

Peace Parks in Southern Africa

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1. Introduction

Transboundary Natural Resource Management (TBNRM) initiatives, such as “peace parks,” abound throughout Southern and Eastern Africa. Defined by Griffin et al. (1999) as “any process of cooperation across boundaries that facilitates or improves the management of natural resources (to the benefit of all parties in the area concerned),” TBNRM can take several different forms: from transfrontier conservation areas to spatial development initiatives; from formal interstate arrangements regarding particular shared resources, such as watercourses, to loosely articulated “smart partnerships” involving donors, NGOs, private companies, and local government. This article focuses on peace parks and adjacent protected areas, arguing that although a good idea in theory, TBNRM in general, and peace parks in particular, must reflexively consider their motives, methods, and hypothesized outcomes to be successful. Failure to do so will result in limited buy-in at all levels of stakeholder involvement.

2. TBNRM in Southern Africa

Transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs or peace parks) and transboundary natural resource management areas (TBNRMAs) are related but different forms of TBNRM that often intersect or overlap. The complex system of protected areas and resource use regimes throughout Southern Africa suggests a symbiotic relationship between these approaches. TFCAs are initiatives undertaken by state agencies in support of biodiversity conservation and focus mainly on expanding protected areas within one country by linking them to a protected area or areas in one or more neighboring countries (Jones and Chonguica, 2001, p. 2). They may or may not be championed by a third-party facilitator, such as the World Bank, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), or the privately funded South African Peace Parks Foundation (De Villiers, 1999). TBNRMAs, in contrast, are more complex, involving *inter alia* a number of government departments, communities, companies, and local and international NGOs. According to USAID (2000), a TBNRMA is “a relatively large area, which straddles a frontier between two or more countries and covers a large-scale natural system (ecosystem).” The definition is flexible enough to include either a portion of a river basin or, where integrated environmental management is the driving principle, an entire river basin (e.g., Zambezi River Basin, which includes portions of eight states, tens of millions of people, and all economic activities, including conservation).

Another feature distinguishing TFCAs from TBNRMAs is the proposed primary beneficiary. In the former, it is the environment, with biodiversity conservation as the driving force; in the latter, it is sustainable use for sustainable livelihoods, with people—particularly rural people and those living in remote areas—being the main beneficiaries. For Katerere, Moyo, and Hill (2001, p. 9), TBNRM initiatives have the following goals: (1) to improve conservation of shared resources that are being depleted or degraded at unsustainable rates; (2) to ensure that communities and

other stakeholders benefit from sustainable use of resources (in particular, to counter inequitable resource distribution arising from land and resource appropriation by local elite and foreign investors); and (3) to optimize the regional distribution of benefits from resource use. Put simply, TBNRM is hypothesized to simultaneously provide biosphere security, national security in a regional context, and human security.

At present, there are more than half a dozen TFCAs in Southern Africa. Two of the more advanced TFCAs in the region are:

- Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park between Botswana and South Africa: The total area is 37,991 km², three-quarters of which is in Botswana, and includes state-owned protected areas in the two countries, as well as communal land within the South African protected area; and
- The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area between Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe: The total land area is 99,800 km², with two-thirds located in Mozambique, and includes state-owned protected areas, private ranches, private game reserves, and communal areas.

Other TFCAs in various stages of development include the Lubombo Transfrontier Conservation and Resource Area, the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project, the Okavango-Upper Zambezi Integrated Tourism Initiative (OUZIT), the Ai-Ai/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, and the Limpopo-Shashe TFC. Each of these is intended to be operational (Phase I) by 2010 (i.e., in place when South Africa hosts the World Cup of Soccer). Phase II initiatives include Niassa-Selous, Iona-Skeleton Coast, Liuwa Plains-Kameira, Lower Zambezi-Mana Pools, Malawi-Tanzania TFC, Chimanimani, and Mnazi Bay-Quirimbas. The Peace Parks Foundation has branded this regional vision as “The TFC Route: one trail, two oceans, nine countries, seven transfrontier parks” (see map).

3. Drivers in support of peace parks

Southern African peace parks’ strongest supporters are international actors: bilateral donors such as the German development agency (GTZ), the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (SIDA), and USAID; multilateral agencies such as the European Union, the World Bank, and the World Conservation Union; and NGOs such as Conservation International and the Worldwide Fund for Nature, several of whom work closely with the South African Peace Parks Foundation. Each of these actors is motivated by a variety of sometimes overlapping interests and beliefs (Kokwe, 1997).

For international conservation agencies, TBNRM fits nicely with current macro-management approaches based on ecosystems (IUCN) or ecological “hotspots” (Conservation International) that seek to conserve biodiversity (Chapin, 2004). Southern Africa appears to be a particularly good candidate for this approach for several reasons. First, colonial/imperial approaches to state and empire building divided the region politically along natural conservation corridors: areas of transition (e.g., from dry to moist savanna or from semi-arid to sub-humid climates) wherein large mammals (including humans) migrated seasonally depending on the movement of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). Substantial portions of these borderlands, remote from

capital cities and other large human settlements, became the sites of the region's extensive network of national parks and game reserves. Contiguous but cross-border parks were usually divided by fences, while others were fragmented islands of biological diversity surrounded by mixed land uses. Conservation groups are hopeful that reconnecting extensive but fragmented protected areas will help correct a wide variety of environmental ills plaguing Southern Africa—deforestation, soil erosion, species loss, biodiversity loss—and so achieve regional commitments to multilateral environmental agreements (global goods) and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Second, Southern Africa is a particularly good candidate for TBNRM because for more than 25 years, the region has enjoyed a formal interstate commitment to regional peace (through the Frontline States alliance) and economic development (through the Southern African Development Community, or SADC). While many rightly question the concrete achievements of these organisations (Vale, Swatuk, and Oden, 2001), we should not underestimate the important habits of cooperation and deep alliances—particularly at top levels of government—that have formed through time. Donors regard SADC's regional protocols on tourism, trade, energy, and shared watercourses (many of which are legally binding), revised bureaucratic machinery, and new policy guidelines (especially for harmonizing policy, laws, and regulatory frameworks across member states) as essential for long-term regional economic growth and sustainable development.

The organization itself puts great stock in TBNRM activities, particularly those related to tourism and shared watercourse development and management (SADC, n.d.). As articulated in the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), SADC views TBNRM as a necessary component of helping the region “bridge the infrastructure gap”—a key development if Southern Africa is to successfully brand itself as a tourism destination of choice—and a means toward the overall goal of poverty eradication.

A third factor springs from the SADC states' recent transition from conflict to peace and from colonial/authoritarian rule to unconsolidated democracies (Chengeta et al., 2003; Ramutsendela and Tsheola, 2002). The twin catalysts for fundamental political change were the end of the Cold War and of apartheid rule in Namibia (1990) and South Africa (1994). South Africa's move to majority rule put an end to a decade of military and economic aggression against its neighbors, leading to a new pressing question: what to do with the large militaries developed by SADC states? Aside from demobilization, one anticipated “peace dividend” was shifting military personnel and technology to environmental protection; IUCN was an early proponent of such activity (Steiner, 1993; Swatuk and Omari, 1997). Given the role of mountains, forests, and national parks as shelters and headquarters for rebel movements, redeployment and reconstruction became key elements in the discourse of peace parks. In the words of Koch (1998), nature was seen to have “the power to heal old wounds.” Given South Africa's regional comparative advantage in technical expertise, functional cooperation on environmental issues was deemed to be a key element in converting “swords into ploughshares.” Importantly, influential donor states such as the United States, Britain, and Germany regard TBNRM as an important aspect of regional peacemaking and building (Swatuk and Vale, 1999; Swatuk, 2004).

Together, these global actors link to national nodes—generally, parks, wildlife departments, and various local/regional NGOs such as the Kalahari Conservation Society in Botswana—that coordinate individual actions with SADC’s RISDP, often liaising directly with one of the Secretariat’s four directorates. Despite the many claimed local benefits—e.g., poverty alleviation, job creation, biodiversity preservation, cross-border peace—this “shared” belief in peace parks does not extend much beyond the actors directly involved. Indeed, given South Africa’s historical dominance of the region, many people in Southern Africa are skeptical of the peacebuilding motives said to be driving TBNRM (Wirbelauer et al., 2003).

TBNRM joins a growing list of new, participatory, rural development-oriented approaches to natural resource conservation (Fabricius and Koch, 2005; Vira and Jeffery, 2001; Jeffery and Vira, 2001). At the center of these new approaches is the belief that economic, social, political, and ecological benefits from protected area management will only be realized if these activities contribute “to well-being appropriate to southern African society, which in the region’s socioeconomic context is likely to include economic growth, employment, and park self-sustainability, with an important proviso that biodiversity is both monitored and maintained” (Child et al., 2004, p. 160). Meaningful participation, particularly by those living within or next to the resource base, is a prerequisite for successful protected area management. According to Child (2004, pp. 2, 240), protected areas such as Arabian *hemas* have survived for more than 1,000 years because of their “alignment, rather than confrontation, with local societal objectives and needs.” Despite the language of inclusion—of “people and parks” and “benefits beyond boundaries”—peace parks, like many national parks, are actually imposed upon recipient societies. Purveyors of this global moral good (i.e., “biodiversity preservation”) are often unapologetic for their approach (Chapin, 2004). For Child (2004, p. 233), by “placing biodiversity ahead of humans, and making conservation a moral issue more than an economic one, ‘conservation’ is in danger of prioritizing the desires of an urbanized techno-elite.” This is a recipe for failure. In order to avoid such an outcome, this essay now discusses three issues that supporters of peace parks should carefully consider.

4. Issues to Consider

4.1 Peace parks must be set within local political ecology

At a theoretical level, peace parks are an indisputably good idea: sustainable resource management, biodiversity preservation, rural economic development, and good governance all rolled into one nice package. But at the level of implementation, one must be willing to adapt a generic model to highly specific local and regional political ecologies—perhaps even to recognize that the peace park approach will not work. In Southern Africa, the sociopolitical and socioeconomic landscape is marred by an unresolved land grab. Initially undertaken by settler societies, large-scale resource capture has continued relatively unabated in the post-colonial era, both by national elites and expatriates. Parks, mining concessions, urban settlements, and commercial farms are birds of the same feather, their establishment resulting from pressure by different interest groups during the colonial era. Pressure for land redistribution and economic restitution is growing throughout Southern Africa, particularly in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. As physical symbols of land alienation and exclusion, national parks have long been

an object of derision by the majority of Africa's rural people (Grove, 1997; Koch, 1998). Linking them together by obtaining more land will surely result in political difficulties; land claims lodged by South African communities forcibly removed from Kruger and Richtersveld National Parks are the examples cited most often (Fig, 1991; Swatuk, 2005b; *Umhlaba Wethu*, 2005; Wolmer, 2003). Given this difficult sociopolitical climate, exacerbated by high levels of rural and urban poverty, parks find themselves under extreme pressure to justify their continued existence in terms of social justice (Child, 2004). However, peace parks, as initiatives undertaken at the highest levels of the sovereign state, stand to replicate the highly centralized and exclusive management approach many parks boards are currently trying to overcome.

The human geography of savannas must also be taken into consideration: demographic pressure combined with land hunger is pushing Africans farther and farther into formerly remote areas that are only marginally suited for human habitation (Bassett and Crummey, 2003). Pressure upon democratic governments to supply services such as road construction, health clinics, schools, and boreholes facilitates this exodus. Moreover, technological advancements combine with increasing pockets of wealth to allow urban elites to expand their cattle holdings into formerly inhospitable rangelands and to acquire new freehold farms. Thus, just as peace parks are being promoted, a new scramble for African resources is underway (Swatuk, 2005a). Indeed, some consider peace park development thinly veiled "resource raiding."

Katerere, Moyo, and Hill (2001) chronicle the mistakes made during the creation of the Greater Limpopo peace park, which brings together the region's strongest (South Africa) and weakest (Mozambique) states in a border area marked during the apartheid era by an electrified fence. Many Mozambicans crossed this fence, then attempted to cross South Africa's Kruger National Park, in a desperate attempt to flee Mozambique's long civil war—a civil war whose main antagonist, the rebel group RENAMO, was supported by South Africa (Hanlon, 1986). Occasionally, newspapers would carry reports of refugees having been devoured by lions in the park.

Following Mozambique's civil war, many displaced peasants are now seeking to return to their homes in the border lands. An estimated 160,000 people live in and around Zinhave and Banhine National Parks and the hunting concession known as Coutada 16 (Koch, 1998, pp. 65-66). The land they now occupy is contiguous with Kruger and integral to the Great Limpopo peace park. Little forethought was given to the place of rural peoples within the borders of this peace park; removing them would reproduce the worst of colonial and apartheid-era state conservation practices. To leave them without a clear understanding of the resource use and personal safety issues they face would subject them to insecurity at individual, household, and village levels. There have been reports of increased settlement and game poaching within the Zimbabwe portion of the park. For one observer, "The transfrontier park is dead. It will take well over a decade before Gonarezhou is worthy of being integrated in Kruger" (Govender, 2005).

4.2 Peace parks cannot be considered separately from other conservation activities and their results

Various INGOs have undertaken the responsibility of preserving biodiversity and empowering communities through the establishment of Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) projects (Fabricius and Koch, 2005). Many have deliberately attempted to begin at the village level and only involve the state when necessary and/or unavoidable. These projects have been sustainable in places where the resource being used (e.g., a veld product such as thatching grass or a type of fruit) has improved personal, household, and/or community incomes, but is relatively small. However, where projects involve state-owned resources such as wildlife, challenge existing forms of land tenure, or could truly empower local people (such that they are no longer dependent on central government for survival), the state invariably gets involved, often in an obstructive way (Swatuk, 2005b). Katerere, Moyo, and Hill (2001) suggest that this is one reason why USAID shifted support from country-specific CBNRM projects to region-wide TBNRM projects: CBNRM, by empowering local people, challenges state power; TBNRM, in contrast, needs the state to succeed. So, while not losing sight of the desire to empower local people through the sustainable management of natural resources, donors acknowledge that state interests must be respected.

One must remember, however, that most African states are in fact highly fragmented nation-states (Buzan, 1991). Problems of rural development are perhaps connected more to inter-ethnic politics than difficulties associated with purportedly “uneducated” peasants. Simply because it is easier to deal with educated elites at a high level of government does not mean that the outcome—peace park establishment—will be any less fraught with conflict and failure than other attempts at linking conservation to rural development. Thus, one (TBNRM) is not a substitute for the other (CBNRM).

4.3 Peace parks cannot be de-linked from national/regional development strategies/priorities

In an important discussion of water resources management in developing countries, Allan (2003) argues that whereas First World actors largely operate within a late-modern paradigm of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), Third World actors, particularly those closest to state power, operate within a 1950s-70s-style, high-modern “hydraulic mission” paradigm. This approach considers nature primarily a resource to be exploited and a sink for the consequences of development. SADC’s stated desire to capture the region’s water resources (e.g., dam building, water transfer, hydropower generation, increased irrigation for food security) is indicative of its commitment to complete an unfinished hydraulic mission. Moreover, this is an approach that remains highly state-centric, and privileges both big capital and big industry (Swatuk, 2005c). It pertains not only to water, but to all other exploitable renewable and non-renewable resources in the SADC region. In many ways, this approach is anathema to the ethos of late-modern conservation and biodiversity preservation. Pressing SADC leaders to adopt a late-modern approach—and the resulting frustration—recalls Kuhn’s inter-paradigm debate: those interested in biodiversity preservation must recognize that SADC leaders’ support for TBNRM initiatives may have different roots and goals, such as achieving economies of scale and

global advantage in megafauna-based tourism to generate revenue and economic development. These goals may only tangentially relate to perceived global environmental goods.

5. Ways forward

In my view, TBNRM—like CBNRM—is worth pursuing despite all the hurdles articulated above. As an outgrowth of late-modern discourses regarding sustainable development, theoretical and practical discussions regarding peace parks should be reflexive by definition. Negotiating such parks should involve active listening and interest-based, multiple-beneficiary bargaining, as opposed to positional, zero-sum bargaining. Moreover, for Van der Linde et al. (2000, p. 73), “the complexity of TBNRM makes it imperative for stakeholders to undertake a very clear appraisal of the opportunities and risks of embarking on such a program.” Complexity counsels a relatively long timeline. However, Katerere, Moyo, and Hill (2001, p. 12) state, “In practice...TFCAs have been pushed forward at a rapid pace without much time for consultation with communities and other stakeholders. While there has been little implementation yet, individual countries have signed agreements committing themselves to TFCAs with very little understanding of the consequences.” States have proceeded with high-level deals in the name of peacebuilding, economic-benefit sharing, ecosystem protection, and the like. Entrepreneurs interested in exploiting tourism-related business opportunities have already begun “resource raiding” by, for example, acquiring freehold land to establish private conservancies bordering the TFCAs (Katerere et al., 2001). A devastated state such as Mozambique, classified as a highly indebted poor country, has virtually no capacity at the local government level to implement decisions taken at higher levels, or regulate activities in political jurisdictions. In the case of peace parks, it is assumed that the stronger partner, South Africa, will bring its human, technical, and capital resources to bear on the sustainable management of the shared resource.

Five suggestions may help lead the way over the hurdles facing peace parks:

5.1 Assess what has been achieved thus far. An accurate assessment will only emerge where we dispense with naïve or arrogant approaches to conservation and biodiversity preservation. However, as Chapin (2004) suggests, humility is in short supply among the global purveyors of “conservation.”

5.2 Put people first: Following Child (2004), the goals of TBNRM must be set and aligned with those of National Parks, game reserves, and other forms of protected area in Southern Africa. This means putting people first and making social/economic benefits the primary motivating factor in TBNRM processes and establishment—and putting conservation second. This, too, may be a pill too bitter for conservationists to swallow.

5.3 Get local level buy-in: TBNRM by definition privileges the central state and its machinery in the negotiation and management process. While it may be easier to deal with centralized agencies, supporters of TBNRM must press for subsidiarity. This does not mean that local level management and various forms of outsourcing will be unproblematic. It does mean that meaningful local level participation must be present from the planning stage. Without local level buy-in, TBNRM will fail.

5.4 Monitor and benchmark: How do we know that parks serve their stated purposes? As highlighted by Murphree (2004), the potential benefits from parks are numerous, and cut across economic, ecological, political, and sociocultural lines. But there has been little systematic information gathered on the performance of protected areas of all kinds. If stakeholders across the spectrum are expected to buy into it, TBNRM must build in mechanisms for monitoring (e.g., biodiversity preservation, economic development, and gender empowerment) and benchmarking (e.g., “by this point we will have created X number of jobs”), as well as the financial means to do so. Claims of “numerous” benefits are not enough.

5.5 Do not exaggerate achievements. Many claims regarding the achievements of TBNRM projects in Southern Africa are not true. Donors should seriously reflect on the achievements of activities such as the WWF-supported Four Corners Project, which professes to link together parks and communities in Angola, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. In truth, this project has zero support from the Government of Botswana. Another project of little consequence, Every River Has Its People (long supported by SIDA), appears again and again in documents supporting TBNRM. This project began with a good idea—linking CBOs and NGOs across state boundaries—but it remains little more than a pet project of donors wishing to see a transboundary community become a reality in the Okavango River Basin. Both SADC and the Peace Parks Foundation trumpet the successes of the Kgalagadi TFCA and the Great Limpopo TFCA, as though signing documents were success enough—akin to a construction company celebrating the winning of a tender but ultimately squandering the money and building nothing. SADC states are very good at signing, and even ratifying into law, a wide variety of documents; implementation, however, is another matter altogether. Evidence from river basin committee development in Southern Africa suggests that where states have rushed ahead with donors’ good ideas, little has been achieved; but where communities have been involved from the start, where government has been brought in as a key stakeholder, and where timelines are medium-term, new, sustainable, and meaningful institutions may emerge (Swatuk, 2005c; Manning and Seely, 2005). This is an appropriate lesson for supporters of peace parks—a good idea whose time may yet still come.

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