

# Briefing Paper

## Co-management and Development of the Greater Sossusvlei - Namib Complex

### Background

Over the past 20 years the freehold land on the immediate eastern border of the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP) has increasingly turned from farming to wildlife, biodiversity and landscape conservation. Today the main land-use is low-impact tourism with some low levels of wildlife off-take in a few localities. This form of land-use is highly compatible with that of the neighbouring Namib-Naukluft Park, run by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET).

Past land use in the western parts of Namibia was mainly small-stock farming. Land was partitioned into camps by thousands of kilometers of mesh and strand fencing. While many of the internal fences have been removed on farms now used for wildlife and tourism, the boundary fences generally remain. Other impacts of small-stock farming were overgrazing, rangeland degradation and soil erosion, depletion of wildlife and persecution of predators which included poisoning, which severely depleted populations of scavenging species.

When small-stock farming was the dominant land use, the eastern border of the Namib-Naukluft Park was a zone of major conflict between MET staff and neighbouring farmers. Transgressions included unauthorised entry into the Park, large-scale poaching and farmers enticing wildlife from the Park onto their farms (by use of fence funnels, water and licks) for the purpose of hunting and selling the meat. As a result, in the early 1980s a strong fence was built along the entire eastern border of the Namib-Naukluft Park. While this fence significantly reduced poaching and loss of wildlife from the park, it caused another problem. The west-east movement of wildlife from the Namib plains up into the escarpment zone, particularly by Oryx in dry years, was cut off. Animals in the vicinity of the Naukluft Mountains were able to pass through the narrow neck (about 12 km wide) connecting the Namib with the Naukluft, but in other parts of the Namib many animals died against the fence. Over successive dry periods the numbers of Oryx have declines in step-wise fashion, not being able to recover sufficiently in the intervening better rainfall years.

There is now compelling evidence for the removal or breaching of the fence to allow the west-east movement patterns to resume. The removal / breaching of the fence should be undertaken in a strategic manner, and only where there are land

owners that have compatible wildlife and tourism land practices to that of the Namib-Naukluft Park. Where there is conflict with neighbours, or conflicting land uses, then the fence should be retained and maintained.

The Ministry of Environment & Tourism, in its Strategic Plan (2007), has embraced the notion of co-management approaches to landscapes and biodiversity conservation across different land tenure systems where different land owners, custodians and managers work together towards achieving a common Vision, Objectives and Outcomes, and do so by implementing a set of agreed Actions.

The core Outcomes envisaged by the MET in its Strategic Plan include the establishment of collaboration and co-management with partners to promote and enhance broad-based approaches to (a) conservation and sustainable natural resource management and (b) socio-economic development.

These evolving changes in the sector have created opportunities for different land holders with compatible land uses to collaborate and develop co-management approaches for landscape conservation.

The main reasons for initiating co-management approaches across contiguous landscapes are:

- To promote more effective landscape and biodiversity conservation across a diversity of land uses, and thus enhance sustainable land management.
- To promote economic development, improve livelihoods and combat rural poverty in sustainable ways. This requires integrated, diversified and holistic approaches, and by its nature is inclusive and partnership based.
- To help mitigate and prepare for the impacts of climate change. Namibia is predicted to be severely impacted, with farming being particularly badly affected. Best forms of adaptation involve opening up systems, working collaboratively, and diversifying from a high dependence on farming systems into indigenous biodiversity production systems such as wildlife and tourism, which achieve best results when managed through collaborative mechanisms.
- To support the Ministry of Environment & Tourism with the implementation of its Vision and Strategic Plan towards co-management approaches to ecosystems, priority areas and actions/programmes.

### **Some principles of co-management**

There has been some confusion around the term “co-management”, with concern being expressed that it allows people to become involved in the management and micro-management of others people’s land, or land that falls under the jurisdiction of other organisations.

Firstly, co-management does **not** imply that people will be managing other people’s areas or enterprises. Rather, it involves agreed higher-level consensus

on developing an overall vision, objectives and targets that will be to the greater good of all stakeholders, and working to achieve these by means of an agreed Action Plan (or Management & Development Plan).

Second, co-management does not involve small local issues that are best managed at local level. Rather, it focuses on things that require collaboration and partnership for actions to be effective and desired objectives to be achieved. It asks the fundamental question – what are the things that we do better and achieve better results from by working together rather than working in isolation?

Third, co-management needs to have a geographic focus that involves enough of the stakeholders to be effective, but not too large an area so as to lose focus and become too general. In the case of this Sossusvlei-Namib initiative, for example, the focus needs to be on and around the Sossusvlei/Naukluft area and specifically on its environmental and socio-economic landscape. In this context, its biophysical characteristics (topography, landscapes, desert environment, biodiversity and cultures) and its marketability come together as the core theme. By extending the area of involvement too wide, the core theme is diluted and stakeholders are so far away from one another that institutional interactions become limited and ineffectual.

Fourth, stakeholders have to be sufficiently regularly in contact with one another, through meetings, institutional collaboration and other forms of communication that a unity of purpose and common vision is retained and evolves constructively over time. If stakeholders are conceptually marginal or geographically distant to the focus of the core theme, then the endeavour is likely to fail or be disrupted by conflicting interests.

Fifth, stakeholders participate in co-management initiatives based on the positive aspects, vision / objectives / outcomes they have in common, not based on their differences. People see value in being part of the process, and this serves as an incentive. At the same time, stakeholders also need to contribute to the process – they cannot be net extractors of value, they need to put value into the co-management process.

### **Stakeholder position**

Three meetings have been held amongst stakeholders of the Sossusvlei-Namib Complex, two in Windhoek and one at Sossusvlei Lodge. The third meeting consolidated the position of the participating stakeholders as follows

- The idea of a collaborative co-management approach for the Sossusvlei / Naukluft area was unanimously endorsed and the name of the “Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Complex” (GSNC) was adopted.

- The geographic boundaries of the area were defined as a preliminary working area (see Figure 1).
- The meeting explored what elements should be captured within a common Strategic Vision for the Complex (see text box below).
- The proposed Actions for the GSNC were discussed, prioritised and expanded into “next steps”.

The stakeholder group of custodians, managers and owners of land in the vicinity of the Sossusvlei-Namib area have a vision. Their operational vision is to embark on a process of collaborative and collegial co-management of their area to promote sustainable development for the benefit of both the environment and socio-economic development.

The GSNC represents a “smart partnership” of custodians, managers and owners that share a common vision for the long-term management and development of the area. This long-term vision incorporates elements of:

- appropriate diversified and sustainable land use
- economic development, improved livelihoods and poverty reduction
- social and cultural development and empowerment
- partnership and co-management to enhance the above

The focus is on the GSNC, but within the context of contributing to sustainable development within the Region. An emphasis is placed on forming a “coalition of the like-minded and willing” to optimizing the opportunities and advantages that co-management across different land units can help generate, to the mutual socio-economic advantage of all participants, the fragile arid environment and to biodiversity and landscape conservation.

To date the stakeholders and custodians of different land holdings (excluding the Namib-Naukluft Park) have initiated the GSNC process that covers a combined area of some 0.8 million ha and shared a common border with the Namib-Naukluft park border of about 200 km. Of particular relevance is the fact that this land provides a bridge between the Namib and the escarpment.

Consistent with the national trend in changing land use, and the economic shift resulting from the growth in indigenous biodiversity production systems, nature-based tourism (scenery & landscapes, wildlife, cultures and adventure activities) is becoming the dominant land use in the area of the GSNC. There is considerable potential growth in this area, particularly if all partners collaborate closely and synergistically.



The overall **Strategic Vision** of the participants is to co-manage the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Complex for enhanced landscape and biodiversity conservation, and socio-economic development, for the sustained benefit of the people within the Complex and the Region.

The **Objectives** are as follows:

- ❖ To conserve and wisely manage the biomes, landscapes, ecosystems, catchments and biological diversity of the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Complex (GSNC) and, where necessary and feasible, to restore and rehabilitate degraded systems to their natural, productive states.
- ❖ To manage wildlife populations and ecosystems to maintain healthy biological diversity and ecosystem stability under hyper-arid and variable climatic conditions and different land-use practices, and to reintroduce and rebuild wildlife populations indigenous to the area within historic times, as might be appropriate under current and changing conditions.
- ❖ To promote socio-economic development opportunities through creation of appropriate enterprises, partnerships and other relevant mechanisms to foster economic growth and thereby, promote job creation and rural development.
- ❖ To promote and support appropriate land and natural resource uses that are compatible with the above objectives, with emphasis on sustainable land management practices, well managed tourism, marketing of flagship species, environmental education, awareness and outreach initiatives and research, and to create strategic and focused economic opportunities without compromising on sound conservation principles and practices.
- ❖ To establish strong co-management partnerships and an appropriate institutional mechanism between the various land custodians, administrators, managers, holders and owners within the Complex, so as to enhance the management of ecological and socio-economic aspects within the GSC to the mutual benefit of all partners.
- ❖ To harness the ecological, social, cultural and economic viability, sustainability and competitiveness of the GSNC as a model of collaborative co-management that could be further replicated elsewhere.
- ❖ To explore ways of jointly marketing the GSNC and create synergies between the individual economic and financial activities and initiatives of the partners to

enhance the development of the overall Complex to the mutual benefit of all partners.

- ❖ To explore the further expansion of the current GSNC as new potential partners seek to join the Complex and co-management Institution to manage the Complex.

## Towards an Action Plan

The stakeholder meeting identified an initial set of priority Activities to start the co-management process. These are as follows:

1. Develop an “Information Briefing Paper” (this document) to capture what we have achieved to date, the principles of co-management, and to help ensure that all stakeholders have a common perspective on the initiative.
2. Develop a “Co-management & Development Plan” for the GSNC that addresses, *inter alia*, landscape and wildlife management, monitoring, introductions and off-takes; joint law enforcement; tourism management and development, joint marketing; socio-economic development, joint enterprise development; environmental education, research; etc.
3. Establish a “leadership group” from amongst the stakeholders to champion and drive the GSNC process and see its possible institutional evolution into a GSNC Association.
4. Stakeholders to provide catalytic funding to assist the GSNC group to make progress. While much of the work will be done by stakeholders volunteering their time, some funds are necessary. Suggested that larger stakeholders contribute N\$2,000 per year and small stakeholders N\$500.
5. Begin to remove fences between neighbouring properties to create an open landscape to facilitate the free movement of wildlife in response to highly variable climatic conditions and, particularly, to create access from the Namib to the escarpment. Priority agreed boundaries to be opened are:
  - NRNR – Dubiseb
  - NRNR – Geluk
  - Witwater – Sesriem
  - Eensaam – Sesriem
  - Gondwana Namib – Dieprivier East
  - Gondwana Namib – Abendruhe
  - Dialogue with MET NNP
  - Dialogue with Roads Authority
6. Focus on wildlife population management through strategic reintroductions and monitoring. Focal areas are:
  - Determining historic distributions and based on that and existing viability, prioritised reintroductions



- Coordinate and harmonise / standardise game counting methods
  - Collaborate with MET on black rhino management (Naukluft – expanding population)
  - Set of formal monitoring programme with a monitoring coordinator that pulls data together and disseminates results
7. Water management in this hyper-arid landscape is an essential management tool. Co-management allows for strategic planning and harmonisation of water supply and management. The following priorities were identified:
- Carry out a water inventory of supply (groundwater) and current use
  - Disaggregate current use into domestic, tourism, wildlife, etc., and record existing water saving / recycling initiatives
  - Look at harmonising wildlife waters, including with MET NNP
  - Establish good water management and use guidelines and explore setting up a monitoring system
8. Strengthen security, including surveillance, tourism protection, crime prevention and anti-poaching, the following being priorities:
- Explore controlling access through road booms and monitoring traffic
  - Work closely as a group with MET and police
  - Explore setting up a radio network and common frequencies
  - Set up a telephone contact system and a communications cascading process.
9. Waste management could be strengthened and made more cost effective by working together. The following were suggested:
- Set up good practice guidelines
  - Explore collaborative waste stockpiling (sorted) and transport
10. Research and document the history of the area

## Conclusion

The stakeholders and participants of the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Complex represent a “smart partnership” concept of land managers and owners that share a common vision for the long-term sustainable management and development of the area. Their aim is to establish a common vision and collaborative interventions to improve both the ecosystem and socio-economic values of the area. As part of this initiative, they seek to engage constructively with the State managed Namib-Naukluft Park in a “smart private-public partnership” to the mutual benefit of all parties and to help create the joint capacities needed to help each party achieve their mandate, mission and objectives.

Ultimately, they seek to co-manage the GSNC for enhanced landscape, biodiversity and wildlife conservation, and socio-economic development, for the sustained benefit of the people within the Complex and the Region and for enhanced tourism enjoyment.

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