn from Newsham 2004:31-4) entails revisiting the Brandberg White Lady Lodge. As noted, the presence in the conservancy of the investors running the Lodge is mediated through a contract which ostensibly secures three types of substantial benefits for Tsiseb:

1. financial – revenues for the conservancy
2. employment for residents
3. a structure through which local people can acquire the knowledge and skills through which, eventually, to manage the Lodge themselves

During the negotiation of the contract, the principal actors were the investors, NGOs – in particular the Namibian Community Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA),

the Legal Assistance Centre and RISE (Rural Institute for Social Development and Empowerment) – and the conservancy executive committee. The legal expertise necessary for drafting the type of contract which emerged, as well as negotiation and facilitation skills, are part and parcel of the joint venture process, and required significant human resources that Tsiseb conservancy largely did not possess. These were held by the aforementioned NGOs, who consequentially played a considerable role in determining the character of the venture. Most conservancy residents could not have performed these functions: English, the language in which the contract is written, is a second or third language for some and not known by other. Nor was there much local experience on which to draw in negotiating favourable terms with the private sector. There were, then, significant stages of the joint venture process in which conservancy residents could not and did not participate. Their participation came in the form of having the final decision over whether to accept or reject the proposal; and in this they were guided by the conservancy executive committee, which advised the acceptance of the offer.

Within the contract, the institutional structure through which conservancy residents are to participate in the joint venture is also elaborated. This assumes the form of the joint liaison committee, which comprises two conservancy executive committee representatives, a member of RISE, Tsiseb's principal support organisation, and one private investor representative. In general terms, its role is:

- to share and communicate plans, expectations, concerns and intentions between the two parties
- to monitor the extent to which the contract is being observed by both parties
- to recommend candidates for employment, and “facilitate the resolution of any disputes that might arise between the parties in relation to the employment of persons in terms of this agreement”<sup>31</sup>
- to highlight, discuss and attempt to resolve issues of importance to either or both parties

However, during the course of fieldwork the Joint Liaison Committee appeared not to be fulfilling all aspects of its envisaged role. Concerns were expressed about

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<sup>31</sup> Agreement of Lease for the Ugab River Wilderness Lodge Site in Tsiseb Conservancy, p27

the reluctance of the conservancy's representatives on the committee to hold the investors to account on issues of employment and payments owed to the conservancy. Significantly, interviews with numerous employees revealed a lack of awareness of their contractually guaranteed rights, of what the Joint Liaison Committee was, and of its role as a mediator in labour disputes. This is especially pertinent given that the interviews revealed that some staff were working without a contract and at a rate of N\$300 per month, N\$200 less than the minimum agreed wage. During the period of the research, there appeared to be little or no contact between the Joint Liaison Committee and the lodge employees. Concerns were also expressed that the committee members were unfamiliar with the contents of the contract, and were therefore not in a good position to be able to discern the extent to which either party was observing it. When, in the Joint Liaison Committee meetings I attended, the committee's functions were fulfilled, it was by a NACOBTA consultant. He knew the contract well, kept in some contact with the Lodge employees and encouraged the committee members to hold the investors to their obligations. That NACOBTA actors proved more capable participants in processes which they had been central to designing in the first place can come as no surprise. It is also illustrative of the size of the gap between the knowledge and skills necessary for the types of intervention proposed by implementing agencies and the knowledge and skills possessed by conservancy residents. Of course, built into the contract is the idea that residents will over a twenty year period acquire the skills and knowledge to run the Lodge without the need for support either from the NGO or private sectors. This type of objective must be borne in mind when making observations about how indispensable NGOs were, during fieldwork, to decision making in Tsiseb. Nevertheless, there is little in these arrangements that can be described as 'grass-roots'.

Looking beyond the Joint Liaison Committee members to conservancy residents more widely confirms the inadequacy of the 'grass-roots' description. Focus group work with residents revealed that often people did not know what the link between the Lodge and the conservancy was, what benefits, other than employment, it offered what or inducements to conserve wildlife in the area. This is understandable, given that for three of the eight focus group sessions conducted with residents, participants did not give any indication of knowing what a conservancy was, and requested me to explain it to them. Herein lies an important corollary of this focus on the link between knowing and deciding: for residents to participate at all, be it in decisions concerning

the enforcement of the Brandberg White Lady Lodge contract or other conservancy issues, there has to be a basic level of knowledge. In the absence of this, the extent to which local people can meaningfully participate in Tsiseb's decision-making processes is limited.

### **The significance of the link between knowing and deciding**

If it is accepted that support organisations deemed by their funders to have the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve the goals of the conservancy programme are rendered indispensable by the dynamics of knowledge transfer, another, and indeed more important, question suggests itself. What importance are we to attach to this phenomenon? First and foremost, I wish to stress once again that our account and understanding of participation in the conservancy programme is incomplete if we do not explore the consequences of knowledge transfer for who participates and on what basis. It has implications for policy formulation: any conservancy policy on participation would benefit from – or may be found deficient without – a clear and complete understanding of the factors which affect participation in conservancies. Whilst it would be inadequate to attempt to explain *all* participation in conservancy-related activities purely as a function of knowledge transfer, I contend that a focus on it brings to light important considerations which need to be better considered and understood than is currently the case.

Second, talk of the indispensability of support organisation actors, as a result of the knowledge gap between implementers and conservancy residents, is related to fractiously controversial issues of power and control within the conservancy programme. It could easily be enlisted to support concerns that non-governmental support organisations have too much control over the conservancy agenda and the power to exclude other agendas therein. But it could just as easily be enlisted to support the argument that the conservancy model is essentially sound. On this view, even if implementation is a far from perfect process, support organisations offer poor communal land inhabitants necessary, welcome knowledge and skills which will allow them to benefit from conserving wildlife in their area. Both 'sides' are explored below, but before doing so, it will be wise to clarify my intentions at this point.

As an external observer whose cognitive authority to designate what the conservancy programme is or is not has been challenged, bringing up issues of power feels a little like stepping into a minefield. I think it unproductive and unnecessary to

exacerbate with my own research the acrimonious character of the relationship between some ‘external’ researchers and some of the conservancy programme’s practitioners. Nor do I want to make claims that go beyond what I can substantiate with my own data. Therefore, in the interests of frank and comprehensive debate, in this work I prioritise leaving space open for all viewpoints, rather than seeking to adjudicate between them.

### **Reasons to be concerned about indispensability**

Concerns about the role of support organisations in the conservancy programme relate principally to what is included into the conservancy policy agenda, what is excluded, and who decides. From this standpoint, the idea that, through having their knowledge accepted as a sound basis for policy and legislation, some actors are central to predefining what there is to participate in, chimes with a number of perceived exclusionary dynamics. Sian Sullivan, perhaps the conservancy programme’s fiercest critic, has argued that the focus on “internationally-valued wildlife” is skewed along gender lines, as activities connected with the large mammals that subsequently receive much attention are the “preserve of men, as hunters, herders, ‘traditional’ leaders and conservationists” (2004 91). This bias, she contends, is evident in the make-up the community game guard system which, though often praised for including local people in wildlife management decisions, serves rather to exclude (Sullivan 2003a, 2003b). For her, it extends a conservation agenda pushed into communal areas, putting wildlife policing and anti-poaching activities (carried out by men) at the expense of rural development (2003a).

Whilst ‘charismatic’ species like elephant and rhino receive protection, compensation to people for living with animals which pose a threat to crops property and even life and limb is, she maintains, allocated on a much less frequent basis. This was certainly an issue in Tsiseb conservancy, which had no initiative to address local concerns about the damage done by elephants to bore holes and crops. Moreover, the tourism activities that are supposed to provide the revenue that will provide local people with the incentive to continue living with what they see as dangerous animals actually produce much greater benefits for the tourism operators and trophy hunters who run them. Indeed, Sullivan concludes that ‘CBNRM *in practice* maintains the interests of conservationists, tour operators, hunters and tourists; i.e. those conventionally associated with “touristic” enjoyment of, and financial benefits from,

wildlife and “wilderness” (ibid: 165). The predominant focus on wildlife, for Sullivan, means also that a whole set of activities, bound up with considerations of ethnicity and gender, do not make it onto the conservancy programme’s agenda. She argues that the resource-gathering, which constitutes an important livelihood strategy for many Damara across North-west Namibia, as well as a rich and diverse body of local knowledge, tends to fall under the radar because it is an activity carried out largely by women, and employs a knowledge and skills set that the Damara had been thought to have lost (Sullivan 2004).

Sullivan’s criticisms are echoed in other work, not least that conducted under the auspices of the snappily-abbreviated WILD (Wildlife Integration for Livelihoods Diversification) Project. WILD was a three-year research initiative, funded by the Department for International Development and based in the Ministry of Wildlife and Tourism. The overarching objective of the research was to investigate the impact on the livelihood activities of communal area inhabitants of changes in natural resource use that had been entailed by the initiation of the conservancy programme. The project acquired the reputation in Namibia of being considerably critical of the conservancy programme. A reader of the project’s Final Report (Long, ed. 2004) unacquainted with the tensions and arguments that emerged during the life of WILD might be puzzled at its controversial reception. The document is often glowing in its praise of the conservancy programme (see Long and Jones 2004a 162 for an example), provides reams of helpful socio-economic baseline data on people’s livelihoods and fills gaps on issues which all can agree are central to conservancy processes, such as wildlife use – legal and illegal – as a livelihood strategy. For all its restraint, though, one of its core arguments is that the “current approaches need revisiting and reviewing in the context of a better understanding of livelihoods and the implications of intervention at household level” (Long 2004).

Although conservation objectives are being achieved in impressive fashion, it contends, the conservancy programme performs less well measured against indicators of human-wildlife conflict resolution. It argues that whilst significant benefits and revenues are also being generated in some conservancies, the extent to which they filter down to residents or provide sufficient compensation for the costs of living with conservation is much less clear. Issues of elite benefits capture and conservancy committees that are accountable upwards to the support organisations and donors, but considerably less so to conservancy residents, are also seen as cause for concern. The



document explains these perceived shortcomings by suggesting that livelihood issues have received less attention than is warranted owing to an over-concentration on conservation objectives. This bias it attributes to a sort of hierarchy within NACSO, in which the conservation NGOs have more control over resources than do those whose brief focuses more on livelihoods or rural development more widely (cf. Long and Jones 2004b). It also draws attention briefly to the rivalries “characterised by NACSO stakeholders themselves as the ‘white-led’ versus the ‘black-led’ NGOs” (ibid: 42), whilst warning against too simplistic an analysis of this dynamic (ibid:42). The chapter goes on to emphasise the value of NACSO as a mechanism for efficient coordination and argues that the conservancy programme could not have been implemented without it. However, it concludes that “addressing issues of development and livelihood support will require some reorganisation of support priorities” (ibid: 54).

Recourse to the notion that the conservancy programme’s agenda is dominated by the concerns of a powerful conservationist clique explains the emergence of the term ‘NGO livelihoods’. The undertone is that the conservancy programme is primarily a livelihood strategy for those who control the resources made available to it within the framework of the Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) programme. It surfaces in observations about the salaries of NGO workers in comparison to the average income of the communal land inhabitants, to the expenses that mount up from the purchase and maintenance of four-wheel-drive vehicles etc. Support organisation participation, taking an extreme interpretation of this view, is explained by pure self interest. Getting the need for a transfer of the knowledge held by those NGOs accepted and funded, thereby rendering those with such knowledge indispensable, serves those interests well.

It is doubtful that even the conservancy programme’s staunchest critics would seek to explain the motivations of *all* conservancy support organisations *purely* in terms of self interest. The issue does tie up, though, with the question of how likely conservancies are to become financially self-sustaining in the long-run, raised by Sullivan, amongst others (2003a). The disappointing economic performance of combined conservation and development initiatives in Southern Africa (ie. Bond 2001, Murombedzi 2001), Sub Saharan Africa (Barrett and Arcese 1995) and elsewhere (Wells et al. 1999) makes such concerns especially pertinent. Filtered through an ‘NGO livelihoods’ perspective, disappointment may turn out to be design:

for as long as conservancies do not become financially independent, the rationale for continued intervention is guaranteed.

### **Responding to concerns about indispensability**

Such criticisms have not gone unnoticed, nor have they passed without reply. Were the ‘NGO Livelihoods’ thesis to be put publicly in its most extreme form, it would meet with much anger and hostility. Given the long working hours and the longing to stop spending so much time driving their four-wheel drive vehicles that characterised many of the NGO workers that I met, such talk would likely be found offensive and cynical.

To deal with Sullivan first, her work has been attacked on a number of fronts. In one article, she recounts how she was thought by some – though by no means all – NGO support actors to be publishing ‘defamatory’ and ‘libellous’ information about the conservancy programme (2003b). Her work – and by implication the work of all ‘external’ researchers looking at the conservancy programme – was deemed irresponsible because she could say whatever she desired without having to face the consequences of those utterances (ibid). The consequences for the conservancy programme of her critique could be adverse, but would not prejudice her career. On the contrary, it would help her build an impressive publications record. In my own fieldwork in Namibia, I was offered many opinions – more often than not without soliciting them – on the validity and morality of Sullivan’s work, sufficient to become aware of how deeply it has stirred passions. An oft-repeated perception was that she generalised her argument on the basis of too small a sample. One commentator opined that she was more interested in interpreting the conservancy programme in terms of fashionable theories than she was in engaging constructively with its empirical complexities. Another thought she had failed to see how far beyond the ‘white male conservationist agenda’ the conservancy programme had travelled. The comment of yet another actor was concerned less with the quality of her work as with the way in which it was expressed: it was neither diplomatic nor constructive.

The WILD (Wildlife Integration for Livelihoods Diversification) project received similar criticism. The accuracy of its data-set was contested; its researchers were accused of naïve and superficial understandings of the complex political and ethnic dimensions which explained why conservancies might be publicly criticised or

praised by residents. Like Sullivan, their research was accused of moving too carelessly from the specific to the general. Even when the validity of the research was not in question, the fact that as ‘outsiders’ they had required a long time to come to understand the intricacies of the conservancy programme meant that, even after three years of research, what they has produced could have been done as a six month desk-study in Windhoek by one of its more seasoned practitioners. Therefore, for one critic, it added very little new knowledge and failed to fill the gaps about which it would have been productive to know more. It was also thought that the WILD team could have been more diplomatic and constructive in their criticism of the conservancy programme; although they appeared to fare better in this regard than Sullivan.

In both the criticisms of the conservancy programme and the responses to them, it is hard not to suspect anger as a prime motivating factor in explaining the hostility generated. In my view, this hostility is regrettable and unhelpful. I suspect that it makes commentators liable to be less fair and less respectful of each other’s work, sometimes to the point of dismissing it wholesale. This would be an unfortunate response from anyone involved in the conservancy programme, as it could lead us to overlook points and recommendations that could in other circumstances be deemed constructive and valid by commentators on both sides of the divide. I would suggest that Sullivan’s work on the gathering habits of the Damara (i.e. 2004) provides information of great utility to conservancy policy makers. I myself have come to be grateful for criticisms of my own research programme in Namibia, in particular regarding how careful I might need to be in employing it generalise about the conservancy programme as a whole. At the time, though, I was angered by the manner in which these suggestions had been made to me. There is no magic solution to stopping disputes becoming too personal, other than leaving space for a variety of opinions, with a view to encouraging frank, comprehensive and good-tempered debate.

Clearly, then, the concept of ‘circularity in intervention’ lends itself to critical appraisals of the conservancy programme. But it need not be taken as an *a priori* condemnation of the enterprise. If the conservancy programme is fundamentally an exercise in knowledge transfer, then does it not follow that, once the transfer is complete, the support organisations will become entirely dispensable? If we recall the classification of conservancies as fast, medium and long track, could we not argue

that it brings into sharp focus the extent to which weaning conservancies off their dependency upon support organisations is the overall rationale of providing support? There is no obligation to initiate a conservancy; rather, support organisations are approached by communal area inhabitants who for one reason or another want to form one. Once a conservancy is formed and assigned a support organisation, neither its committee institutions nor its residents need take the advice offered by the support organisation; nor need they sign up to suggestions to negotiate a hunting concession or enter into a joint venture agreement with a private investor.

Evidence from Tsiseb conservancy can be used to support these points. Tsiseb was slowly weaning itself off at least some of the support it received from RISE (Rural Institute for Social Development and Empowerment) and NACOBTA (Namibian Community-Based Tourism Association), as well as the budgetary support it received from NACSO. The executive committee had become capable of taking many decisions without seeking advice, and had been inclined on some occasions not to follow the advice that was offered. For instance, NACOBTA had advised against accepting the bid for the running of the lodge put in by Kobus de Jager, the principal investor in the Brandberg White Lady Lodge, on the basis that he did not have an established track record of running the size of operation he had proposed. The committee, though, decided to recommend to conservancy residents de Jager's proposal at the Annual General Meeting. This decision may or may not have been prudent. The Brandberg White Lady Lodge was generating income for the conservancy, but investors had fallen behind on monthly payments and were encountering difficulties absorbing the heavy start-up costs entailed by the construction of the lodge. It was unclear in 2004 whether they would be able to stave off potential bankruptcy, but in order to make that possibility a little less likely, the conservancy committee had decided to be flexible with payment demands. Whether mistaken or inspired, the decision indicates that the conservancy committee was starting to take decisions based on its own criteria, not just those of support organisations.

Deciding to accept the proposal that led to the Brandberg White Lady Lodge is one thing. Having the knowledge, skills and resources to negotiate the contract through which the conservancy's benefits are legally guaranteed is another. But it remains the case that the conservancy committee retained discretion over how much of this advice and assistance to accept or discard. Its acceptance indicated a process

roughly similar to a coordination of beliefs about the purposes that the Lodge should serve. Nothing was forced upon them; rather the agreements were negotiated and arrived at by consensus, which, as demonstrated, is an idea from an available and widely-accepted knowledge tradition.

Finally, a comment on the relations between the executive committee and the support organisations, which was by and large very amicable. That the RISE staff based in Uis were black (one of them was Damara, hailing from the nearby town of Omaruru) made good relations easier; although relations with the white as well as black NACOBTA staff that made visits to Tsiseb were just as friendly. Perhaps most importantly in regard to the question of indispensability, RISE staff in particular made it clear on various occasions, such as executive committee meetings, that the conservancy had to prepare itself for their departure. Owing to the popularity of the conservancy programme, RISE was providing support to increasing numbers of conservancies and was being called upon ever more to assist in the process of conservancy formation. They could not maintain the same level of support for Tsiseb that they had in previous years, attended fewer conservancy committee meetings and were called away from Uis with greater frequency, reflecting a shift in their priorities.

## **5. Conclusion**

I hope with this chapter to have illustrated the importance of exploring the link between knowing and deciding if we are to understand who participates and on what basis within Tsiseb conservancy. As the course of my analysis suggests, I think that what applies to Tsiseb may well apply to other conservancies. The extent to which it does will depend according to context. We might wish to use it to locate conservancies on a sliding scale, running from the indispensability to the dispensability of support organisations. I hope also to have demonstrated that, whilst viewing the conservancy programme as an exercise in knowledge transfer can lend support to a variety of (sometimes diametrically opposed) standpoints regarding issues of power, control and their effects upon implementation, it is not intended solely as a criticism. Rather, it is intended as a way of clarifying what type of participation characterises the conservancy programme, and the extent to which having or not having knowledge affects who participates and on what basis. Moreover, in a context in which increasing attention is now being paid to the

specifics of participation, as opposed to agreement on the premise that local participation is a good and necessary condition of sustainable natural resource management, I think that having a clearer view of a central factor in determining participation in the conservancy programme is very helpful to the policy-making process. This, though, is a point that is taken up further in the concluding chapter.

# **PART III**

# Chapter VIII

## The municipality of Los Toldos

### 1. Introduction

The municipality of Los Toldos is located in a sub-Andean mountain chain running through the province of Salta and on into Bolivia. The landscape is therefore one of sweeping valleys, towering peaks and steep slopes with a dense cover of subtropical mountain forest, better known in Argentina as the ‘Yungas’. This forest has become an object of considerable conservation value and forms the ‘eco-region’ across a part of which the activities of the Alto Bermejo Project unfold. The Yungas are not only found in Argentina. In total, this type of forest stretches down the eastern slopes of the Andes from Venezuela to Northwest Argentina in a series of discontinuous strips covering 4.5-4.8 million hectares (Brown et al. 2001). Within Argentina, it stretches southwards along the eastern Andean foothills, in narrow strips for roughly 700km, from the border with Bolivia in the North, down to the province of Catamarca (Brown and Grau 1993).

Altitude is the principal variable which determines the composition of vegetation within the Yungas, and the range of 400-3000m (above sea level) across which the forest grows, can be divided into three distinct layers:

1. Piedmont forest. This layer grows between 400-700m and is also known as “transition forest” (Cabrera 1976). Much of this forest type has since disappeared, owing to the expansion over two centuries of the agricultural frontier (Brown et al. 2001 629)
2. Mountain Forest, which grows between 700-1500m (ibid.)
3. ‘Cloud forest’, which grows between 1500-3000m, so-called because of the cloud formations that envelop large areas of the forest at such altitudes during the rainy season (ibid).

Ever since a section of the Argentine-Bolivian border was re-drawn in 1938, the Valley of Los Toldos, which incorporates the present day municipality of Los Toldos,

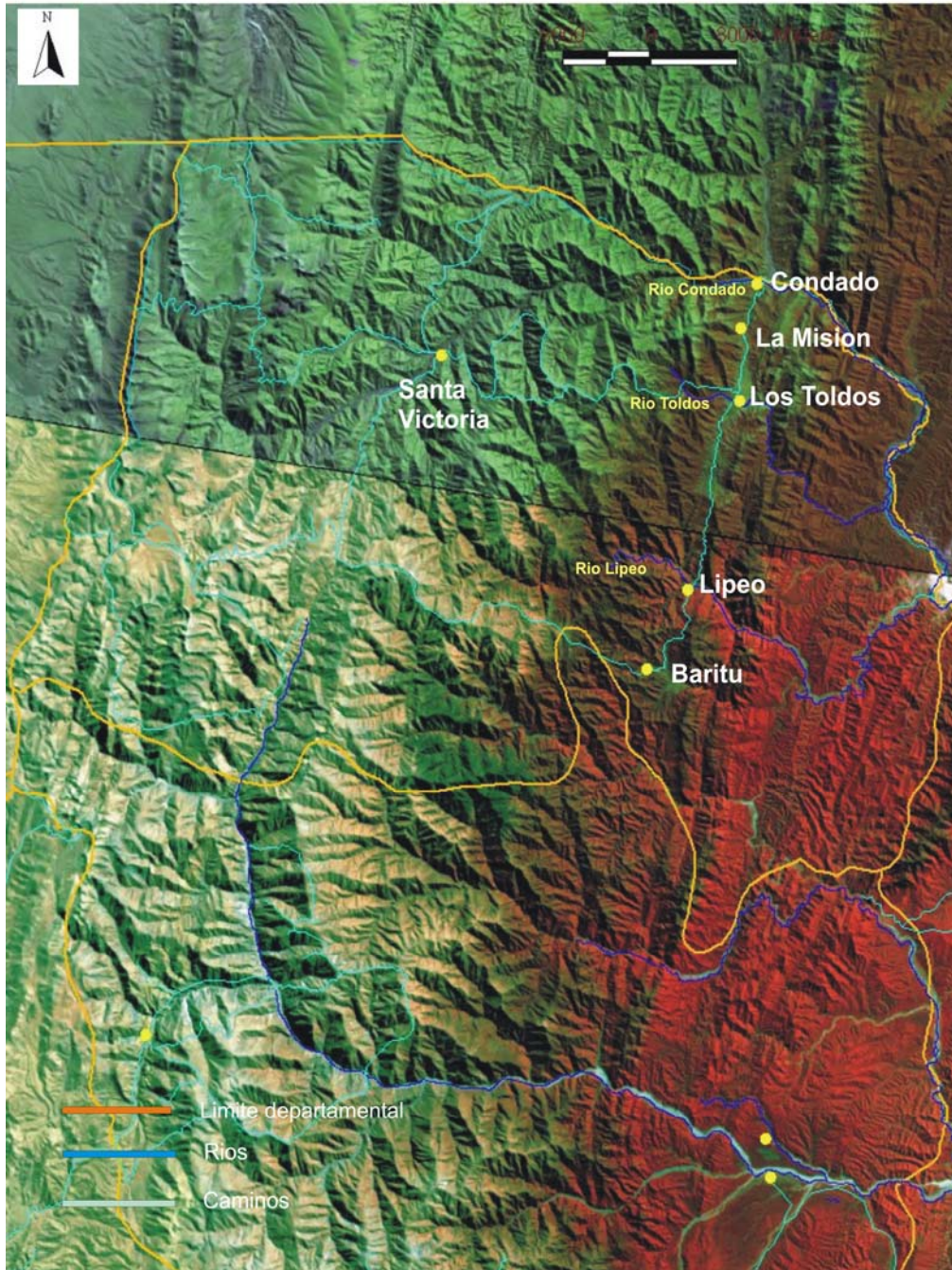


has been located within the Department of Santa Victoria, in the province of Salta, Northwest Argentina. Historically, however, the village of Los Toldos is a product of settlement patterns in the Tarija Valley in modern Bolivia. Its current situation was forged principally through the interplay of: colonisation; migration; war; trade; the adjustment of national borders between Argentina and Bolivia; and the uneven industrialisation of the Argentine Northwest.

This chapter kicks off in section two with a broad-brush sketch of these interwoven processes which, when taken together, constitute a history of geographical isolation, marginalisation and concomitant poverty. After offering a brief background history of the area, the focus switches to events post-1938 in section three. Three themes are explored in particular. First, the municipality continues to have more in common with the nineteenth-century, pre-industrial Bolivian setting which first gave rise to permanent Hispanic settlement than it does with, say, modern-day Buenos Aires. Second, changes have occurred following the assimilation of Los Toldos into Argentina, not least because of the increased presence of the state from the mid 1960s onwards. The municipality is less poor as a result of its incorporation into the Province of Salta, but *toldeños*, the inhabitants of Los Toldos, have become increasingly dependent upon state resources. Third, this dependency facilitates the development of the political machines that are part and parcel of municipal, regional and national politics in Argentina (cf. Levitsky 2001, 2003). I draw on Susan Stokes's (Stokes 2005) account of perverse accountability in order to demonstrate how access to valued state resources is often determined by political allegiance. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how this history of isolation and poverty has shaped the basis on which *toldeños* engage with and participate in the Alto Bermejo Project.

Finally, a note on the focus on the specific history of Northwest Argentina. This contrast with the general history given for Namibia reflects nothing more than the sources available during the research period. Had there been more material available on Uis and Damaraland, chapter five would have been correspondingly more specific.

**Map 8.1 – The municipality of Los Toldos**



Source: LIEY

## **2. The Valley and municipality of Los Toldos: a historical introduction**

### **Prehispanic settlement**

Not a great deal is known about the inhabitants of the upper basin of the River Bermejo prior to the arrival of the Spanish, although the “Yungas” (subtropical mountain forests) of the zone are thought to have been inhabited since approximately 10,000 B.C. (Brown et al. 2001 646), and in greater numbers than currently inhabit the zone (Bolsi 1997, Reboratti 1996). The origins and history of many of the peoples thought to have populated the area are still a matter of much conjecture and relatively little research, but two that are worth mentioning in connection with Lipeo are the Mataguayo and the Chiriguano. The Mataguayo are thought to have been hunter-gatherers (Reboratti, 1996) and the Chiriguano, of the Tupí-Guaraní family, to have been shifting cultivators (Ventura 1991) who migrated southwards between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Gil Montero and Massé 2004b). ‘Chiriguano’ is a Quechua term which translates roughly as ‘those who die of cold’, interpreted by Giannecchini (1996) as meaning that they were incapable of living at 4000m above sea level.

It has been suggested that toldeños have continued the farming practices of the Chiriguano, (Natenzon 1993, although she is not explicit about the basis on which this assertion is made). Interestingly, there is local speculation in Los Toldos that Lipeo inhabitants in particular may be of (at least) partial Chiriguano descent, given that their facial characteristics are held by some to be different to the more Hispanic features claimed for the inhabitants of the nearby village of Los Toldos. Certainly, toponymic evidence testifies to Chiriguano presence in the area: Lipeo would appear to derive from Ipeu, one of the place names that are taken to denote the arrival of the Chiriguano to the upper basin of the river Bermejo (Reboratti, 1996:44). However, to cast Lipeo in the light of a surviving remnant of Chiriguano culture whilst setting up Los Toldos as a place of a contrastingly Hispanic heritage may have more to do with local identity politics, which denote ‘Indian’ as low status and Hispanic as respectable, than with significant genetic or cultural differences between the people of the two places. Nor are the people of current-day Lipeo alone in practising shifting cultivation; rather, it is a livelihood activity common to most of the residents of the

municipality of Los Toldos. The historical Chiriguano presence in the area may be more likely help us understand local life not just in Lipeo but also in the surrounding areas, including into modern Southern Bolivia.

### **The arrival of the Spanish, war and the establishment of the *marquesado***

The period of Hispanic colonisation which, in the case of what is now Southern Bolivia and Northwest Argentina, ran from the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century, was established and consolidated through four central factors: military force (Giannecchini 1996), missionaries (Teruel 1999), the introduction of livestock (Comajuncosa y Hortet 1993) and intermarriage between Spanish and autochthonous populations (Susnik 1968). Subjects of the Spanish Crown who had travelled to the ‘New World’ were persuaded to ‘take possession’ of land – and effectively the people living upon it – through the granting of the *encomienda* (the right to put ‘indigenous’ inhabitants to work on a piece of land) or the *merced* (the ceding of a piece of land to the subject who would work it or have it worked); although in practical terms, both amounted to the same thing, as far as colonial settlers in the zone were concerned (Reboratti 1996). On this basis the great *latifundios* or *fincas* (estates or ranches) were gradually established, becoming important economic centres of agricultural and livestock production (ibid.). Eventually, an area which includes the current municipality of Los Toldos would be subsumed into the *finca* named Toldos, which itself formed part of a wider *marquesado* (marquisate, or territory pertaining to a marquis), comprising a number of *fincas*. Important though the *marquesados* were to the economy of the zone until well into the nineteenth century, their constituent parts were not homogenous, precisely because not all of the peoples who inhabited the further-flung territories to which a *Marqués* (Marquis) might make claim were easily dominated. Establishing the kind of settled agriculture and livestock farming activities on which a *Marquesado* depended was far from straightforward in areas claimed and defended by the people who had lived there for centuries before the arrival of the Spanish. The chronicles of missionaries of the time make this clear (i.e. Nordenskjold 1917), with special reference to the ferocity of resistance that came from the Chiriguano who, for Reboratti (1996), were an indomitable and bellicose group that waged war not only on the Spanish but also on the Mataguayo. Gil Montero and Massé (2004:2) take a slightly different view, arguing that the Chiriguano were more selective in their ferocity, tending to make alliances with the

Spanish in their campaigns against the Mataguayo. For this reason, they contend, up until the start of the nineteenth century, Spanish Christian and Chiriguano groups could largely coexist in parts of the Toldos Valley.

Whatever form the alliances and animosities between these three groups may have taken, up until little more than a hundred years ago, Toldos Valley, in which most of the present-day municipality of Los Toldos is located, resembled a no man's land, a war zone between the Chiriguano and the Mataguayo peoples (*ibid.*). This was despite the fact that, following the close of the wars of independence from the Spanish crown in the 1820s, the valley became part of the Bolivian Canton of Tarija – at least on paper. Any sort of human settlement would, therefore, have been transitory in character until the Chiriguano frontier had been pushed steadily eastwards towards the end of the nineteenth century (*ibid.*). As Gil Montero and Massé point out, this instability contrasts with the image, drawn by a traveller from Salta in 1791, of prosperity and plenty derived from working the land in the fertile valleys of Tarija (cited in Dalence 1975 [1851]). However, the Toldos valley was probably the last of those in Tarija to be conquered, and therefore the prosperity from the surrounding environs that did arrive came only at a later stage.

Whilst this account demonstrates that Uis and Los Toldos evidently share a history of colonisation, it also makes clear how very different they are. Los Toldos was at the end of a wave of colonisation that can be traced back to the sixteenth century. Its peaceable settlement by people of European descent marked the final chapter in the story of the area's territorial consolidation. West-central Namibia, the area in which Uis would later be built, was caught up in the 'scramble for Africa' which occurred in the 1880s. It was settled Europeans, unlike other parts of modern Namibia, and indeed comparatively soon after the arrival of the German colonial presence. The pre-Hispanic indigenous groups in and around the valley of Los Toldos were far more – although by no means completely – assimilated first into Bolivian and then Argentine identities through inter-marriage than the Damara, Herero and Nama groups were assimilated into the identities of German or South African colonisers. The environments in which the two places were settled also differed vastly: the valley of Los Toldos lay nestled between densely forested Andean mountain chains, whilst Uis sits a mere 30-40km from the arid, rainless expanse of the Namib desert.

### **From the *marquesado* to patchy industry**

Throughout the nineteenth century, the direct economic importance of the *marquesado* (marquisate) declined. In the first half of the century, this phenomenon was due to the interruption of trade routes during the wars of independence (Langer and Conti 1991). In the second half, the uneven process of industrialisation gained momentum in the Argentine Northwest, and reduced income generated by the big *fincas* (Reboratti, 1996). With the establishment of countries following the wars of independence, some *marquesados* were over time cut in two by the new (albeit vaguely drawn) national borders (Langer and Conti, 1991). This was the fate of the *Marquesado de Tojo*, at one point perhaps the richest and most politically important in its vicinity (ibid.). Some of the *fincas* (estates) which comprised it were declared to be in Argentine territory, whilst others, such as the Los Toldos *Finca*, pertained to Bolivia. Making what was broadly one unit into two and subjecting it to different governments, legal and taxation systems, made it harder to ensure that a *marquesado* based on agricultural production and sale continued to be profitable.

After the Los Toldos *finca* had been sold, subdivided into smaller properties and resold in the course of the nineteenth century, and perhaps 40-50 years after it had become sufficiently peaceable to permit the inhabitation of smallholder farmers, the area it covered became part of Argentina. A border change between Bolivia and its southern neighbour was drawn up in 1925, in the form of the Carrillo-Diez de Medina Treaty. The treaty was ratified in Bolivia in 1929, and finally brought into effect in 1938 when the Bolivian Vice Canton of Los Toldos was incorporated into the Argentine Department of Santa Victoria, Province of Salta<sup>32</sup>.

The nature of income derived from *fincas* (estates) also changed, from the production of goods for sale at markets to the extraction of rent and grazing fees from the tenant farmers living on the land. With the development of the sugar industry, though, the *fincas* provided the necessary manpower to process the sugar harvest (*zafra*), at the large sugar refineries. The necessity of paying rent and grazing fees in hard currency obliged tenant farmers to look for paid work for several months of the year. This was convenient for the province of Salta's landowning oligarchy, many of whom had shares in the province's sugar refineries. It offered them a ready-made workforce, who in addition started to buy food supplies from their landlords, because

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<sup>32</sup> Tratado de límites con la República de Bolivia, <http://www.argentina-rree.com/7/7-061.htm>

the interruption from working in the sugar harvest did not always permit them to carry out all of the livelihood activities which had previously satisfied their families' subsistence needs. In this way, what Reboratti has called the 'iron circle' was forged (1989). Whether by accident or design, the development of the profitable sugar industry in some parts of the Northwest ensured that other parts of it remained poor, isolated as they were from many of the benefits of industrialisation, such as infrastructural investment and improvements, or greater access to public education and health services. At the same time, those who migrated from poorer, remoter spots to work seasonally contributed to the development of industrialising areas and thereby unwittingly (or perhaps unwillingly) reinforced the inequitable character of that development.

For a significant portion of the Twentieth century, many of its inhabitants entered into this cycle. This was not the case for everyone, though: whilst still part of Bolivia and even after its assimilation into Argentina, there were significant amounts of living in the valley who owned the plots they lived on. A country-wide cadastral survey from 1906 registered the presence of 128 properties and 73 title-holders in the Toldos Valley, reflecting the aforementioned process of subdivision of the Toldos Finca into smaller plots over the course of the nineteenth century<sup>33</sup>. The majority of these would probably have been farmed by their owners (Gil Montero pers. com.), or perhaps rented out to one or two small farmers. There may not, in this scenario of smallholders, have been the same imperative to rely on the income from seasonal labour, and it may therefore not have been sought by all of the valley's residents. Nonetheless, there were still tenant farmers on larger landholdings who felt this imperative more keenly. In order to comply with their financial obligations, tenant farmers work for up to six months at a time in the San Martín de Tabacal sugar refinery, one of the province of Salta's largest. Indeed, through the first half of the twentieth century, sugar harvesting and other seasonal activities became an increasingly important source of income for many of the valley's inhabitants. How increasing numbers of small-holder farmers became tenant farmers – i.e. became considerably poorer – seemingly in the first decades of the twentieth is not understood. Hopefully, it will in future be taken up by impressive scholars of the Argentine Northwest such as Raquel Gil Montero.

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<sup>33</sup> Catastro de la provincia de Arce. Registro de las fincas rústicas del vicecantón de Toldos, 1906, Bolivian National Archives and Library.

However, the modernisation of the process of sugar cane harvesting reduced the dependency of the Sugar refineries upon large quantities of manual labour. After 1960, new technology for cutting and burning sugar cane, as well as for loading and transporting it, led to the hiring of far fewer workers for the sugar harvest, leaving much of the Northwest's rural population with more precarious employment prospects (Campi 1991). This has certainly been the case in the municipality of Los Toldos at large, in which the level of seasonal migration has sharply dropped since the 1960s, replaced by a rising trend of permanent migration to urban centres in Salta and surrounding provinces (Gil Montero and Massé 2004a, Salta 2002).

Here once again a fundamental difference can be noted with respect to Uis, which was very much the product of the development of the tin-mining industry in West-central Namibia. It benefited, up until the closure of the mine, from industrial development. Moreover, it did not engender a cycle of seasonal migration, as it provided sufficiently stable, year-round employment which enabled workers to settle in Uis.

### **3. Los Toldos since 1938**

#### **Geography, infrastructure and continuity with Bolivia**

Owing to its history, the municipality of Los Toldos has to this day in many ways more in common with rural Bolivia than it does with Argentina. Residents of the municipality of Los Toldos often have relatives living in Bolivia. Women dressed in wide-brimmed hats, patterned, pleated skirts worn just below the knee and llama or vicuna wool shawls are not an uncommon sight either side of a local border which, in terms of the movement of persons and goods, is purely notional. During the period of field research, there was no border post or customs checkpoint to mark an entry/exit point between the two countries (though there was talk at another customs checkpoint of building one in the near future). What provides a more tangible degree of separation is the River Bermejo, roughly 75km of whose course constitutes the western leg of the v-shaped kink in the national border.

Bolivian influence on the make-up of Los Toldos persists in large measure due to infrastructural and geographical factors. To this day, the only vehicle access from Argentina to Los Toldos is through Bolivia. The journey involves crossing the River



Bermejo 50-60km downstream at the (Argentine) border town of Aguas Blancas and heading north along the Pan-American Highway. Los Toldos is served by a turn-off from the Highway down to the River Bermejo. Once on the other side of the river, a wide dirt track winds and twists its way up the valley for twelve kilometres, passing en route the settlements of El Condado and La Misión before coming into the village of Los Toldos. Since 2002, access has been made much easier by the construction and opening of a bridge. Prior to this date, vehicle access was determined by the water-level of the river, which in the wet season (in summer) was more often than not sufficiently high to block the passage even of four wheel drive or other high ground-clearance vehicles. Goods and people were instead ferried across by means of a *roldana*, a pulley-wheel and cable-operated system. Even before the building of the bridge, though, it was easier for people living in the municipality of Los Toldos to cross to the Bolivian locale of La Mamora than for them to travel to Santa Victoria Oeste, the 'capital' of the department of Santa Victoria, which Los Toldos became part of in 1938. A round trip on foot from Los Toldos village to La Mamora could be done within one day at most. A return journey to Santa Victoria Oeste and back from Los Toldos village, in contrast, involved (and still involves) a 40km trek along narrow footpaths that cross five Andean valleys. A return trip would require at the very least two long and arduous days at a pace that could only be sustained by hardy cattle herders (*vaqueanos*). This journey could not safely be attempted in the rainy season.

There was talk in the 1970s of building a road within Argentina to Baritú National Park, which would also have provided access to Los Toldos, thereby rendering it unnecessary to enter via Bolivia. However, such suggestions have not as yet made significant headway against two strong objections set against them. The first came from the Administration of National Parks, which has argued that a route through the Park would open up previously inaccessible primary Yungas forest to illegal logging activity. Logging does appear to have been poorly controlled in the areas surrounding the park (Bianchetti 1973). The second relates to the construction costs of any potential route: to go through the Park would be expensive, to go around it even more so. Certainly, it would be no small feat of engineering to build across so many tree-lined valleys, passes and rivers. Given how unlikely it is that Los Toldos will in the near future be connected by road to the rest of the province of Salta, the influence of and local ties with Bolivia are bound to remain strong.

### **Unchanged local livelihood activities**

The remoteness of Los Toldos both explains why so many of its residents continue to earn at least part of their living from activities which have been practised in the region for hundreds of years, whilst also shaping the extent and character of those activities. The majority of people in Los Toldos depend in varying degrees for their livelihood on livestock farming and cultivation, largely for subsistence purposes, sometimes for (non-monetary) exchange, known locally as *trueque*, and occasionally for sale at local and regional markets.

Shifting cultivation is widely practised in the municipality. The following account is based partly on personal observation but also on Ramadori's study of shifting cultivation in Baritú, a village in the southernmost part of the municipality which (importantly for its inhabitants) is located outside the boundaries of its namesake park (Ramadori 1995 208-212). Individual families clear small plots (known as *rozas*) of forest cover, measuring between 0.3ha to 3ha, and normally sow them for between one and three years, depending on the altitude. In Lipeo, for instance, where plots are generally cleared at 900-1300m above sea level, it is possible to use the same land for up to three years. The altitude of Baritú, at 1500-1700m, militates against sowing the same land for more than one season. After use, plots are left fallow for up to twenty years. Leaving plots to recover sufficient nutrients for cultivation requires a family either to clear another or to return to one which has previously been left fallow (known locally as a *champa*).

Crops are harvested between March and April (autumn), following which the clearance of another portion of forest is started, generally next to or as close as possible to the harvested plot. Towards the end of winter, cultivators burn cleared vegetation on top of the plots, leaving aside some of the felled tree-trunks to fence the plots, so as to stop livestock intrusions. In spring (September-October), having burnt the vegetation, the plots are sown. Holes are dug in the ashen surface at an average distance of 1.15m apart, with 3-5 seeds apportioned to every hole. During the summer (November-February), it is necessary to 'clean' the plots repeatedly, an arduous and unpopular task which involves chopping down re-emerged vegetation whilst taking care not to harm the crops sown.

The most widely grown crop is maize, followed by potatoes and groundnuts, but a number of vegetables are also grown, such as peas, broad bean, onion, pumpkin, sweet potato, garlic and *chilacayote* (similar to Thai marrow). Subsistence fruit-

growing, mostly of orange and lime but also lemon, mandarin and grapefruit in smaller quantities, is also widespread. In his study, based exclusively on maize production, Ramadori calculated that one hectare yielded 1057kg of maize on average, providing an average family size of eight with a maximum of 1,278 kcal per day (ibid.:210), much lower than the World Health Organisation's average of 2,000 kcal per day for adult women and 2,500 kcal for adult men. Ramadori argues that other crops are not grown in sufficient quantities to compensate for this shortfall in calorie intake. It is hard to dispute this argument, and, sadly, easy to spot signs of malnutrition within the populace of the municipality. However, it should not be concluded most people are malnourished: one local medic thinks instances of it are more common in areas such as Lipeo, El Arazáy or Baritú, but less so in others, such as Los Toldos village or El Condado. Birth rates have dropped and pensions/subsidies income helps compensate low *roza* yields.

Livestock farming in Los Toldos complements subsistence cultivation. Although sheep are quite often kept as well, occasionally as goat, and despite a recent resurgence of farmyard animals such as egg-laying hens, cattle predominate and are kept in greater numbers than any other animal. Livestock serve a variety of practical purposes in Los Toldos:

- Subsistence – sheep, for instance are bred for meat and, increasingly, for wool as a response to an increase in local artisanal production.
- Cattle are slaughtered for local festivals.
- Cattle in particular constitute a form of security and savings.

Livestock, and in particular cattle, also have intrinsic and symbolic value. Herd size is an indication of status and sometimes also of power (though it would be erroneous to assume that the most important powerbrokers in Los Toldos also had the largest cattle herds). Therefore, some people choose not to eat as many of their animals as they might in order to maintain a larger herd size.

As in other parts of Northwest Argentina, toldeños employ a system of transhumance, in order to make the best of the grazing resources available to them. From November to March, cattle (but not sheep) are taken higher up the mountains to pastures above the treeline (2,500-4,000m) From April to October, they are brought

down into the Yungas, where the grazing is less nutritious and less abundant, but sufficient nonetheless to provide an alternative that takes pressure off the pastures further up the mountains.

In neither cultivation nor livestock farming have *toldeños* made, until recently, recourse to modern agricultural inputs and techniques. The introduction of some of these, to the extent that they are deemed useful by potential users, underpins the agroforestry initiatives carried out by the Pro Yungas Foundation and the Social Agricultural Programme, within the framework of the Alto Bermejo Project (these initiatives are explored further on in the chapter). It is not difficult to trace the continuance of such practices back to the isolation of the municipality in relation to the rest of Argentina. By dint of its location in a heavily-forested, mountainous region, it was poorly served by road connections and ill-suited to the agricultural economies of scale that had emerged in lower, uniformly flatter parts of the region.

### **Changes in Los Toldos through assimilation**

Notwithstanding the Municipality's strong links to Bolivia, it would be very odd if becoming part of another, much richer country had *not* engendered significant change. And, clearly, it has, in both predictable and surprising ways. Given the history of Los Toldos, it is initially baffling to discover that 'Bolivian' is often, though by no means always, a dirty word in the municipality. 'Bolivian' has become a term imbued with undesirable connotations of low status, in contrast with the respectability and relative affluence associated with being Argentine. Upon further inspection, this adjustment of local identity is indicative of other changes that have occurred since the area was assimilated into Argentina.

Initially, the inhabitants of Los Toldos were not keen to be associated with Argentina. The Provincial Government of Salta was slow to adapt to the changed border arrangements, and did not until the 1960s make serious efforts to incorporate the newcomers into the province. According to the Salta Tribune, a provincial daily, the establishment in 1965 of the Municipal Commission (27 years after the border treaty was ratified) did not meet with any great amount of local approval. One inhabitant was cited in the newspaper as saying

They have brought laws that are not known here and they go against the people. They don't leave people be for *tomadas* [consumption of alcohol on public holidays] on the days they are accustomed to.

They don't allow trading with Bolivia. They want to oblige us to fly the Argentine flag on our houses, with the majority of us here being Bolivians [19.6.1965; my translation].

Such protests can hardly have been conducive to encouraging the toldeños to embrace a more Argentine identity; what, therefore, prompted the change? This question is another clear candidate for further research, but the most likely factors are, first, the significantly increased state presence in the area and, second, the negative perception of Bolivians in the Argentine Northwest more widely.

Although slow to start, the state's growing presence, over the course of the last third of the twentieth century, became the central source of economic development in Los Toldos, especially in terms of employment opportunities. Following the establishment of the municipal council, and concentrated mostly in the village of Los Toldos, the area has played host to the opening of:

- a primary and lower-secondary school
- a health clinic, recently expanded to form a small hospital with a travelling clinic that visits other villages and settlements in the municipality
- a town hall
- a small library
- a provincial police station

Local and provincial government have become one of the most important sources of employment and other forms of revenue. In total, combining municipal and provincial jobs with pensions paid, local government accounts for 21% of all sources of income for people in the municipality aged over 15 (Salta 2002). This does not include other subsidies, such as the Work Plan, the Plan for Household Heads or the food assistance for those deemed poorest, all provided by the federal government. The figure is even more significant given that 53.7% of those aged over 15 reported that they had no source of income (ibid). Herein lies a significant parallel with Uis, Namibia, where pension payouts and state employment are essential contributors to local livelihood (see chapter 7). However, this similarity plays out differently between Namibia and Argentina, especially in regards to the political systems which characterise the two contexts (as the following sub-section explores in greater detail).

The greater presence of the state coincided with the decline in opportunities for seasonal labour, upon which local livelihood strategies had been partially based for much of the twentieth century (Gil Montero and Massé 2004a, 2004b). The amount of manpower required for harvesting sugar cane started to drop off in the 1960s and then more sharply in the 1970s, owing to the introduction of machines to the process (Campi 1991). In turn, and not just in Los Toldos but also in other isolated, rural parts of the Argentine Northwest, the drying up of work in the sugar industry led to a change in migration patterns from rural-rural to rural-‘urban’ (Gil Montero and Massé 2004b:12). I put ‘urban’ in inverted commas because by it Gil Montero and Massé refer not just to rural migration to provincial or departmental capitals, but also to the biggest villages within a given municipality, a use of the term which rather fudges the rural-urban divide. Los Toldos village is a case in point: it witnessed a population increase in the 1980s and on into the 1990s (*ibid.*). Montero and Massé argue that this upturn is explained by two principal factors:

1. The mortality rate has declined much more sharply than the birth rate since the end of the 1960s.
2. There has been a significant decline in migration patterns to the bigger cities

This second factor in particular is a marker of urbanisation: migration to bigger cities has ceased, at least in the case of Los Toldos, because people have replaced seasonal labour with state employment and subsidies (*ibid.*). They make the further claim that the availability of these income sources has led to the frequent abandonment of the livestock and cultivation activities common to the rural economy. Arguably, Gil Montero and Massé underplay the importance to livelihood strategies of these activities. Nonetheless, salaries, subsidies and other forms of access to state resources are a crucial form of income for many in Los Toldos.

The sheer extent of the state’s increased presence in Los Toldos since 1965 explains its significant impact on local identity. There is a very straightforward sense in which it pays to be Argentine. Without Argentine citizenship, the people of Los Toldos would in many ways be worse off. A comparison of modern-day Los Toldos with neighbouring Padcaya, the Bolivian Vice-Canton of which Los Toldos formed part prior to 1938, is illuminating. Los Toldos remains among the poorest municipalities in the province of Salta: according to the Los Toldos Strategic Plan

document, the basic needs of 69.1% of the population are unmet (Salta 2002:35). Yet in Padcaya, according to the Bolivian national census of 2001, basic needs were unmet for 88.1% of its residents. The comparatively improved fortunes of the toldeños correlate closely with the increased presence of the state since the 1960s. Economically speaking, therefore, it makes little sense for the area's inhabitants to play the Bolivian identity card.

It is easy to see how these economic incentives for the adoption of an Argentine identity would have been accompanied by social ones. In Northwest Argentina in particular, but also in the country more widely, there is a recognisable (although by no means universal) tendency to denigrate people of Bolivian origin (*boliviano*). It is a striking irony that *boliviano* is sometimes used pejoratively in Los Toldos. Even this cursory consideration of Argentine animosity towards Bolivia offers clues as to why it would be expedient for toldeños to identify themselves with Argentina.

### **Local politics: 'small town, big hell'**

The local importance of the state is so great that the emergence of a culture of dependency is to be expected. The livelihood strategies of many, both in Los Toldos and in the department of Santa Victoria more widely, are now tied into various forms of local, provincial and national assistance. Dependency is the most crucial factor in understanding political dynamics in the municipality. In an economically impoverished context, a municipal council with employment opportunities and control over state resources can prove a valuable ally or a formidable adversary.

The dependency of a local populace upon the resources of the state provides, then, ideal conditions for the development of machine politics, that is, a system in which politicians use their control over access to the resources of the state to seek (re)election and for personal or party gain. This may be brought about by acts such as vote-rigging or voter intimidation, but another common strategy employed by machine politicians is to utilise state resources to buy votes from particular electoral groups, or from clients who are able to influence and mobilise electoral groups. A huge literature exists on this topic: for instance, James Scott's (Scott 1969) work on the similarities between the graft and patronage common to new nations, such as the Philippines, and the political machines of nineteenth-century New York or twentieth-century Chicago. In Argentina, Steven Levitsky has detailed the transformation of the current party of government, the Justicialist Party (known often in Argentina as the

Peronist Party, after its founder Juan D. Perón) “from a de facto labor party into a patronage based or machine party” (2001:43)<sup>34</sup>.

In the department of Santa Victoria, the Justicialist Party reigns supreme, as much in the departmental capital of Santa Victoria Oeste as in the municipality of Los Toldos. There is so little in the way of opposition that Justicialist Party candidates compete against each other in municipal elections. Given the national profile of the Justicialist Party and especially the culture of local dependency on state resources, it comes as no great surprise to find that the political life of the department would appear to bear the hallmarks of machine politics. It is against this wider departmental background that the municipal politics of Los Toldos need to be considered.

If local accounts are to be believed, an example of machine politics is embodied by the Ontiveros family, who have dominated departmental politics for three decades<sup>35</sup>. The amount of Ontiveros family members that have held positions in local government over the past 25 years is very suggestive of a political machine at work. From 1982-2003, Alcides Ontiveros was mayor of Santa Victoria Oeste, the departmental capital, and acquired a reputation for graft that led to him finally losing the municipal elections in 2003. His wife was the departmental senator, one of his brothers, René, was the departmental deputy, another brother, Adolfo, ran the secondary school’s hostel, for which yet another brother had won the contract to supply bread. In September 2006, Dante Báez, a relation of Alcides Ontiveros, was made headmaster of the secondary school in Santa Victoria Oeste. The appointment prompted a series of local protests, which were eventually quelled by provincial infantry troops.<sup>36</sup>

Recent work by Susan Stokes (2005:315-325) on machine politics in Argentina may well help us to elucidate more precisely the purposes served by installing allies in the local government of Santa Victoria department. Central to her account is the concept of perverse accountability, which entails a reversal of the intended or desired consequences of representative democracy. Instead of elected representatives being accountable to their voters, (at least some) voters become accountable to their elected representatives. Stokes is concerned with predictive failures in current theoretical

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<sup>34</sup> See also Levitsky 2003, chapters 1-2 for a more elaborate account of the transformation.

<sup>35</sup> The following account, unless otherwise indicated, draws on interviews with a number of key informants in Los Toldos and Santa Victoria Oeste whose identities shall remain anonymous for reasons of expediency.

<sup>36</sup> Copenoa News Agency, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006, <http://www.copenoa.com.ar/v2/spip.php?article235>



models of machine politics. In particular, she seeks to understand why it is that machine politics persists in countries, such as Argentina, which have adopted the secret ballot in all voting procedures relating to municipal, provincial and national elections.

Machine politics is conventionally held to function through a political party (or machine) offering individual voters, especially poor ones with no strong commitment to any one party, particular enticements to vote for a given candidate. This could, for instance, take the form of promising a bag of food in return for a voter's endorsement at the polls. For such a system to work, that voter's decision must be known to the party making the promise. Parties in possession of this knowledge can make the voter (perversely) accountable to them in two ways. First, the immediate reward may be withheld; second, 'disloyal' voters may be punished by exclusion from access to the resources of government that a party will command if it wins the election, for all of the time it spends in office.

However, it is precisely this scenario which a secret ballot is designed to prevent: theoretically, if the voter's choice remained secret, s/he could receive the reward *and* vote for another party. If voters can renege on their promise, then it is not expedient for machine parties to use resources on them. The consequences of this scenario taken at the collective level would spell the end of clientelist politics wherever the secret ballot is present, but in the Argentine case clearly does not. Stokes resolves the dilemma by documenting the strategies employed by party operatives who strive to render the voting process an open secret. Party operatives drive voters to polling stations and hand them ballot tickets en route. In Argentina, ballot tickets list only the names of a party's given candidate(s) and can be issued directly by that party. Furthermore, in smaller towns and villages, one of Stokes' interviewees notes that there is a lack of anonymity built into the act of voting, captured by the sardonic popular refrain, '*pueblo chico, infierno grande*' ('small town, big hell'). It is much easier for party operatives to discover voter preferences in places where everyone knows each other. Because of this lowered anonymity, Stokes contends that voting should be analysed in the context of a repeated game, not as a one-off. Voters that take a reward but are found to have voted for another candidate will not be considered for rewards in further 'games' (elections) on grounds of disloyalty. Such voters are likely to be aware that they face a higher chance of discovery and that they risk

forfeiting future access to state resources if they do vote against a candidate who offers them a reward.

Against the backdrop of the departmental context and the dynamics of Stokes' compelling outline of perverse accountability, we can start to make some sense of politics in the municipality of Los Toldos. Although no elections took place during the course field work, they were a frequent topic of discussion in my interviews and everyday conversations with toldeños. I was informed of vote-buying during elections on numerous occasions in Los Toldos; and even more so for Santa Victoria Oeste. One interviewee told me that during election campaigns for Santa Victoria Oeste it was common for operatives of the Ontiveros re-election campaign to offer people gifts such as bags of maize, sugar and also shoes. Another told me of how, for the 1999 municipal elections in Los Toldos, a truck was sent down to Lipeo to bring its inhabitants to the polling station, and that once there, lipeños (inhabitants of Lipeo) were given little in the way of privacy when casting their vote. Carolina Cibantos, headmistress of the lower secondary school of Los Toldos, worried that voters did not always know that their voting preferences were supposed to be a secret<sup>37</sup>. In the last instance, though, secrecy is more easily promised than kept. There were numerous occasions on which I heard Los Toldos described with the phrase '*pueblo chico, infierno grande*', and for good reason: privately-held knowledge frequently and quickly becomes public.

To return to the point made at the start of this section, then, the strong presence of state institutions and the dependency of local livelihood strategies on the resources of the state lends itself to the perpetuation of machine politics. The lack of alternatives for income generation strengthens the hand of people who do have access to state resources. Supporting a given political figure is often necessary to acquiring access to such resources. Many examples were given to me; here I will limit myself to two.

First, a dispute between the current mayor, Eleudoro Idiarte, and his predecessor, José Luís Ramírez, demonstrates how public resources are utilised to capture the votes of the Mothers' Clubs operating in the municipality. Whilst still mayor of Los Toldos, former incumbent José Luís Ramírez had been instrumental in the creation of the Mothers' Clubs (*Clubes de Madres*) in 1998. These groups were set up in different localities within the municipality with a view to assisting the women of Los

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Carolina Cibantos, 24.11.04, Los Toldos

Toldos in generating alternative sources of household income, and subsequently became heavily involved in the Alto Bermejo Project's agroforestry initiatives in the municipality. As the Mothers' Clubs started to gain a clearer sense of purpose, craftwork, with a view to recovering lost traditions and supplementing household income through craft sales in local and regional markets, became a popular pursuit.

The Mothers' Clubs became very popular. By 2004 there were a total nine Mothers' Clubs in existence. However, the establishment of the Mothers Clubs brought rivalries as well as cooperation: the Clubs became divided into the 'old' and the 'new'. The event which (chronologically) separated 'old' from 'new' clubs was the municipal elections of December 2003. The emergence of 'new' Mothers' Clubs after this point appears to have been a reflection, in part, of tensions between existing members of the clubs and women who were seeking to join but, having been rebuffed by existing members decided instead to form their own, 'new' Mothers' Clubs. However, personal tensions do not fully explain the emergence of these new clubs: the 'old' Mothers' Clubs appear to have voted for José Luís Ramirez, the mayor who lost in 2003; whilst the 'new' clubs, with one exception, appear to have voted for Eleudoro Idiarte, who defeated Ramirez. Therefore, it is understandable that locally, the formation of mothers' club groups is widely held to have been politicised. Indeed, the potential of the clubs as voting blocks, if given sufficient incentive to be loyal in their commitment to one candidate, was demonstrated by voting patterns in the election. What incentive was offered by the respective candidates in the 2003 election?

By way of assistance to the 'old' Mothers' Clubs, José Luís Ramirez had signed over to them a small house owned by the municipal government, which was set up as a sales outlet for the crafts they produced. Idiarte, the winner of the 2003 elections, weighed in on the side of the 'new' clubs, initiating legal action against the former mayor on the grounds that he had simply given away state property to the 'old' Clubs. Most of the 'new' clubs were not permitted to sell their craft products in the shop; the 'new' (and only) Mothers' Club of Los Toldos alone enjoyed access. At more than one of this club's weekly meetings, I heard unambiguous endorsements of the 'legacy' of José Luís Ramírez, whilst encountering instances of equally unambiguous disdain towards Eleudoro Idiarte.

On hearing the news, José Luís Ramírez, at that point living in Salta (Capital), sought legal advice. Through his brother, Delfo, it was communicated to the 'old'

Mothers' Clubs that he would fight on their behalf to keep the shop, its members being in no financial position themselves to hire a lawyer. Having won the votes of the members of the Mothers' Clubs through giving them the shop, they became more dependent upon him through the legal action, and quite possibly accountable to him come election time. Moreover, the efforts made by both candidates to enlist the support of the 'old' and 'new' Mothers' Clubs, indicates their emergence as groups that could potentially deliver a significant number of votes, both from their members but perhaps also from their families.

The second example involves the distribution of food aid provided by the national government. The municipal council has a committee whose function is to monitor levels of malnutrition in the municipality and ensure that food aid is given to people who are either malnourished or at risk of becoming so. However, it is less than clear that the food aid is distributed on the basis of greatest need. One woman who had been receiving food aid told me of how she was one day informed by the committee that her own case was no longer considered a sufficient priority, and subsequently her food aid was withdrawn. She later discovered that her name had not been removed from the register for recipients of food aid, but that instead her signature had been forged, and food had continued to arrive in her name. When she threatened to take the matter to the provincial authorities, her ration was quickly reinstated to her. Is this an instance of a 'disloyal' voter having been held accountable to a politician? It may, after all, be coincidental that the woman was a member of one of the 'old' Mothers' Clubs, and was known publicly to be a supporter of José Luís Ramírez. However, I was told of so many similar incidents rooted in the same dynamic – exclusion from access to resources of people perceived not to support a given candidate – that coincidence seems less likely to explain this particular woman's troubles.

The system of machine politics in Los Toldos – and in Argentina more widely – differs markedly, then, from political dynamics found in Uis. Fieldwork in Namibia did not uncover the tracks left by a none-too-subtle political machine, but rather a running battle between three political groups and two competing systems of legitimate decision-making. Swapo and the UDF (United Democratic Front) contested local council elections, whilst the Traditional Authority constituted an alternative form of governance whose authority had been eroded since the advent of independence. As chapter 7 noted, Chief Elias //Thaniseb is not legally recognised, under the Traditional Authorities Act (GRN 2000) by Namibia's government.

Nonetheless, the Chief commands much respect locally and remains a local power-broker whom it would be unwise to alienate.

Another key difference is evident from this comparison: the existence of an important opposition in Uis's political scene. Swapo has acquired a bedrock of support in Uis and gained an additional seat on the local council in the local elections of 2003. In short, it now offers a credible alternative to the UDF. Moreover, the continued existence of Traditional Authority structures, albeit in weakened form, provides a parallel set of political resources for local people to draw upon. In Los Toldos, in contrast, the Justicialist Party (PJ) dominates the scene. Whilst the 'Partido Renovador' (Renovation Party) contests local elections, sometimes alongside local independents, the PJ fields the candidates most likely to win. Indeed, oppositional politics occurs largely *within* the party itself, rather than between it and other parties. Both José Luís Ramírez and Eleudoro Idiarte ran simultaneously as Justicialist candidates, and were the only ones who stood a realistic chance of being elected. Much like Argentina at the national level, opposition groups in Los Toldos are proving unable to make enduring inroads against a party that has dominated Argentina's periods of democratic rule since the 1940s.

#### **4. Conclusion: the background to local participation**

The history of Los Toldos has been marked by geographical isolation and inequity. Hispanic settlement was shaped by this wider history. From the seventeenth through to the end of the nineteenth century, the valley of Los Toldos was ostensibly a far-flung and unproductive part of a *marquesado* (marquisate), but perhaps better described as a war zone, as no-man's land. The battleground eventually shifted eastwards, but by that point the industrialisation that was occurring in other parts of Bolivia and Argentina had bypassed Los Toldos. At the same time, tenant farmers in the area found themselves obliged, if they were to continue to live on the land they farmed, to sate the demand for labour produced by the sugar refineries which drove that very process of inequitable industrialisation. These, then are central factors in accounting for and understanding why Los Toldos continues to be so poor.

The decline in opportunities for seasonal labour coincided with the increased presence of the state in Los Toldos. Although this has not brought about a

transformation of the conditions which continue to account for the poverty found in the municipality, the state has provided a lifeline to the people of Los Toldos, one which halted and even reversed the pattern of rural-urban migration that had become increasingly prevalent up until the early 1980s.

The lack of local alternative sources of employment has resulted in a culture of dependency upon the state, and with it, ideal conditions for the spread of perverse accountability (Stokes 2005). Perverse accountability has consequences for participation in the decision-making processes which determine questions of access to and distribution of local state resources. Indeed, perverse accountability in itself *is* a form of participation in a decision-making process. Even to be considered as a potential recipient of such resources, it may be necessary for a toldeño to form an alliance with an incumbent mayor or a challenger for the post. Toldeños can, then, make decisions about which allegiance will best serve them. The ultimate decision about resource allocation remains, though, in the hands of whoever controls those resources.

But it is not just control over access to resources that toldeños lack: it is also the cognitive authority (Barnes 1983) to define what constitutes the development objectives those resources are supposed to serve. What development there is in Los Toldos has come from elsewhere, so to speak; it is based on a set of beliefs about progress and development not so much found in as *brought to* Los Toldos. There is a knowledge gap between the municipality's inhabitants the state and other actors proposing and attempting to effect its development. The gap is a consequence of the historical isolation of the area, and its exclusion from industrialisation and other processes which have been transforming other parts of the region to which it pertains. For such transformation to occur in Los Toldos, there must be, then, a process of knowledge and skills transfer. Of course, for it to take place, toldeños have to find some merit in this transfer process in the first place: there must be a consensus between actors proposing change and actors to which change is proposed. Indeed, there is a significant consensus, at least on the point that some sort of change to current levels, of poverty, illiteracy, lack of employment opportunities, mortality rates etc, is necessary and potentially beneficial. But the means through which such change is to be achieved are not in local hands; instead, they are to be acquired. And it is this dynamic which lessens the protagonism of toldeños in the decision-making processes

about what needs to be acquired, how best to acquire it and who will be involved in the transfer process.

Under the sort of decision-making process that characterises perverse accountability, one might not be surprised to find that the inhabitants of Los Toldos could not be described as the protagonists of the development of the municipality. However, one might be more hopeful of the arrangements for participation within the Alto Bermejo Project agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos. These are based on the premise that anyone can participate, regardless of their political allegiance. And indeed, the way in which decisions about resource allocation are made in the initiatives contrast significantly with the way such decisions seem often to be taken within the domain of municipal politics, a point the following chapter develops. Nonetheless, the role of the toldeños within the Alto Bermejo Project must be understood against this background of geographical isolation and poverty. This background plays an important role in explaining the knowledge gap that exists between the people of Los Toldos and the people who propose the need for changes in conservation and development processes, to be guided by the concept of sustainability. And this knowledge gap is crucial to understanding participation in the agroforestry initiatives of the Alto Bermejo Project. It is to demonstrating why this is the case that the focus turns in the following chapter.

# Chapter IX

## The Alto Bermejo Project

### 1. Introduction

The Alto Bermejo Project is the overarching-framework for a set of initiatives which seek to reconcile a conservation agenda with the established common-pool resource use activities of the inhabitants of the Yungas, in the interests of sustainability. It proceeds from a view of the competencies and capacities of resource users in the Yungas which is distinctly at odds with that which has informed conservation policy and intervention in the Northwest for much of the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first. Conservation activities in the region have mostly taken the form of protected areas. Although national and provincial parks and reserves are part of the Alto Bermejo Project framework, it also seeks to undertake conservation activities outwith the protected domain. The Project's re-conceptualisation of who can legitimately participate in conservation processes, and indeed the status of local-level participation as essential if conservation objectives are to be achieved, transforms local-level common-pool resource users from threats into opportunities. In doing so, what constitutes conservation, as well as the means through which to achieve conservation objectives, are conceived in ways that have more in common with Namibia's conservancy programme than with previous Argentine conservation policy. This is chiefly because, as with the conservancy programme, the Alto Bermejo Project is prefigured by the concept of sustainability. It is in many ways a product of the privileged status that, as part one discussed in detail, knowledge about sustainability has acquired globally.

This chapter has two broad aims. First, it provides an overview of the Alto Bermejo Project, which comprises a number of different initiatives. Second, it attempts to demonstrate how the influence of the concept of sustainability manifests itself in the policy which frames the reasons for and means of intervention. Repeating the approach taken in chapter six, on the conservancy programme – and thereby squaring the comparison – this is done principally by analysing how Alto Bermejo Project policy documents are formulated in terms of the six 'principles of



sustainability’ identified in chapter four. Having identified this basis for comparison, the chapter goes on to consider the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme in comparative perspective, pointing out that although the ideas underlying them are remarkably similar, the two initiatives are in themselves very different, and unfold against markedly contrasting backgrounds.

Whilst a general outline of the PAB – which in its entirety is a numerous and diverse set of initiatives spread across an extensive area – and a list of the myriad actors involved is offered, my concern is principally with the agroforestry initiatives that occur within the municipality of Los Toldos, carried out by the Pro Yungas Foundation. These are introduced in this chapter (and explored in greater detail in chapter 10).

## **2. An overview of the Alto Bermejo Project**

### **Links to sustainability and antecedents**

The Alto Bermejo Project (PAB) is essentially a conglomeration and continuation of pre-existent initiatives and activities, and a means through which to provide further funding for these. It takes place across two provinces, Salta and Jujuy, involving provincial and local authorities in both, federal agencies working in the Northwest, private sector actors and the people living in the localities in which project activities are situated. Much of the finance for it is provided by the French Fund for the Global Environment (FFEM), with counterpart funding from private sector actors and, ostensibly, from federal and regional government organisations. Essentially, the idea is to coordinate all such activities within the geographical area covered by the Yungas Biosphere Reserve, with a view to ensuring that they all contribute to an overarching conservation and development strategy consonant with the guiding principles of a biosphere reserve.

In the thinking that underpins its approach to conservation, the Alto Bermejo Project has more in common with Namibia's conservancy programme than it does with the types of conservation that have been standard in Argentina until recently (see Box 9.1 for an example). It corresponds to the six ‘principles of sustainability’ that, as I argued in chapter six, also characterise policy statements and influence intervention in the conservancy programme. To recap, these are:

1. It is more important to address questions of how to ensure the continued existence of biodiversity outwith protected areas (i.e. Adams and Hulme 2001, Cumming 2004).
2. Careful use of common-pool resources is more likely to ensure their continued existence for future generations than is a blanket prohibition on any kind of use (Adams and McShane 1992, Murphree 1997, Pimbert and Pretty 1995).
3. It is not a foregone conclusion that people who use common-pool resources will destroy them whenever no state intervention occurs or individual property rights regime is established; there is much evidence to the contrary (Berkes 1998, Feeny et al. 1990, Ostrom 1990).
4. Conservation often fails when people who have to live with the costs of it have insufficient incentive to do so. Indeed, conservation efforts will fail wherever they beg, rather than answer, the question of sufficient incentive (Jones 2000, Ostrom 1990).
5. Realising the economic value of a common-pool resource and ensuring that resource users benefit economically from the exercise is a crucial part of answering the question of sufficient incentive (Bond 2001, Hulme and Murphree 2001a, Murphree 1997). That said, other, less tangible benefits are also vital to this exercise, and may be overlooked if the importance of economic incentives in themselves is overstated (Emerton 2001)
6. Conservation efforts will also fail if the resource users most in a position to determine how it is used are not involved in the decision-making processes that attempt to conserve said resource. Involvement in such decision-making processes is likely to make little difference unless users have defined, recognised usage rights (Ostrom 1990, Ostrom 1992, Pimbert and Pretty 1995).

The overview given here, whilst supplemented by interviews and observations acquired during the course of fieldwork, is based largely on the February 2002 Project Document, which gives an indication of what the Alto Bermejo Project was intended to achieve shortly after funding for it had been secured. To reiterate a point made in chapter I, “the relationship between policy models and development outcomes is complex and obscure” (Mosse 2005:230). Furthermore, it was not, during the course

of the fieldwork, a document with which a great many project actors appeared to be very familiar, and did not seem to be drawn upon with great frequency to describe and explain the PAB. Indeed, the very large number of different actors, initiatives, spaces and levels which constituted the Project produced a complex web of activity which, it seemed, few who were involved had an understanding of in its entirety. Nonetheless, what the document does give us is a much clearer sense of the ideas, concepts and beliefs which justify and frame the types of intervention of which the Alto Bermejo Project is comprised.

### **The Yungas: the geographical and ecological focus of the Alto Bermejo Project**

The Alto Bermejo Project is an attempt to integrate conservation and development objectives not just within, but also outwith protected areas. It is therefore an embodiment of the first of my six principles of sustainability. One of its chief concerns – to extend its conservation brief beyond the national and provincial parks of Argentina’s Northwest – resonates with recently-influential trends in conservation rhetoric favouring wider ecological corridors or other such units which cross regional/national borders (cf. Bennett 2003, Brockington 2002, Brosius 2004). The focus of the Project is on a large chunk of the area covered by what might be termed an ‘eco-region’, rather than a specific species or type of vegetation, within the boundaries of an isolated ‘island’ of biological diversity. That ‘eco-region’ is the Yungas, the subtropical mountain forest found across parts of Argentina’s Northwest (see map 9.1 below).

Originally, what is now known as the Alto Bermejo Project was expected to be international in scope, including a sizeable portion of Bolivian Yungas. This proposal had been formulated with a view to creating an ecological corridor between the two countries. However, the area within which the activities of the Alto Bermejo Project unfold falls exclusively within Argentina. The decision not to make the extension into Bolivia was made in light of the fact that in 2001, a Yungas Biosphere Reserve had been designated in Northwest Argentina by UNESCO. Its designation prompted a concern that there would be a duplication of conservation units vying to conserve the same biodiversity<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview 23.12.2004, with Albane Du Boisgueheneuc, Project Coordinator in the Alto Bermejo Project.

### **Box 9.1 – ‘Fortress’ conservation in Argentina**

*In order to illustrate the extent of the changes in thinking about conservation manifest in the Alto Bermejo Project, it is helpful to explore dominant notions of conservation dominant in twentieth century Argentina. Conservation was (and continues to be) largely an activity to be conducted within the confines of the protected area. Very much in line with the ‘fortress’ narrative of conservation (see chapter 4), a separation between valued biodiversity and the humans who posed a threat to its continued survival was deemed vital. The case of Lipeo provides a good example of this thinking and the consequences that stemmed from it (see Newsham 2005 for a fuller account). Lipeo is a small village which has since 1974 found itself situated within Baritú National Park, province of Salta, designated by the Administration of National Parks (APN). Forming part of the Municipality of Los Toldos, its current inhabitants (known locally as lipeños) practice shifting cultivation and (mostly bovine) livestock farming.*

*According to local medical records, 45% of Lipeo’s inhabitants live in a “critical state”, defined in terms of unhealthy sanitary conditions, high levels of malnutrition and the prevalence of chronic illnesses (Ricardo Merlo pers. com). There is an almost total lack of physical infrastructure: access to Lipeo is via a dirt track, impassable by vehicle for much of the rainy season; there is no electricity supply, potable water or sewage system. Public services in this part of the municipality are limited to a dilapidated primary school and a sanitary post. The poverty of Lipeo stands out even within the setting of the municipality of Los Toldos, one of the poorest parts of Salta. Since 1974, the inclusion of Lipeo within Baritú National Park has until very recently entrenched rather than alleviated this poverty, owing to legal restrictions on common-pool resource use and infrastructural development on land designated as a national park.*

*The impetus to create a park in this part of Argentina was generated through a couple of excursions made in the area by a group of naturalists from the Miguel Lillo Institute of Tucumán (Natenzon 1993). They gave a presentation to the General Directorate of National Parks (as was), which persuaded its directors of the necessity of establishing legal protection over a part of the Yungas. Among the reasons given in favour of creating a new protected area were that:*

- *its “pristine” forests were a good example of their type*
- *it was important to preserve the environment for the enjoyment of future generations*
- *it was a “living museum”*
- *its beautiful landscapes could foster the development of “recreational activities”*
- *it was considered to have high potential for scientific and biological studies (Tribunal de Tasaciones 1979)*

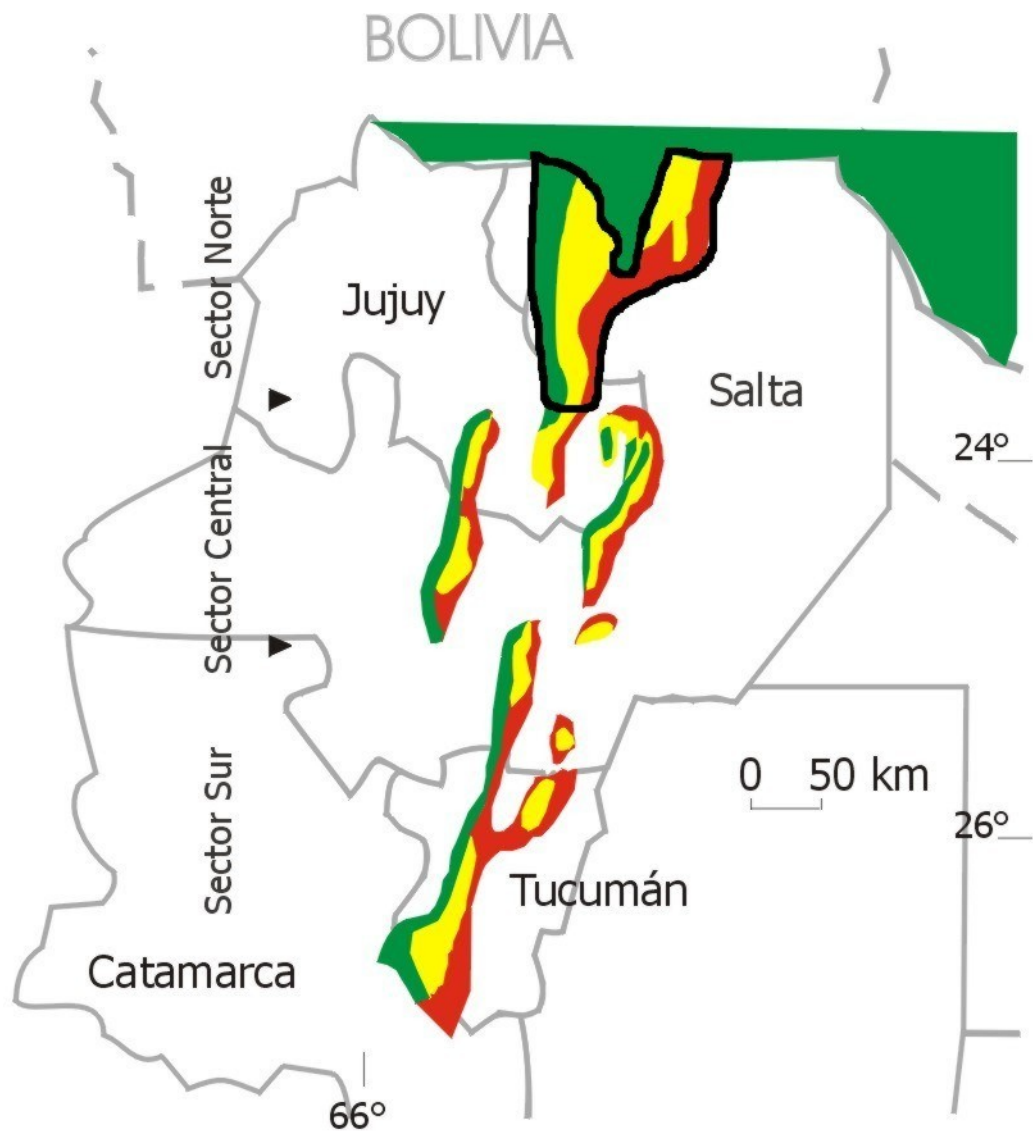
*In order to comply with existing criteria for the level of protection conferred upon a national park, it was necessary to expel all human settlement, and of course to prohibit any consumptive use of the biodiversity that was to be preserved. To establish the park, therefore, the government had to acquire the land it was going to occupy. Lipeo was in the 1970s located within the Rodeo Monte portion of Finca Santa Victoria, its inhabitants living as tenant farmers, rather than owners, of the land. When Rodeo Monte was expropriated for incorporation into the new protected area, so too was Lipeo. The expropriation process recognised the landowners as legitimate pobladores (settlers or inhabitants) of the area, whose rights were to be respected, and who were given financial compensation for the loss of their land and allowed to keep a portion of it. As tenant farmers, the lipeños were not accorded the status of pobladores, but instead were categorised as intrusos, or intruders, in the newly-created park. Whilst pobladores can be granted permits for occupation and restricted agricultural and livestock-related activities, intrusos cannot, as their presence within the boundaries of a national park is deemed to be illegal. The official reason given for classifying the lipeños as intrusos rather than as pobladores was that the possibility of staying on as tenant farmers ceased when Rodeo Monte passed from the private to the national domain. They could not continue to pay rent because it was forbidden by law to rent out for occupation any part of a national park. The lipeños were on this basis declared not to be “true settlers” (Cichero 1992 5). Therefore, according to this logic there could be no legal basis for their continued presence in the park, and nor were they due any compensation.*

*The livelihood activities of the lipeños were criminalised overnight when the park was officially declared, but restrictions remained unenforced until the late 1970s. Moreover, eviction attempts have been incomplete. In 1980, the Administration of National Parks drew up an order to evict the people of Lipeo from Baritú National Park which was never fully executed, partly because of provincial government resistance and partly due to lack of sufficient personnel (Natenzon 1993:51). Some lipeños did, though, leave of their own accord. Because of their status as intrusos (intruders), no provision for resettlement pending eviction was made, nor was any compensation for loss in earnings awarded. At no point were the lipeños included in decisions about the creation of the Park, restrictions on resource use, or what should become of Lipeo. The classification of the lipeños as intrusos was not based on a detailed knowledge of the impact on the environment of the presence of the lipeños. It stemmed from the privileged character accorded to the notions of separating humans from the environment and of providing protection to the latter through the establishment of protected areas. It also demonstrates how much less necessary it was – at least within APN – to consider the human costs of conservation that current ways of thinking about conservation are rendering much less politically acceptable.*

For this reason, apparently, it was decided that the Alto Bermejo Project would mostly be implemented within the boundaries of the Biosphere Reserve. At 2.1 million hectares, the area of the project currently encompasses between 43.75% and 46.67% of the total amount of Yungas that corresponds to Argentina. Whilst it does not cross international borders, 70% and 30% of the project area falls respectively within the Provinces of Salta and Jujuy. Although the attempt to reflect the distribution of Yungas, even regional or national borders, is reminiscent of the Trans-Frontier Conservation Area and Peace Park initiatives to be found across Southern Africa, an important difference should also be distinguished. The conservation lobbies in Argentina and Bolivia do not carry nearly as much clout as those operating in Southern Africa. Precisely how concerns about a new attempt to roll out 'fortress conservation' initiatives on a bigger scale in that part of the world might translate into the Argentine context is as yet unclear. There are, to be sure, still few initiatives in Argentina which attach such importance to local participation as does the Alto Bermejo Project, or which view conservation in terms of use as well as preservation. However, local people are unlikely to 'drop out' of decisions about common-pool resource use in the Yungas simply because there is neither the political will nor the resources to enforce strict or prohibitive common-pool resource use regimes outside of the protected area.

The international dimension has not entirely been lost. The Alto Bermejo Project takes its name from the Upper Basin of the River Bermejo, in which is located the stretch of Yungas that constitutes the focus of all of the Project's related activities. The Project is in itself part of a wider strategy for the sustainable use of natural resources in the Upper Basin, known as the Strategic Action Programme (SAP). This is a collective effort between the Bolivian and Argentine governments to manage jointly the Upper Basin, which extends across the borders of both countries. Both governments share the view that the Upper Basin can only be managed sustainably in its entirety, as opposed to having two separate national management plans for the sections of it which fall into Argentine and Bolivian territory. The Strategic Action Programme (PEA) is funded partially by the World Bank's Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organisation of American States (OAS), with (ostensible) counterpart funding from the Argentine and Bolivian governments (PEA 2000).

**Map 9.1 – the Alto Bermejo Project area (demarcated in bold black) and the distribution of the Yungas in Argentina**



### Referencias

Distribución de los pisos de vegetación y sectores latitudinales en las Yungas del noroeste argentino

- Área del Proyecto
- Bosque Montano
- Selva Montana
- Selva Pedemontana

Source: French National Forestry Office

The Yungas have acquired considerable conservation value in Argentina over a relatively short timeframe of 20-30 years, perhaps chiefly because they are reckoned to contain 50% of the country's biodiversity in only 2% of its surface area (Brown 1995a). Other than Antonio Cabrera's (1976) work on the phytogeographical regions of Argentina, the most frequently-cited studies have been undertaken by the Laboratory of Ecological Research into the Yungas (LIEY). A substantial number of these were written by its director, Alejandro Brown (i.e. Brown 1995a, Brown 1995b, Brown 1995c, Brown 1995d, Brown 1995e, Brown and Grau 1999, Brown and Grau 1993, Brown et al. 2001), a central actor in raising the public profile of the Yungas. This he did partly through an extensive list of publications but also through the involvement of LIEY in conservation and development projects in the Yungas throughout the 1990s, as well as the subsequent establishment of his NGO, the Pro Yungas Foundation. Arguably, it is largely to Brown's efforts that the popularisation of the term 'Yungas' can be attributed. More recently, the designation of the Yungas Biosphere Reserve itself generated coverage in the local, regional and national press.

### **Overall scope and structure of the Alto Bermejo Project**

It is precisely because of the wider focus on a large slice of the Yungas that the Alto Bermejo Project seeks to take its conservation profile outwith the protected area domain. In its explicit commitment to conservation across a much broader landscape, the Alto Bermejo Project is, then, clearly underpinned by the first of my six 'principles of sustainability', namely that the focus solely on the protected area as the basic unit of conservation is misplaced. It is also because the Yungas are inhabited by some of the poorest people in the country that the Alto Bermejo Project also has an agenda for development, and ultimately conceptualises the relationship between conservation and development as one of necessary interdependence.

The desire to reconcile conservation and development processes is evident in the Alto Bermejo Project's central objective, which is:

The conservation of biodiversity of the Yungas forest in the High Basin of the River Bermejo through the creation and consolidation of an ecological corridor...favouring activities of protection, sustainable use of natural resources and local development" (FPY 2002 4, my translation)



That the PAB is a mechanism through which to bring together, coordinate and fund a series of pre-established activities helps explain why such a large amount of actors, from the public, NGO and commercial sectors, participate in and, to a greater or lesser degree, fund or seek funding for it. It groups these activities and actors under the four constituent components, which are posited as the means through which to achieve its objectives:

1. The institutionalisation of the Biosphere Reserve and its area of influence
2. The management of protected areas
3. The sustainable management of natural resource utilisation for commercial and farming purposes
4. Environmental monitoring of activities in the Project area

What follows is a brief summary of the components, in terms of their activities and objectives. The thesis does not engage with every single activity encompassed within the Alto Bermejo Project.

### **1. The institutionalisation of the Yungas Biosphere Reserve**

This component is a response to the perceived need to address the lack of rules governing the use of natural resources within the Biosphere Reserve. The many forms of resource use that occur within the area covered by the Biosphere Reserve are held to generate significant pressure upon its natural resources, as well as involving a wide range of commercial, governmental and non-governmental actors. Forms of resource use which have caused concern include:

- Intensive agriculture
- logging
- subsistence agricultural activities i.e. ‘overgrazing’, burning the topsoil and shifting cultivation.

Clear guidelines and norms to regulate such different activities do not currently exist. As a conservation unit, therefore, the Biosphere Reserve is supposed to set out sustainable use guidelines and integrate a diverse range of interests. This objective is

to be realised by the formal creation of the Biosphere Reserve “through a structure that integrates and strengthens the links between public entities, NGOs, peasant grassroots organisations and the private sector” (FPY 2002:25). More specifically, the creation of the Biosphere Reserve is expected to give rise to the following activities:

- The delineation of ecological zones and territorial planning
- The definition of the limits of conservation spaces within the Reserve
- Analysis of existing legislation and the extent to which it supports or constrains the objectives of the Biosphere Reserve
- A socio-economic diagnosis of the area’s inhabitants
- The production of a preliminary planning document that is to be subject to a process of “participatory validation” (ibid:26). This will determine the content of the final document, which, on completion is to be disseminated to society at large.

In these objectives, the concern is not with the imposition of regulations prohibiting resource use. The importance attached to a review of existing legislation with a view to bringing it into line with the objectives of the Alto Bermejo Project is linked to my second ‘principle of sustainability’, of sanctioning careful use rather than prohibition.

The other objectives of socio-economic analysis and “participatory validation” reflect an awareness of the potential costs of conservation for resource users and a need to include a wider range of actors in the decision-making processes which will establish how natural resources within the Project area should be used. Such thinking relates not only to the second of my six principles of sustainability, but also to the sixth, which stresses the need for local participation as a precondition of sustainable common-pool resource use.

## **2. The management of protected areas**

There are four protected areas within the boundaries of the Biosphere Reserve which in total cover 180,000 hectares. Pintascayo Laguna Provincial Park and Acambuco Flora and Fauna Reserve, both fall within the province of Salta and, as federal entities, under the jurisdiction of the provincial government of Salta. Calilegua National Park is in Jujuy province and the Nogalar National Reserve in Salta

province, but both, as national entities, are administered by the Administration of National Parks, itself an organ of federal government. The Alto Bermejo Project document states that The Pintascayo Laguna Provincial Park and the Nogalar National Reserve are both of recent creation and require support in relation to the formulation of management plans and to the participation of all the social actors, especially the adjacent communities. Action plans have been formulated, though, for all of the protected areas, and a sample of planned activities includes:

- Socioeconomic, economic and legal/regulatory analyses
- Participatory input on the final management plan documents of the reserves
- The elaboration of environmental monitoring systems
- the demarcation of buffer zones around the protected areas
- The ecological zoning of protected areas

The vision of simultaneous conservation and development, the incorporation of people into a landscape with conservation value, forms a marked contrast with the vision that accompanied the establishment of Baritú National Park in 1974. Moreover, although Baritú National Park is not officially part of the Alto Bermejo Project, attempts have been made to renegotiate the restrictions on agricultural activities in and around Lipeo. These form part of efforts, on the part of the Pro Yungas Foundation and also the Social Agricultural Programme, to initiate within Lipeo the sorts of agroforestry and other activities commonly undertaken in other parts of the municipality of Los Toldos. That some of these activities are now permitted to occur by the Administration of National Parks is a clear indication of the increasing credibility invested in notions of conservation defined in terms of the sustainable use of common-pool resources. In line with principles three and six, extension workers employed by the Pro Yungas Foundation and the Social Agricultural Programme view the *lipeños* not as a threat to valued biodiversity, but rather as competent common-pool resource users. They are seen as people who can and should participate in decisions about how best to manage the resource bases upon which their livelihood depend.

### **3. The sustainable use of natural resources**

Under the banner of sustainability, many of the diverse activities which constitute the Alto Project are grouped and connected. It pins the future of by far the greater part of the biodiversity of the Yungas upon finding ways to make its sustainable use attractive to its users. Herein lies a commitment to the second principle of sustainability, namely that careful use is better than preservation through prohibition. The Project consists of a variety of smaller projects and initiatives that, when taken in conjunction, are intended to serve as a model of sustainability which could then be applied on a larger scale. It is in the commitment to sustainability that the Alto Bermejo Project is essentially comparable with the conservancy programme, even though the structure, mechanisms and components through which sustainability objectives are to be achieved differ.

At present, according to the Alto Bermejo Project document, the commercial utilisation of the common-pool resources within the project area is not sustainable. The extraction of commercially viable species from the forests, hydrocarbon exploitation (petrol and gas), the seasonal burning of land and forest for farming activities are all held to exert considerable pressure on a fragile ecosystem. The need to manage sustainably both the commercial operations and the livelihood activities of the people who inhabit the Yungas or who use the natural resources found within it is, therefore, identified as a priority.

For this reason, one component initiative of the Alto Bermejo Project is the commercial operations of the Santa Barbara Forestry Project, financed by Candlewood Timber Group, a forestry consultancy firm, and Arlington Associates, a company from the energy and natural resources sector, both from the US. The initiative aims to provide a model for ecologically sustainable and economically viable timber extraction, in order to demonstrate an alternative to current practices which appear likely to exhaust the most valuable species, such as cedar and oak. So far, the aim of the project has been sustainably and profitably to manage 100,000ha of primary and secondary forest in the Yungas, through the extraction of exotic timber species of high economic value for sale on the international market of certified wood. It has been proposed that this experience might be replicated in two or three pilot projects of between 10,000 to 30,000 hectares of forest. The Santa Barbara Forestry Project has, then, a clear correspondence with the fifth sustainability principle which the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme have in common, the fifth

principle relating to the importance attached to realising the economic value of a common-pool resource and ensuring that users benefit economically from the exercise.

Another component project takes the form of an experimental forest nursery. Financed by Shell Forestry, a subsidiary of the Shell Group, 50 hectares of both native and exotic species with an established economic value are grown, with a view to the achievement of the following objectives:

1. creating a seed bank for re-stocking degraded areas in the Yungas
2. generating an information base for environmentally restorative practices such as establishing and commercialising carbon bonds

As well as being instances of attempts to use natural resources sustainably, the above projects also represent examples of involving a wider gamut of resource users in an over-arching resource-use strategy for the Yungas. Amongst the actors whose participation is deemed important for the concept of sustainable use to become more widespread are local-level populations, of which there are significant numbers peppering the Andean foothills across which the Yungas extend. Many of these fall within the Alto Bermejo Project area, although at present, the principal activities at the local village level are situated in relatively few sites. These interventions focus on the provision of alternative livelihood options and agroforestry techniques for subsistence farmers. These are thought to offer the potential to ameliorate pressure on the Yungas whilst helping to strengthen the livelihood strategies of Yungas inhabitants. Principally, such initiatives occur in the Municipality of Los Toldos, in the department of Santa Victoria, and in the small '*Kolla*' villages of Los Naranjos and San Andrés, in the Municipality of Orán, within the department of Orán. The initiatives in Los Toldos, as principal Argentine fieldsites in the thesis, are dealt with in greater detail in the section on conservation and development in Los Toldos, below. Here, meanwhile, it is useful to concentrate on how the contrast between the representation of local-level resource users within the Alto Bermejo Project and the representation of the people of Lipeo at the time of the creation of Baritú National Park. In this regard, the representation of local people within the Alto Bermejo Project is more readily comparable with their representation within the conservancy programme.

Local people in the Yungas are not viewed as merely an obstacle to conservation, a threat to valued biodiversity whose destructive way of life must not be permitted to compromise a 'pristine' landscape. On the contrary, the object of the local development components is ultimately formulated in terms of helping the inhabitants of Andean villages such as Los Toldos, Los Naranjos or San Andrés not to lose a way of life whose value has been eroded, but is worthy of rescue. Indeed, local interaction with the environment is frequently talked of by NGO and government actors within the Alto Bermejo Project as having produced some of the biodiversity that is these days taken to be of conservation value. An example of such biodiversity is the preservation of a wide variety of Andean potato seeds, which have disappeared from other parts of Argentina and Bolivia. In this sense, local traditions, knowledge and ways of living have to some extent become an object of conservation, thereby reflecting wider changes in beliefs about what is worth conserving and how to go about conserving it. When discussing the future of places like the municipality of Los Toldos, it is very common for local government and NGO staff to talk of the need for a process of 'revalorisation' of local culture and livelihood strategies, and even to suggest these to be considerably more sustainable than the lifestyles of city-dwelling environmentalists. Such talk chimes with the third 'principle of sustainability', i.e. that people who use common pool resources will not necessarily destroy them in the absence of state intervention or the establishment of private property rights regimes.

Crucially, recognising and valuing the presence of the inhabitants of the Yungas has the effect of legitimising their participation in the Project's attempts to set natural resource use on a sustainable footing. It sets them up as indispensable to decision-making processes concerning common-pool resource use, as opposed to representing them as an obstacle to the continued existence of valued biodiversity. In doing so, the Alto Bermejo Project's participation policy fits with the sixth sustainability principle, relating to the importance of involving those actors who use and affect the state of a given resource base/valued biodiversity item. Designating toldeños as competent resource users contrasts significantly with the designation of lipeños as intruders in the context of the national park.

#### **4. Environmental monitoring**

Given the perceived impact on the Yungas of large scale agricultural activities – such as clearance of land for cultivation of soya or maize, changes to how soil is used,

and traditional forms of exploitation of forest resources, environmental monitoring is, not surprisingly, another priority. In particular, the gathering of information on aspects of resource use concerning change in the composition of the soil, deforestation, water quality and the impact of forest management is deemed important.

One initiative which has been conceived to make a contribution to this objective is the ‘Native Forests and Protected Areas Project’, which is intended, through applied research, to generate a forestry inventory for the Salta Secretariat of Sustainable Development and Environmental Politics, as well as a legal framework for regulations regarding the status and use of native forests. It is also designed to allow for ‘community management’ of two fiscal lots in General Mosconi, Salta. Finally, the project is expected to contribute to the establishment of a geographical information system for the upper basin of the River Bermejo.

### **The actors involved in the Alto Bermejo Project**

The Alto Bermejo Project incorporates a large number of groups and institutions. This is a consequence of it being essentially a means for bringing together and securing continued funding for existing activities and initiatives, and of the regional scale across which it takes place. Listed below in table 9.1, then, are the institutional actors that are directly involved, along with a brief description of the types of activities and initiatives in which they are involved and also their roles and responsibilities. More attention, though, is given below to the groups and organisations involved with the agroforestry and other livelihood-based activities that occur within the municipality of Los Toldos.

**Table 9.1: Groups and organisations involved in the Alto Bermejo Project**

<b>Institutional Actors</b> ( <i>Spanish acronym given unless otherwise indicated</i> )	<b>Initiatives / Activities involved</b>	<b>Roles &amp; responsibilities</b>
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IRD)	Native forests & Protected Areas (PAs)	Funding provision
French Fund for the Global Environment (French acronym FFEM)	Initial negotiations & periodic project visits	Internat. donor, monitoring & evaluation (M&E)
French National Forestry Office, contracted through the FFEM	Agroforestry in Los Toldos, San Andrés & Los Naranjos	Provide agroforestry personnel, overall project M&E
French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development, through the FFEM	Technical assistance	Technical assistance, environmental M&E
Institute for Development Research, contracted through FFEM	Technical assistance	Capacity building, environmental M&E
Binational Commission for the Development of the	Agroforestry in Los Toldos, San	Finance within the

Upper Basin of the River Bermejo and the River Grande (COREBE)	Andrés & Los Naranjos	framework of the Strategic Action Prog.
United Nations Environment Programme	Agroforestry in Los Toldos, San Andrés & Los Naranjos	Finance within the framework of the Strategic Action Prog.
Pro Yungas Foundation (PYF), Lead organisation - recipient of funding for the Alto Bermejo Project from the FFEM	PA mgmt plans, implement or support all sustainable agric. & environmental evaluation initiatives	Allocate FFEM funds, overall coordination of Bermejo Project
The Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development (Provincial Government of Salta)	Implement. of biosphere reserve, management plans	Coordinate institutionalisation of PAB
The Administration of National Parks	Formulate & implement PA management plans	Protected Area management
Secretariat of Health, Environment and Sustainable Development (Federal Argentine Government)	Native Forests & PAs	Environmental M&E
Agricultural Social Programme (PSA)	Agroforestry in Los Toldos	Technical assistance, provide & finance agroforestry personnel
Secretariat of Production and Environment, Provincial Government of Jujuy	Implement. of biosphere reserve, mgmt plans	Technical assistance
National Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA)	Native Forests & PAs	Technical assistance, provide extension services
Nor Andino Argentina Gas Pipeline Ltd.	PA mgmt, agroforestry in San Andrés & Los Naranjos	Provision of funding for FPY projects
Pan American Energy	Acambuco Provincial. Reserve	Funding for creation & maintenance of Acambuco Provincial Reserve
Shell	'Morado Valley' forest species nursery	Funding for Fundación Yungas activities in Morado Valley
Candlewood Timber Group Inc.	Certified timber extraction	Expertise in sustainable, profitable timber commerce and finance for environmental M&E
Greenpeace Argentina	Biosphere Reserve	Environmental lobbying
Argentine Wildlife Foundation (FVSA)	Wildlife refuge programme	Private land conservation & certified forestry techniques
Yumos Foundation	Communal management of fiscal lots, General. Mosconi	Advocacy and institutional capacity building
The Laboratory of Ecological Research in the Yungas (LIEY), University of Tucumán	PA management plans, agroforestry in Los Toldos, San Andrés & Los Naranjos	Provision of data for PA management plans, environmental M&E
Institute of Rural Development, University of Salta	Native Forests & PAs	Technical assistance
Municipal Council of Los Toldos	Maintenance & management of Nogalar National Reserve	Tech. assistance, logistical support
The people of Los Toldos, General Mosconi & the Kolla villages of Los Naranjos and San Andrés	Agroforestry/livelihood initiatives.	Receive assistance to achieve conservation-development aims
Tinkunaku Foundation (representatives of the 'Kolla' inhabitants of the San Andrés Finca)	Agroforestry/livelihood initiatives.	Advocacy and negotiation on behalf of involved 'Kolla' people.



### **Local level (in Los Toldos only)**

In the municipality of Los Toldos, the principal groups of actors directly involved in the Alto Bermejo Project (PAB) are:

- The Pro Yungas Foundation (FPY)
- The Municipal Council of Los Toldos
- The Social Agricultural Programme (PSA)
- The Producer Groups
- The Mothers' Clubs
- The Santa Ana Cooperative

The Pro Yungas Foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in 1999. Its origins spring from another institution, the Laboratory for Ecological Investigation of the Yungas (LIEY), an academic centre within the University of Tucumán. Throughout the 1990s, LIEY provided technical support for the agroforestry and resource management activities in the municipality of Los Toldos that were funded by GTZ, the German cooperation agency, and also by the Strategic Action Programme (PEA), mentioned above. With the increasing commitment of LIEY in the area to conservation work with inhabitants of Los Toldos, as opposed to its biological and ecological research profile, the centre's director, Alejandro Brown, deemed it expedient to create the *Pro Yungas Foundation* as a dedicated organisation. The *Fundación* lists as its foremost objectives:

- To contribute to the definition of a regional conservation strategy
- To conserve the biodiversity of the Yungas
- To promote the rational and sustainable use of natural resources
- To promote agricultural development and the improvement of the quality of lives of various inhabitants of the Yungas
- To increase ecological awareness among the population of the regions across which the Yungas extend (Pro Yungas Foundation website, my translation)

The Pro Yungas Foundation was designated by the French Global Environment Facility to be the sole administrator of the funding they have allocated for the Alto Bermejo Project. As the recipient of the largest single financial contribution to the Project (€844,758 according to the 2004 budget plan), the Foundation is the 'lead' institution, a circumstance which has been a cause of resentment and tension between government and project actors. Given that the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development of Salta was also a contender as a recipient of this funding, it is of significance that a non-governmental organisation was chosen in preference to an organ of government. It has been suggested at more than one point in the course of fieldwork that the reputation for corruption and incompetence of the Argentine state was the principal reason why the French Global Environment Facility decided on putting the Pro Yungas Foundation in charge of the administration of their funds. Entrusting these funds to the Foundation has important causal effects on the type of participation that characterises many of the activities contained within the Alto Bermejo Project, which are explored in the following chapter.

As the political head of the inhabitants of Los Toldos, the Municipal Council has to approve and, thereby, be involved in the activities envisaged by the Alto Bermejo Project<sup>39</sup>. From the council's viewpoint, the Alto Bermejo Project should consolidate municipal policy on common-pool resource use and regulation, as opposed to existing independently of it. The project funds they receive are designated to pay the salary of one of the local government's employees. His role had originally been to work directly with some of the Producer Groups and Mothers' Clubs. By 2004, it had been decided that he would instead work in the area of strategic planning. This involves collating a database of social, economic and environmental information, as well conducting diagnostic exercises with the inhabitants of the municipality, with a view to producing a plan for the wider development of the municipality.

Of course, given the history of machine politics in the department, there was local speculation about the character of municipal participation in the Alto Bermejo Project. It did not go unnoticed, for instance, that the government employee paid for by the Alto Bermejo Project was the cousin of one of the Pro Yungas Foundation's project managers, or that he had worked on the 2003 election campaign of Eleudoro Idiarte, the current mayor. It was suggested by one key informant that this made him

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Esteban González Bonorino, director of strategic planning for the Municipal Council of Los Toldos, 1.12.2004.

an acceptable candidate both from the point of view of the Foundation and the council. It was also thought that the paying of his salary constituted the means through which to gain the acceptance of the local council for the Alto Bermejo Project; it might not otherwise have been so compliant. Given the council's seeming indifference to the task of enforcing regulations on local common-pool resource use, it is tempting to suspect that it had other reasons for its involvement in the Alto Bermejo Project. Not only does it receive resources, but it could feasibly claim credit for the Project's outcomes come election time. It is also worth observing that the Alto Bermejo Project document is better at legitimising the participation of the municipal council than it is at specifying its role or the expected outcomes such involvement is to entail.

The Social Agricultural Programme is an initiative that was set up by the national government in 1993, with the aim of providing support to the country's *minifundista* (smallholder) farmers, whose dwindling contribution to GDP belies their numerical importance in the agricultural sector. The starting point for the Social Agricultural Programme is that smallholder agriculture can, through improvements to productivity, become sufficiently competitive – albeit on a minimal level – within the agrarian market (ibid). Raising productivity through technical assistance – in the form of micro-irrigation, fencing cultivated plots, using fertiliser and other such techniques – as a means to render smallholder agriculture more commercially viable than it currently is – also feeds into wider national poverty reduction objectives. The Social Agricultural Programme provides extension workers, who generally set up groups of six or seven people with whom to pursue jointly-identified activities. Credit is provided on a family basis, once these activities have been costed; although its sister scheme, the Poverty Reduction and Rural Initiatives Programme (PROINDER), financed by the World Bank, also offers the option of grants which do not have to be repaid. The Social Agricultural Programme started its work in the municipality of Los Toldos at the beginning of 2004. Whilst some of its work contributed towards Alto Bermejo Project activities and is as welcome locally as it is important, it operated mostly independently, and for that reason is not considered further.

The extension workers of the Pro Yungas Foundation and the Social Agricultural Programme undertake project activities in conjunction with local groups that have formed in each of the small villages and settlements of the municipality of Los Toldos – Los Toldos (village), El Condado, La Misión, El Arazáy, Lipeo and Baritú (village,

as opposed to National Park) – partly with a view to the achievement of specific objectives of current and previous interventions. The type and makeup of each group varies from place to place, but they can be classified into two broad categories. The first of these encompasses groups which bring people together to work on a cluster of the agricultural activities listed above. These include, for instance, the Producer Groups, which together to work on a cluster of the agricultural activities listed above, or the Fruit Growers' Group, which has formed around the objective of producing fruit for domestic consumption and also for sale in regional markets.

The second category is comprised of the Mothers' Clubs which have been established in each of the villages/settlements of the municipality of Los Toldos. These have already been discussed in chapter eight, and are not therefore further dwelt upon here.

The Santa Ana Cooperative, created in 1998, is an artisan's cooperative which operates a shop in the village of Los Toldos and sends some of its members' wares for sale in a craft market in Salta Province's capital. Unlike the Mothers' Clubs it has managed to achieve legal status. It is this status which makes it possible for the cooperative to sell both its products in Salta's marketplace and those of the Mothers' Clubs, from whom it also makes purchases. The other important respect in which it differs from the Mothers' Clubs is in its attempts to remain independent of local political patronage; indeed, the beliefs of one of its founding members stress the importance and expedience of access to sources of income unconnected to the local and provincial political economy.

Prior to the existence of the Alto Bermejo Project, the initiatives carried out by the Pro Yungas Foundation and its forerunner in the area, the Laboratory of Ecological Research in the Yungas (LIEY), were financed on the basis of an agreement between the extension worker and the producer groups or mothers' clubs, as to what activities were to be carried out, what skills would need to be learned and what purchases would have to be made. With the onset of the Project, funds for project activities were to be applied for by means of a form that members of various groups would complete, with a minimum of 4 people per proposal. Funding could be solicited for any of the livelihood activities listed above. The proposal would be considered by a small projects committee, on the basis of merit, and successful applications would be granted 70% of the anticipated costs of their proposed

initiative. As a sign of local commitment, applicants were expected to supply the remaining 30% of financing and resources by themselves.

### **The Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme in comparative perspective**

Once the broad outlines of the Alto Bermejo Project are in view, it is easier to trace the overarching similarities and differences between the two initiatives. Because the principal focus of the thesis is on how both are prefigured by similar ideas – and in ways which produce remarkably comparable consequences – this section concentrates on the differences between the two initiatives, and how these arise as a result of the wide variations in the contexts in which they take place. This exercise is a necessary corrective: the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme differ in fundamental ways and are affected by disparate contextual factors: these must be highlighted rather than flattened out.

The circumstances in which the Alto Bermejo Project and conservancy programme emerged were notably distinct. As detailed in chapter six, the conservancy programme was made possible by the ‘policy space’ opened up by the advent of independence in 1990. There was a clear and imperative rupture with the past. The conservancy programme was successfully represented to Namibia’s new policy makers as an embodiment of how to change the relationship between the government and the wider populace. It did so by plugging directly into the wider project of re-casting black African populations as the legitimate majority around which a just, egalitarian future would address past wrongs and radically change the fortunes not just of the few but of the many. In such a climate it was easy to suggest that communal area inhabitants were more than capable of handling the responsibilities associated with wildlife management.

There was also a rupture in the fabric of Argentine political life which took place only seven years before the declaration of independence in Namibia, when in 1983 democratic rule was finally consolidated. But it did not quite change the country as radically as independence changed Namibia.

From the 1930s onwards, the history of Argentina in the Twentieth century was characterised by two countervailing forces. On the one hand, there were the attempts to establish and consolidate a functioning constitutional democracy; on the other, there were a series of military coups which attempted to justify themselves through

claims to restore the order and economic stability that, it was argued, civilian regimes had not been able to guarantee (Romero 2004). The last coups-d'état occurred in 1976, installing a paranoid *Junta* characterised by extremely violent methods of crushing political dissent. Resistance largely took the form of the left-wing guerrilla groups that had emerged partly as a result of the cycle of coups, but a pacific response also emerged to the revolutionary fervour that had gripped countries such as Chile and Cuba in the second half of the twentieth century. The *Junta* did not just stifle consent against those who took up arms against it, however: non-violent dissidents, left-leaning intellectuals and other civilian critics numbered amongst those who found themselves 'disappeared'. By some estimates, as many as 30,000 Argentines were 'disappeared' by a dictatorship whose leaders were not the first to use state violence against the general populace, but who did so on an unprecedentedly wide and brutal scale (CONADEP 1984). For the sake of balance, it should be noted that it was not only the military government that wielded such violence against its opponents: left-wing guerrilla groups often deployed similar tactics against military personnel and also civilians. The 'dirty war' of the late 1970s – sometimes described as a civil war – left bloodied hands on both sides of the divide.

By 1982, the *Junta's* regime was on the brink of collapse. Pre-empting the neo-liberal reforms that President Carlos Menem would undertake in the 1990s, the *Junta* had attempted to reduce state bureaucracy, introduce some partial privatisation of state companies, and had lifted many trade tariffs that had protected local industry (De Privitellio and Romero 2000). But the reforms had been neither sweeping nor successful, and the country's economic malaise had, after a purple patch financed by cheap international credit, deepened by the start of the 1980s (ibid). Factional infighting within the *Junta* certainly did not help, and the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas, leading to a predictable defeat and total humiliation, proved to be its undoing.

Elections were held in October 1983, installing in government the *Unión Cívica Radical* (Radical Civic Union, more commonly known by the initials UCR). However, the future of constitutional government remained uncertain for the rest of the 1980s and on into the early 1990s. Both the presidencies of Raúl Alfonsín, from 1983-89, and of Carlos Menem, from 1989-1999, were subject to military uprisings which demonstrated the will amongst some of the Army's factions to reassume control. Therefore, the establishment of a democratically elected government in

Argentina in 1983 did not constitute a break with the past as solid and secure as did the establishment of Namibia's independence in 1990. Since 1990 in Namibia, there has been no danger of a return to power of its former rulers. The same clearly cannot be said of Argentina: it was not clear until perhaps as late as the mid 1990s that constitutional government was unlikely to be disrupted once more by a coup d'état.

Concomitantly, the emergence of the Alto Bermejo Project cannot be linked as directly to the 'changing of the guard' as the conservancy programme can be to the advent of independence in Namibia. Although the establishment of enduring democratic rule re-ignited in Argentina considerable reverence for civic participation in the political process, the Alto Bermejo Project did not come into existence as a result; nor has there been any need for it to be cast as part of an alternative to a previous era in the way that was necessary for the conservancy programme.

These considerations are linked to another significant point of difference: although federal, regional and local government comprise important sets of actors within the Alto Bermejo Project, it was not conceived and formulated by the Argentine government. The conservancy programme is predicated on the Amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance, which passed into law in 1996. It was essentially designed by the Namibian government, in collaboration with communal area inhabitants, NGO, private sector Traditional Authority and other actors. The Alto Bermejo Project, as already mentioned, brings together an array of pre-existent activities within a framework determined principally (if not entirely) between the French Global Environment Fund, the most reliable source of funding for the Alto Bermejo Project; and the Pro Yungas Foundation, as the sole administrator of that funding.

As a result of these differences, the influence of the concept of sustainable use of natural resources by competent local users – as a means of effective conservation beyond the protected area – took root in the two countries in distinct manners. In Namibia, although it had links to a tradition of white conservationism (as opposed to preservationism) that predated independence, its introduction was swift and dramatic for the black African majority. In Argentina, it found purchase in a more gradual fashion; and not along explicitly racial lines. The exact course of its diffusion is harder to trace than in the Namibian context, but it can be found in the adoption of conservation thinking and agendas prevalent at the international level. One clear instance of this process is the Yungas Biosphere itself, the organising framework to

which the activities grouped under the banner of the Alto Bermejo Project are intended to give substance. At the core of thinking on the UN's biosphere reserve programme is the placing of humans within ecological systems and the use of zoning, which attempts to tackle the question of moving the conservation agenda outwith the borders of the protected area. This vision for conservation embraced by the Alto Bermejo Project contrasts markedly with that embodied by the case of Lipeo, within Baritú National Park (see box 9.1).

Although sharing some fundamentally similar objectives, the Yungas Biosphere Reserve and a conservancy differ in important respects. Primarily, there is a significant difference in terms of the making and allocation of rights to use natural resources and/or to benefit from their use by other actors. Within the Yungas Biosphere Reserve, regulation governing natural resource use may be introduced to the nucleus (i.e. protected area), buffer or transition zones, but it is to be done by government, which retains responsibility for their enforcement. In a conservancy, in contrast, some rights governing resource use are devolved to conservancy residents and enforced by the conservancy committee, principally through the community game guard system (although the government retains some enforcement responsibilities and is keen to monitor the performance of conservancies as makers and enforcers of rules governing wildlife use). Whilst Alto Bermejo Project policy documents envisage various forms of consultation prior to any changes in legislation, there is no scope for devolution of rights to resource use down to groups of people who use the resources of the Yungas.

Another point of difference relates to the focus of the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme. The Alto Bermejo Project takes as its focus a large swathe of an 'eco region' – the Yungas – and seeks their conservation in ways which contribute to local sustainable development objectives. It is, of course, this focus which forms the common link between the diverse activities which constitute the Alto Bermejo Project, from agroforestry to the extraction of certified timber. The conservancy programme has as its focus not an 'eco region' but a type of land tenure: Namibia's communal areas. Conservancies tend to concentrate on the conservation of big game animals, partly because of their revenue-generating capacity but also because many conservancies are located in semi-arid or arid environments without enough rainfall or groundwater to support the kinds of sub-tropical mountain forests common in some parts of Northwest Argentina. Whilst conservancies in Northern



Namibia might feature management plans for available wood resources, they were less of a priority than wildlife in Tsiseb. There were fewer of them, they were not identified as a type of biodiversity to be accorded international conservation status (in contrast with the Yungas), and they were valued by Tsiseb's inhabitants for their household uses, i.e. cooking and heating, rather than as a key source of income.

Turning our attention to the dissimilarity in focus between the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme reveals perhaps the most crucial contextual difference: that of land tenure. The category of communal land tenure is so central to communal area conservancies that it would not be possible to replicate a communal-area conservancy in most parts of Argentina; and certainly not in Los Toldos. Whilst both countries are the product of colonisation processes, their separate histories have subsequently brought about separate arrangements for the ownership of land. Both may be seen on some level as settler colonies, but with Argentina being, according to the logic of the settler colony, by far the most successful of the two. In the Argentine context, the descendants of European settlers – and the governments they established – came to control and inhabit almost all the land in the country. By and large, therefore, land ownership in Argentina is based on the principles of private ownership; indeed the majority of land is owned privately albeit with some important exceptions (important politically rather than in terms of land-mass covered).

In Namibia, as chapter six made clear, no colonial power managed to put all of the territory's land at the disposal of their settlers; even if they did manage to appropriate the most agriculturally suitable land. The pre-colonial populations still occupied significant amounts of land, first through the native reserve systems and subsequently through the establishment of the homelands. Even at independence in 1990 the state was able to claim ownership over the (then) homelands: these constituted 40.8% of the country's land<sup>40</sup>. Conservancies rest upon the legal rights that the government, through the 1996 Amendment to the (1975) Nature Conservation Ordinance, devolves to those communal area residents who meet the criteria for the establishment of a conservancy. These rights are a function, then, of the existence of the tenurial category of communal land. It is this which allows some – though not all – of the rights of land ownership to be devolved to people who cannot claim legal

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<sup>40</sup> The post-independence Namibian government's claim to own the communal lands is far from universally acknowledged by all Namibian traditional leaders, communal land inhabitants or legal scholars (for more see **Harring 1996**)

ownership over a common-pool resource, thereby providing a legal framework for collective action; it is this which provides the basis for a nationwide programme which has conservation outwith protected areas as a central aim.

Because most people in Argentina either do not live on state-owned land or do not own large estates and the natural resources pertaining to them, the only type of conservancy that could exist would be an equivalent of Namibia's commercial land conservancies; effectively a conservancy on a large stretch of privately owned land. Nevertheless, if the people who live on the land do not themselves own it – or are not legally recognised owners – it is hard to see how to devolve to them legal usage and management rights conventionally reserved for land owners.

The case of Los Toldos, with contested ownership claims over the same area of land which arose as a result of assimilation into Argentina, is even more complicated. In a nutshell, despite the existence of Bolivian property deeds covering much of the land that was transferred to Argentine sovereignty after the ratification of the Carrillo-Diez de Medina Treaty, all of that land was permitted to be sold as a *finca* to Argencampo, a timber company. As a result, common-pool resource usage in the municipality of Los Toldos is based largely on the *de facto* basis of possession being nine-tenths of the law, with people attending to individual plots used for subsistence agriculture, but also accessing the area's water, forest and grazing resources without restriction, despite the fact that few can claim legal ownership over any of the land on which these are found. Even by making the assumption that ownership rights will eventually be established, they would apply to individual plots of land, not be held collectively over a group of resources which spread across individual plots of land, as in the case of a communal area conservancy in Namibia.

The significance of this observation becomes clear if we consider the advantage that conservancy residents, through their representatives, can have when negotiating the basis on which any sort of tourism enterprise is to operate within a conservancy's boundaries. Both contracts for the Brandberg White Lady Lodge joint venture and the African Hunting Safaris trophy hunting quota are testament to the leverage that conservancy legislation can provide to poor common-pool resource users who lack the knowledge, skills, finance and experience necessary to realise the economic potential of 'their' resource base. There is at present no legal basis on which people in Los Toldos can have a guaranteed claim to benefit significantly from tourism

activities, precisely because they have no legal claim on anything in the area which might be deemed a tourism attraction.

### **3. Conclusion**

Knowledge about sustainability is given privileged status within the context of the Alto Bermejo Project. Such knowledge shapes its wider framework. The objectives of the Alto Bermejo Project are framed in the language and logic of sustainability. It is very much at odds with the predominant type of protected area conservation in Argentina, and of which the history of Baritú National Park provides a good example. It constitutes an attempt to pursue a conservation agenda outwith the protected area. It redefines conservation in terms of careful use, not prohibition of use. It does not see humans solely as a threat to the conservation of valued biodiversity, but instead as competent resource users who are capable of using common-pool resources in such a way as to ensure their continued existence. Indeed, to ensure the continued existence of the Yungas in Argentina, sustainable forms of use of the resources it comprises have to be made attractive to the people that live in and around it. Its objectives are framed in terms of the over-arching goal of sustainable use of natural resources, and indeed are neither intelligible nor justifiable *without* making recourse to the idea of sustainability. Without the perceived need for setting common-pool resource use within the Yungas on a sustainable footing, there would simply be no need for the Alto Bermejo Project.

In its commitment to this concept, it is essentially comparable with the conservancy programme. The policy documents of both can clearly be read in terms of the six ‘principles of sustainability’ extrapolated in chapter four. Both are testaments to the staggering global reach of the notion. Having established that knowledge about sustainability enjoys a privileged status in the policy texts of the Alto Bermejo Project, what remains to be done is to chart the consequences of this status for local participation in the Project’s agroforestry initiatives in the municipality of Los Toldos. This exercise reveals another fundamental similarity between the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme: both are exercises in knowledge transfer. Viewing the PAB in this light is essential if the significance of the link between knowing and deciding is to be fully appreciated.

# Chapter X

## Knowing and deciding in Los Toldos

### 1. Introduction

This chapter examines in detail the Alto Bermejo Project agroforestry initiatives in the municipality of Los Toldos, rendering explicit their correspondence to the six ‘sustainability principles’ gleaned from wider thinking on the notion in chapter four. This exercise leads onto a consideration of the type of participation in the agroforestry initiatives. I designate this ‘direct’ participation, because decisions about what activities to pursue, what resources to utilise and how, are taken directly by the people of Los Toldos, in conjunction with the Pro Yungas Foundation extension worker. Direct participation contrasts with the other type found in the conservancy programme, namely representative participation. Direct participation could not have come about without the re-evaluation of local resource users which is entailed by acceptance of the concept of sustainability. The toldeños (inhabitants of Los Toldos) are treated as competent decision-makers who must of necessity be involved in decisions about local common-pool resource use if it is to be enduringly sustainable. It is therefore understandable that some may conclude that participation in the agroforestry initiatives can unproblematically be designated as ‘bottom-up’.

However, this designation does not lead to a fuller understanding of one of the crucial dynamics affecting who participates and how in the Alto Bermejo Project. Like the conservancy programme, it depends for the realisation of its objectives upon a process of knowledge transfer, and subsequently on having, or not having, the necessary knowledge required to make given outcomes obtain. In order for it to be possible for the NGO, government, donor and research actors to be able to designate its outcomes sustainable, the people of Los Toldos have to come to accept the expediency of the techniques and ways of doing things – the agroforestry activities themselves – that are seen as sustainable forms of common-pool resource use. To the extent that they do so, there is a coordination of beliefs (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996:121), a consensus between them and the actors that introduce these techniques and ways of doing things – in this case the Pro Yungas Foundation. For as long as it remains the case that these activities cannot be undertaken solely by the people of Los

Toldos themselves, but require the assistance of the actors who transfer the necessary knowledge and skills, the participation of such actors is rendered indispensable. Therefore, circularity in intervention persists. Section four offers an explanation of this circularity and explores its short- and long-term consequences. One might expect a withdrawal of the Pro Yungas Foundation once the process of knowledge transfer is complete; once indeed such actors have rendered themselves sufficiently dispensable. But there is little sign that the Pro Yungas Foundation will become dispensable in the short to medium term, or indeed plans to. This continued indispensability is not reducible simply to rational, self-interested calculation on the part of the Pro Yungas Foundation; I attempt therefore to pick out some of the goals and interests which tend toward the consolidation of the presence of the Pro Yungas Foundation in Los Toldos.

The chapter concludes that circularity in intervention need not be seen as a purely negative phenomenon. Toldeños may not quite be the protagonists in the agroforestry initiatives, independent of external sources of assistance, that talk of ‘bottom-up’ participation would make of them. For them to become so continues to be a distant prospect; but this is not merely down to the actions of the Pro Yungas Foundation. On the contrary, it may well be that a speedier withdrawal of the Foundation than is currently envisaged would not be welcomed by the toldeños themselves.

## **2. Conservation and development in Los Toldos**

The importance of the concept of the sustainable use of natural resources as a means through which to address both conservation and development objectives is explicitly manifest in the projects that are undertaken by the Pro Yungas Foundation in the municipality of Los Toldos. By enhancing existing livelihood strategies and increasing the livelihood options available to the inhabitants of Los Toldos, it is held to be possible to improve living standards whilst reducing pressure on available common-pool resources. This aim is especially pertinent in respect of food security, given the price rises of foodstuffs after the most recent Argentine economic crisis.

The activities which attempt to achieve this overarching aim can be grouped into three broad categories: agroforestry for improved cultivation, livestock farming and complementary livelihood activities. Table 10.1 below illustrates the types of activity

that occur, lists the expected conservation or development benefit and which underlying principle or assumption is implicit in their formulation and implementation. The table is followed by a more in depth description of the activities.

### **Agroforestry for improved cultivation**

Agroforestry and cultivation activities reflect the importance of subsistence cultivation in local livelihood strategies. In one form or another, many of these activities have been carried out in Los Toldos since 1993. The Pro Yungas Foundation offered seven principal activities relating to agroforestry, listed below.

1. Wire-fencing cultivated plots, protecting crops against animal-caused damage. The aim is to increase the yield from land already under the plough whilst reducing the need to clear forest for cultivation.
2. Planting forest curtains as a windbreak, with a view to improving productivity and reducing erosion.
3. *Macizo* planting: planting rows of eucalyptus trees, to create a supply of timber more suited to household and work purposes than Yungas species.
4. Micro-irrigation systems, using small-bore plastic tubes fitted with drip-valves, to increase yields from existing plots. It is hoped more productive land could better meet subsistence food needs and provide as well as a surplus for sale, whilst reducing environmental pressure.
5. Planting peach and orange fruit trees, partially for nutrition purposes, but again, also with a view to producing for sale in local Bolivian and Argentine markets.
6. Creating a nursery to increase the variety of local produce and graft local, disease-resistant but bitter-tasting orange and peach plants with less disease-resistant but saleable, sweeter-tasting plants.
7. Increasing local horticulture production, to reduce dependency on expensive Bolivian supplies and to produce a saleable surplus.

**Table 10.1: breakdown of agroforestry initiatives in the municipality of Los Toldos**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Conservation benefit</b>	<b>Development benefit</b>	<b>Underlying principle(s)</b>
<b><i>Agroforestry</i></b>			
Fencing cultivated plots	Less land needed for cultivation	Greater yield, less livestock damage	Awareness of human costs of conservation, incentive structure for conservation
Forest curtains	Reduce soil erosion	Increase yield	Awareness of human costs of conservation, incentive structure for conservation
<i>Macizo</i> eucalyptus planting	Reduce pressure on Yungas timber/ resources	Quicker-growing species better adapted for domestic needs	Awareness of human costs of conservation, incentive structure for conservation
Micro-irrigation	Reduce land needed For cultivation, less pressure on Yungas resources	Higher yield, food security, potential for surplus production	Awareness of human costs of conservation, incentive structure for conservation
Fruit cultivation	Negligible impact on environment	Food security, potential for surplus production	Aid livelihood security without adverse environmental impact
Plant nursery	Negligible impact on environment	Making local plants more saleable at market, seed bank for extending crop variety	Aid livelihood security without adverse environmental impact
Horticulture	Negligible impact on environment	Food security, potential for surplus production	Aid food & livelihood security without adverse environmental impact
<b><i>Livestock farming</i></b>			
Purchase of vaccines	May help reduce herd size and pressure on resources	Less animal deaths from disease, more saleable and healthier meat	Aid food and livelihood security without adverse environmental impact
Education about diseases and prevention	May help reduce herd size and pressure on resources	Less animal deaths from disease, more saleable and healthier meat	Aid food and livelihood security without adverse environmental impact
Small livestock-rearing	Negligible impact on environment	Food security, potential for surplus production	Aid food and livelihood security without adverse environmental impact
Move to semi-intensive methods?	Reduce pressure on resources by reducing prevalence of transhumance	Food security, make livestock much more valuable at market	Awareness of human costs of conservation, incentive structure for conservation
<b><i>Complementary livelihood activities</i></b>			
Apiculture	Negligible impact on environment	Contribution to household income	Aid food and livelihood security without adverse environmental impact
Craft-making	Negligible impact on environment	Contribution to household income	Aid livelihood security without adverse environmental impact

### **Livestock farming**

Whilst the importance of livestock farming to household income is recognised within the context of the Alto Bermejo Project, there are concerns about the environmental impacts of putting livestock out to graze. However, as no impact studies had been

made, Pro Yungas Foundation staff were reticent to make claims about the scale of impact. All livestock activities were undertaken by a Pro Yungas Foundation veterinarian. These activities were not as long established as those relating to agroforestry, having been initiated at the beginning of 2004 and did not enjoy uninterrupted funding. During the research period, the principal activities carried out with respect to livestock farming were:

1. Education about disease prevention general animal welfare
2. improvement of animal nutrition
3. Sourcing cheaper drugs for disease treatment, by pooling money locally for the purchase of vaccines in bulk and at cost price.

These were characterised by field staff as objectives which were intended to further community development<sup>41</sup>. In the long term, however, work with livestock was intended to address also the environmental impacts of livestock rearing, especially of cattle grazing. This aim was eventually to be achieved by encouraging a move towards semi-intensive livestock production, although only insofar as there was a local willingness to make the changes such a move would entail. It would involve:

1. Stabling cattle more frequently than is done under current practice, where cows are left to wander and seek pasture wherever they find it
2. Improving the genetic stock, to make stock more economically competitive
3. Reducing herd sizes, on the rationale that higher returns can be secured from smaller herds of healthier and better-fed animals, thereby reducing the environmental impact of herding

### **Complementary livelihood activities**

This component relates to activities either not previously practised in Los Toldos, or whose practice had been in decline but have been taken up once more with a view to increasing household income:

1. Apiculture (bee-keeping)

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Eloisa Ferro, veterinarian for the Pro Yungas Foundation 11.12.2004



2. Support for handicraft making, as a (currently unpredictable) source of income which makes little or no extra impact upon the environment. Assistance takes the form of a rotating fund, providing credit for purchasing materials and flexible repayment options

Exploring the assumptions that frame these initiatives reveals their correspondence to my six 'principles of sustainability'. As noted, it is held that increasing the yield from land under cultivation serves two important purposes. First, it may encourage a shift from subsistence to surplus cultivation. Second, increasing yields can serve conservation objectives by reducing the amount of forest needing cleared and burned. Such thinking is, in theory if not always in practice, a model for sustainable agriculture. Although it is not yet clear that planting eucalyptus significantly reduces pressure on the Yungas, that it is seen as a potential solution demonstrates the privileged status of the proposition that it is imperative to address and mitigate the human costs of conservation, thereby corresponding to the fourth 'principle of sustainability'. It is thought by Pro Yungas Foundation staff to serve both conservation and development objectives, even in the absence of scientific data to support the conclusion. It serves as the rationale for the employment of such techniques, a basis on which to organise programme activities.

Many of these activities have in-built incentive structures for their own long-term adoption and maintenance, in terms of potential gains in productivity, greater food and/or livelihood security concomitant increases in household revenue etc. Many of these potential gains are economic in character, making such thinking intelligible in terms of the fifth 'sustainability principle' as well as the fourth.

Bee-keeping and handicraft production are included in the Alto Bermejo Project activities in Los Toldos because they are considered to aid livelihood security whilst causing little or no adverse environmental impact. It would not at all be controversial to argue that their environmental impact was negligible or even positive, although the extent to which either do so to any great extent is yet to be established. Nonetheless, their worth and inclusion in the Alto Bermejo Project derives from their perceived contribution to the overarching goal of sustainability.

### **‘Direct’ participation in Los Toldos**

The approach favoured within these small projects is, then, essentially one of providing technical and financial assistance to people who are persuaded of the merits of the knowledge and resources being offered to them. On that basis, different techniques from within mainstream agricultural science are suggested to – and increasingly accepted by – group members to employ alongside those that have been in existence for generations and perhaps centuries. Through working either with individual group members on household-level activities or with a number of members on shared projects, the idea is that extension workers reach a consensus with beneficiaries and assist them in achieving their objectives.

This, then, forms the basis of decision-making, which might perceivably be called ‘direct participation’, in the sense that it is group or club members themselves – as opposed to representatives of the group or club – who determine what activities they will pursue, albeit in conjunction with a person who has the knowledge, skills and access to resources that are required for their implementation. The extension workers, mostly through groups but sometimes even with individual families, work directly with a majority of the families in the municipality. It is this direct working relationship which differentiates arrangements for participation within the small projects from the conservancy programme in Namibia.

It is worthwhile drawing out explicitly the links between ‘direct participation’ and the ‘principles of sustainability’ that the Alto Bermejo Project and the conservancy programme have in common. First, the actors and institutions responsible for implementing this part of the Alto Bermejo Project clearly view *toldeños* as competent resource users capable of making sound decisions about resource use and agricultural production strategies. This fits well with the third ‘principle of sustainability’, that it is no longer a foregone conclusion that people will exhaust available common-pool resources whenever there is not a state or private resource regime imposed and enforced. Second, that they are viewed as competent resource users prefigures the importance of *toldeño* participation in the Alto Bermejo Project. Therefore, they arrive at a decision with the project extension worker, making them central to the decision-making processes which determine the activities of the group in which they work. This is in line with the sixth principle, that sustainability objectives cannot be achieved without the broader participation of common-pool resource users in the decisions. Third, not only are *toldeños* to be incorporated into

the decision-making process regarding the utilisation of natural resources, but they are also to be given a sound reason to do so (principle four). For this reason, the initiatives they undertake with the extension worker revolve around techniques which are intended to yield not only conservation but also development benefits.

The costs of conservation are explicitly addressed in the formulation of the agroforestry and other initiatives in Los Toldos and are to be mitigated or compensated if they are to be achieved. Clearly, then, beliefs about who can participate and on what basis in conservation-related decision-making processes have changed, especially if compared with the thinking which culminated in the inhabitants of Lipeo being excluded from all of the decisions about the creation and running of Baritú National Park. This change in belief is essentially comparable with the type of change in post-independence Namibia documented in chapter six. Conservancy committees all over Namibia, and the residents they represent, are deemed capable of sustainable common-pool resource when the government of Namibia declares (gazetting) a conservancy a legal entity. As we have seen, one of the underlying beliefs of the conservancy programme is that not only are local people capable of participating in the management of common-pool resources, but that their participation is indispensable to the overarching objective of sustainability.

However, it is important not to lose sight of central differences between ‘direct’ participation in agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos and ‘representative’ participation in Tsiseb conservancy, as well as variations in the access to and distribution of benefits within both settings. Activities in Tsiseb conservancy took place across a much bigger scale than those in Los Toldos and involved more people which, as discussed in Part II, is one of the principal reasons why participation through representatives was adopted. Another important reason why representative participation is found in Tsiseb conservancy – and in many other conservancies – is, of course, because it is part of the requirements for conservancy formation. A representative committee of some sort is one of the criteria specified in the (1996) amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance. Representative participation is, therefore, envisaged for a conservancy even before the process to request the ‘gazetting’ of one in a given area is initiated. Representative participation stems, therefore, from the very development of conservancy legislation. The ‘direct’ participation of the agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos are rooted, in contrast, not in national legislation but in processes largely specific to Los Toldos: in the

agroforestry work done in the municipality, under the auspices of different projects and programmes, since the early 1990s.

Another crucial contextual factor has a significant impact on how people participated in Los Toldos and Tsiseb conservancy respectively: land tenure. Communal tenure in Namibia permitted communal area conservancy residents to have collective rights over common-pool resources – and especially game animals – in the area. No single person ‘owned’ these resources, but all residents had a legally valid claim to benefit from their conservation and/or a share of any revenue-generating activities derived from them. Arrangements in Los Toldos were different; and precisely because land tenure in the municipality and the department comprised the standard divisions of private property. Each family or individual had some claim – without or without titles (most of which were not strictly recognised under Argentine law) – to a plot of land on which to set up accommodation and grow produce for subsistence, sale or *trueque* (non-monetary exchange of goods). At the same time, however, the transhumance arrangements still used for livestock husbandry *did* constitute a common-pool resource use regime, in that cattle, goats or sheep were grazed either within the Yungas in and around the municipality of Los Toldos, or they were taken to graze the pastures above the tree line. Herders could make no legal claim to the use of this land: their *de facto* access to it rested upon the lack of any challenge to it. Moreover, they were not in possession of the legal right to benefit from the use of the resources afforded to them by the Yungas or the pastures.

In consequence of these differing tenure arrangements, the direct model of Los Toldos focussed on working with families. The producer groups that were formed comprised members of the families resident in a given part of the municipality, and activities concentrated on the resources controlled by those families. New technology, such as irrigation or grafting, would be introduced within the context of the groups, but each family – or sometimes members of three or four families in collaboration – would be provided the equipment, seeds or other input required for the upkeep or improvement of resources available to them in a context of the division of private property. The existence of this private tenure regime therefore led benefits to accrue around individual produce. The incentive for people to adopt the new techniques which would ease pressure on the Yungas resource base derived from individual, not collective benefits. The precise opposite was the case in Tsiseb conservancy, where all activities were forms of managing – and distributing the benefits from – available

common-pool resources. The management of those resources was delegated to specific institutions: the conservancy committee and manager; the investors and the Joint Liaison Committee for the Brandberg White Lady Lodge; African Hunting Safaris for the trophy hunting agreement; the Daureb Mountain Guides (and increasingly the National Monuments Council) for the Brandberg Mountain. In Los Toldos participants in the agroforestry initiatives managed their own resources in conjunction with specialist help provided by the Pro Yungas Foundation and/or other actors.

As a result of these different mechanisms for resource management, local experiences of participation were concomitantly different. In Tsiseb conservancy, the achievement of the conservancy's conservation and development objectives hinged more on what people *did not* do – kill wildlife – than what they *did do*. They were required to oversee the institutions of resource management, via the Annual General Meeting and through meetings with area representatives; much as an electorate oversees a government in the broadest sense. Some residents would be directly involved, for instance as Community Game Guards, as employees of the Brandberg White Lady Lodge, as a safari hunter in training or as a conservancy committee member. However these were, of course, the minority. In light of this delegation of wildlife management responsibilities to specific institutions, and bearing in mind also the difficulties of communication across an area the size of Tsiseb, it is easier to understand why conservancy residents who participated in focus groups often struggled to see its relevance to their own situation. The members of mothers' clubs and producer groups in Los Toldos, on the other hand, were, by dint of their direct involvement in resource management activities, could much more easily perceive the link to their own forms of resource use and the benefits that could potentially be accrued through the use of new techniques.

In Argentina the achievement of conservation and development objectives depended more on what people *did* do, i.e. adopt different methods from agroforestry, new (for toldeños) approaches to cultivation and livestock husbandry. In Tsiseb, it was the conservancy executive committee and staff that did what needed to be done – much of which consisted in learning what to do in order to run a conservancy. Conservancy residents oversaw, at the AGM, the whole project, But toldeños were

directly involved in making the difference to their own plots of land – the agroforestry initiatives revolved directly around their activities<sup>42</sup>.

Moreover, if we look at the agroforestry initiatives in terms of access to and distribution of locally valued resources, it becomes clear that ‘direct’ participation differs not just from the ‘representative’ model of Tsiseb conservancy. It also differs fundamentally from local access/distribution dynamics. As seen in chapter eight, access to the resources of the state is to be negotiated through political allegiance. Such access is not open to all who seek it; rather, there is evidence to suggest that it is used as a bargaining chip to secure consistent voter support in municipal elections. In contrast, access to the resources of the Alto Bermejo Project can be solicited by any resident of Los Toldos. As toldeño Miguel Tapia explained to me, people trusted the extension workers of the Pro Yungas Foundation because they would work with anyone, putting at the disposal of the producer groups or mothers’ clubs the resources bound up with the agroforestry initiatives – and without expecting political allegiance in return<sup>43</sup>. Ironically, José García, a Pro Yungas Foundation extension worker, became very popular, precisely because he was so unswervingly apolitical in the pursuance of his work, that he was repeatedly entreated by residents to run for office in the municipal elections. In effect, his access to valued resources – and consistent tendency to make them available without demanding a pledge of political allegiance – had garnered him sufficient political capital to make him a viable candidate, and indeed one which local politicians might well have had good reason to fear had he chosen to run.

That project resources could be locally and directly solicited in this way is, of course, also intimately connected to beliefs about the necessity and desirability of local participation in processes through which conservation and development objectives are to be achieved. Indeed local participation partially justifies the very existence of the agroforestry initiatives, with toldeños represented as protagonists

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<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that if toldeño participation in the Alto Bermejo Project overall were compared with the participation of the residents of Tsiseb conservancy, greater similarity would emerge. The Alto Bermejo Project is coordinated through sub-committees and the regional level and an overarching coordinating committee, in line with the decision-making structures prescribed in the declaration of a Biosphere Reserve. Toldeños can and have sent representatives along to these committees. However, in the case of the first coordinating committee meeting in October 2004, the few that did attend seemed not to understand either why their presence was requested or what had occurred throughout the meeting.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Miguel Tapia, member of the ‘Nueva Esperanza’ (New Hope) Producer Group, La Misión, municipality of Los Toldos, 12.12.2004.

who *can* modify their agricultural activities in such a way as to boost household income whilst relieving pressure on the Yungas. There is consensus within the Pro Yungas Foundation and other Alto Bermejo Project institutional actors that this is the case, and it precedes the arrangement that producer groups or mothers' clubs either make decisions with the extension worker or directly by themselves. For this reason, toldeños are not made perversely accountable (Stokes 2005) to the extension worker or the Pro Yungas Foundation in the way they might be were the resources they used for these activities provided by the municipal council.

### **3. Circularity in intervention**

#### **Why 'direct' participation is still circular**

On these grounds, the Fundación Pro Yungas maintains for understandable reasons that it is their beneficiaries who in large measure define the trajectory of the agroforestry initiatives. They might thereby intelligibly and plausibly lay claim to describing the activities as 'bottom-up'. However, without wanting to deny the value of these initiatives either for such organisations or the people of Los Toldos, applying the 'bottom up' label in this case does not bring us to a fuller understanding of what types of participation characterise intervention in this context.

It is precisely because current policy and intervention is underpinned by commitment to the importance of local participation that the Pro Yungas Foundation is rendered indispensable to the initiatives for which it has successfully secured funding. One basic dynamic remains unchanged: as in the conservancy programme, the initiatives that occur in Los Toldos still depend for the achievement of their objectives on a process of knowledge transfer from implementers to beneficiaries. This dynamic is only modified, rather than radically altered, even when two core beliefs underpinning intervention stress the competence of local people in resource management and the importance of their participation, in reconciling conservation and development objectives. Being in possession of knowledge about sustainability is still necessary in order to be able to define objectives and still serves to evaluate what – or whose – knowledge is seen as helpful or necessary in defining what needs to be done and how to do it.

Let us recap on some of the theoretical insights detailed in chapter two. First, recall that I have argued that the concept of sustainability has a self-referential component. That is, when we say of something that it is or is not sustainable, we do not refer *directly* to the empirical properties of that thing, but rather to other references to it. These references specify the relationship in which what that thing is and does stand to a particular set of activities, goals and interests. So, for instance, small-bore tubing can be designated ‘sustainable’ *in relation to* its use in micro-irrigation systems which are favoured by the Pro Yungas Foundation because of their potential to reduce the need for forest clearance for agricultural purposes. But its status as a sustainable technology does not derive directly from its physical characteristics, but from the purposes that it can be made to serve. Its sustainable status is imputed to it, and is intelligible only within the context of established reference to sustainability (cf. Barnes 1988). It is a sustainable technology, then, partly because it is referred to as such. Crucially, therefore, if its status as ‘sustainable’ comes not solely from an investigation of its empirical properties, its validity – the reason why we accept that it is a sustainable technology – derives *also* from the cognitive authority of the people who refer to it as sustainable. Now, the sheer amount of things it is deemed necessary to know in order to produce an acceptable definition of sustainability demonstrates that it is a highly specialised body of knowledge. Consequently, few people have sufficient knowledge to be able *credibly* to designate as sustainable or, conversely, unsustainable, particular things and activities, and hence the cognitive authority for such designations remain at first in the specialist domain. However, when non-specialists accept the designations that specialists make about what is or is not sustainable, they extend the cognitive authority invested in that designation. The designation then becomes general, rather than being the preserve of a few people with specialist knowledge, and in being generally referred to becomes valid. To repeat a quotation from Barnes “we validate what we believe by referring to what we believe” (1988:49). Returning to the example of the small bore tubing, then, we can see the Pro Yungas Foundation as the source of cognitive authority – in this context – for its designation as sustainable. When people living in Los Toldos agree that it is a good idea to initiate micro-irrigation activities, they are endorsing and extending the source of cognitive authority.



Having or not having cognitive authority entails fundamental implications for the type of participation that characterises the Alto Bermejo Project agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos. This is precisely because these depend upon a process of knowledge transfer. The Pro Yungas Foundation is indispensable to this transfer process for two principal reasons. First, there is already a consensus on the need to set resource use within the Yungas on a sustainable footing, much of which has been brought about by the Foundation's energetic attempts to create a public profile for the Yungas of national proportions. This consensus justifies the transfer of knowledge deemed necessary for the overarching goal of sustainable common-pool resource use. As I have sought to demonstrate with Part I of the thesis, this consensus did not just 'happen'. It emerged, was – and continues to be – contested and negotiated within a global context of changing beliefs about the potentially adverse impacts of current modes of human existence on the environment.

Implicit in the consensus regarding the necessity of setting common-pool resource use in the Yungas on a sustainable footing is the notion that not all have the necessary capacity – knowledge and skills – to do so. This leads to the second reason: The Pro Yungas Foundation is seen by its funders (principally the French Global Environment Fund, or FFEM) as having the capacity to devise appropriate policy, and to design and implement corresponding policy solutions for realising sustainability objectives. Of course, it is no coincidence that the Pro Yungas Foundation is viewed in this light: it has striven to convince the FFEM that it is the best recipient of funding, in the face of competition, not least from Salta Provincial Government's Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development (see below). Before the knowledge transfer process has even occurred, then, considerations of what needs to be known, what needs to be done and who can do it have been settled, and in such a way as to reinforce both the validity of knowledge about sustainability and the indispensability of those actors deemed to be in possession of it. Therefore, much of what there is to participate in, who should participate and why it is necessary to participate has already been decided.

Clearly, it would be simplistic to reduce what then *happens* in agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos to the status of self-evident corollaries of policy design and implementation. Perhaps such straightforward causal relationships between policy and project outcomes only ever exist in the mind of a funding proposal writer. The people of Los Toldos come to the initiatives with their own goals and interests, and

generate their own understandings of and uses for project activities. Furthermore, the wealth of agricultural knowledge which they bring to the initiatives is recognised and valued by Pro Yungas Foundation extension workers; toldeños too can be sources of cognitive authority. As we have seen, this much can be inferred from the representation of toldeños within the Alto Bermejo Project policy documents effectively as capable agents of sustainability. Nonetheless, however events do unfold, the agroforestry initiatives depend more on the knowledge held by extension workers than on the knowledge that toldeños bring to them. For as long as this is the case, and no matter how honourable the intentions of the Pro Yungas Foundation, their participation remains indispensable.

### **Who does what with micro irrigation**

By way of putting these remarks in context, it is helpful to continue with and flesh out the example of micro-irrigation. Having consulted with a Pro Yungas Foundation extension worker and chosen to pursue one of the agroforestry, livestock or alternative livelihood initiatives outlined in table 10.1, an individual must form a group of a minimum of four people. Ever since early attempts at combined conservation and development were introduced in Los Toldos in the early 1990s, group work has been the *modus operandi*. There is, moreover, a partially intact local custom known as the *minga* which aids group work. *Minga* refers to the pooling of labour resources among a group of people for activities that are hard to achieve individually. The most frequent activities a *minga* is used to achieve are agricultural, i.e. clearance of forest for cultivation. The *minga* lends itself, then, to the Alto Bermejo Project agricultural initiatives, as one member of the group may enlist other members to work on his or her plot one day, on the condition of returning the favour at a later point in time. It serves as an example of the incorporation of local practice into project activity. Nonetheless, it is used towards a pre-defined set of activities that have been selected by the Pro Yungas Foundation because, as we have seen, they are underpinned by a sustainability rationale. Even before discussing how people participate and on what basis, what there is to participate in – i.e. the activities offered by the Pro Yungas Foundation – has been predetermined. This may seem an obvious observation, but it serves to underline that the people of Los Toldos did not and could not have put together these activities themselves, and the Pro Yungas Foundation was

instrumental in designating them as a sustainable and, therefore, necessary intervention.

If a group wants to set up a micro-irrigation system, it will in the first instance be as a result of a consensus with the extension worker. The group has first to agree with the extension worker that micro-irrigation techniques are indeed preferable to the rain-fed agriculture that they have practised up until that point. Indeed, in practice, there is widespread agreement on this point, as evidenced by the popularity of micro-irrigation. People unproblematically attribute to it much of the improvement in crop yields, plant size and quality they experience. They could, of course, always attribute such changes to some other phenomenon. But they do not, because they accept the explanation of the extension workers and take improvements to crop yields that come about after the introduction of micro irrigation as confirmation of the validity of the extension workers' knowledge. Here we can see how the cognitive authority underpinning beliefs about the efficacy and utility of micro irrigation moves from being specific to general, at least within the context of the agroforestry initiatives.

Once this consensus on the benefits of micro-irrigation is reached and it is deemed an expedient course of action, the group must apply for financial and technical assistance from the Pro Yungas Foundation and its proposal is to be subjected to evaluation. This is done through completing a form which indicates which of the activities will be taken up and how it will be implemented. Given low adult literacy rates in Los Toldos, it is unsurprising that the help of the extension worker is often enlisted in the completion of the form. Indeed when the form was first introduced, the extension worker thought it would be so difficult for groups to understand that he often automatically assumed responsibility for its completion, thereby pre-empting any requests for assistance. When ready, a proposal is referred to a small panel of employees – including the extension worker – of the Pro Yungas Foundation, who decide whether to offer the necessary financial and technical assistance, based on the merit of the proposal. Presuming that the group's proposal is approved – and there is a high approval rating – they will embark upon it with the assistance of the extension worker, with whom they will plan the activity. The extension worker will then drive one of the Foundation's pickup trucks the 150km from Los Toldos to Orán, the nearest Argentine town, using Alto Bermejo Project funds to buy the pump, small-bore tubing and other necessary hardware. On his or her

return, he or she will, with the help of the group, install the micro-irrigation system and give instructions on use and maintenance.

What emerges from this description is the indispensability of the knowledge, skills and access to resources of the Pro Yungas Foundation in the implementation of the agroforestry initiative. Having been used to secure the necessary project resources, the capacity that the Pro Yungas Foundation is deemed to have is what justifies the salary of the extension worker, the purchase and running costs for the vehicle, the costs of the components for micro irrigation etc. The initiative is, then, based more on the extension worker's expertise and access to resources than it is on the agricultural knowledge that toldeños already have, even though this is by no means taken for granted. Producer group or mothers' club members come to view the acquisition of this expertise, or at least some of it, as potentially fruitful and on this basis choose to participate in the initiatives. Precisely because of the privileged status of knowledge held by Pro Yungas Foundation staff – both in relation to funders and the inhabitants of Los Toldos – it would be missing the point to cast toldeños in the role of protagonists who set the trajectory for project activities. This was already defined before any projects were initiated, was conceived in terms of knowledge about sustainability and with a view to achieving sustainability objectives. Toldeños were not in a position to define this wider trajectory, to designate particular activities as sustainable or unsustainable, to procure funding from international sources, or to set a combined conservation and development agenda in Argentina's subtropical mountain forest regions. There were sufficient incentives for toldeños to come to agree that the agroforestry initiatives could offer them significant benefits, and to become involved on that basis. But they did not become involved out of a locally-generated desire to set their principal livelihood activities on a sustainable footing. Nor was there a groundswell of concern regarding the extent to which conservation objectives were or were not being met. Neither 'sustainable' nor 'conservation' are important, frequently-employed terms in the local vocabulary; and yet the aims of the agroforestry initiatives cannot be even be expressed, let alone understood, without them.

Another indication of the privileged status of the knowledge held by Pro Yungas Foundation staff is a tension which arises regarding the extent to which the knowledge underpinning agroforestry initiatives complements or replaces local agricultural knowledge. With some of the activities, such as employing fertiliser to

improve crop yield or grafting plants to produce more saleable fruit, the argument that the initiatives do no more than complement existing knowledge and practice can be made relatively straightforwardly. No fundamental change in what the toldeños cultivate is entailed; nor is it necessary for them to abandon the tradition of shifting cultivation to which they are most accustomed. And yet the implications of adopting other initiatives would require a much more significant adjustment in local knowledge and practice.

To take an example, the overall aim of the livestock-related initiative is to move toward a semi-intensive farming system, by way of stabling animals more frequently, improving the genetic stock and reducing herd sizes. This would constitute the adoption of a system at variance to the transhumance around which toldeños currently organise large portions of the year's activities. There is locally a perception that it is 'natural' to permit large livestock animals to graze widely, there are festivals to celebrate the marking of the animals and there are mental maps of valleys and mountain chains formed around transhumance patterns. To adjust these activities would entail a concomitant adjustment of local culture. Of course, extension workers were aware of this, and stressed that they would only attempt any such modification with people who were willing to experiment. Indeed, the comparative reluctance of the Pro Yungas Foundation to introduce such measures is a recognition of a domain of knowledge underpinned by toldeño cognitive authority. Nonetheless, if people do of their own volition adopt at some point semi intensive livestock methods, it will constitute the adoption of a new set of beliefs in preference to an existing set. The cognitive authority of expert NGO staff would be an important part of what made this coordination possible. Toldeños may have convinced the Pro Yungas Foundation to value transhumance to the extent that it is not seen to be something that can be sacrificed even bearing in mind the posited conservation value of doing so. But it is very unlikely that the people of Toldos would be able to persuade the Pro Yungas Foundation that transhumance is sustainable, not least because toldeños do not speak the language of sustainability.

### **Indispensable for how long?**

As with the conservancy programme, a number of questions arise with regard to the implications of circularity in intervention. Even if the participation of the Pro Yungas Foundation is rendered indispensable because it has the knowledge in terms of which

the agroforestry initiatives are defined and, through securing funding, reinforces the privileged status of that knowledge, then so what? If the agroforestry initiatives entail a process of knowledge transfer, then will not the completion of the transfer process render the Pro Yungas Foundation wholly dispensable? Might we not see the Foundation as actively seeking, through transferring valued and useful knowledge, to become wholly dispensable? Is it not possible to read into my account of circularity in intervention an attempt to explain the actions of the Pro Yungas Foundation in Los Toldos, purely in terms of the 'NGO livelihoods' (i.e. self-interest) concerns that have been raised with respect to the conservancy programme? As in the Namibian context, I do not see circularity in intervention simply as a function of pure self-interest. The explanation lies in a subtler understanding of the goals and interests at play. For better or worse, I think that the Pro Yungas Foundation is unlikely soon to become dispensable in the initiatives and projects that it currently leads.

### **Indispensable in the wider context...**

Self-interest cannot, of course, be wholly discounted from the explanation. During a discussion with the director of the Pro Yungas Foundation, Alejandro Brown, I mentioned that during research in Namibia, I had come across the concern, held mainly by certain government and research actors, that NGOs benefited more from the conservancy programme than the people who justified its existence, neatly captured by the notion of 'NGO livelihoods'. To my surprise, he replied that he agreed with the sentiment of this argument (though he was not necessarily endorsing it in the specific Namibian context). He thought that in broad terms, the principal beneficiaries of development intervention were the NGOs, aid agencies, government departments and research actors that provided or accessed funds made available for developmental purposes. This was, he argued, a necessary arrangement: there had to be sufficient incentive for their continued involvement and commitment to frequently difficult, stressful jobs; altruism alone could not be relied upon to provide that incentive. It was perhaps not the fairest system, in his view, but was one that 'worked' because it was not only the development professionals that benefited from it, but also project beneficiaries.

However, what Brown would not wish to endorse is the view that NGO and government involvement in the Alto Bermejo Project has been motivated solely by financial gain. One of the goals Brown has pursued since the 1980s is to ensure that

the public profile of the Yungas continues to increase and to have them widely designated as a resource worthy of conserving. He can legitimately claim to have made a very significant contribution to the much-increased notoriety which the Yungas these days enjoy. This he has done through his own writings, his tenure as director of the Laboratory for Ecological Research into the Yungas, advocacy in the construction of the gas pipe through the Yungas, his involvement in the establishment of the Yungas Biosphere Reserve, the establishment of the Pro Yungas Foundation and, of course, through securing the funding for the Alto Bermejo Project. Doing all of this has not generated vast personal wealth for him. Wealth does not explain why he believes it vital to ensure the future survival of the Yungas, or why he has strived to become well-placed to make a significant contribution to this goal. His strategy *has* rendered him and his organisation indispensable to matters relating to the Yungas. He *has* succeeded in persuading a large variety of actors that the conservation of the Yungas matters on many different levels, and also that conservation objectives need not necessarily conflict with development efforts with resource users living in or near the Yungas. In doing so, he has been instrumental in extending the cognitive authority which underpins the validity of the designation of the Yungas as an area worthy of conservation. This has become a generalised concern, no longer limited to a small number of individuals with specialist knowledge of montane forest biodiversity. Being part of this process, a ‘player’, gaining access to resources through which to expand conservation and sustainable use activities further, better explains what drives Brown’s efforts to consolidate the status of the Pro Yungas Foundation as a key actor in conservation and development in the Yungas.

Indeed, it is quite remarkable just how indispensable the Foundation has become within the context of the conservation of the Yungas, even given that this context is partly of its own making. Remarkable because the Foundation, and particularly Alejandro Brown himself, has become a very controversial figure, as reviled in some quarters as he is admired in others. He has made enemies along the way; not least among these is the Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development (Provincial Government of Salta). During the design stages of the Alto Bermejo Project in 2001 and 2002, the lead organisation, was yet to be chosen by the French Global Environment Fund. At one point, the Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development was, apparently, a clear contender for this position. However, as noted previously, it was the Pro Yungas Foundation that was ultimately

chosen instead. The wrangling that occurred over this change contributed to a year of delay to the initiation of the Alto Bermejo Project, and made a large hole in the Pro Yungas Foundation budget. It has been suggested that the French Global Environment Fund became so concerned about the perceived potential for corruption if the funds were released to an arm of provincial government that it chose instead to entrust them to an NGO. It may have been thought easier to hold an NGO to account over any abuse or misallocation than it would the Provincial Government of Salta, or indeed the Federal Government of Argentina. Due care must be taken with such suggestions: it proved beyond the scope of this research to establish in depth what prompted the Pro Yungas Foundation to be designated lead organisation in preference to the Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development.

The consequences were, though, clear: one set of actors saw its strong hopes of securing control over funds totalling €1.3m dashed, provoking a lasting resentment of the Pro Yungas Foundation. This resentment manifested itself, amongst other ways, in a decision to exclude the Foundation, along with other NGO counterparts, the Argentine Wildlife Foundation and Greenpeace Argentina, from the meetings of the Yungas Biosphere Reserve Management Committee, on which also sat the Salta Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development. Pro Yungas Foundation staff complained in private that a deal had been cut with other stakeholders, and one which would suggest that it was not only the Salta Development Secretariat which was hostile to the Foundation and its NGO 'allies'. Interestingly, however, even this exclusionary attempt was to have comparatively little effect on the involvement of the Pro Yungas Foundation in the Biosphere Reserve, for two reasons. First, they continued to be involved in the meetings of the local committees for the different zones of the Biosphere Reserve. Second, they continued to be the principal source of funding for any initiatives to be conducted within the framework of the Biosphere Reserve.

### **Indispensable in Los Toldos...**

There are a number of reasons to expect the continued presence of the Pro Yungas Foundation in Los Toldos, as opposed to a strategy which favours as rapid a withdrawal as possible, once toldeños have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out the agroforestry initiatives without external assistance. For a start, the Foundation does not anticipate an imminent end to its presence in Los Toldos. During



interview, Alejandro Brown argued that the involvement of his Foundation and other support organisations in agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos was likely to be on a long-term basis<sup>44</sup>. He disagreed with the notion that it would be possible for the municipality's inhabitants to become independent of current modes of assistance over a short timeframe. It is not difficult to see why: Los Toldos remains geographically isolated; it is one of the poorest parts of a poor Argentine province; its basic infrastructure is rudimentary; in 2002, 38.2% of people between the age of 15 and 64 had not completed primary school education (Salta 2002:23). Even despite job creation from the increased presence of state services, formal employment opportunities are slim and people ill-equipped to take advantage. There have, of course, been gains in health care, schooling and other services as a result of increased state presence in Los Toldos. But the commensurate increase in the numbers of people receiving state pensions and unemployment subsidies – not to mention the prevalence of machine politics – has fostered a culture of dependency on state resources. There are compelling reasons to think that the chances of a rapid transformation of structural poverty, which for centuries has shaped livelihoods in Los Toldos, are minimal. Intervention of any kind takes place against this wider backdrop. It is understandable that actors involved in such intervention may formulate their timeframes accordingly.

All of these factors, then, militate against the toldeños becoming the sort of protagonists envisaged by 'bottom-up' participatory rhetoric, even if they do make decisions about group work jointly with extension workers. The consequences of the culture of dependency are particularly worthy of consideration as they constitute an important determinant of what people believe they can or are prepared to do for themselves and, therein, the extent to which they will embrace the role of 'protagonist' prescribed by the logic of empowerment. It should be noted that they may not perceive it to be in their interests to do so. The assistance offered by groups such as the Pro Yungas Foundation constitutes an important supplement to household income, may perhaps be seen as a livelihood strategy in itself. Why would people want such assistance to be withdrawn? In the previous description of the process of setting up a micro irrigation facility, the extension worker, as well as the resources s/he can access, are preconditions of realising the dual objectives of strengthening

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<sup>44</sup> Interview conducted 22.8.2004

local livelihood options whilst reducing pressure on the environment. It is far from clear that toldeños feel the need to assume all the responsibility required for the achievement of these objectives. Assuming that micro irrigation improved crop yields by a quantity sufficient to produce a surplus that could be sold in regional markets, the producers would soon run into the practicalities of transporting produce to market. How to address this without free access to the Pro Yungas Foundation pickup truck? They could hire space in the local supermarket lorry, which does weekly trips to Orán, but that would incur extra (and currently avoidable) costs. How would producers pay for micro irrigation system maintenance or seed purchase? Again, it is perfectly possible and feasible for toldeños to find solutions to all such difficulties; but whether they would want to is another matter. We should remember that these resources – seeds, fertilisers, tubing, water pumps, use of a vehicle, extension workers with valued knowledge and a desire to make it locally available – are offered with no political strings attached. The recipients are not required to pledge an oath of political fealty in return for access to resources; nor is access threatened by the defeat of a political ally in municipal elections. Therefore, the long-term presence of the actors who can guarantee such access may well be looked upon favourably by toldeños.

Now, focus group and interview data do not unequivocally support the notion that all toldeños involved in the agroforestry initiatives felt a sense of dependency regarding the Pro Yungas Foundation. Some groups reported that either they thought they already could operate independently of the Foundation or were moving in that direction. Others, such as the Mothers' Club of La Misión, which had initiated activities with the Pro Yungas Foundation more recently, did not feel they could dispense with assistance received. Some activities were more established than others, too: i.e. grafting and fertilising were better understood and more widely adopted than bee-keeping.

Even if some toldeños think they are or should be less dependent on the Pro Yungas Foundation, it is telling that most of these initiatives are not new. In the early 1990s, they were started through funding from GTZ, which collaborated with the Laboratory for Ecological Research in the Yungas (LIEY), the forerunner to the Pro Yungas Foundation. By 2004, such initiatives had been underway for more than a decade; yet during fieldwork, very few people continued the activities independently of the support they received. This does not appear to constitute a strategy for becoming dispensable.

Why, then, have the agroforestry initiatives continued over this comparatively long timeframe? Part of the answer is related to the management and uneven provision of funding over substantial periods. Both in fieldwork conducted in 2002 and 2004, a situation had arisen in which money was not available for some or all of the activities in Los Toldos. As a consequence, the salary of the extension worker (then) responsible for the agroforestry initiatives, was paid only intermittently through 2002 and, apparently, was not paid for the greater part of 2003. Indeed, in that year, Pro Yungas Foundation staff told me, so little funding was available that the organisation almost ground to a halt. There was a period of four consecutive months in which extension workers were not remunerated, and in which there was not even money to pay for petrol for most of the vehicles. With the onset of the Alto Bermejo Project in September 2004, monthly salary payments for one of the extension workers responsible for agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos resumed. The French Global Environment Fund (FFEM) had agreed to cover the cost of the extension worker responsible for all of the agroforestry activities, and was strictly and frequently monitoring the expenditure of its funds, leaving little room for discretion over their disbursement. However, the salary of the extension worker (then) responsible for the livestock activities, was not being paid: these activities, although classified as part of the Alto Bermejo Project, were not covered by the FFEM. Other sources of funding for the Pro Yungas Foundation have not, it appears, proved so reliable. Therefore, scheduled activities have sometimes either not been carried out or have been delayed.

The extension staff most affected have, of course, been in a very difficult position. There are the obvious problems that stem from being paid infrequently, i.e. paying rent, buying food etc. But the extension workers were also angered by an ethical dilemma to which they felt subjected. They were still requested to write or assist in the writing of funding proposals for continued work in Los Toldos or other places in which the Pro Yungas Foundation also works, such as Los Naranjos or San Andrés, but were unsure that the funding gained would ever reach the projects. One extension worker characterised this as an abuse of the people in whose name the funds had been requested, and eventually refused to be involved in writing funding proposals unless given guarantees that the funds would not be spent on anything else. Considerable resentment was expressed, by more than employee and on more than one occasion, over the perception that funds had instead been spent on propping up what was

viewed as an unnecessarily large amount of staff – 15 employees in total – as opposed to on the project activities themselves.

With all due respect to the holders of these views, mitigating factors may be cited here. Further, it should be clarified that I do not have a complete account of the complex reasons for this funding shortfall. It has been argued that it was not within the power of the Foundation to control the unforeseen events connected to the development of this chronic shortfall in available revenue. It has also been argued that it is difficult to apportion blame to any one actor. One staff member at the Foundation told me that the reason why the organisation had been expanded to number 15 people was related to the negotiations over who would be lead organisation for the Alto Bermejo Project. Apparently, the Foundation had been told that it had insufficient capacity to take up the mantle of lead organisation. Therefore, it hired staff to cover perceived gaps, especially in terms of social development. As a strategy to convince the FFEM that the Pro Yungas Foundation had improved its capacity sufficiently, this was very successful. However, as noted, financial difficulties arose when the funding arrived to the Pro Yungas Foundation one year later than expected. The delay left the Pro Yungas Foundation in the position of having large salary costs but without sufficient funds to cover them. The priority became institutional survival, leading to a situation in which funds that were intended for project activities were diverted for other purposes. There were also, apparently, interruptions to existing sources of funding *separate* from that secured from the French Global Environment Fund. This led the Foundation to use up all its existing funding, until it became impossible, for a brief period, to pay any salary. Indeed, it was apparently the conviction held, especially by the Foundation's president, Alejandro Brown, that its survival was essential to the future conservation of the Yungas, that justified taking a course of action that led to an inability to pay employees. The vision of conserving the Yungas, to which the Pro Yungas Foundation had already made a significant contribution, would, on this view, otherwise be impossible to realise. It might also be noted that as the delays occurred after institutional expansion, the Foundation has little choice but to make do as best it could.

Whatever conclusion one arrives at about the strategy through which the Pro Yungas Foundation became lead organisation in the Alto Bermejo Project, it serves as an illustration of one of the limits to participation of the toldeños in the decision-making processes regarding agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos. The people in

whose name funding was solicited took no part in some of the most crucial decisions determining how that funding was spent. This situation also illuminates an important question: at what stage should the participation of the toldeños begin?

Moreover, not disbursing the funds in accordance with the proposals through which they were secured has not yet stopped the Pro Yungas Foundation from accessing further funding to continue their activities. Indeed, using money for the purposes of institutional survival has served so far to assist the Foundation in gaining access to even greater sources of funding, not to be disqualified from it.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Alto Bermejo Project's agroforestry initiatives are formulated in terms of knowledge about sustainability. Consensus between PAB implementers and their funders on the need to transfer of knowledge about sustainability to the people whose resource usage will determine the viability of the resource base justifies intervention. Credible knowledge about how to achieve conservation and development objectives is concentrated within the NGO, government and private sector actors, all of whom are seminal in the design and implementation of these projects in the first place. The cognitive authority of these actors is crucial to maintaining the credibility of this knowledge: their designation of certain things and processes as sustainable or otherwise is one of the fundamental reasons why those things or processes are more widely designated sustainable or otherwise. It is this circular dynamic which renders their participation indispensable. Having knowledge about sustainability, if the results of what they do are judged favourably by those who provide the resources deemed necessary for the running of the project, guarantees their participation and allows them to continue to be seminal in defining the agenda. In this regard, broad parallels can be drawn with the conservancy programme: examining the link between knowing and deciding reveals not just the privileged character of the concept of sustainability in both initiatives, but also that it has comparable consequences for participation in two markedly distinct contexts.

The indispensability of governmental, non-governmental and private sector actors in the agroforestry initiatives is to some extent at odds with the rhetoric of 'bottom-up' participation which would at first glance seem to apply to the 'direct

participation' encountered in the agroforestry initiatives. As noted throughout the chapter, one privileged belief in Alto Bermejo Project – and conservancy programme – policy is that what local people know has to be incorporated or has to influence the shape of the project and the type of participation that characterises the project. But neither is or can be based solely on what local people think or believe, precisely because they do not have the 'project-specific' knowledge that NGOs or government actors or specific private sector actors have. Indeed, such actors in both Argentina and Namibia are much more equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and resources successfully to implement the initiatives they have designed in the first place than are the local people who are within such initiatives elevated to the status of principal protagonists.

However, this circularity in intervention does not necessarily constitute grounds on which to issue an outright condemnation of the Alto Bermejo Project. The long term assistance provided in a resource-poor area, which is at such a structural disadvantage when it comes to any attempts to reduce poverty, is welcome. When resources do find their way down to the agroforestry initiatives, they are put at the disposal of recipients with no political strings attached. In focus groups and interviews, time and again toldeños highly valued the knowledge and skills Pro Yungas Foundation extension workers provided. Moreover, in the context of increasing dependency on subsidy as a viable livelihood strategy, toldeños might have good reason to conclude that they did not want the Foundation to become indispensable any time soon. As Mosse has argued with regard to research on the Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project (2001), there may well be a case for the continued presence of support actors like the Pro Yungas Foundation over the longer term. It is as well to leave space for this argument to be made, as opposed to explaining the presence of the Pro Yungas Foundation merely in terms of self-interest and judging their efforts according to the extent to which toldeños could be left to pursue project objectives without assistance.

When the people in whose name resources are claimed and accessed do not benefit from them because they have been used for other purposes, then questions emerge about accountability. The stage at which the toldeños should start to participate in decision-making processes is another important issue. However, it might also be noted in this regard that the accountability strictures put in place by the French Global Environment Fund (FFEM) have been both stricter than those of other

organisations from which the Pro Yungas Foundation has secured funding and, on their own terms, more successful. For the period of research period for which the Alto Bermejo Project was up and running, extension workers whose salaries were covered by the FFEM were paid regularly, and resources were consistently available for the agroforestry initiatives. Whatever conclusions are arrived at about the consequences of circularity in intervention, I hope to have illustrated the utility of insights from the sociology of knowledge – especially cognitive authority, self-referential knowledge and goals and interests – in rendering visible the circularity in the first place, as much in Argentina as in Namibia.

# Chapter XI: Conclusion

## 1. In summary...

This thesis has attempted to chart the effects on local participation, in two initiatives in very distinct contexts, of the link between knowing and deciding. What people know or do not know about how to define and achieve sustainability objectives is a central factor in deciding who participates and on what basis in both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project. This is especially so to the extent that the simultaneously privileged and specialised character of knowledge about sustainability renders the participation of some actors indispensable. This is the essence of circularity in intervention, and it is a dynamic which remains invisible without a thorough investigation of the link between knowing and deciding. It *will* be overlooked, I contend, if we view either of these initiatives in terms of ‘grass-roots’ participation. That idea, of local people being the source of the initiatives deflects attention away from the global influence of the concept of sustainability which, in my view, is the ‘real’ source of both initiatives. Nor does this idea help us to remember that above all both of these initiatives are exercises in knowledge transfer. In order to reorient attention back towards this defining characteristic, I have employed and, I hope, demonstrated the utility of insights from the sociology of knowledge which help us to understand the consequences – especially for local participation – of processes of knowledge transfer.

Another goal from the outset has been to be clear that circularity in intervention may be good or bad according to context or perspective, but it is as well to reiterate my own perspective on the matter. Within the specific contexts of Tsiseb conservancy and the Alto Bermejo Project’s agroforestry initiatives in Los Toldos, there are grounds for concern about some of the consequences for local participation of circularity in intervention. In Tsiseb, for instance, during the research period some conservancy residents knew so little about the conservancy that it was not possible for them to participate in the conservancy’s central decision-making processes. The knowledge deemed necessary for running the conservancy and which had been transferred was concentrated in the conservancy executive committee and even more in the conservancy manager. Even with this transfer, the continued participation of



NGOs such as the Rural Institute for Social Development and Empowerment (RISE) and the Namibian Community-based Tourism Association (NACOBTA) continued to be indispensable; not least owing to the funding and other resources to which they helped the conservancy secure access. In Los Toldos, despite the 'direct' model of participation which characterises the agroforestry initiatives, NGOs or government actors or specific private sector actors remained, after ten years of intervention, better equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and resources, successfully to implement the initiatives they have designed than are the local people who are ostensibly the principal protagonists. There are also questions about claiming funds in the name of local people and not spending those funds on those people: this is a direct consequence of the circular character of participation in these agroforestry initiatives.

However, there is a danger of failing to appreciate the benefits that are offered by both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project, especially if we interpret the continuing centrality of having knowledge about sustainability purely in terms of the self-interest of government, non-government, research or private sector actors. In the case of Tsiseb conservancy, representative structures derive considerable legitimacy from the very struggle for Namibia's independence. There is a consensus within Namibian society on the legitimacy of representative democracy, even if there are growing concerns about the extent to which the manner in which Namibia is governed is democratic (cf. Melber 2003). Moreover, having representatives standing in for larger numbers of people in Tsiseb is a response, albeit an imperfect one, to the classic dilemmas of collective action that surface in the context of having to consult hundreds of people dispersed over an extensive geographical area. It has required specialist knowledge to devise and implement the representative system, both in its original version and in the version that was being introduced towards the end of the field research.

Representative decision-making gets a bad name, understandably, to the extent that it facilitates elite capture of benefits and exclusion of the majority. Indeed, it has been argued that in a democracy, the connection between state and citizen should be mediated not through representation but through participation and inclusion (i.e. Gaventa 2004). I think the evidence from Tsiseb points to the difficulties in maintaining such an argument. First of all representation *is* a form of participation, not something to be contrasted participation. Second, the work of Olson (1965) has demonstrated that there is a balance to be struck between the efficiency and the

inclusivity of making decisions about what collective action to take. Gaventa's call for states to include their citizens in more decisions is a promising basis for generating widespread consensus; but if, as he claims, it is necessary to link up local, national and global levels in making decisions, the increasing numbers of potential decision-makers entailed in a link-up to the global level are likely to make some form of representation, be it by politicians or civil society organisations, inevitable. Tsiseb conservancy demonstrates that even at the local level it is not always possible to dispense with representative structures. It seems better, as has been done in the conservancy, to attempt to engage with it and find remedies for flaws. Given that the 'area representative' structures were not fully established by the time this research ended, it is not possible to analyse the extent to which they addressed the issue of lack of information about the conservancy amongst its members. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there was an attempt to address the issue. The creation of these structures depended more on what people did not know than on what they did know, and their acceptance rendered indispensable the participation of the NACSO and RISE actors who sought to introduce them. Nonetheless, it seems to me better to evaluate whether they should be dismissed or encouraged not on whether they originated at the local level or because they are 'representative' as opposed to 'direct', but rather on what their consequences are and how these consequences are greeted, used, co-opted or otherwise negotiated at the local level.

In the case of the Alto Bermejo Project, the agro-forestry initiatives in Los Toldos provided long-term assistance in a historically neglected, geographically isolated area, with some of the highest incidences of poverty in Argentina. When resources *do* get to recipients, they are not offered on the condition of political allegiance, which is another pattern of resource distribution seemingly common in Los Toldos. The toldeños with whom the Pro Yungas Foundation works are not made perversely accountable to it (cf. Stokes 2005). In focus groups and interviews, toldeños clearly valued both the knowledge and skills Pro Yungas Foundation extension workers provided and the 'no strings attached' basis on which they were offered. Furthermore, within the context of dependency on resources provided by the state or NGOs, subsidy becomes a viable livelihood strategy. Toldeños therefore might not welcome becoming responsible for decisions and processes with which they currently receive assistance from the Foundation. Whatever view is taken on this form of dependency,

it cannot be discounted when assessing local views on how much protagonism to ascribe to the toldeños themselves within the agroforestry initiatives.

## **2. Where do we go from here? Directions for further research**

It seems often the case with research that what we discover serves to demonstrate just how much more there is to discover. What we might at the outset have seen as the end of an inquiry at the end seems merely the beginning of another. So it is with this thesis. I have said much on the importance of recognising the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project as exercises in knowledge transfer if we wish to understand who participates and on what basis. And I have repeated the point that the achievement of objectives in both depends more on what local people do not know, and less on what they do know. But I have said rather less on what might be called the ‘mechanics’ of knowledge transfer. That is, what and how do local people come to know about the conservation and development processes in which they participate, how do they incorporate, square or contrast it with what they already know (presuming they understand it or do not choose to ignore it altogether)? What are the factors which affect the processes of knowledge transfer and acquisition? In hindsight, perhaps a certain bias in my research design may be detected, which often proved better at establishing what local people did *not* know than it did at establishing what they did know, or *how* they had come to know it. These are important questions which have fallen largely outwith the scope of this thesis, but finding answers to them may prove fruitful.

Consider the example of the first significant involvement in decision-making processes of the conservancy management committee (the structure comprising the executive committee, the area representatives and the Traditional Authority representatives). This took the form of a management workshop which took place in May 2004. It was held between conservancy management committee and an employee of the NACSO (Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations) Institutional Working Group to devise the conservancy’s management plan. This event gave the area representatives much information to report back to residents, although the extent to which they did so, and how they did it could not be

investigated within the timeframe of the research. Further questions could be posed with a view to:

- establishing what notions about conservancy management representatives took away from the workshop
- how they were translated and re-told in Damara (and/or Otji-Herero, or Oshivambo)
- how they were re-presented to the people in their settlements and farmsteads, i.e. what was left in the account, what dropped out of the story and why
- what people understood of what their representative had said at the end of this process

This is a promising area for further research. Clarifying what information is available to members and residents in far-flung parts of the conservancy, and what *becomes of* that information could be very helpful for the people who design and run such workshops, the people whose task it is to convey conservancy-related information, and for residents themselves.

There is, of course, a broad literature on which this direction of research could draw; indeed, it should be noted that I have already drawn implicitly on it, but have not exhausted its explanatory potential. The concepts of – and differences between – ‘tacit’ and ‘codified’ knowledge have for some time been useful tools for grasping how we know what we know and how we might make it understood to others (cf. Polanyi 1966). Some of what we know is amenable to an explicit rendering – we can explain it verbally or write it down – thus allowing for the compilation and communication of the knowledge necessary for understanding how to complete a given task or process. Other things are known tacitly, in a fashion which is sufficient for understanding how to complete a given task or process, but is intuitive, not spoken or otherwise communicated (ibid). Such knowledge is acquired through direct experience, and is the essence of ‘learning by doing’. Devising methods to teach knowledge which does not lend itself to textbook description has received substantial attention (i.e. Baughn *et al* 1997). Another notion central to the ‘nature’ of knowledge is its embedded quality. Clearly, tacit or explicit knowledge is ultimately embedded in

people (Starbuck 1992), in the teams and networks in which they work; but it is also held to be embedded in tools and routines.

Distance is a concept which manifests itself in various guises within the literature on knowledge transfer. One such manifestation of no little relevance to further research in Namibia and Argentina is that of knowledge distance. This refers to the gap between the respective knowledge bases of source and recipient (Cummings 2003, citing Hamel 1991). A significant point to take from the literature on knowledge distance is the centrality of the relation of the knowledge of the recipient relative to that of the speaker (Cummings 2003). It is, further, possible to distinguish other types of distance. One type might be geographical distance (cf. Marshall 1920). I will not elaborate on this point, given how much has already been mentioned on the consequences for local participation of the large and isolated geographies across which the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project extend. It remains as an approach amenable to further research, nonetheless.

Another type of distance might be called organisational or institutional. A focus on this type of distance might generate questions about the discrepancies between the institutions seeking to transfer knowledge and those seeking to receive it. It would be salient to point out here that in both the Namibian and Argentine contexts, the 'institutions', governmental and non-governmental, are also gatekeepers of the conduits through which knowledge is to be transferred: those institutions are part of the transfer process and it is not always clear that their functions are fully understood locally, or to what extent they coincide with local priorities or decision-making processes.

An example drawn from a part of the Alto Bermejo Project which I have not covered in the main body of the thesis is provided by the North Zone Committee of the Yungas Biosphere Reserve, that is, the local Biosphere Reserve committee that sits in Los Toldos. The committee does not serve its stated purpose as an arena in which local people can come together to debate and resolve issues related to local common-pool resource use (cf. Cornwall 2004). Rather, it is better seen as a contested political space in which different actors fight to establish the system through which decisions will be made and the resources available to the Biosphere Reserve through the Alto Bermejo Project will be controlled. Some actors saw the committee as a space which should at all costs be kept separate from the dominant dynamics of municipal politics. These same actors were very concerned that the municipal council

would appropriate the committee as a means through which to secure control over resources which could then be used to consolidate local political power bases. Consequently, the amount of debate around the legal implications of the committee's formation – especially the perceived need to establish a constitution with a set of clearly-defined rules which all committee representatives would be obliged to follow – can be read in the light of a power struggle. One 'side' ostensibly wanted a decision-making process which would prevent available resources from being allocated on the basis of patronage, and charged the 'other' side of wanting the precise opposite.

In this struggle, at least as viewed through the minutes taken for the North Zone Committee meetings, the same voices appear over and over, whilst other participants, who are listed as having attended, make little or no contribution. Why this should be the case may be related to what I call, as yet somewhat vaguely, as the 'committee culture'. With the term, I wish to draw attention to those factors which increase the likelihood of some actors becoming vocal participants, whilst decreasing that likelihood in the case of other actors. Speculating on what these might be, I would include:

- The level of education of the recipient – the majority of the more vocal participants had also finished secondary school or had attended university.
- The level of independence from the resources of local government: the most vociferous critics of the local government had well-paid jobs with an independent source of income. There were attempts sometimes to remove these individuals from their jobs, but as long as the position was maintained, so too was the potential for critique.
- The perceived local relevance of the matters discussed. Locally, I was given to understand, attending committee meetings could be seen as lazy, to be done by those who did not have more pressingly urgent matters (generally livelihood-related) requiring their attention. I was informed by some of the poorer committee members that their principal reason for participation was the pursuit of financial gain.
- This is related to the final factor, that of understanding. Concerns were expressed by a number of the members with more formal education that some

members simply did not understand what was being spoken of at the meetings, which limited the extent to which they could participate. It seemed sometimes, when it came to voting on what decision to take, that some members would observe how ‘allies’ or figures of respected (cognitive) authority had voted, and use this to guide their own decision.

These are fascinating dynamics which, with further recourse to the concept of knowledge distance, could be much better illuminated than I have been able to do here. It would be interesting to explore, for instance, local forms of decision-making processes regarding common-pool resource use and to compare them with the representative and direct types of participation that currently prevail in the Namibian and Argentine contexts respectively. To return to the North Zone Committee once more, one committee member told me that it was not widely understood why there had to be so much attention paid to the legalistic details of committee establishment. Why did the constitution have to be so clearly defined? Why was it that written consent for decisions taken was seen as so important? Indeed, written consent in particular was seen by that committee member as perhaps inappropriate in an area where much importance was attached to the spoken word as the binding basis for agreement.

A third type is relationship distance, which refers to the ease or difficulty with which sources and recipients interact and share knowledge (Cumming 2003). Clearly, if two parties have a stormy relationship, any knowledge sharing exercise will become much more difficult, perhaps futile. We may wish to include here the ill-will consequences of bad personal chemistry, professional rivalry and an over-dependence on negative stereotyping which can be engendered by relationship distance. As I hope is by now abundantly clear, in both Namibia and Argentina, the relationship between government, NGO and also research actors could sometimes be fraught with underlying tension. Despite attempts to engage in diplomatic or constructive criticism on all sides, sometimes ill-disguised hostility increased the likelihood of one party rejecting plausible but critical (and sometimes unnecessarily personal or caustic) statements made by another. Tensions between NGO and local actors were also an issue in both contexts (see Reboratti 2003 for an Argentine example and , Sullivan 2003b for a Namibian one).

Significantly, the greater the knowledge distance (in whatever sense), the more difficult the transfer process is rendered; in some cases it may become “almost impossible” (Hamel 1991: 97). I do not wish to suggest that the sorts of knowledge transfer processes at the heart of the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project are characterised by such distance that the exercise is so difficult as to be futile. On the contrary, I am inclined to think that it is possible to transfer much of what is currently transferred: the more important point is to be able to grasp more fully what sort of knowledge is ‘recreated’ at the end of such transfer processes (cf. Cumming 2003). Having a better understanding of what is known, by whom and how, could be beneficial for intervention and for the formulation of policy. It provides a direction for future research only partially addressed by this thesis. The analytical tools offered by the literature on knowledge transfer may give us a better idea of how to go about extending the exercise to include more on local knowledge and the interaction between local knowledge and ‘external’ or ‘introduced’ knowledge.

### **3. Wider implications for thinking on the relationship between policy and practice**

The final aim of this thesis is to make a contribution to wider thinking on the relationship between policy and intervention or, as David Mosse would have it, between policy and practice. I want to do so by drawing on Mosse’s account of this relationship in his compelling and controversial book, *Cultivating Development* (2005), noting where my own work is similar to his and where it differs. The responses to this book that I have seen concentrate principally on the ethical dimensions and polemics surrounding its launch (Mosse 2006, Sridhar 2005, Stirrat 2005). Important though these are, I wish, in contrast, to make some tentative remarks about one of his conclusions, namely the possibility that good policy is “not implementable” (2005:20); though he later qualifies this and, citing Latour, argues instead that “policy design is ‘in contradiction’ with other ideas” (Latour 1996: 92, in Mosse 2005:230). In either case, how does he arrive at this conclusion?

Mosse views policy as a way to form and recruit networks of people and enlist support for the mobilisation of resources according to a way of doing things held to comply with specific criteria, be that participatory, gender-focused, poverty reduction etc. But these policy models may not be appropriate to the socio-historical setting to



which they are being applied, may fail to comprehend it or may have to address goals related to the maintenance of networks which get in the way of or have no impact on the project's actual goals. In short, Mosse is concerned that explaining the success or failure of implementation in terms of good or bad policy design is to miss the vital point that “the operational control which bureaucracies or NGOs have over events and practices in development is always constrained and often quite limited” (2005:8). Success for Mosse has more to do with the extent to which a particular policy narrative used to interpret empirical phenomena continues to enlist the support of actors involved in a given development intervention (ibid). Success is not a matter of implementing a policy that will cause some specific thing to happen (i.e. the poverty of farmer *a* is reduced by a factor of *x* through policy *p*), but rather one of bringing together diverse and often fractious interests in conformity with a single interpretation of what is happening. Project managers, extension workers, consultants, community leaders, researchers and others all help in the translation of a vague policy goals – such as participation – “into practical interests; practical interests back into policy goals” (ibid:9).

Because of the importance of mobilising and maintaining the relationships which legitimise practice, development intervention is not driven by policy, but rather by “the exigencies of organisations and the need to maintain relationships” (ibid:16). This ‘ordering of juncture and disjuncture’, as Mosse puts it, is attended by costs and risks. First, judging success and failure in terms of project models entails too much deductive generalisation on the part of donors, allowing little in the way of “inductive understanding of contingencies and instrumentalities, or open-ended learning” (ibid:232-233). Second, maintaining the legitimacy of policy models is a process mediated through “unequal relations of power”, and therefore “the orientation is always ‘upwards’ in international development. Even in ‘bottom-up’ projects, policy innovation comes from on top” (ibid:233). Because securing further funding requires projects to “reflect external agendas...rather than reflect their own organisational and social reality”, projects are “forever *projections*” (ibid, emphasis in original). Their actions and events have of necessity to be interpreted in terms of the policy text, their meaning prescribed within that context. Therefore:

for organisations as well as for local communities, empowerment or simply survival comes not through validation of their own knowledge processes or cultures, but through orientation to the knowledge and narratives of more powerful players (ibid:233)

Because the most controversial aspect of Mosse's work is probably the proposition that policy may be 'unimplementable', it is, in the interests of balance, as well to point out that he is at pains *not* to make the claim that policy is therefore irrelevant. Moreover, he identifies two ways in which the Indo British Rain-fed Project (IBRFP), the initiative that serves as his case study, 'works': "first, it established itself as an exemplar of policy, generating valid interpretations; and second, it had some positive local socio-economic effects" (ibid:231).

This, at least, is my understanding of Mosse's position. I now want to relate his work to my own. I have said that policy descriptions of local participation in both the conservancy programme and the Alto Bermejo Project cast it in the light of a grass-roots experience. But this view ignores the fact that the privileged status of knowledge about sustainability is already established. This status determines in large measure what there is to participate in and renders some non-local actors indispensable, precisely because the achievement of policy objectives in both initiatives depends more on what local people do not know than it does on what they do know. I have ended up, then, saying something rather similar to Mosse. I am charting the discrepancy between 'the policy line' on what is said about who participates and on what basis on the one hand, and who I think actually participates and on what basis on the other.

Where our work differs, though, is with regard to the conclusions reached about the cause and effect relationships between policy and practice. For Mosse, policy is not to be seen as a cause, but rather as "an *end*" (ibid; emphasis in original). Indeed, he comes very close to saying that practice *causes* policy, not the other way round. However, he also argues that "Policy provides the context for action and is crucial for a project like IBRFP to work", in the sense of providing socio-economic benefits (ibid:232). This would appear to suggest some sort of fundamental causal link from policy to practice. Whatever form development practice assumes, it is caused partially by the existence of a context which calls for action and which provides resources for pursuing and realising such action. Action may not occur as per the policy script; but presumably it does not occur *at all* in the absence of a policy script and the resources connected to it. Mosse seems to me to write often about policy as wholly separate

from the practices it is supposed to influence. This is not at all a ridiculous proposition: it is analogous to differentiating a description from that which it describes. However, in appearing at some points to sever implicit causal links between policy and practice, and to reverse them at others, Mosse leaves himself open to the charge of not adequately specifying the causal relationship between policy and practice. Moreover, to the extent that Mosse does not entirely get away from the idea that policy does *not* cause practice, his grounds for claiming that policy is not implementable would appear to be compromised.

In my view, cause and effect relationships between policy and practice cut both ways. That is, policy influences practice and vice versa, albeit in ways that are often difficult to predict and which do not always realise policy objectives. Endless contingency and conflicting interests notwithstanding, I do not think Mosse's argument obliges us to abandon the idea that policy can be the cause of the achievement of at least some of its objectives. However, although I part company with Mosse in his conclusions regarding the relationship between policy and practice, I concur with many of the premises he draws upon and the arguments he makes. What *Cultivating Development* does so compellingly is to illustrate that the causal relationships between policy and practice are very complicated and seldom captured by present-tense policy descriptions which describe the logic according to which action will inevitably unfold long before that action has unfolded.

Furthermore, it is hard to see how policy formulation could be harmed by a more nuanced understanding of what factors affect the practice that policy is transformed into. Mosse encourages us, rightly in my view, to engage more thoroughly with the complexity of such relationships *without* condemning or cutting all links with development intervention. It seems to me that this aim can be furthered by continuing to maintain that policy influences practice and vice versa, as it leaves open the possibility for researchers to continue to suggest ideas about what kinds of policies to follow, as well as ways in which those policies might contribute to bringing about positive change. I do not pretend to have, with my own research, a clearer account of the cause-effect relationships between policy and practice than Mosse, but that is a project to which the direction for further research I have outlined above may make a helpful contribution. By investigating how knowledge about sustainability changes and is changed by local level encounters with it, we may come to a better understanding of this relationship.

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