

# Who will benefit from tourism and wildlife management? Conflict management in Salambala Conservancy, Namibia

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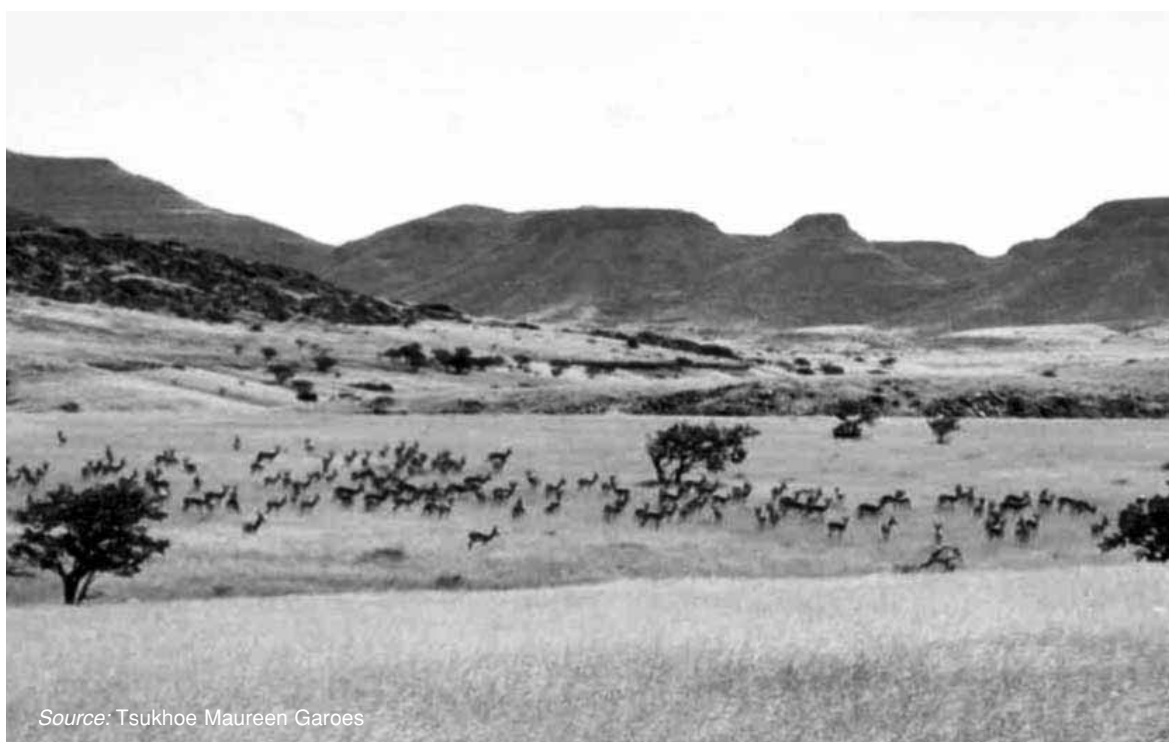
## SUMMARY

Sikanjabuka is a small rural community in Caprivi region in northeastern Namibia. Along with 17 other Caprivi villages, it is a member of Salambala Conservancy, an innovative, participatory institution that allows communities to pool their land to co-manage wildlife and other natural resources and to secure concessionary rights for tourism enterprises. A conservancy aims to foster sustainable resource management and promote local socio-economic development through decentralization, thus reversing colonial and apartheid-era policies that marginalized rural people. Namibia's national conservancy programme, carried out in collaboration with NGOs and international donors, has had much success. One of its hallmarks has been the attention it pays to institutional capacity building. Before it is officially registered, each conservancy must meet legal requirements, including electing a management committee, establishing a constitution, and formulating natural resource management plans and a strategy for the equitable distribution of benefits.

Salambala was the second conservancy set up in Namibia (in 1998), and is cited internationally as a success story. It has not been without conflict, however. Bukalo Khuta, the traditional authority in this area, ordered Salambala Conservancy to stop benefit payments to the village of Sikanjabuka. Although the khuta has no right to interfere in the conservancy's affairs, traditional authorities are

very powerful and have been involved with Salambala since its foundation. The conservancy initially ignored this request, but eventually complied in 2005. In response, the leaders of Sikanjabuka sent a letter of complaint to the Caprivi Regional Governor and the Minister of Environment and Tourism, which is responsible for the conservancy programme.

This case study is based on the efforts of staff from Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), an NGO with a long history of involvement in conservancies, and from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), the government department responsible for overseeing the programme. It emphasizes the importance of conflict analysis in the process map for consensual negotiations. The dispute reflects deep ethnic and political differences between the Masubia and Mafwe tribes. It is not simply rooted in primordial tribal differences, however, and should also be seen within the context of the region's historical political economy, particularly the "divide-and-conquer" strategy of the colonial and apartheid regimes. Conflict analysis revealed that the principle issue in this case relates to a conflict between the roles and responsibilities of the new conservancies and those of the tribal authorities, which have overlapping – and sometimes competing – interests in the devolution of power regarding natural resources to the local level. The case study acknowledges that it is not always possible to resolve the entire conflict, particularly when it involves structural tensions. Nonetheless, the breakdown of the main dispute into smaller, more manageable pieces provides entry points that may serve to reduce latent and deeply rooted social tensions over time, and the process map for consensual negotiation may be applicable for managing or resolving such structural tensions.



Source: Tsukhoe Maureen Garoes

## KEY ISSUES AND CONTEXT

### Overview

Namibia is a large, generally arid and lightly populated country along the Atlantic coast of southern Africa. Its 824 268 km<sup>2</sup> of surface area includes the Namib desert, where annual rainfall averages only 25 mm. Rainfall totals are higher in the northeast, where Caprivi region is located, and average more than 600 mm/year. As is common in arid and semi-arid areas, rains are erratic, both spatially and temporally, making Namibia prone to drought. With 2 million inhabitants in 2005, the country has one of the lowest average population densities in the world – three people per square kilometre. Most people reside in the wetter north.



Two-thirds of all Namibians are rural dwellers, relying directly on local natural resources for their livelihoods, including from agriculture, mining, fishing and – increasingly – tourism. In 2005, the per capita gross national income was nearly US\$3 000, but most rural people received considerably less, reflecting long-standing patterns of wealth distribution established in the colonial era. Surveys conducted in 1993, only a few years after independence from South Africa, revealed that more than one-third of Namibia's population lived on less than US\$1 a head per day, the international benchmark for extreme income poverty, and more than half on less than US\$2 a day. Low life expectancies at birth – 47 years for males and 48 years for females in 2004 – reflect not only the country's widespread poverty but also its high incidence of HIV/AIDS, which affects nearly 20 percent of the population between 15 and 49 years of age (World Bank, 2006).

## Decentralization of wildlife management and tourism

This case study focuses on a conflict occurring within the context of Namibia's efforts to decentralize wildlife management and tourism development. Wildlife constitutes one of the most important resources in Namibia, which still has substantial numbers of large mammals, such as elephants, and many other kinds of animals. The country's scenic landscapes and considerable marine resources also attract tourists. In colonial times, both wildlife management and tourism were largely State-controlled, centring on national parks and other official conservation areas, which covered 14 percent of Namibia's total area. The government considered all wildlife to be State property. It eventually bestowed freehold land, covering 43 percent of the nation, to white inhabitants for the conditional ownership of certain species. White inhabitants also engaged in private tourism development, including commercial lodges, hunting enterprises and related businesses. Reflecting the prevailing ideology of apartheid, the "homelands" or communal areas (41 percent) reserved for black Africans – who comprised the vast majority of Namibia's population – received no rights to local wildlife and no support for tourism development (Jones and Mosimane, 2000). Ownership of even communal lands was vested in the State.

Since independence in 1990, Namibia's tourism sector has boomed; propelled by a growing number of international arrivals, tourism is now one of the most important sectors of the national economy. In conjunction with policy and legislative reforms to decentralize wildlife management, tourism is increasingly viewed as a means of fostering biodiversity conservation and sustainable local socio-economic development. In 1996, the Government of Namibia passed the Nature Conservation Amendment Act, which grants rural communities legal rights over the management and utilization of their natural resources, and gives the residents of communal areas the same rights over wildlife and tourism as freehold farmers. Conservancies have been established as the institutional mechanisms for local participation in the co-management of wildlife management and tourism development.

The CBNRM Programme provides an official platform for encouraging the formation of conservancies. Villages in communal areas can join together with the State, NGOs and private

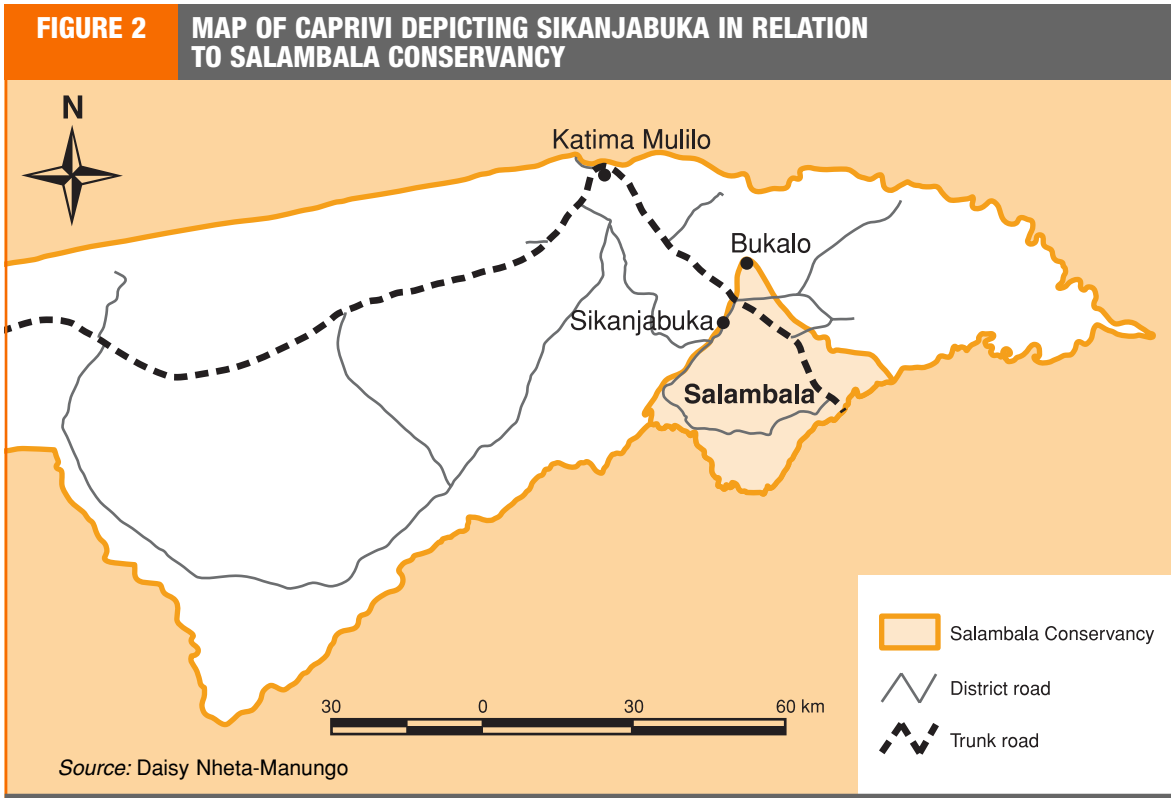
enterprises to benefit from trophy hunting, tourist campsites, handicraft sales and other endeavours related to wildlife conservation and tourism. As a legal entity, a conservancy has a set membership, demarcated boundaries, a constitution, operational rules, an elected management committee and a set of procedures for distributing its income equally among its members. Its rights to game are limited, however, and members must follow State-mandated regulations for natural resource use. MET provides official oversight of conservancies. Traditional tribal authorities also work closely with and, to some extent, monitor the new institutions. Even with such restrictions and supervision, the conservancies offer an innovative participatory setting for Namibia's rural population to pursue new livelihood activities. To date, the national conservancy programme has been largely successful in pursuing its diverse goals (Long, 2004a), although it is not without critics (such as Sullivan, 2000).

As in other parts of the world, the process of decentralizing natural resource management to communities and local resource users has not been without conflict and disputes. Decentralization not only creates a new arena for disputes to emerge, but it can also rekindle and intensify existing tensions and conflicts in society. This case study deals with a conflict that occurred in one of Namibia's conservancies.

## The local setting: Sikanjabuka village and Salambala Conservancy in Caprivi region

Caprivi region is a panhandle-shaped extension of territory in northeastern Namibia that is surrounded by Angola, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Its boundaries follow no obvious geographical or social logic and originated in response to European colonial interests in the late nineteenth century by giving the German colony of Southwest Africa access to the Zambezi river. Caprivi is one of the best watered parts of Namibia, and population densities are higher here than in the rest of the country. Sikanjabuka village, which is the case study's focal point, is a small agricultural community situated on the border between territories long associated with Mafwe and Masubia tribes (or ethnic groups), which have a long history of political conflict, mainly over the control of land. There are several hundred people in Sikanjabuka, most of whom are of Mafwe ethnicity, although there is intermarriage with Masubia people.

Sikanjabuka falls within the jurisdiction of Chinchimane Khuta (the traditional authority). The khuta is a very powerful institution politically, economically, socially and culturally. It controls access to land and other resources, and it settles disputes. The bulk of the members of a khuta are senior heads, known locally as induna, who represent their village areas and have inherited their roles. Supreme power is vested in the chief, who the national government recognizes as the legitimate, hereditary leader of the khuta. The khuta is ethnically based, and Chinchimane Khuta represents the Mafwe people. Bukalo Khuta, which covers the area west of Sikanjabuka, is the traditional authority for the Masubia people. Khuta membership is customarily open to men only. Women may attend meetings, but their ability to participate is limited (Flintan, 2001).



Caprivi is one of the least economically developed regions in Namibia, with more widespread poverty than in the rest of the country (Long, 2004e: 58). People rely on natural resources for their livelihoods, including through rainfed cultivation, herding, fishing and foraging for wild plants and game (Murphy and Mulonga, 2002; Murphy and Roe, 2004). During severe drought, as in 2002, local residents receive food aid. The conservancy programme offers an important opportunity for the people of Caprivi to improve their livelihoods through tourism-related development based on wildlife management.

One of the hallmarks of the conservancy movement is the attention it gives to institutional capacity building. Setting up a conservancy requires considerable time and effort to meet the legal requirements, including those directed at fostering democratic processes and practices, such as electing committee, establishing constitutions and formulating plans for managing resources and distributing benefits. As Long (2004d: 47) notes:

*Building democratic institutions of this nature was something that was entirely new for communal area residents. Prior to Independence, the communal areas of Namibia were subjected to discriminatory policies and legislation that disenfranchised people from political processes; they had no legal rights to vote or to form interest groups or coalitions. ... The colonial and apartheid system left a legacy of dependence and the ideas of self-help and empowerment were new concepts.*

Capacity building is seen as a means for promoting social equity and thus strengthening democratic processes. With international donor support, the CBNRM Programme established numeric targets for women's involvement in the management of conservancies, and no-one is supposed to be excluded from conservancy membership on the basis of gender or ethnicity (Flintan, 2001: 12).

TABLE 1

ATTRIBUTES OF SALAMBALA CONSERVANCY, 2005

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Date registered  | June 1998  |
| Biome  | Woodland   |
| Size   | 93 000 ha (the largest conservancy in Caprivi)   |
| Registered members   | 3 500  |
| Total population   | 8 020 people in 1 597 households in 18 villages  |
| Committee members  | 41   |
| Executive committee  | 9 (including 1 non-voting member from Bukalo Khuta)  |
| Staff  | 2 community resource monitors, 8 community rangers and 3 campsite staff                            |
| Conservancy infrastructure   | 1 conservancy office (in the Bukalo Khuta building) with a phone, 1 vehicle and 1 tourist campsite |
| Revenue for 2005   | N\$500 000 (N\$6 = about US\$1)  |
| Budget for 2005  | N\$300 000   |
| <i>Source:</i> Information collected by the IRDNC and MET team; Long, 2004b. |  |

Table 1 summarizes the key attributes of Salambala Conservancy, which covers more than 93 000 ha spread over 18 communities. Its activities include wildlife monitoring and management by a small conservancy staff. The types and numbers of animals seen in the area have increased significantly since Salambala Conservancy was established. Most of the conservancy's collective revenue comes from a trophy hunting concession involving a professional hunter. The conservancy also has a tourist campsite located within a core wildlife area, which has proved controversial, as it involved the relocation of 17 families and the establishment of grazing restrictions. Revenue from the camp has suffered for

extended periods when tourism dropped off severely because of security concerns in Caprivi region, such as following violence aimed at Caprivi's secession from Namibia in the late 1990s, and instability arising from troubles in Angola. Grants from the national conservancy programme and international donors have helped to cover shortfalls in revenue. The increase in wildlife has had local costs in terms of crop damage, livestock predation and even attacks on people (Murphy and Roe, 2004). Effective prevention of such events and compensation for losses have yet to be devised.

As well as through a limited number of conservancy jobs, people – particularly women – have also benefited from handicraft sales, and conservancy members have a small hunting quota (Murphy and Roe, 2004). Cash benefits are distributed collectively to the communities every year or two, when Salambala Conservancy distributes revenue to each of its 18 villages. Benefits are distributed in equal amounts to each community, as specified in the conservancy constitution, and have totalled about N\$2 500 (US\$400) per payment. The conservancy members in each village decide how to use the money, either distributing cash to individuals or investing in development-oriented activities. Sikanjabuka village members have invested their funds in a bank account to accumulate for use in a development project.

Salambala's affairs are governed by the conservancy committee and its smaller executive committee. Since 2002, the conservancy has been operating without external funding, which is a major accomplishment (Long, 2004c). Staff have sought to widen the scope of their duties by, for example, furnishing information on HIV/AIDS and mitigation, and overall Salambala is considered to have been successful in pursuing the diverse goals of biodiversity conservation, sustainable natural resource management, promotion of local socio-economic development, and institutional capacity building. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an external donor to the national conservancy programme, has identified Salambala Conservancy as a success story ([www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)).

## CONFLICT HISTORY

Sikanjabuka village is located along the boundary separating the Mafwe and Masubia peoples, who have a long history of conflict, mainly over land. The dispute between the village and Bukalo Khuta did not emerge until implementation of the conservancy programme in the late 1990s, however. Table 2 summarizes key dates and events in the conflict. Sikanjabuka has been part of Chinchimane Khuta, which is associated with the Mafwe people, for decades – villagers report that their inclusion in Chinchimane was confirmed by a colonial survey conducted in about 1945. The community is not clearly separated from its neighbours, however, and some residents have farmland in adjacent communities falling within Bukalo Khuta's jurisdiction. As already noted, there is also intermarriage among the different ethnic groups.

The Bukalo traditional authorities strongly supported Salambala Conservancy as a means of improving the livelihoods of the Masubia people (Long and Jones, 2004). They were instrumental in its formation in the mid-1990s, working with IRDNC, MET and other agencies promoting conservancies. A total of 17 of the 18 villages that joined Salambala Conservancy were situated





within Bukalo Khuta's boundaries. Traditional authorities from Bukalo helped secure Salambala's official registration in June 1998, as the second conservancy in the country at that time. Strong personal backing from Chief Moraliswani and his son Prince George Mutwa, who served in a key administrative role, reinforced the conservancy's identification with Masubia interests, and both national and international supporters of the conservancy movement were happy to highlight this feature of Salambala. For example, Prince George received the Namibia Nature Foundation Conservationist of the Year Award in 2002, a fact that USAID emphasized on its Web site. Some analysts assumed that Salambala and its surroundings were ethnically homogeneous: "The Masubia is the only ethnic group residing in Salambala" (Long, 2004c: 17). The view that rural Namibia is composed of "stable, separate and coherent groups" has been one of the most enduring official narratives since colonial times, and has often been relied on – and reinforced by – development interventions (Sullivan, 2000: 146).

Even if traditional tribal officials wished to limit conservancy membership to their own groups, however, they could not do so under government guidelines which, as mentioned earlier, do not allow membership to be denied on the basis of ethnicity or gender. Sikanjabuka was the only one of the 18 villages not to come from Bukalo Khuta, and it also lacked a predominantly Masubia population, its people being largely Mafwe in ethnicity. Although the people of Sikanjabuka could join the conservancy, they ended up in an ambiguous position, especially given Bukalo Khuta's role in Salambala management.

The trouble started with the first benefit sharing payment from Salambala Conservancy, in 2000. According to the conservancy's constitution, equal disbursements were to be made, based on earnings from trophy hunting fees. Payouts are made to villages rather than individuals because the

conservancy's revenues are modest and it has a large number of beneficiaries, so cash payouts to individuals would be very small (Murphy and Roe, 2004: 128). The initial village-level payments were about N\$2 500 (approximately US\$400), which each community could decide how to use for its own purposes. The Bukalo traditional authorities urged the Salambala staff to halt the payment to Sikanjabuka unless the village shifted allegiance to Bukalo Khuta. The conservancy's management ignored this request and issued funds to Sikanjabuka; the controversy was not repeated for the second round of benefit sharing in 2001. Prince George, who had been closely associated with the conservancy since its founding, died in 2002, and it is not clear whether this had any impact on how the conflict unfolded.

TABLE 2

## SIKANJABUKA CONFLICT TIME LINE

| Year | Event   |
|------|---|
| 1945 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sikanjabuka area reportedly surveyed by colonial authorities; community is made part of Chinchimane Khuta of the Mafwe tribe</li> </ul>  |
| 1998 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salambala Conservancy officially registered; all its communities except Sikanjabuka fall within the jurisdiction of Bukalo Khuta of the Masubia tribe</li> </ul>   |
| 2000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the conservancy's first benefit distribution, Bukalo Khuta tries to halt payment to Sikanjabuka unless the village switches to Bukalo Khuta's jurisdiction</li> <li>• The request is ignored, and Sikanjabuka receives its payment</li> </ul>   |
| 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second benefit distribution by Salambala Conservancy</li> <li>• Bukalo Khuta does not object to Sikanjabuka receiving payment</li> </ul>   |
| 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict flares when Bukalo Khuta allocates land traditionally belonging to Sikanjabuka to two other villages within its jurisdiction</li> <li>• Sikanjabuka protests to Chinchimane Khuta, which meets Bukalo Khuta to resolve the issue</li> <li>• The land is returned to Sikanjabuka village control</li> </ul>  |
| 2005 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third benefit distribution by Salambala Conservancy</li> <li>• Bukalo Khuta orders the conservancy to halt the payment to Sikanjabuka</li> <li>• Bukalo Khuta also requests Sikanjabuka to show its conservancy form and relocate to Bukolo Khuta's jurisdiction</li> <li>• Sikanjabuka representatives send a letter of complaint to the Caprivi Regional Governor and the Minister of Environment and Tourism</li> </ul> |

Conflict between Sikanjabuka village and Bukalo Khuta flared up again in 2003 – this time over land. The khuta allocated land belonging to Sikanjabuka, but falling within its own jurisdiction, to other

communities. The people of Sikanjabuka appealed to Chinchimane Khuta, which met Bukalo Khuta to resolve the issue. The event was unusual in that the two khuta generally avoid direct confrontation to avoid refuelling old disputes and causing conflict to escalate. The traditional authorities agreed that the land would be restored to Sikanjabuka's control.

In 2005, representatives of Bukalo Khuta once again instructed Salambala Conservancy not to pay Sikanjabuka its allocated dividend, even though the khuta had no right to influence the conservancy's benefit distribution. This action was politically motivated by the Bukalo traditional authorities who aimed to exert their power over Sikanjabuka and force the village to become formally incorporated into Bukalo Khuta's jurisdiction. This was not an economic move to divert Sikanjabuka's funds to other purposes, and the Salambala Conservancy treasurer retained the money allocated to Sikanjabuka in the conservancy safe. Sikanjabuka village would receive the payout if it switched allegiance to Bukalo Khuta, but the villagers refused and appealed to the Regional Governor, Caprivi's elected authority, and the Minister of Environment and Tourism, who is responsible for the conservancy programme. The conflict management process was set in motion.

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION PROCESS

### Initial effort to address the conflict

Bukalo Khuta's insistence in 2005 that conservancy members from Sikanjabuka were not to receive any payout unless they switched allegiance to the Masubia tribal authority generated much anger. The Sikanjabuka members felt that the order was unwarranted and violated their rights under the Salambala Conservancy's constitution. They also had no desire to leave Chinchimane Khuta. As in the past, however, the villagers chose not to present their grievance directly to Bukalo Khuta, which they felt lacked knowledge about the proper management and functioning of the conservancy. Responsibility for governance rested with the conservancy committee, not the traditional authorities. The people of Sikanjabuka also believed that confronting Bukalo Khuta directly might intensify the conflict. People in Caprivi are not used to dealing with tribal authorities outside their own areas.

Instead, the local induna (senior chief) wrote a letter, signed by ten others – probably members of the village development committee (VDC), a government initiative aimed at decentralizing development to the village level. The letter was sent to national and regional officials and noted that Sikanjabuka members had been told that their benefits would “only be paid to us on condition that we change our tribal affiliation from Chief Mamili to the Masubia tribal authority. This we are not prepared to do, as the area and the community has never before been under the Chief of the Masubia.” The letter also said: “Should it have been known that the establishment of the Salambala Conservancy was intended to expand the area of jurisdiction of the Masubia tribal authority [we] as a community belonging to Chief Mamili would not have accepted its establishment around our communal area.” The conservancy no longer seemed to be an entity to benefit the people of Sikanjabuka, but a means for Bukalo Khuta to extend its own powers.

## Entry into the conflict situation

The Minister of Environment and Tourism instructed the Regional Governor to resolve the conflict. The governor convened a meeting at Katima Mulilo, the capital of Caprivi, and invited representatives from Sikanjabuka village and Salambala Conservancy to attend. Significantly, the governor excluded representatives from either khuta, probably because under Namibian official policy it is not acceptable for regional governors to get involved in tribal issues. In addition, the protocol for dealing with chiefs and traditional authorities is very time-consuming. Through regional government legislation, the governor has authority over Sikanjabuka village, but not over the khuta. Representatives from MET and IRDNC were also invited to the meeting as interested parties in the conservancy programme and – on the request of the Regional Governor – to serve a mediation role. The governor recognized that IRDNC's long history of involvement in the conservancy movement dated back to its earliest days, and that some IRDNC members had experience in managing natural resource conflicts.

At the meeting, the governor requested Salambala to pay Sikanjabuka the benefit payment that it was entitled to under the conservancy's constitution. This decision resolved the village's immediate grievance, but did not address the underlying conflict, which required mediation and reconciliation among the disputing parties. The meeting provided the entry point for IRDNC and MET representatives to begin the conflict management process, and it was agreed that the two organizations would collaborate as mediators. The main negotiator from IRDNC had substantial experience in the area, and a keen appreciation of the role of cultural issues. Cooperation with MET was aided by the fact that its lead representative was an ex-employee of IRDNC and had been mentored by the main negotiator. In addition, both parties were helped by their cultural neutrality. The leading MET official was not from Caprivi, and the main IRDNC negotiator was originally from Zimbabwe. Overall, the MET and IRDNC representatives maintained a strong working relationship during the conflict management process. The mediation team received logistical support in the form of transport, additional staff, supplies and funds for other expenses.

The starting point was to identify the primary stakeholders before beginning to analyse the dispute. The stakeholders were identified as the Sikanjabuka village representative, the Salambala Conservancy executive committee, Bukalo Khuta and Chinchimane Khuta (although this last would not play a direct role in the conflict management process). The mediators also acknowledged that the Caprivi regional government, MET and IRDNC constituted secondary stakeholders with a firm interest in bringing a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

## Conflict analysis

The IRDNC and MET mediators organized a visit to Sikanjabuka village to uncover the root cause of the conflict. They based their approach on the ten-step process map of consensual conflict management (Engel and Korf, 2005). Using a time line, the onion tool and other procedures for conflict analysis, the team obtained important information from the induna and other villagers, and examined written sources to obtain a deeper understanding of the situation. Through this approach they found that the conflict was not rooted in primordial ethnic differences between the Mafwe and the Masubia

alone. Instead, tensions between the groups needed to be seen within the context of the region's historical political economy. As Fosse (1997: 438) writes, "The ethnic labels of Mafwe and Masubia have through history had different coverage and relevance, affected by Lozi rule during the nineteenth century, as well as German and South African apartheid ethnic classification." Ethnic tensions were manipulated by colonial policies, which aimed to create or reinforce social differences among Africans as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy; the awkwardly shaped Caprivi region even owes its existence as an administrative entity to such intentions. Geographically, Caprivi clearly forms part of southern Zambia or northern Botswana, but in 1890, German Southwest Africa claimed this area of Masubia and Mafwe settlements and named it after the German leader of the day. This colonial boundary cut off some Mafwe and Masubia communities from their Lozi rulers (in present-day Zambia), and set the scene for local struggles over political legitimacy. Fosse recounts: "Conflicts have erupted over issues such as rivalling settlement histories, the legitimacy of each other's chieftainships and tribal borders." These conflicts were exacerbated by military action during the South African occupation of Caprivi in the 1970s and 1980s. The different groups' different roles in the apartheid administration and liberation struggle added to the tensions. Caprivi region is known in Namibia as one of the "most problematic in terms of ethnic strife and lack of political stability" (Fosse, 1997: 437), and experienced a succession attempt in August 1999, spearheaded by individuals from the Mafwe tribe. This rebellion was rapidly quelled by the Namibian military, but it underlined the intense competition in Caprivi for economic and political resources such as land and ethnic allegiance. Tribal differences are not entirely hard-and-fast, however, and widespread intermarriage across ethnic boundaries has probably served to make social conflict less pronounced.

Conflict analysis revealed that the dispute reflected not only ethnic-related tensions but also strains in the relationship between newly created conservancies and local tribal authorities. Indeed, the principle issue in this case relates to the conflict between the roles and responsibilities of the two different institutions, which possess overlapping and sometimes competing interests in decision-making regarding devolution of the use and management of natural resources to the local level (Jones and Mosimane, 2000). In the national policy framework there is ambiguity about the relationship between traditional authorities and conservancies. As Long and Jones (2004: 144) point out: "Neither the CBNRM policy nor the legislation, however, address the issue of the relationship between conservancies and traditional authorities. It is left to communities themselves to decide on how these relationships should be structured." This situation creates much uncertainty for the conservancy, which has constitutional obligations to its membership but has to deal closely with the khuta given the latter's substantial social, cultural, political and economic influence in local affairs, particularly its control over land allocation (Long and Jones, 2004).

In Caprivi, the traditional authorities and the conservancies have been very closely connected. Long and Jones (2004: 144) note: "Throughout Caprivi, the conservancies have been formed with the express support of the traditional authorities." Bukalo Khuta appointed conservancy members to initiate the conservancy process, with the late brother of the Masubia Chief serving as the first Chair of Salambala Conservancy. Traditional authorities helped demarcate the conservancy's core area boundaries, and a khuta representative – the senior induna – is included on the conservancy's

executive committee in an *ex officio* role without formal voting rights. The community rangers who are a part of the conservancy take people accused of illegal hunting to the khuta for judgment. The traditional authorities also arbitrate disputes arising within the conservancy. Quite clearly, the khuta and the conservancy are inseparable, with the khuta supporting the new institution as a means of improving the livelihoods of its ethnically defined constituents:

*The devolution of authority from the khuta to the conservancy committee in Salambala is very clear. Institutionally the conservancy derives its authority from the Masubia traditional leadership, which, to a large extent, has driven the formation of the conservancy. The khuta formed the conservancy in order to retain wildlife, manage natural resources for future generations of Masubia people, and increase the ability of the Masubia to undertake community development initiatives with funds generated by the operation of the conservancy (Long and Jones, 2004: 144).*

Salambala Conservancy rented its office space from Bukalo Khuta. Despite these close connections, however, the conservancy is a distinct entity from the khuta, with a legal responsibility to its members, including Mafwe people from Sikanjabuka. The conservancy's formal duties, interests and obligations are not identical to those of the khuta.

At the meeting in Sikanjabuka, the induna and village representatives explained that they wanted justice – payment of the conservancy benefit to which they were entitled, without the need to switch tribal allegiance. People in Sikanjabuka were also adamant that Bukalo Khuta should stop interfering in the conservancy's affairs. Its representatives asked the IRDNC and MET team to train the Bukalo traditional authorities in halting ethnic conflict.

## Broadening stakeholder engagement

The IRDNC and MET team visited Bukalo Khuta to discuss the conflict; it should be noted that some saw Sikanjabuka village's membership of Salambala Conservancy as an opportunist action. According to this view, the people of Sikanjabuka wanted to benefit from the conservancy programme and joined Salambala – the only available option at the time – until the time was ripe to join a Mafwe-based conservancy. Even if this was its motive for participating, however, the village was entitled to receive its full share of Salambala Conservancy's benefit payments. Sikanjabuka could not be denied the funds simply because its inhabitants were Mafwe. The Bukalo tribal authorities claimed that they had been unaware of Salambala Conservancy's obligation to treat all its members equally, but the Regional Governor's order to pay the village had made clear the conservancy's constitutional obligations.

The IRDNC and MET team also met representatives from Salambala Conservancy to ascertain their reasons for halting payments to Sikanjabuka. The conservancy leaders acknowledged that it was wrong not to distribute funds to all villages, but they believed that they could not refuse Bukalo Khuta's request. The conservancy's operations require the khuta's good will, and the physical proximity of the conservancy's offices to the khuta offices (in the same building) added to the political

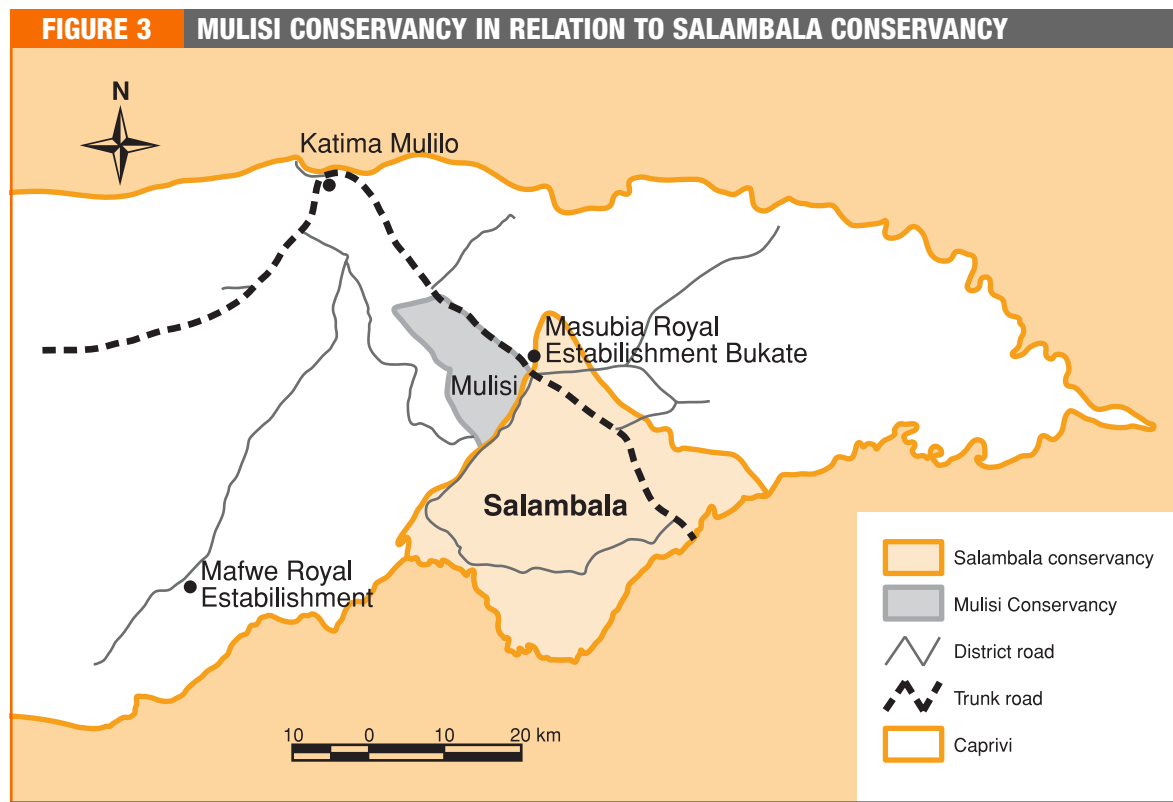


pressure to conform to the latter's will. The team members emphasized the conservancy's constitutional obligation to all its members.

Overall, the reactions of the three stakeholder groups to the mediation team's visit were positive. The IRDNC and MET staff were seen as neutral parties who could provide information and listen to the position of each stakeholder. It now appeared possible to move ahead in the conflict management process by bringing together the key stakeholders.

## Negotiations

The representatives from Sikanjabuka village and Salambala Conservancy requested the IRDNC and MET mediation team to organize a joint meeting with Bukalo Khuta. At the meeting, the Bukalo Khuta representatives agreed that Sikanjabuka should receive its benefit payments from Salambala as stated in the conservancy's constitution. In addition, the idea was tabled that Sikanjabuka might have the option of joining the newly established Mulisi Conservancy, which includes areas under Mafwe traditional authorities. All parties welcomed and accepted this proposal, and the meeting went extremely well, fostering positive relationships among all the parties in the conflict. The session ended with all parties shaking hands on their agreements.



## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OUTCOMES

Bukalo Khuta's agreement to allow payment of the Salambala Conservancy benefit share to Sikanjabuka village ended the immediate dispute. The decision of all parties to permit Sikanjabuka to shift to the newly established Mulisi Conservancy, which is composed of Mafwe communities, addressed the tensions arising from Salambala's original multi-ethnic composition. The conflict revealed the difficulty of having a conservancy with diverse tribal allegiances. The establishment of Mulisi Conservancy presented a long-term solution to the Sikanjabuka conflict, and it is worthy of note that both its Chair and its Vice-Chair are members of Sikanjabuka village. Mulisi Conservancy was established very rapidly – between January and July 2006 – with no conflict over its boundaries. The new conservancy means that more communities will participate in the CBNRM Programme, receiving benefits from the use and management of natural resources. Mulisi Conservancy's membership is expected to earn income from fees from trophy hunting, tourism and other activities.

The transfer of Sikanjabuka village to Mulisi Conservancy will reduce the time that Salambala's executive committee and membership has to devote to conflict management. In addition, Salambala Conservancy is currently constructing a new office in Ngoma village, about 50 km from its old headquarters in Bukalo. This move away from Bukalo Khuta (out of the office rented from the khuta) will help increase the conservancy's managerial independence from the traditional authorities, but the conservancy still has to work closely with the tribal authorities on land and related issues. The complementary and conflicting roles and responsibilities will have to be sorted out in the context of the national policy framework for conservancies.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The dispute over the payment of conservancy benefits to Sikanjabuka village reflected structural conflicts of a socio-economic, political and institutional nature that were rooted in the historical political economy of Namibia's colonial experience. The divide-and-conquer strategy used by the colonists to impose and maintain their control has a deep legacy, and continues to influence the definition of interests by different political groups, as well as the relations among social actors and institutions. In devolving power to the local level, the policy of decentralization unintentionally rekindled long-simmering tensions. This case study shows that the process of promoting participatory natural resource management needs to be accompanied by capacity building for dealing with the disputes – new and old – that are likely to arise when groups perceive a conflict of interest in the use or control of such resources. The timely and non-violent resolution of the Sikanjabuka payment dispute through mediation and consensual negotiation emphasizes the usefulness of such techniques. If addressing underlying structural conflicts seems too challenging, it is important to remember that the peaceful handling of seemingly small disputes can reduce latent and deeply rooted social tensions. The introduction or promotion of consensual negotiation also adds to society's overall capacity to address its problems and conflicts in a peaceful manner. Just as a large tree originates from a little seed, the process map of consensual negotiation that resolves small disputes can be applied to wider social settings and issues, if people are willing to give it a chance.



Source: Tsukhoe Maureen Garoes



**“COMMUNITY BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IS A LONG ROAD,  
BUT NAMIBIANS ARE PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH  
SUCCESS STORIES OF CONSERVANCIES TODAY!”**

Tsukhoe Maureen Garoes, Head of CBNRM Programme Ministry of Environmental Tourism

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