



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION®

CONSERVATION BUSINESS ENTERPRISE SUCCESS STORY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA¹

By

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

When African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) was founded 44 years ago, our precursor: African Wildlife Leadership Foundation priority was to help develop among Africans the skill and knowledge to effectively manage wildlife resources. As conservation thinking has evolved, AWF has supported both the traditional approaches while taking the lead in implementing innovative approaches to conservation that attempt to rethink the relationship between people and wildlife. Rethinking traditional conservation is not just about correcting the wrongs that have been responsible for the disappearance of wildlife, but recognizing that the communities must, once again co-exist with wildlife in a fairly harmonious manner. It is with this background in mind that AWF began working on community conservation in 1988 involving national park authorities and pastoral communities around Tsavo National Park in Kenya. This work expanded to Tanzania and saw the development of the community conservation service in Tanzania National Parks.

Community conservation has now evolved into the ‘second generation’ whereby AWF has been looking to strategic partnerships involving private sector and communities. To this effect, AWF has established a network of strategically located Conservation Service Centers (CSCs) to help in establishment of management plans and wildlife-based business

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enterprises. CSCs are staffed with professionals with a diversity of expertise ranging from ecology, community development, land-use planning to law. CSCs works with communities living near the national parks and other wildlife protected areas to identify conservation-conscious private investors to establish wildlife-related enterprises (e.g.: lodges, fishing camps, etc). AWF believes that through conservation business enterprises, wildlife conservation can be developed as a commercially viable land use that will provide more space for wildlife while improving the livelihoods of local people.

This paper presents one of AWF's success stories in collaborating with local people on the Santawani Lodge conservation business enterprise in Botswana. Key success factors, challenges encountered and lessons learned are discussed. Finally, some insights are presented for the 21st Century African Agenda on peace through tourism.

2.0 PROJECT SITE LOCATION AND KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Santawani Lodge is located in the Okavango Delta south of Moremi Wildlife Reserve and is about 80 kilometers from Maun. The Lodge was owned by a private operator under a 25-year lease from the Government of Botswana. When the lease expired, the government handed over the lodge to the Sankuyo Tshwaragano Community Development Trust (STMT). At the time of handing over, the lodge infrastructure was very dilapidated. In 2002, AWF started working with STMT in order to re-build the lodge. The project started in October 2003 and was completed in May 2004. Key factors that contributed to the success of the Santawani Lodge conservation business enterprise are discussed below.

2.1 Heartland Conservation Planning

The Santawani Lodge conservation business enterprise was part of the AWF *Four Corners* transboundary natural resources management (TBNRM) program involving Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Before undertaking any conservation work, AWF conducts a Heartland² Conservation Planning (HCP) meeting. The HCP for the Four

² *Heartland* is the term AWF uses to refer to large and cohesive conservation landscapes, which are biologically important and have the scope to maintain health populations of wild species and natural

Corners TBNRM program was held in June 2001 and brought together different stakeholders representing local people, wildlife agencies, private sector, Non-Governmental Organizations, etc to come and identify conservation targets, threats and threat abatement strategies. The HCP formed a crucial stage in understanding the various dynamics of the local communities including STMT such as the size of the community, stability and nature of any threats to conservation business enterprise development.

2.2 Government policy

The Government of Botswana has created policies aimed at increasing local participation and ownership in the tourism industry. When the lease agreement between Game Trackers and the Government of the Republic of Botswana expired in January 2001, the government handed over the lodge to the community in line with government policy. AWF provided financial and specialized services to STMT as part of support to government policy and hoping to further promote wildlife conservation.

2.3 Resource availability

The AWF support discussed above was provided in conjunction with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Regional Center for Southern Africa (RCSA) funded Four Corners TBNRM project. Furthermore, AWF provided crucial skill mix in ecology, community development, enterprise development and legal services.

2.4 Use of existing mechanisms

The STMT proved to be a useful mechanism for discussing issues with the local community. Other government recognized structures were equally useful especially the Chobe District Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) which provided technical and policy guidance. TAC membership included relevant government Ministries / Departments such as Tourism Department, National Parks and Wildlife, Lands Board, etc.

2.5 Business Plan and Conservation Logic

AWF availed to STMT expertise to prepare a Business Plan for the conservation business enterprise development. The Business Plan articulated background to the project and the conservation logic included the setting aside 8,600 hectares of prime wildlife area and conserving the wildlife corridor between Chobe National Park and Moremi Wildlife Reserve.

processes well into the future. A Heartland may include a combination of State land, community-owned lands and lands held privately.

Furthermore, the Business Plan included some analysis of the market including product description, services, pricing, performance indicators and not the least, budget.

2.6 Memorandum of Understanding with STMT

Terms of collaboration were included in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by AWF and STMT. Obligations of the two parties and desire to explore other collaborative opportunities were articulated in the MOU.

2.7 Sub-grants

AWF awarded a sub-grant to Botswana Community Based Organizations Network (BOCOBONET) to provide support services to community-based organizations including STMT. BOCOBONET provided financial management training and facilitated the formation of a National Community Forum that afforded opportunities for communities to interact and share information on their development efforts.

3.0 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND HOW THEY WERE DEALT WITH

The challenges encountered are summarized below:

3.1 Local community expectations

The collaboration arrangement was based on the understanding that the two parties were going to jointly fund the project with AWF putting in 60% of the total cost. There were times when the local community obligations delayed although the money was available and sometimes, more than what was pledged by AWF was demanded. Clearly articulated MOU and regular project review meetings helped to resolve some problems. AWF went further to provide a contact person who was readily available to deal with issue immediately they arose.

3.2 Resources and project implementation period

AWF relied more heavily on a single source of financial support, which was tied to a very short implementation period (three years). To deal with this problem, AWF worked with STMT to prepare funding proposals and to facilitate the process of finding suitable private partner willing to enter into a mutually beneficial and long-term arrangement.

3.3 Marketing the Lodge

AWF assisted in the hiring of a Marketing Officer and provided some logistical support for the booking office in Maun. Furthermore, AWF signed an MOU with the Regional Tourism

Association of Southern Africa (RETOSA). The partnership with RETOSA helped in expanding the marketing reach of the lodge and also provided opportunities for training. In addition to these efforts, AWF has produced some brochures and has showcased Santawani Lodge in a number of international travel and tourism shows and conferences including the Africa Travel Association conference held in Lusaka in 2003, the Corporate Council for Africa meeting held in Washington DC in 2003, the XXXX held in Durban and Indaba held in Harare in 2004.

4.0 LESSONS LEARNED

The key lessons learnt from this experience are summarized below:

- It is very important to clearly articulate the obligations of the parties involved and to append signatures in form of an MOU to the agreement. While this does not completely solve the problem of high expectations, it allows the involved parties to be focused on their obligations.
- Relationship building takes time and can be costly. It is, therefore important to make adequate resource provisions. It is also important to provide for a contact or lead person to coordinate activities and ensure that work progresses in line with the work plan.
- Sub-grants to local institutions can play an important role in developing partnerships and enhancing the skills necessary to effectively manage a conservation business enterprise.
- Wildlife conservation can – through conservation business enterprise – be developed as a commercially viable land use option while improving the livelihoods of local people (ref to the Annex).
- A Community Development Trust such as the STMT is a good mechanism for community empowerment – allows communities to manage their own resources and to enter into viable strategic partnerships.

5.0 INSIGHTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY AFRICAN AGENDA ON PEACE THROUGH TOURISM

It is important to note that tourism can provide a solid base for improving national and local economies. However, the resources upon which tourism is based such as wildlife, cultural heritage, etc must be well managed in order for tourism to be a sustainable socio-economic activity. Below is a brief summary of some insights for the African Agenda on peace through tourism:

- ***Government commitment.*** Government should create policies that will increase active participation of local people and ownership in the tourism industry. Furthermore, government should create incentives that will make tourism an attractive investment portfolio. The Tourism Investment Facility administered through Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources is a commendable effort.
- ***Resource allocation and Management capacity.*** Tourism is dependent on a number of resources key among them are wildlife and cultural heritage. There is a very urgent need for sufficient resource allocation in order for these resources to be well managed. Furthermore, the management capacity of institutions mandated with the responsibility to manage natural resources should be improved and to be given the opportunity to work without unnecessary interference.
- ***Local people's role and benefits.*** Some critics of community-based natural resources management programs have argued that even with a few cases of increased incomes, local people have remained poor. It is important that local people are able to take an active – not passive participation through ownership of tourism enterprises and to enter into strategic partnerships.
- ***Infrastructure.*** In addition to natural resources mentioned above, tourism is dependent upon good infrastructure such as good road network, air travel facilities and lodges/hotels. While some efforts are being made, this remains to be one of the most serious drawbacks to tourism development in Zambia.