



PERISA Case Study **3** Public Goods

The Impact of Transfrontier Conservation Areas on Regional Integration

By Talitha Bertelsmann-Scott

Transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs) have been established or are under discussion in various locations within Southern Africa. The aim is to have 18 TFCAs in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in coming years. These areas attempt to protect specific environmental assets that belong to two or more SADC member states and co-ordinate the land use beyond wildlife protection. They involve the participation of various actors ranging from heads of state and border officials to nature conservation officials, donors, actors in the private sector, local communities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They cover a host of cross-boundary issues including visa requirements, fencing, policing and patrolling; as well as the free movement of wildlife assets, their health and interaction with domestic animals.

This case study has a strong element of political-economy aspects for the very reasons that it has to

involve a large number of regional actors with the view of regional benefits in both the tourism and economic

development sectors. Of interest here is to identify the actors driving the process, how they obtain buy-in from the others, and the ultimate beneficiaries. With numerous such areas taking shape, it would seem as if regional integration in the management of the environment and wildlife is progressing at a steady pace. Although significant stumbling blocks are currently being experienced owing to the scourge of rhino poaching, it is unclear whether this problem could signal the end of some of the TFCAs. The case study examines progress made and obstacles faced, as well as the reasons and processes behind them.

STEPS TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED AFRICA

The idea behind the TFCAs originated from the relationship between former South African president, Nelson Mandela, and South African businessman and philanthropist, Anton Rupert, but it was kick-started at a meeting between Rupert and Mozambique's president, Joaquim Chissano, in 1990, at which they discussed the possibility of combining South African and Mozambican conservation areas. The discussion centred on the arbitrary nature of African borders that were drawn by colonial masters. Although it was felt that Southern African states were still too young to be asked to give up on their sovereignty and either redraw borders or integrate at a rapid pace, borders could be opened for the free movement of wildlife.

Rupert established the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), which he funded, and managed to draw substantial funding for globally. In turn, Chissano and Mandela approached other Southern African leaders to form part of this initiative. In the interim a number of other organisations have come on board, including the World Bank, donors like the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), SADC, the private sector, and other smaller NGOs. The result: 10 transfrontier wildlife areas in just over two decades that range from six treaty-based, formally established parks to some in the advanced phases of signing treaties based on memorandums of understanding, and others still in their inception phase.

The testing ground came about in the Kgalagadi area, where South Africa and Botswana were already in the advanced phases of establishing joint wildlife protection areas. Historically the Kgalagadi area was a natural large

ecological unit with animals moving freely between the two countries' borders. There was a recognition that in order to protect wildlife assets, South Africa and Botswana needed to co-operate closely. The rights over the animals depend on where within this combined territory they are at any given time. An elephant might belong to South Africa today but as it crosses the border overnight it becomes Botswana's property. When countries decide to harvest wildlife, it can become contentious if there is no clear communication with counterpart governments.

Advocacy on encouraging replication throughout the region resulted in the SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement of 1999. It defines a TFCA as 'the area or component of a large ecological region that straddles the boundaries of two or more countries, encompassing one or more protected areas as well as multiple resource use areas.'¹ As such, it encourages member states to conserve shared wildlife resources through the TFCA.

The aim of the TFCAs has in the meantime gone beyond mere wildlife protection to now include objectives in tourism and economic development for local communities. The main NGO involved, the PPF, has also set up tourism and hotel schools, clinics, and is reintroducing the age-old skill of on-foot tracking into communities. In one TFCA only were local communities moved to outside the park areas; in all others officials are working with the people living inside the park to realise the TFCA objectives.

BARRIERS THAT HAD TO BE OVERCOME

Traditional politics and processes within Southern Africa follow a very consultative and participative process. Private-sector initiatives, by contrast, are normally to the point and rapid in search of profit and gain. These two approaches have clashed somewhat within the development of the TFCAs, with government involvement, especially at the lower levels, following the former and the main driver, the PPF, the latter. A number of compromises have had to be reached between these two parties in order to ensure the success

1 SADC, Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement, 14 August 1999, <http://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/813>.

of each project. The PPF has had to change its approach to local communities, by letting them participate fully in all processes and exploring maintaining their presence within the parks, rather than rushing a process and focusing on relocating communities to new areas. Their image of caring more for animals than people is slowly changing into one where TFCAs are seen as tools to develop communities while preserving a regional public good. In addition, the PPF has consciously attempted to change its role from driver and initiator to facilitator and resource organisation.

The property rights in question normally lie with the governments of the member states, with some claims by local communities living on the land for generations. At the outset of the project there was a focus on Africa's borders, which colonial powers had arbitrarily drawn but which natural, ecological units did not follow. TFCAs were presented as opportunities for African states to redraw Africa's borders to return to pre-colonial times. However, there was a recognition that in terms of sovereignty, SADC member states were still a long way off from integrating their states completely; although they recognised the opportunity of reclaiming natural ecological units in Africa by establishing the parks.

There are some stumbling blocks between wildlife conservationists and traditional cattle farmers, who regard wildlife as carriers of foot and mouth disease, which is very harmful to the cattle industry. Local communities find living next to a large herd of elephant problematic, as they can be destructive to planted crops and villages. In addition, globally, there is an increase in demand for land for human settlement rather than wildlife protection.

The fight against foot and mouth disease for domestic beef industries is also an ongoing battle. Vets who operate alongside or even in the TFCAs have often expressed their concern that the parks have dealt their work in the control of disease a significant blow. The beef industries in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia are vocal voices within the region's private sector and could advocate strongly for the closures of the parks in order to protect their industries.

The difficulties experienced are legion, with many legal and territorial issues that some TFCAs find hard to resolve. Apart from visas and border-crossing issues, there is the question of counting and protecting wildlife. Allowing law enforcement officials the right to work

within neighbouring territories is problematic, and currently poachers seem to be the winners in an unclear situation. The scourge of rhino poaching has brought the Greater Limpopo TFCA under clear threat, as talks have appeared to move in the direction of reintroducing fences in order to apprehend poachers that cross from South Africa into Mozambique (via the park), where South African law enforcement officials have no authority. Malawi and Zambia have established a joint anti-poaching unit, which, according to the PPF, can provide pointers to other states on how to jointly act on poachers without formal agreements on law enforcement.

As is often the case, there is a real difficulty in securing funding for establishing and maintaining parks and for the training of local communities. However, SADC in partnership with the PPF leverage funds for the TFCAs, with SADC bringing the institutional backing and the PPF the capacity to manage large funds.

DRIVING THE PROCESS

The SADC Secretariat is involved in as far as it can give political guidance and a setting within which individual member states can co-operate. The secretariat itself has no mandate to work on the ground and has to rely on member states, donors, NGOs and local government to operationalise the parks. SADC facilitates donor engagement with potential TFCAs. As donor disbursements are increasingly focused on the regional rather than national authority, SADC plays an important catalyst role in channelling funds. In most cases, the secretariat itself does not have the capacity to manage a grant of millions of dollars, and out-sources this management to the PPF.

The parks seem to be working and progressing at their best in areas where borders transect ethnic groups, like the Zambian–Malawi border. On both sides of the border one finds the same ethnic groups, who share languages and culture and who tend to marry across the border. In such a setting progress on cross-border initiatives tend to work better than at, for example, the Swaziland–South Africa border, where there are no cross-border cultural exchanges, border control is very strict, and little contact is encouraged between ethnic Swazis and South Africans.

However, donor interest in the TFCAs has prompted some to invest in positive spin-offs for

local communities that go beyond income from jobs created. The PPF invests in clinics and schools for local communities, as well as training initiatives on how best to optimise income from the parks. Other actors like GIZ and the World Bank contribute with technical advice. Tourism is clearly an important enabler, and it has become very important to ensure economic benefit for local communities in order to ensure their buy-in and positive participation.

It is interesting to note that SADC member states that are traditionally seen as weak participants within regional integration, like Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), are actually very active within the TFCAs. Language barriers do not seem to be a constraint here, and the DRC is active in the establishment of parks even beyond working with its SADC counterparts. Angola has progressed to signing a treaty to establish the Kavango–Zambezi TFCA with Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition, tourism industry leaders point out that Angola participates in the TFCA uni-visa initiative, alongside Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Swaziland and South Africa. Although a latecomer to the process, the initiative does signal intent to further the debate on the ease of movement of tourists through the TFCAs.

Is there a lesson here for other SADC initiatives or does it show that where of interest and real benefit member states will participate? Or does it point out that success can be found in a process whereby officials at the ground level are engaged early in the process paired with strong leadership at the higher level?

THE APPROACH

As much as heads of state can give the go-ahead for an endeavour like the TFCAs, the initiative depends on officials working at the ground level to put into place all the necessary arrangements. In the case of the Kgalagadi Park, the two countries had to discuss issues of wildlife management, which rested with wildlife officials. As soon as the discussions turned to visa requirements and border crossing, border officials had to be brought on board. In this fashion several working groups were established, which then fed up to higher levels for formalisation through a treaty.

Each of the parks deals with the access of tourists and their visas differently. A system that seems to work

well is one in which tourists entering a park from a specific country and then exiting the park from the same country can do so without the need for a visa or passport clearance for the country visited. For example, tourists entering from Namibia into the Richtersveld Park and exiting via Namibia, despite having spent some time on the South African side, will not require visas or undergo passport formalities for South Africa. In other parks, like the Kgalagadi Park, tourists still follow normal border-crossing procedures within the park.

THE TFCA IMPACT ON REGIONAL INTEGRATION

When borders are opened between two or more existing national wildlife parks, the stakes are relatively low in terms of sacrificing sovereignty in favour of a regional outcome. It is a small step by supra-national standards, but a significant step towards understanding and managing public goods as regional entities. The process towards establishing the parks and the mutual management thereof goes a long way towards building relationships at the ground level, which in the long term can filter to the top.

The concept of a tourist uni-visa has long been under discussion in the region, and the TFCAs should have given some impetus to this process. However, at a political level, resistance remains towards granting a privilege to foreign tourists and not to local citizens. The free movement of people is being discussed at various forums throughout the region, even within the Tripartite process. Although the current focus for now is on business people, visas and border-crossing will also be discussed within various services-sector negotiations. Jurisdiction of law-enforcement agents also needs to be discussed in order to allow joint operations against poachers and other illegal activities within the parks. Although it will be a lengthy process, it is expected that a positive outcome here is attainable.

CONCLUSION

The TFCAs show that a regional public good can be protected, developed and shared between various member states by the active participation of a multitude of actors. The process was kick-started at a very high

level, but the parks' success depends entirely on the implementation by and co-operation among officials on the ground level. These officials range across various sectors, including wildlife, border, law enforcement and veterinary services. The SADC Secretariat plays an important role in attracting funding at the regional level. The PPF plays a critical role in managing the funds and acting as a facilitator and co-ordinator for states that want to proceed with the implementation of a TFCA. The active engagement and early successes of the TFCAs have further attracted more donors and actors to the process, like the German government with technical advice and the World Bank.

Opposition has come from wildlife officials and vets who have concerns regarding the rapid increase in TFCAs without due regard to how cattle will be affected by the transmission of animal illnesses across borders; and how countries can effectively co-operate on poaching issues when law-enforcement agencies are not integrated and do not as yet allow foreign law enforcers to operate within their borders. The Malawi–Zambia Anti-Poaching Unit is a step in the right direction in this regard.

The case study concludes that strong top-level political leadership was required at the outset of the project but that the key to the successful implementation of the project depends on strong collaboration between

all officials at the low-level. Cross-border community linkages with the necessary backing of donor and NGO funding and guidance is also a key to success. The TFCAs show that a softly softly, bottom-up approach to regional integration is sometimes more critical to tangible results than a top-down approach with strict rules and regulations, time and deadlines.

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