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CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITIES: CHANGING NARRATIVES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN AFRICAN CONSERVATION

by

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Introduction

The involvement of local people in conservation has become a major feature of conservation policy, both in Africa and more widely. While the principle of 'community conservation' has received widespread support, there has been little research either on the origins of the idea, or on the concepts and ideas it draws upon. This paper seeks to provide a framework to deepen understanding of community-oriented approaches to conservation with particular reference to sub-Saharan Africa. To do this we examine both the conceptual roots of community conservation and the processes that have favoured its international diffusion as a practice. We discuss the relations between the terms 'community', 'conservation' and 'development', but we also consider the processes through which they are disseminated in public policy-formulation and foreign aid-financed project design and implementation. As Johnston and Clark (1982, p12) advise 'policies are intimately bound to policy-making processes': in order to better understand community conservation policies, we have to examine both the ideas that comprise them, and the ways in which they are formulated.

Our analysis highlights the significance of particular sets of ideas (discourses) within conservation and the ways they are contested and evolve. While we use Emery Roe's (1991 and 1995) idea of 'narratives and counter-narratives', as has become common in the study of African environments (see Leach and Mearns, 1996 for numerous examples), we conclude that a fuller understanding of the theory and practice of community-oriented approaches to conservation requires a framework that goes beyond such a zero-sum analysis. As Uphoff (1992) passionately argues, theoretical and practical choices do not have to be 'either-or': they can also be 'both-and'. Achieving conservation goals is not simply about making a choice between state-centred or society-centred approaches, as is often claimed. Rather, it is about developing policies and institutions out of which effective solutions to complex resource use (utilitarian or intrinsic) problems can evolve. Effective conservation demands dynamic mixes of both state action and societal action, not the dismissal of one of these actors to the sidelines.

Conservation Narratives and Policies in Africa

In his seminal work *Development Projects Observed* Hirschman (1968) argued that development action is habitually based on simplifications of the world's complexity. The virtue[s] of these 'cultural script[s] for action...more or less naive, unproven, simplifying and optimistic assumptions' (Hoben 1996, p 187) lie in their capacity to provide an apparently secure platform for development policy regimes in the context of persistent uncertainty. With the addition of the problem of environmental change, it is clear that the decision-making context for those engaging with conservation policy[1] is directly comparable with that of development: policy making in the face of extreme uncertainty. Roe (1991, p.288) has extended this theme and suggests that one of the principal ways in which practitioners, bureaucrats and policy-makers operate is 'to tell stories or scenarios' that simplify ambiguities and hence control (or, at least appear to control) uncertainty so as to provide a secure basis for debate and action. Such 'narratives' are operationalised into standard approaches with widespread application, often leading to the standardised 'blueprint' approaches to planning that have been so often condemned as ineffective or destructive (Korten 1980; Rondinelli 1983 and 1993).

In the context of Africa, Roe (1991) analyses a series of narratives, including Hardin's (1968) 'tragedy of the commons' and the issue of land registration and agricultural productivity. These have a series of common features. First, all the narratives analysed tell stories about what would happen, if events unfold as they describe. Second, they seek to get their listeners to do something, and hence they are much stronger than myths. Third, each has persisted in the face of strong empirical evidence against its story line[2]. Once national leaders and aid donors throw their weight behind a narrative it gets established and rapidly entrenched. Elite interest groups benefiting from the narrative form a powerful constituency; they are strengthened because they are used to define the parameters for research; professions provide strong support for the story line (Chambers 1993); aid donors promote policy transfer between countries; narratives are disseminated nationally by media campaigns and accounts of 'success', often associated with national symbols and political figures. Narratives are disseminated locally as community leaders learn what to say to access external resources. Thus these development policy narratives become 'culturally, institutionally and politically

[1] However this is defined - species, ecosystems or biodiversity.
[2] Hoben (1995) emphatically illustrates this point in his account of the power of neo-Malthusian narratives in development planning in Ethiopia in the wake of the 1985 famine.

embedded' in developing countries. Their 'influence and durability' is not related to their actual economic, social or environmental achievements (Hoben 1995, p.1009), but to the interests of a complex web of politicians, policy makers, bureaucrats, donors, technical specialists and private sector operators whose needs are served by the narrative (Schaffer 1984).

Narratives and related policies are not automatically wrong: without simplifications of both problem and context, policy-making and action would be paralysed. However, the processes surrounding the creation of narratives in colonial and post-colonial Africa have in practice created narratives that are often significantly wrong in their portrayal of the world. Such narratives cannot be effectively undermined either by providing case-by-case demonstration that they are wrong, or by other more gradual learning processes (such as participatory rural appraisal or participatory learning and action). They endure because they are useful to those who build them and they become institutionalised as part of a 'received wisdom' (Leach and Mearns 1996). While it might be tempting to dismiss the 'tragedy of the commons' narrative as 'some kind of old-fashioned fable', it has staying power because it 'has helped to dispel and underwrite the assumptions made for decision-making' (Roe 1991, p290). The narrative is false, but it is very powerful: it 'works', but does so counter-productively in terms of providing a basis for understanding from which positive policy outcomes can be created. Roe suggests that the only way to move on from an erroneous narrative is to create a plausible 'counter-narrative', one that 'tells a better story' (Roe 1991, p.290). Point-by-point rebuttals are not stories, for they do not have a beginning, middle and end. Counter-narratives have to be as parsimonious, plausible and comprehensive as the original.

In this paper we use Roe's conceptualisation of narrative and counter-narrative to describe the shift away from a widely accepted ideology of conservation based on the preservation of wild species, the exclusion of humans and the minimisation of human influence. This narrative of 'fortress conservation' is now challenged by a counter-narrative, which we term 'community conservation' (this term is discussed further below), which has been adopted as a central element in conservation discourse and policy from the Equator to the Poles (Cartwright 1991; Hannah 1992; Lewis *et al.*, 1990; Lado 1992; United Nations 1992).

The Narrative of Fortress Conservation

The dominant theme in conservation until recent times has been one of species extinction due to the consequences of human action. This has in turn generated a typical response based on attempts to reserve places for nature, and to separate humans and other species[3]. Historically, this response occurred in both the colonial periphery and the metropolitan core. Grove (1987, 1990 and 1992) describes the emergence of ideas about environmental management in the British Empire from the mid-Eighteenth Century, in association with the interaction of imperial trade, a rising sensitivity to Romanticism and the growth of science. The central strategy that arose from this environmental concern was the creation of reserves for nature. Forest reserves were established on Tobago and St Vincent in the West Indies in the Eighteenth Century, and in India in the Nineteenth Century. In the South African Cape, a botanical garden was established in 1820, legislation to preserve land from soil erosion was passed in 1846. Forest reserves were established in 1858, and acts to preserve forests and game were passed in 1859 and 1880 (Grove 1987).

In Europe and North America, the establishment of formal conservation institutions began in the nineteenth century (Sheail 1976; Evans 1994; Nash 1983; Worster 1985). Romanticism, the deleterious dimensions of rapid urban growth and the pollution caused by industrialisation were significant driving forces for the development of nature conservation in the UK in the Nineteenth Century, and remained potent in the Twentieth (Veldman 1993; Adams 1996). In the USA, the closing of the frontier of the West, and the natural marvels revealed by exploration, gave rise to the first National Parks. Similar government-reservations of natural (or apparently natural) areas began to appear in the 1880s and 1890s in Canada, South Australia and New Zealand (Fitter and Scott 1987). Small nature reserves were established in the UK from the 1890s, and although it was the late 1940s before legislation empowered the government to establish nature reserves or national parks, the idea of conservation as something done on reserved land was common to both North America and Europe. Throughout the Twentieth Century, conservation thinking internationally has been dominated by such ideas, particularly the US idea of a national park as a pristine or wilderness area, and the British notion of a nature reserve, managed for wild species. In this model, which has been called 'fortress conservation' or the 'fences and fines approach' (Wells and Brandon et al

[3] See Harrison and Burgess (1994) about the 'extinction discourse' in the UK in the 1980s and Marsh (1864) for an early account of such concerns.

1992), conservation has primarily involved the creation of protected areas, the exclusion of people as residents, the prevention of consumptive use and minimisation of other forms of human impact.

The narrative of ‘fortress conservation' has been very influential in sub-Saharan Africa. The Sabie Game Reserve was established in Natal in 1892[4]. In 1899 a game reserve was established in Kenya enclosing the present Amboseli National Park (Lindsay 1987). King Albert created the Parc National Albert, now the Virunga National Park in Zaire, in 1925 (Fitter and Scott 1978; Boardman 1981). The Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire (the ‘penitent butchers’, Fitter and Scott 1978) was established in 1903.

Conservation policy in Africa grew out of the ideas of expatriate European men about 'the wild', a place where manhood could be proved, civilised virtues demonstrated by the manner in which animals were hunted and killed, and European rituals of hunting could be lived out (MacKenzie 1987 and 1989). The hunting of large mammals is inter-weaved with the history of colonialism. It developed through several stages, first in the extractive exploitation of ivory, in the later Nineteenth Century as a subsidy for colonial expansion as a source of food for labour, and lastly in the practice of trophy or ‘big game’ hunting. This was accompanied by ritualistic notions of ‘the Hunt’ (MacKenzie 1987) as something only properly done using certain methods (shooting for example, certainly not trapping or spearing), under certain rules, and by Europeans. As colonial territories enacted laws restricting or banning hunting, Africans who hunted for the pot or for trade were redefined, using a quintessentially English concept, as 'poachers'. Conservation legislation from that developed to reserve areas of land, and certain quarry species, for European hunters. Most government conservation departments in sub Saharan Africa had their origins in agencies established to defend hunting reserves and suppress 'poaching'.

Following the end of World War Two the *ad-hoc* practices of game management and game reserve management in colonial territories were organised and institutionalised *as* an increasingly formal practice of conservation. Many protected areas were declared at this time (Fitter and Scott 1978), for example: in Kenya, Nairobi National Park in 1946, and Tsavo in

[4] In 1926 this became the Kruger National Park.

1948; in Tanganyika, Serengeti in 1951; in Uganda, Murchinson Falls in 1951. During this period, colonial interest in hunting and poaching merged with a growing international consensus (based on UK and US models) about wildlife conservation and many controlled hunting areas and game reserves were reclassified as national parks.

Conservation institutions were also developing rapidly in the post-World War Two years in the colonial metropole, developing models for export. In the UK, the government began to commit money to both nature conservation (establishing National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and to landscape conservation (establishing National Parks). Expertise was developed in the scientific management of protected areas, and the application of scientific ideas to land management (Adams 1997). Ideas about conservation also became part of a specific international discourse in the post-war period, particularly through the work of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN, originally established as the International Union for the Protection of Nature in 1934, becoming IUCN in 1956) and later through the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). This discourse was strongly rooted in the circuit of Paris (UNESCO), the Geneva region (IUCN), Washington (World Bank and US Government), and New York (UN). British scientists and conservationists (not least Thomas Huxley, first Director of UNESCO) were very influential in these discourses.

Africa had a special place in the rise of global conservation concern, not least, because of its exceptional endowment of large and charismatic species, the high densities of wildlife populations and the relatively slow rates of wildlife extermination it had experienced in comparison to other regions. By 1960 Africa had become 'the central problem overshadowing all else' for IUCN (Boardman 1981, p.148). The IUCN and FAO launched the African Special Project in 1961. The 'Arusha Declaration on Conservation' came in the same years, stressing both a commitment to wildlife conservation and wider concerns about resource development. In 1963 a special conference on African conservation problems convened at Bukavu in the Belgian Congo. Africa was becoming independent, and political control was shifting as 'poachers' turned gamekeepers. The African Special Project was followed up by IUCN missions to 17 African countries (Fitter 1978), and eventually (after considerable political haggling between the IUCN and FAO) a new African Convention on the

Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity in Addis Ababa in 1968 (Boardman 1981).

Not only was Africa the prime target for global conservation concern and action, it also provided potent conservation images that in their turn fed into the global discourse of extinction. African independence coincided with the growth of mass audiences for television in the developed world and a series of popular books, such as *Serengeti Shall not Die* (Grzimek 1960) or *S.O.S Rhino* (Guggisberg 1966) predicted the extinction of charismatic species. Africa was portrayed as Eden, humankind as its chief destroyer, and conservation its necessary regime of salvation (Graham 1973). Such images still retain their power, and remain a central feature of Western perceptions of Africa (Gavron 1993; Douglas-Hamilton 1992; Thornton & Currey 1991). Western domination of the global media, the power of Western culture, and the increasingly easy communications between African cities and Europe and North America, mean that these images are fed back into Africa and, at least partly, internalised by Africa's elites and middle classes. International ideas about conservation are, in that sense, also now genuinely African.

While ideas about conservation were central to the establishment of Africa's protected areas, they were also in part, a by-product of the ideology of national development that dominated the late-colonial and independence periods. In this era of 'high modernism' development was modernisation, and modernisation meant that African agriculture had to be transformed. Agricultural scientists, national planners and political leaders focused on land use planning as a means for transformation. High and moderate quality lands would be ploughed up for arable farming while drier areas and poor soils would be dedicated to cattle ranching. As the planners drew lines on their maps, informed by what they had been trained to believe was an objective science, those with interests in conservation and wildlife - conservationists, white hunters, forestry and wildlife bureaucrats and miscellaneous romantics - argued and negotiated for controlled hunting areas, reserves and other lands to be zoned for conservation. As in Europe and North America, the essence of conservation practice was the preservation of certain selected areas, their landscapes and species. People had little place in this vision of conservation.[5]

[5] Conservation in the UK also has a different tradition of conservation with and through local people and local authorities, in the work of the Countryside Commission. National Parks in the UK are not strict government-

Attacking the Fortress: The Rise of Community Conservation

The dominant narrative of Fortress Conservation no longer enjoys hegemony, either in Africa or globally. The discourse of extinction and preservation, of the reservation of land and the exclusion of removal of human settlement and influence, has progressively been challenged by another discourse. This stresses the need not to exclude local people, either physically from protected areas or politically from the conservation policy process, but to ensure their participation. This counter-narrative we label 'community conservation' (c.f. IIED 1994). This term is used to describe a wide range of different kinds of projects and programmes. Definitions of community conservation are reviewed by Barrow and Murphree (1998). At this stage it is sufficient to define community conservation as those principles and practices that argue that conservation goals should be pursued by strategies that emphasize the role of local residents in decision-making about natural resources. This includes community-based conservation, community wildlife management, collaborative management, community-based natural resource management, neighbours as partners and integrated conservation and development programmes. Numerous examples of this approach are presented in Western and Wright (1994). Its central theme is that 'conservation will either contribute to solving the problems of the rural poor who live day to day with wild animals, or those animals will disappear' (Adams and McShane 1992, xix).

Of course, the idea that local communities can and do (and should be allowed to) manage wildlife was not invented in the 1960s. Royal hunting reserves were established by the Shaka Zulu (contemporary Natal/Kwazulu), the Mwami of Rwanda and the King of Barotseland (Parker 1984)[6]. In places, notably at Amboseli in Kenya, conflicts between Maasai and conservation agencies from the 1950s led to the development of an approach to its conservation that built in an element of concern for (and consultation with) local residents (Western 1982). Just as the formal conservation that was institutionalised in the late

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owned reserves, but national designations over ordinary private land. Landscape quality (and biodiversity) are maintained through the decisions of private landowners, who are the target of a range of incentives and restrictions on their freedom of action, and of a barrage of conservation arguments emphasising the national importance of the resource they control.

[6] We are grateful to Simon Anstey for this reference.

Nineteenth Century (through legislation, the creation of specific organisations, policies and activities) built on many pre-existing ideas and practices, so as community conservation has become institutionalised in the 1980s, it too has built upon earlier experiences. These ideas became part of as we shall argue subsequently came to dominate the global discourse of conservation policy.

Institutionally, the new community conservation counter-narrative was developed in the context of protected areas at successive World Congresses on National Parks and Protected Areas, particularly the Third in 1982 and Fourth in 1992 (McNeely and Miller 1984; McNeely 1993; Kemf 1993). Practically community conservation emerged in a whole series of programmes in the 1970s and 1980s. It was a fundamental element in the concept of Biosphere Reserves developed in the 1970s by the Man and the Biosphere (*sic*) programme, and was recognised in the WWF's Wildlife and Human Needs Programme (launched 1985). Within sub-Saharan Africa, the experience in Kenya perhaps demonstrates the development of the counter-narrative best. Experience at Amboseli National Park through the 1970s (Western 1982; Lindsay 1987) subsequently developed into the Wildlife Extension Project, experience from which in turn led to the establishment of the African Wildlife Foundation's Tsavo Community Conservation Project (launched 1988), the Kenyan Wildlife Service Community Wildlife Programme and the USAID-funded COBRA project (Conservation of Biodiverse Areas), launched in 1991, (Barrow *et al.* 1995; Barrow *et al*, 1998).

The community conservation counter-narrative has two distinct elements. The first is the imperative to allow people in and around protected areas, or others with property rights there (in land or living resources) or other claims on the land (e.g. spiritual claims) to participate in the management of conservation resources. Thus 'people and park' projects have been developed (Hannah 1992) such as the African Wildlife Foundation's 'Neighbours as Partners' Programme and CARE's 'Development Through Conservation' project, begun in Uganda in 1988. As Blowers notes 'having gained the support of government planners and decision-makers, the most important task is to win the understanding and cooperation of the local people in the vicinity of the proposed parks' (Blowers 1984, p725).

The second dimension of the community conservation counter-narrative has involved the linkage of conservation objectives to local development needs. Examples include

‘conservation-with-development projects’ (Stocking and Perkin 1992) or ‘integrated conservation and development projects’ (Wells and Brandon 1992; Barrett and Arcese 1995). The economic impacts of conventional protected areas can be disastrously negative on local residents, particularly when the eviction of human communities is attempted or effected (e.g. Turton 1987; Schoepf 1984; Turnbull 1972; Brockington and Homewood 1996; OXFAM 1996). The community conservation counter-narrative recognises both the moral implications of imposing costs on local people in this way, and the pragmatic problem of the hostility of displaced or disadvantaged local people to conservation organisations practising a 'fortress conservation' policy[7].

These two dimensions of community conservation, participation and a concern for economic welfare, create a space within which a great variety of different kinds of conservation interventions lie. At one extreme fall existing conservation projects (e.g. conventional protected areas) that belatedly make minor efforts to draw in local people (one might speak of them as conventional conservation projects ‘retrofitted’ with a participatory or community conservation approach). At the other extreme lie initiatives aimed specifically at the development of particular (often ‘sustainable’) uses of natural resources by local people who are given full tenure over those resources. These two forms of ‘community conservation’ draw on quite different meanings of the word conservation. The first is based on the idea that conservation has to do with concern for ‘wild’ species and their associations (ecosystems and habitats) and the conservation of ‘nature’ or ‘wildlife’. Historically this has been the dominant meaning of conservation in sub-Saharan Africa. The second is based on the idea of conservation as the sustainable management of renewable resources, as originally developed in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century (most notably by the forester Gifford Pinchot): conservation as the ‘gospel of efficiency’ (Hays 1959; Norton 1991).

These differences in the meaning of conservation are fundamental to understanding the breadth of policies and practices that community conservation encompasses. Both stem from similar roots, in ideas about nature, and about the need to limit human use of nature. However, in the first case this is because of the intrinsic values of nature (i.e. ‘conservation

[7] In different circumstances this hostility can lead to actions that range from local piecemeal destructive acts of defiance (Hulme 1997) to local or national political action, legal challenge in national courts or (where institutions allow) challenge in the press.

for its own sake'), whereas in the second case the limits are imposed for utilitarian reasons (because wise use demands careful husbanding of resources for greater future human benefit). The former meaning is basically biocentric (i.e. focused on the rights or needs of non-human species), whereas the latter is anthropocentric (i.e. focused on human needs and benefits). There are, of course, significant overlaps between these categories, such as the possibility of economic non-use values and existence values (Barbier et al 1993), and the concept of sustainable development which can combine both biocentric moral arguments about the need for conservation and anthropocentric arguments about optimal ways to sustain revenues from resource use (IUCN 1980).

Notwithstanding the complexities of these debates, the distinction between biocentric arguments and anthropocentric (and utilitarian) arguments is a useful analytical device for classifying conservation initiatives. A strict nature reserve involves little if any consumptive use of nature, and meets few if any utilitarian goals; however, it seeks to maximise gains to the existence-value of non-human species, i.e. the intrinsic value of nature. A project involving agreements about forest cutting or fishing seeks to achieve utilitarian goals (e.g. equity, productivity, sustainability), but may do little or nothing to preserve species that have little economic relevance. Choices about particular conservation activities inevitably involve a trade-off between utilitarian and non utilitarian or intrinsic goals. To take one example, the IUCN East Usambaras Agricultural Development and Environmental Conservation project in Tanzania sought to meet biodiversity conservation goals (preserving forest cover and endemic species) only through a primary goal of making livelihoods and resource use more sustainable (Stocking and Perkin 1992).

Community conservation projects not only differ in the way in which they relate to nature, but also in the degree to which they involve local people, and the way in which they do so. In a critique of protected area buffer zones, Neumann (1997) points out that conservation projects that attempt to draw in local people are usually devised and implemented by outside agents (be they international consultants or NGOs, or national governments). He rightly asks 'who are the local people?' and argues that many community conservation initiatives in Africa are happy to include 'traditional' peoples in their target groups but seek to exclude progressive farmers and immigrants. The terms on which local people are brought into 'community conservation' projects also vary from glorified public relations exercises (where local people

are made to feel less antagonistic towards exclusion from national park resources by incentives and ‘education’) through to projects devised and run by local people alone (IIED 1994). A second axis can therefore be added to the biocentric/anthropocentric distinction to create a matrix, within which community conservation projects may be situated (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A Typology for Community Conservation Initiavies

	Conservation for Use Values	Conservation for Non-use Values
LOW	CC to conserve resource (CBNRM overseen by government or fishing control area)	CC to protect wildlife (National Park Buffer Zone)
Community Control		
HIGH	CC to achieve development (eg. CAMPFIRE)	CC to achieve conservation (eg. sacred groves)

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The Conceptual Roots of Community Conservation

The conceptual roots of community conservation can be traced down four main paths. These create an armoury of arguments to support community conservation policies, though it must be noted that they are not all mutually compatible[8].

The first is a conservation root that equates conservation with sustainable development. Underlying it is the moral argument that conservation goals should not over-ride basic human needs. In its starkest form this argues that 'fortress conservation' must be abandoned because of its adverse impacts on the living conditions of isolated human communities (see above). In a less radical, and now widely accepted, form it argues that conservation goals should be integrated with the development objective of meeting human need. Ideas about community conservation developed in tandem with ideas about the integration between preservationist goals and the consumptive and non-consumptive use of wildlife resources (the 'sustainable use' debate, Campbell 1997). The World Conservation Strategy (IUCN 1980) sought to link conventional conservation concerns with those of development, using the notion of sustainable development, a concept later popularised by the Brundtland Report in 1987, and central to the UN Conference on Environment and Development at Rio in 1992. The close links between environmental quality and poverty are now widely recognised (Adams 1990). Access to natural resources (particularly land and water) is uneven, and those who are poor can be so economically marginalised that their livelihood strategies degrade the very resources that sustain them (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987). Poverty and environmental degradation, driven by processes of economic change, expose the poor to risk and hazard, and the environment (and notably in this context biodiversity) to degradation. From the perspective of sustainable development, the conservation of biodiversity and the challenge of meeting human needs must be integrated: community conservation provides a conceptual framework within which this could be made to happen in and around protected areas.

The second root lies in ideas about the 'community'[9] and particularly about the need for local communities to be more involved in designing and implementing public policies than had

[8] In particular, there is an incompatibility between some of the neo-liberal economic arguments that emphasize self-maximising behaviour by individuals and the communitarian arguments about groups of people working cooperatively and sometimes voluntarily.

been the case in the 'statist' era of the 1940s to the 1970s. These ideas became popular in the West during the 1980s with, for example, conservation in the UK taking an increasingly community-based and participatory approach (Warburton 1995) and writers such as Etzioni (1993) launching the 'communitarian' movement in the USA as a new political force. Their origins are complex lying partly in a response to the belief that state power was too great and too centralised, partly in a move to strengthen the legitimacy of public policies, and partly in response to the rise of the new social movements and demands for improved local democracy. Regulation over the behaviour of individuals, according to these ideas, is best performed by 'the community' rather than state officials.

While this focus on 'community' was (and remains) a widespread international phenomenon it tapped into well elaborated notions about the nature of communities in sub-Saharan Africa. These draw on ideas about the structure and organisation of African society with origins in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries that saw Africa as a kind of 'Eden', exotic alike in its fauna, flora and people; a 'Merrie Africa' of wild animals and pre-modern people located in discrete 'villages', classified into static 'tribal groups' and relating to each other through ties of kin and propinquity and experiencing low levels of economic differentiation. The idealistic and simplistic nature of such views is now being everywhere challenged by scholarship, but it retains power in general debates about Africa, on the part of Northern observers (from tour companies to conservationists), and in the minds of African bureaucrats and politicians.
The power of these idealistic notions of the existence of organic human communities in Africa reflects not only an outmoded understanding of anthropology and history, but also certain ideas current in Northern conservation thinking and neo-populist conceptions of development (Kitching 1982). Opposition to modernity (industrialisation, urbanisation, pollution, specialisation) has been a potent theme within environmentalism and wildlife conservation in the North, for example in the UK and USA (Adams 1996; Hays 1987). 'Tradition' has been seen as an oppositional category to 'modernity', supporting the notion that conservation has a natural affinity with indigenous people and rural dwellers (Neumann 1997): those outside the urbanised existence common in industrialised countries. Both nature and 'traditional' lives and lifestyles can be seen to be threatened by 'modern' development, and, since those

[9] Words like 'community' and its relatives (eg. local, grassroots, tradition, participation) have a long history in development studies. They are used widely, but have no unique meaning in social science; they are used loosely;

lifestyles tend to be idealised and romanticised, it is easy to assume that conservation will be supported by a newly empowered and intrinsically pro-conservation 'indigenous community'.

A third root lies in economic theory and particularly in the neo-classical economic analysis that became widespread in the 1980s creating a 'counter revolution' in ideas about national development strategies (Toye 1993). This argued that to achieve public policy goals (such as conservation or development or sustainable development) the economic incentives for all of the main actors must be set correctly (Bromley 1994) and, that the best mechanism for achieving an appropriate incentive structure was the market mechanism. Non-market actors, such as state agencies, tended to distort markets so that goals were not achieved. What was required to achieve conservation goals was less regulation, the acceptance that all ecosystems and species are 'natural resources' and more entrepreneurial action by local communities, individual businessmen and private companies. This would permit the economic values of conservation resources to be unlocked - for leisure, tourism, trophy-hunting, meat, other products, theme parks, medicines - as they were traded in open (or relatively open) markets. The perverse incentives of the past would be corrected and the sustainable development of conservation resources would be achieved through their becoming part of the local and global economy, rather than trying to excise them from the economy. Conservation bureaucracies should promote small enterprise development, rather than set up fences and levy fines. The catch-phrase for this root was '...use it or lose it'. Many conservationists signed up to this idea, but interpretations have varied. In Southern Africa the trend has been to equate conservation resources with economic resources and to be driven by market forces, most obviously in terms of supporting big game hunting and ivory sales. In other areas, particularly East Africa, ideas about the role of markets have been more tempered by concerns about the intrinsic value of certain species and of biodiversity generally.

The fourth root is ecological. It argues that the achievement of conservation goals requires that conservation occurs outside of protected areas. In particular, genetically viable populations of many of Africa's highly mobile species cannot be sustained on small preservation 'islands' (ie national parks and buffer zones). They need large dispersal areas and a capacity to move from 'island' to 'island' for feeding purposes and to ensure a healthy

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they carry complex associations, which gives them power, but at the same time makes them difficult to tie down. According to Shore (1994:98) 'community [is] one of the most vague and elusive concepts in social science'.

breeding stock. The 'community' (ie. the people whose land mobile species crop and cross) must be recognised as key stakeholders in conservation, even if they are remote from protected areas, because of the mobility of wildlife and the complex linkages between all elements of the biotic environment.

The Context of Community Conservation in Africa: Foreign Aid and International Relations

While the previous section has shown that community conservation has strong and varied conceptual roots to justify its adoption as a policy, the rapidity of its diffusion across Africa must also be understood in relation to the context. Sub-Saharan Africa is an aid-dependent region within which multilateral and bilateral development agencies have considerable influence over domestic policies. Changes in the nature of donor policies during the 1980s created an international environment that looked favourably on the idea of community conservation and indeed, that actively sought to promote it.[10]

Two points stand out. First, the community conservation counter-narrative developed at a time of significant shifts in the dominant discourses of development. During the 1970s 'top down', 'technocratic', 'blueprint' approaches to development came under increasing scrutiny as they failed to deliver the economic growth and social benefits that had been promised (Turner and Hulme 1997, pp 132-150). An alternative agenda emerged arguing that development goals could only be achieved by 'bottom up planning', 'decentralisation', 'process approaches', 'participation' and 'community organisation'[11]. By the early 1990s, aid donors and development planners were falling over themselves in attempts to adopt participatory approaches. The link that had been forged between conservation and development gave conservationists no option but to jump on the bandwagon of community participation. Indeed, it created an opportunity for conservationists (and particularly

[10] See other working papers in this series for details of donor support for community conservation in Eastern and Southern Africa (Barrow et al, 1998, and Murphree et al, 1998).

[11] E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful: economics as if people mattered*, published in 1973, set a new agenda. David Korten's (1980) seminal paper 'Community Organisation and Rural Development: A Learning Process Approach' caught the attention of researchers, policy-makers and managers and produced powerful converts in USAID and the World Bank, and Robert Chambers' *Rural Development: putting the last first* (1983) transformed the thinking of a whole generation of development studies students and practitioners.

international and domestic NGOs) to tap into new sources of funds as their activities could now lay claim on ‘development’ aid budgets.

Secondly, community conservation fitted well with the ‘New Policy Agenda’ for foreign assistance (Robinson 1993) that had developed in Washington in the early 1990s. This is driven by beliefs focused around the twin poles of neo-classical economics and liberal democratic theory (Moore, 1993). Community conservation appeared consonant with the former as it recognised the importance of economic incentives and markets, meant a reduced role for the state and created spaces for ‘communities’ (villagers, private individuals, companies, groups of companies) to be more involved in conservation. It supported the latter, as its emphasis on helping communities to organize themselves to manage natural resources meant that it added to the vibrancy of associational life and thus unconsciously deepened the democratisation process itself.

These global influences have been reinforced by conditions more specifically related to the relative weakness of the state in Africa, the role of international development agencies and ‘eco-imperialism’ in the West. Hoben has identified a set of conditions under which development narratives are likely to be strong (Table 1). These include countries with weak and/or authoritarian governments, where local research capacity is weak and countries are dependent on aid and expatriate 'experts'. These attributes are all exhibited strongly by the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Narratives are also likely to be strong where donor experts and domestic constituents are strongly attached to them: this is certainly true of community conservation which has been formulated and disseminated at numerous international meetings, applied widely and rapidly in Africa by NGOs and international aid donors such as USAID, often developed and implemented by particular ‘champions’ (such as David Western in Kenya), and reported on positively in television programmes beamed around the World[12]. In particular sub-Saharan Africa’s dependence on foreign aid - and the expatriate consultants and experts this supports - has made it the world region in which exogenous ideas about ‘what to do’ hold the greatest influence. Conditions for the rapid transfer and acceptance of community conservation (at least at the policy level), in most sub-Saharan African countries have been strong over the last decade (Table 1).

[12] One author has watched programmes on Zimbabwe’s CAMPFIRE project on stations in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal and the UK.

Table 1 Factors Favouring Strong Narratives and Their Relevance to Conservation in Africa

Factor[1]	**Summary of the Situation in Africa**
1. Donor experts and domestic constituencies are attached to the narrative.	1. Key donor countries (USA and UK) adopted a community conservation approach and this influenced their 'experts' overseas. Conferences (Airlie 1993, Sunningdale 1996, Istanbul 1997) financed by official donors and NGOs helped to transmit the idea of community conservation. Large numbers of leisure-time conservationists in such countries learned to support the new narrative.
2. When there is political strategic or moral pressures on donors to act quickly.	2. Media accounts of the imminent extinction of the gorilla, African elephant and rhino prompted donors to act rapidly. Where states emerged from civil wars (Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique, Angola) there was an urgent need to save 'the remnants' of the conservation estate. Crises narratives (Roe 1995) allow foreign 'techno-managerial elite's' to shape policy and action on the African environment.
3. When there has been little technical or socio-economic research locally.	3. Despite the wealth of data on the zoology of charismatic species in Africa research on the ecology of Africa and on human-wildlife interaction remains in its infancy.
4. When a recipient country relies heavily on expatriate experts for advice.	4. Many African countries were more reliant on foreign advisers in the early 1990s than they were at independence (Berg 1993). This relates to specific advice on conservation and broader advice about the policy and institutional frameworks that countries should adopt.
5. When a recipient country relies heavily on foreign assistance.	Sub-Saharan Africa is the most aid dependent region in the world. In 1990 foreign assistance, as a percentage of GNP, stood at 66% in Mozambique, 48% in Tanzania, 26% in Malawi, 18% in Uganda, 19% in Mali, 11% in Kenya, 14% in Zambia[2] (World Bank 1992, pp 256-7). The setting up of the Global Environmental Fund (GEF) and specialist funds (e.g. USAID) post-Rio has led to a flush of external funding for conservation projects in Africa. The idea of 'Sustainable development' has also meant that international conservation NGOs have gained influence (and control) over some development funds.
6. When the recipient government is weak or authoritarian (or both)	Over the period 1960-1995 there have been frequent coups in African states. Where this has not occurred then, commonly, authoritarian regimes have held power (e.g. Kenya, Zaire, Malawi). Such regimes have been weak in terms of their ability to meet the needs of their people.

1 From Hoben (1995)

2 Fascinatingly the country in Africa which has developed an indigenous model of community conservation, Zimbabwe, had an aid dependence (against GNP) of only 5% in 1990 (World Bank 1992, pp 256-257)

Community Conservation as a Privileged Solution

Hirschman (1963) described the way in which problems in development that had been recognised for a long period came to be seen to require organised solution through public intervention. These he termed 'privileged problems'. Jon Moris (1987) pointed out that such problems tended in their turn to generate 'privileged solutions', by which he meant 'material and organisational technologies which seem self-evidently suited for dealing with problem needs', and furthermore which are 'not thought to require testing and modification' (p99)[13].

This concept of a 'privileged solution' is directly applicable to community conservation. Community conservation has become so self-evidently the 'right' approach, on a range of grounds, that debate about its merits or demerits, about its costs and benefits, about the conditions under which it may prove effective and ineffective, have been very limited. As Gibson and Marks (1995, p952) argue 'wildlife conservation organizations and international donors currently provide substantial funds to community-based wildlife management initiatives and despite their weaknesses, this trend will likely continue'. There has been only limited questioning of what exactly community conservation means (if indeed it has a single meaning), or whether it 'works' in the sense of meeting either conservation or local development expectations.

One reason for the privileging of the community conservation narrative is that few community conservation projects in sub-Saharan Africa have been studied critically and in depth. There is a large (and growing) descriptive literature, but most studies are more or less optimistic descriptions of local level 'success', often early in a project's life. These have been repeated and disseminated internationally to great effect. This phenomenon, which is also common to rural development, leads to what Chambers (1983) calls 'project bias', whereby successive evaluations of a region or programme look repeatedly at the same projects, and one anothers' reports, without properly questioning the nature of change on the ground. This leads to the narrowing of possible lessons that policy-makers and researchers can learn, and constrains creativity and innovation.

[13] Moris's specific subject is irrigation in sub-Saharan Africa, the disastrous record of which through the 1970s and 1980s stood in remarkable contrast to the continued policy enthusiasm for it as a solution to drought, food deficits and un-modernised agriculture.

The privileging of the community conservation narrative is problematic for conservation for several reasons. First, there is no guarantee that a participatory approach will necessarily be effective in delivering conservation goals. Excessive emphasis on development can lead to de-emphasis of conservation goals that they are no longer seriously addressed. Oates (1995) argues that precisely this has happened in the case of the Okumu Forest Reserve in south-west Nigeria. She is very critical of the sustainable development rhetoric in Caring for the Earth, and blames this for new conservation programmes that have accelerated forest loss to small farmers. There may be a need to distinguish between the merits of development interventions of this kind as a contribution to local livelihoods and their contribution to conservation. While at a rhetorical level it may be desirable to argue that conservation and development can go hand in hand through a joint programme, development expenditure for conservation purposes may not give results that are effective in conservation terms.

Second, a community conservation approach may not be cost-effective. Research is starting to emerge, for example, that is critical of Integrated Conservation-Development Projects (ICDPs). These seem to perform poorly when considered against both developmental and conservation criteria (e.g. Stocking and Perkin, 1992; Barrett and Arcese 1995). In terms of conservation, Barrett and Arcese (1995) argue that ICDPs are 'no more than short-term palliatives' (p 1081). They may not achieve species or ecosystem conservation goals, for example because of technical uncertainties in setting a 'sustainable harvest', and may also fail to break existing economic and cultural logics driving illegal and unsustainable harvests in critical areas. The positive impacts of ICDPs on local economies are typically transient and dependent on the maintenance of foreign aid flows.

A case study of an ICDP in Tanzania (the East Usambaras Agricultural Development and Environmental Conservation project) by Stocking and Perkin (1992) suggests similar limitations with the model. The IUCN project aims were to improve the living standards of the people, to protect the functions of the forest (particularly its role as a catchment for downstream water supply) and preserve biological diversity. Traditional conservation objectives were deliberately de-emphasised to stress revenue generation and development. After four years, achievements were modest. A vast range of project activities had been begun, from agricultural extension to attempts to control illegal pit-sawing, most with limited

success. Problems included lack of funds, leading in turn to a lack of breadth in technical expertise, the way in which capital and energy were dissipated in too wide a range of activities. Behind many of these problems lay the lack of a proper feasibility study, at planning stage (Caldecott 1996) and a failure to recognize the capacity of implementing agencies to try to continue with 'business as usual'.

Stocking and Perkin suggest that ICDPs are inherently highly complex, requiring high levels of skill from project staff, substantial funds and a realistic (i.e. long-term) time scale. Their chances of success depend on local perceptions of the project, which are vulnerable to any public failure in particular components. Clear and precise objectives, careful evaluation of the costs and benefits of project components at the level of the individual household, long-term commitments to funding and strong local participatory linkages are essential, but have been lacking, in ICDPs. Too often '...wildlife managers and conservationists believe that merely allowing villagers to become scouts and to share in the proceeds of wildlife are revolutionary undertakings' (Gibson and Marks 1995, p952). Effective community conservation requires a change in the organizational culture of conservation agencies (to see local residents as 'partners' not as poachers)[14] and in the social norms of rural residents (to respond to wardens and rangers as 'partners' and not as corrupt policemen). Neither of these changes is likely to be achieved in a short-term project.

These criticisms of ICDPs are no different to those that are commonly made of rural development projects attempting to do a great deal with limited funds at a sensible and localised scale. There is therefore nothing uniquely problematic about community conservation projects compared to their non-conservation development equivalents. Nonetheless, the complexity and persistence of these difficulties are easily under-estimated by conservation agencies relatively new to community work, and it is important to recognise that they are inherent to the practice of participatory local development. Participation, despite the rhetoric, is not a panacea.

[14] See Bergin (1998) for a discussion of organizational change in conservation agencies.

Community projects are usually not cheap to implement[15]. In particular, they tend to have high administrative costs as they demand significant numbers of high quality staff with locally-specific knowledge, and can be frustratingly slow to bear fruit. They are therefore often not attractive to mainstream (and therefore high-budget) aid donors or governments who are interested in clearly visible and preferably rapid results. Not uncommonly project designers are compromised by donor pressures for results and at the planning stage set objectives for 3 or 5 year projects that they know will take 10 or 20 years to achieve. Furthermore, broadly focused 'sustainable development' projects may have limited conservation benefits. Several development ‘micro projects’ in support of conservation in the Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands in Nigeria (technical innovations developed in collaboration with local communities, e.g. a fish-pond, improved bee-hives for honey production, donkey-ploughs, tree-nurseries and embankments to control flood depth and timing to allow transplanting of rice) were successful at a technical level, partly because their development was slow and careful. However, there were significant constraints on their implementation on a large scale and their direct contribution to conservation goals were slight (Adams and Thomas, 1995).

A third risk for conservation in the community conservation narrative relates to the instrumental way in which it is viewed. Participation is a process not a project input: thus, it may not be effective in delivering pre-selected conservation outcomes. The conservation goals that communities identify may well conflict with agency or national level goals. Moreover, participation is a process that often generates high local expectations. These may in turn trigger other processes, for example a debate about and affirmation of rights to resources, or the awakening of political consciousness. While the community conservation approach is conceived of as a way of placating local opinion, it may in fact inflame it as participants argue with the conservation agency (or with each other) about their rights, needs and aspirations. A community conservation strategy may be both morally right and politically necessary, but if implemented it may cause conservation goals to be challenged. This may be a valuable or even necessary process (if, for example, ideas from Europe or North America have been adopted that are inappropriate to a particular national situation), but it is likely to be a considerable institutional challenge for conservation bureaucracies and environmental

[15] Their overall cost may be low (compared to a major infrastructure project such as road construction or a dam), but their cost per participant, per unit area, or in terms of specific conservation outputs is likely to be very high.

policymakers. Fortress conservation was an inherently authoritarian approach. By contrast, community conservation is underpinned by much more democratic ideas; once the flood gate is opened the fortress may be swept away!

Conclusion: Policy Change in African Conservation

Contemporary frameworks for the analysis of change in the understanding of the environment and natural resource use in Africa highlight the cut and thrust of 'narrative' and 'counter-narrative' creation, the establishment of 'received wisdoms' and the need to cast them down (Leach and Mearns 1996; Roe 1995). If applied to ideas and policy declarations about conservation such frameworks would lead to the conclusion that the historically dominant narrative of 'fortress conservation' has been overthrown by the counter-narrative of 'community conservation'. We can certainly not identify any serious efforts to promulgate or refine the concept of fortress conservation in recent years, while entire forests have been cut down for the publication of papers elaborating the idea of community conservation! While this narrative change may be observed at the level of academic and intellectual debate and at international conferences and meetings, it is erroneous to assume that such changes in discourse translate directly into changed policies and practices. Equally, it would be naive to assume that all of the elements of a narrative or received wisdom (eg fortress conservation) are 'wrong' and should disappear from policy and practice, while all the elements of a counter-narrative (eg community conservation) are 'right' and should be adopted.

In reality, the links between discourses, policies and practices are much more complex than the narrative/counter-narrative framework infers. Discourses contain many concepts from which policymakers can pick and mix to generate an enormous range of policy choices. Policy studies from around the world indicate that policymakers most commonly take an incrementalist approach to 'new' policy rather than totally rejecting earlier policies (Schaffer 1984; Lindblom 1979)[16]. Also, the agencies and officials that implement policy have enormous discretion in the interpretation of policy so that the links between policy and action can take many different forms. In East Africa it seems likely that that national conservation agencies have shaped the policy and practice of community conservation more than the

[16] Although, they are likely to make more radical decisions in situations of crisis or impending catastrophe (Grindle and Thomas 1991).

external agencies who have promoted the approach (pers. comm. Patrick Bergin). Organisations rarely abandon their pre-existing ways of dealing with issues and stakeholders; these are continually evolving and past practice exerts considerable influence on future changes.

The recognition that conservation policies and practices in African countries (as elsewhere) gradually evolve, rather than change dramatically as the narratives about conservation have, may not merely be the way things are: it might actually be a good thing[17]. Lindblom (1979) has argued convincingly of the benefits of an incrementalist approach; Johnston and Clark's (1982) seminal work on rural development made a strong case for 'adaptive learning' rather than dramatic policy changes; and Rondinelli (1983 and 1993) has argued for technical cooperation to focus on creating 'adaptive administration', rather than over-designed projects and policies that are based more on theory than practice. Uphoff (1992) posits that in a world that recognises the diversity and complexity of humanity and the unpredictability of social, political and economic futures, there is a need for a less adversarial approach to knowledge-creation. He suggests that heightened levels of cooperation and trust amongst actors could allow for positive sum outcomes (both-and) that mix 'abstract principles' (*ibid*, p282) to produce more effective policies. While Roe's ideas provide a guide for our retrospective analysis it is to Uphoff that we turn when looking to the future. Conservation in Africa does not simply need a new 'privileged solution': it requires a policy process that is more effective for meeting contemporary and future challenges. The achievement of the counter-narrative is not that it has proved that community conservation 'works': it is that it has created the space for a set of community conservation experiments that take many forms and are achieving very different results. These demand intensive monitoring and study so that the knowledge they create can be fed back into policy. The pressing contemporary issue is how to relate and mix strategies that incorporate elements of fortress conservation and community conservation, not to prove that one is always better than the other.

Our understanding of conservation policy in Africa must go beyond the 'Punch and Judy' style of analysis that recent scholarship has suggested. In an unpredictable world - complex, diverse and contingent -with goals that are constantly refined and redefined, the idea that the

[17] With the proviso that more effective learning from practice could speed up the evolutionary process and improve outcomes.

‘right policy’ can be identified and then indefinitely pursued is an historic artefact. What is needed are broadly based ‘enabling’ policies that promote the creation and strengthening of networks of institutions and organisations that have the flexibility to deal with contingency and complexity. The question is not of whether state action or community action is better: both are essential, along with private sector support, and the challenge is how to develop effective mixes of state, community and private action in specific contexts.

At the ‘grassroots’ this is already the nature of day-to-day activity as wardens, villagers and business people interact to resolve local issues of conservation and development. Paradoxically, creating an enabling environment for conservation and development requires greater state capacities than did the ‘fortress conservation’ of the past. As the TANAPA ‘Tanzania’ case (Bergin 1998) and CAMPFIRE ‘Zimbabwe’ (Murphree 1997) illustrate, working with communities and the private sector does not mean doing less it means doing things differently and having to do more (meetings, negotiations, agreements and monitoring). Contradictory principles (law enforcement and community development) must be grappled with and turned into strategy. This has great implications for the staffing, training and financing of conservation bureaucracies and is not simply a matter of fostering a greater role for NGOs.

The economics of conservation in much of Africa (Bromley 1994; Swanson and Barbier 1992; Emerton 1998 a and b) also indicate a need for the ‘community’ beyond rural Africa to think about its role. Society in the West, with images of wild Africa transmitted to its television screens for hours every evening, will have to decide whether it is prepared to share the great costs of species and ecosystem conservation with the states and societies of Africa. Our research has already indicated the value that communities close to African protected areas place on ‘reciprocity’ with the organisations that manage such areas (Hulme 1997). This concept can also be applied to the international conservation community. If this wider community reciprocates only in a token fashion then increasingly the meanings of conservation for local communities, and their local economic analyses, will determine the types of change that occur in the African environment.

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