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Community Owned and Run: A Case Study of Santawani Lodge, Ngamiland, Botswana

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Table of Contents

Summary	page 2
Introduction	page 2
Background	page 2
The Sankuyo Community	page 3
Santawani Lodge	page 4
Wildlife Management Areas	page 6
Risks and Threats	page 6
Lessons learned	page 9

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works to ensure the wildlife and
wild lands of Africa will
endure forever.



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The AWF Working Paper Series has been designed to disseminate to partners and the conservation community, aspects of AWF current work from its flagship African Heartlands Program. This series aims to share current work in order not only to share work experiences but also to provoke discussions on what's working or not and how best conservation action can be undertaken to ensure that Africa's wildlife and wildlands are conserved forever.

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Summary

Most lodges on land owned or leased by local communities are sub-leased to established private sector safari companies. But the community that owns Santawani Lodge, located at the eastern edge of the Okavango Delta, took the unusual decision to manage and run their lodge themselves. The African Wildlife Foundation worked closely with the community and provided co-funding and a suite of business support services. Can the Santawani Lodge business model be replicated elsewhere in Africa and what lessons that can be learned from this unusual community-based natural resource management enterprise?

Introduction

Santawani Lodge, situated in Ngamiland district, Botswana, on the eastern fringes of the world-famous Okavango Delta, is an unusual example of a community-based conservation-oriented business. In the past most such enterprises have been leased to established, private sector operators, often with minimal benefits accruing to the community partners. In contrast, Santawani is both owned and managed entirely by and for the benefit of the local community.

Since the late 1980s, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) has worked closely with communities living near national parks and other protected areas. More recently an important focus has been on helping such communities develop conservation business enterprises. The Foundation believes that in this way wildlife conservation can become a commercially viable land use, providing more space for wildlife at the same time as improving the livelihoods of local people. With this win-win goal in mind, AWF supported the local community to renovate the once derelict Santawani Lodge.

This paper explores the regional, national and local circumstances, institutional arrangements and policies that enabled Santawani Lodge to re-open under local management. It goes on to consider the threats and risks that may affect the long-term success of the Lodge, before teasing out lessons learned that might usefully be applied in the development of similar wildlife-tourism based enterprises in other parts of Africa.

Background

Since the 1980s there has been considerable interest and investment in community based natural resource management (CBNRM) programmes in various countries in southern Africa, including the Communal

Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) in Zimbabwe, Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas (ADMAGE) in Zambia, Natural Resources Management Project (NRMP) in Botswana and Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) in Namibia. However, by the late 1990s it was becoming increasingly apparent that many of the resources being managed under CBNRM programmes were transboundary in nature – such as wildlife, habitats, river systems and fresh water resources that moved or extended across national boundaries. This concern led to the establishment, in 2001, of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Four Corners Transboundary Natural Resource Management Area (TBNRMA) Initiative, covering portions of Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe and encompassing around 220,000 square kilometres of land, 40% of it made up of protected areas. AWF was contracted to implement the three-year, US\$4 million Four Corners Initiative, which was based on two of AWF's key strategic approaches: its African Heartlands approach, which promotes landscape level conservation management, and its Conservation Business Venture approach, in which business support services and funding are provided to local communities to enable them to establish and run viable conservation-based enterprises. The latter are envisioned as a means of providing incentives for communities to engage in better natural resource management. Santawani Lodge was one of ten Community Business Ventures supported by AWF as part of Four Corners Initiative, selected on the basis of their good prospects for commercial success and of making positive impacts on livelihoods and conservation goals.

In Botswana in the early 1980s, the Government became increasingly concerned by the reduction in populations of many species of wildlife in the country. More recent data for the northern system, centred on Okavango,



demonstrated further pronounced declines of buffalo and zebra by 1994, although during the same period elephant and lechwe numbers increased significantly. Many blame the decline in most species of wildlife in Botswana on the game-proof fences erected throughout the country to protect the countries large beef export trade to the EU. This trade is predicated on the demonstrable absence of various diseases in the export zone, especially foot and mouth disease which is endemic in the country's wild buffalo. While protecting Botswana's valuable beef herds from diseases associated with wildlife, the fences also curtail the traditional migration of many species of wildlife and their access to key resources. Many wild animals are also directly killed when they become entangled in the fences.

In 1992, the Government introduced the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act, which included a policy of moving control of wildlife and other natural resources away from government, towards giving communities living in or adjacent to wildlife areas a greater role in their management. As a result of this policy change several previously undeveloped areas surrounding the Okavango Delta were designated as 'community areas' and communities within them were encouraged to apply to the local tribal Land Board to lease blocks of land. The communities would then be able to exploit their land allocations, for example by selling the associated hunting quotas to a licensed hunting company or entering into joint venture partnerships with commercial operators on wildlife tourism enterprises.

Tourism is the second highest foreign exchange earner in Botswana. The tourism policy in Botswana targets the 'low volume-high value' end of the market with a view to maximising income from a minimum number of visitors. This policy is designed to minimise the threat to the country's fragile ecosystems and increase value by imposing scarcity of supply. The policy is implemented through high daily entrance charges for national parks (approximately US\$33 per person per day) and imposing an upper limit of 24 beds in all lodges in game reserves or national parks. The result of this policy is that accommodation in protected areas is fully booked year round, which provides an opportunity for community-based tourism ventures outside these areas.

An outbreak of the cattle disease contagious bovine pleropleumonia (CBPP, also known as cattle lung disease) in February 1995 had a profound impact on

Ngamiland, the district in which Santawani Lodge is situated. Prior to this outbreak, Botswana had been free of the disease for the previous 50 years. After various approaches to containing and controlling the disease failed, the Government took the decision to destroy all cattle in the district. In all over 300,000 cattle were destroyed and most of their owners opted to receive compensation in cash rather than to be restocked with disease-free animals. The result was that many households in Ngamiland ceased keeping cattle, which had significant implications for their livelihoods and nutritional security. The erection of a buffalo fence in the district in 1996, and the subsequent banning of cattle keeping in areas designated for wildlife to the north of the fence, further restricted cattle rearing as a livelihood option.

The Sankuyo Community

The community that lives at Sankuyo village is, in the main, ethnically Bayei although other minority groups are also represented. The Bayei (or BaYei), who are Bantu speakers, migrated to the Okavango Delta in around 1750 to escape tribal aggression from the Lozi in present day Zambia. They were primarily riverine people - credited with introducing a traditional dug-out canoe, the *makaroo*, to the Delta - who at that time relied on fishing, agriculture and, to a lesser extent, livestock for their livelihoods.

Today Sankuyo village, situated at the extreme eastern fringe of the Okavango Delta some 80 km from the town of Maun and close to Moremi Wildlife Reserve, is home to around 400 people. In addition to several CBNRM projects detailed below, the residents also now rely for their livelihoods on formal employment, especially in tourist facilities, basket making, agriculture and small livestock. Previously cattle keeping was of major importance but this is now banned under zoning and disease-control regulations as the village lies to the north of the Southern Buffalo Fence, erected to separate buffalo and other wildlife from cattle herds to the south. Growing crops in this area is made difficult due to the threat of crop-raiding elephants.

In the early 1990s, the Sankuyo community was selected for support by a USAID-funded CBNRM programme. The community was initially facilitated to carryout a participatory process that resulted in the drafting of a deed of trust - laying the foundation for the establishment of the Sankuyo Tshwarangano Management Trust (STMT) in 1995 - and in the

development of a strategic plan and 5-year management plan. The first objectives of the Trust were to obtain a concession of land from the Tawana Land Board and to establish community-based enterprises. In 1996, the Trust was awarded the concession for some 8,600 hectares of land adjacent to the village, known as NG34 – only the second community to be awarded such a concession. Under the terms of the 15-year lease from the Land Board, the area was sub-leased and its hunting quota sold to commercial safari and hunting operators, which provided the Trust with a source of income. Between March 1996 and December 1998, direct benefits to the community derived from these arrangements netted around US\$600,000 – equivalent to around US\$2,700 per year for every household in the Sankuyo community.

In 1996, a Botswanan NGO, the People and Nature Trust, started working with STMT and facilitated a new strategic planning process. This led to the establishment of four community-based economic initiatives, for which STMT provided 50% of the start-up capital, the remainder coming from a grant. The enterprises were vegetable gardens, grass and reed harvesting and the development of two tourist facilities. The latter consisted of Shandreka and Kaziikini. Shandreka is a cultural village where visitors can experience traditional dancing, basket making, hunting with traps and bow and arrows, and have a consultation with a fortune-telling traditional healer. Kaziikini is a campsite which also has four rondavels, a bar and restaurant, targeted at self-drive tourists and mobile safari operators. Both these facilities were managed and run entirely by the Sankuyo community through the STMT. In the case of the campsite, the income was allocated as follows: after deduction of operating expenses, 20% of the gross profit was retained in a capital reinvestment fund controlled by STMT. The balance was divided in two, with one portion being split equally amongst the 15 community members who ran the facility and the other portion going to STMT. The latter was spent on projects that would benefit the wider Sankuyo community, for example building a school and clinic, buying a maize grinder and sinking a borehole.

In 2001, STMT was awarded the concession to an additional, adjoining, smaller block of land, NG33. This was a former hunting block that used to be leased by a commercial safari hunting operator. The allocation included a run-down safari lodge, previously used to accommodate hunting clients. The land use of NG33

was also changed at this time, and it was now designated as a photographic safari area.

The two land blocks, NG 33 and 34, are situated on the wildlife corridor between Moreni Game Reserve and Chobe National Park. The area was considered to be a prime candidate for developing as a conservation-oriented business venture because of its significant conservation value. Developing a successful conservation business in the area offered the potential for conservation gains including: securing the movement patterns of elephants and other species; conserving the keystone species – the elephant; securing not only the corridor but also associated natural resources and habitats; checking subsistence poaching of plains game and occasional poaching of large herbivores, such as buffaloes; increasing knowledge of the key biological resources; and increasing the skills, changing the attitude and increasing the communities stake in regard to sustainable and profitable management of the area's natural resources.

Santawani Lodge

In view of their previous experience of managing their own tourist enterprises and, in many cases, of working in the tourist sector in Botswana, the community took the unusual decision to manage and run the lodge themselves rather than simply lease it out to an established safari operator. So, on being allocated NG33 and the lodge, STMT approached AWF for support. A formal Memorandum of Understanding was entered into by the two parties in July 2003, which covered the financing of the renovation and refurbishment of the lodge together with marketing the business and building the capacity of the community. Under the agreement AWF, as the implementer of the USAID-funded Four Corners Initiative, provided a grant of US\$60,000

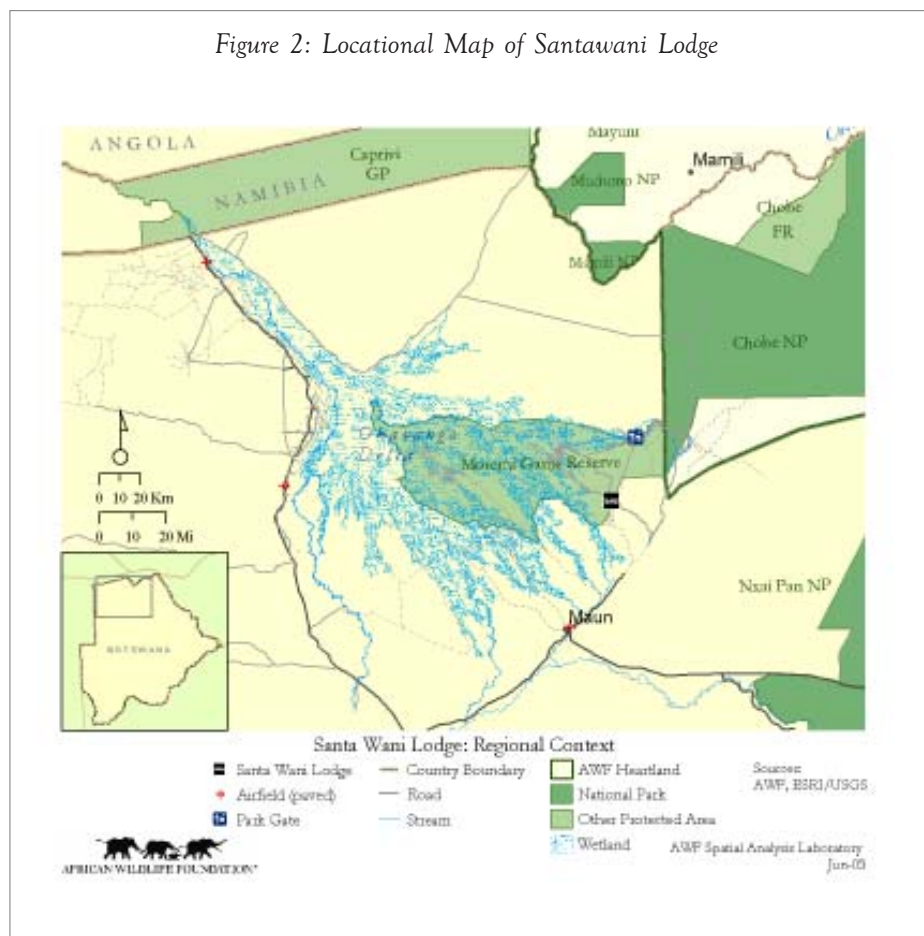
Figure 1: Photo of new chalets at Santawani



towards the total cost of phase one reconstruction. This amounted to US\$110,000, with STMT providing the balance of US\$50,000 from their capital reinvestment fund. An additional sum of around US\$20,000 was provided as a grant from the Four Corners Initiative to cover items such as fees for a quantity surveyor and environmental impact assessment, and capacity building for community members to strengthen their business planning and management skills. Prior to reopening, twenty community members who would eventually run the lodge, together with the existing staff from the already

chalets costing US\$56 per night on a self-catering basis. Full-time employment has been created for 12 community members, eight of whom are women, who will enjoy a salary plus a profit-related bonus. It is envisaged that the lodge will be expanded in a second phase of reconstruction which will see the accommodation increase to 12 chalets supporting the employment of 23 community members. The area has two tourist seasons, with the peak season running from March to July and the low season running from August to February.

Figure 2: Locational Map of Santawani Lodge



To strengthen the marketing of the lodge, AWF assisted STMT to train a marketing officer, also a member of the Sankuyo community, based in a strategically positioned office near to Maun airport. The business plan forecast that the lodge would operate at 40% occupancy in its first year of operation, increasing to 70% by year three. In fact in the months after the official opening in June 2004 occupancy was better than anticipated at 60%. The forecast for first year net profits, after tax, of US\$65,000 looked set to be bettered.

With the eventual expansion of the lodge under phase two to 12 chalets, the projected net profit is predicted to grow to close to \$110,000 per year. Community benefits are in fact higher and could amount to more than US\$160,000 a year - worth, on average, around \$2,000 per household per year (Botswana is a middle-income country with a per capita GDP of US\$ 9,200, largely due to the export of diamonds, tourism and beef ¹). This

includes allowance for some members of the community enjoying salaries and bonuses, while the STMT will receive a management fee equivalent to 10% of the gross profit and also receive the full net profit. The latter two amounts will be spent on community-level benefits. To date these have included building environmentally-friendly toilets for all households, building a social centre, sponsoring student from the village for tourism-related courses and supporting HIV/Aids orphans. Botswana has amongst the highest HIV/Aids prevalence rates in the world; an estimated 37.3% of the population is HIV-positive, life expectancy has dropped in recent

established Kaziikini Campsite, were trained in various aspects of lodge and campsite management

The lodge, situated near the southern gate to Moremi Game Reserve (see figure 2), reopened under community management in June 2004 at a ceremony attended by the Assistant Minister for Labour and Home Affairs. Under phase one, six two-bedded chalets have been restored together with a reception area. Local materials such as lava rock, grass thatch and timber have been extensively used in the renovation. Pricing is initially pitched slightly below the industry standard with

years from 72 to less than 34 years and there is estimated to be close to 80,000 Aids orphans in a total population of 1.7 million (more than one orphan for every 22 people). In recognition of this, STMT has also contributed US\$11,000 to tackling HIV/Aids in their local area.

The lodge complements STMT's other two community managed tourist enterprises, the cultural village and campsite, as well as the hunting camp and two photographic camps operated by private sector partners on land sub-leased from the Trust.

Wildlife Management Areas - NG 33 and 34

Sankoyo village is situated in a parcel of land known as NG 34. In addition, this 8,600 hectare block of land is the site of Shandareka Cultural Village and Kaziikini Campsite, both run by STMT, a photographic lodge, Starlings Camp, and a hunting safari lodge, the latter two run by STMT's joint venture partners. Although there are no settlements in NG33, this block is the site of Santawani Lodge and also a camp for a wild dog research project.

NG 33 and 34 lies to the extreme eastern end of the Okovango Delta. The terrain includes dryland and old floodplain, mostly mixed scrub with some broken mopane woodland (*Colophospermum mopane*). There are no wetland areas and flooding, though once common, now occurs less frequently. The formerly flooded areas together with relic riverine woodlands are undergoing rapid change, with encroachment of acacia on the flood plains and change in species composition in the riverine woodland. The area has a high density of large mammals including elephants, zebra, giraffe, a wide range of antelopes including sable and red lechwe, leopards and lions. Elephants and zebra utilise the area as a corridor between Moreni Game Reserve and Chobe National Park. Threatened species occurring in the area include the giant bullfrog, lappet-faced vulture and African wild dogs. Being outside of protected areas and therefore not subject to their regulations, tourists can enjoy both day and night game drives, offering them the opportunity to view seldom seen nocturnal species such as aardvarks, serval cats and leopards, as well as trekking on foot.

Risks and Threats

The long-term viability of enterprises based on wildlife tourism is obviously dependent on the continuing presence of large numbers of wild animals, in this case elephants, plains game and predators. Significant declines in the country's wildlife populations have been

blamed on the veterinary cordon fences that criss-cross the country, with one – the Southern Buffalo Fence (designed to keep potentially foot and mouth infected buffalo from coming into contact with cattle in the country's beef export zone) – passing just to the south of the land concessions awarded to the Sankuyo community. Critics of the fences point out that many were erected without prior environmental, social or economic impact assessments – although this is now being done. Government policy in Botswana appears to be somewhat contradictory with policies and measures, such as the game-proof fences, put in place to facilitate and protect the beef export trade to the EU, apparently adversely affecting the country's more valuable international tourism business. Recognising these potential conflicts of interest, an inter-ministerial committee on fences has been formed to address these issues but critics suggest that to date no mitigating action has been taken to relieve or reverse critical impacts on wildlife. These are said to include: disruption of seasonal movement of wildlife; death of animals due to entanglement; group fragmentation and isolation; denial of access to water and seasonal habitats; improved access for poachers due to construction of service roads; increased disturbance of wildlife by vehicles; concentration of animals and resultant destruction of habitat; and direct habitat loss from fence construction. Significantly, a recent independent report on the Botswana beef export has suggested that the 'industry is in crisis... A trade that was once profitable is now marginal.'² It goes on to point out that the Botswana Meat Commission has run at a loss in all but one year since 1998/99, suggesting that this is due to decreasing prices for beef exports, increasing costs and decreasing efficiency of production.

The unusual feature of the Santawani Lodge model is that it is owned, managed and run entirely by the local community – an arrangement said to be viewed with scepticism in many quarters. Most tourist facilities in Botswana are managed by established safari companies and the industry is second only to diamonds in the magnitude of its contribution to the GDP. However, much of the industries' earnings are lost to the country through payments to external agents and because many large tourism companies are foreign-owned. In addition, even though local communities have been awarded land concessions, in the past these have mostly been sub-leased to commercial safari and hunting operators who have enjoyed the majority of the benefits.

With Botswana's focus on the 'low volume -high value' segment of the global tourist market, expectations of clients is likely to be high and the level of management of tourist facilities needs to be equally high to match this. The risk is that community management may fall short of the required standard, with the risk perhaps being higher as external project-based support, such as provided by AWF, is eventually wound-down or removed. Although the community appears to be confident of its capabilities in this area, citing their experience in managing other community owned tourist facilities and considerable experience of the broader hospitality industry through working in other lodges and hotels in the Okavango area, external assessments have been less positive. At the outset, the People and Nature Trust highlighted lack of management capacity within the community as a serious constraint. To address this weakness, AWF provided considerable investment in training to equip community members with the necessary management and marketing skills and assigned an experienced enterprise specialist to the project under the overall direction of the Conservation Services Centre in AWF's office at Kasane. Arrangements have been made for AWF to continue providing business support services beyond the lifetime of the Four Corners Initiative. However, the proceedings of the Fourth National CBNRM Forum meeting, held in Gaborone, Botswana in June 2003, states that: 'CBNRM in Botswana is characterised more by failures than successes' and goes on to suggest reasons for the failures: 'The concept of community managed enterprise projects is questionable; capacity building support (time and resources) is underestimated; programme scope and coverage have been over-ambitious and community "ownership" of projects is insufficient. Furthermore, business advisory services have been inadequate. Thus support for project identification, formulation and implementation have been inadequate. Also Local Government structures (including TAC, District Councils & traditional authorities) were largely ignored/ bypassed/ sidelined.' And, further challenging the validity of community managed business it states: 'The newly proposed strategy is to ensure viability of business-related projects by shifting emphasis away from approach that CBOs should become entrepreneurs towards an approach where CBOs create an environment that encourages entrepreneurs to invest with confidence by providing infrastructure, security of tenure and a regulatory framework'.

The true test of the success of the Santawani model will be how well the lodge performs in the coming years; is it a successful, profitable, viable business? Early indications were, however, encouraging with occupancy levels and profitability exceeding that forecast in the business plan. An additional factor operating in the community's favour is that the lodge is mainly targeting 'medium-level' self-drive tourists from South Africa, who are perhaps less demanding than high-end visitors from overseas.

Effective marketing of the lodge is a prerequisite for success; without adequate marketing the lodge will inevitably fail, as have many previous community development projects in Africa. The success rate for small business start-ups in the tourism sector in Africa is as low as one in eight. In recognition of this, AWF has provided support in this important area. Initially, in 2003, AWF assisted the community with logistics for a booking office in Maun, the nearest main town and hub for tourism in northern Botswana, located some 80 kilometres from the lodge. The booking office was moved in 2004 to a more strategic location, near to the airport in Maun, with a view to capturing more clientele. Help was also provided to identify a suitable community member and train him to serve as the lodge's marketing officer. However the marketing officer, Dux Mareja, reports that marketing is still a challenge as most tourists arriving at the airport already have their itineraries booked. Marketing efforts are therefore now targeting self-drive tourists from South Africa coming to visit nearby Moremi Game Reserve and Chobe National Park. In addition, AWF has partnered with the Regional Tourism Association of Southern Africa (RETOSA), which markets tourist destinations within the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Further afield, AWF has assisted with marketing the lodge in USA, as well as at South Africa's premier tourist fair and the African Tourism Association conference held in Lusaka, Zambia in 2003. Within the USA, AWF marketing personnel in the Washington office are piloting a marketing approach which targets clients who favour supporting tourist destinations that reinvest profits directly into poverty reduction and conservation. A useful advantage enjoyed by the lodge is the fact that it is already well known by many tourists who previously stayed there when it was run by the private sector. Currently the lodge has to contend with relatively little competition - there are no other facilities offering accommodation to tourist in the immediate vicinity, except for STMT's own Kaziikini Campsite, which



targets a different market segment. However, there are other options for tourists a little further afield and new facilities may open over time, requiring the lodge to remain competitive on price and service and to continue to mount an effective on-going marketing campaign.

Intra-community conflict is a major area of risk for any community-based enterprise. Inevitably not all community members will enjoy the same level of benefits and this can result in dissatisfaction and jealousy. In the case of Santawani Lodge, some members enjoy private benefits from salaries and profit-related bonuses whilst others enjoy only community level benefits. Critical in this regard is how transparent and open the staff recruitment process is: are the community members selected for direct employment in the lodge those with the best qualifications, experience and skills? In the case of community level benefits, are these distributed in a fair and transparent manner? Some benefits have been provided to all households, such as provision of environmentally friendly toilets, others are accessible to the entire community, such as the school and clinic, but others are more selective, such as sponsorship for tourism related training courses. The main factor behind all these issues is the governance of STMT; how democratic is the selection of the various Trust management committees, how responsive are the committees to the opinions and needs of the ordinary members, and crucially, how transparent, open and honest is the financial reporting – overall is the Trust accountable and responsive to its membership. In the past there have been problems with the governance of the Trust. The performance of the first representative committee did not satisfy all community members and there were reportedly allegations of theft and corruption. However, encouragingly the members were able to elect a new committee.

There has also been controversy surrounding the selection of the Trust's joint venture partners and in this regard the institutional arrangements for sub-leasing concessions to commercial partners brings its own problems. The communities are awarded land concessions by the Land Board on the basis of 15-year leases. Where these are sub-leased, for example to licensed safari hunting operators, this is done on the basis of a one year probationary period followed by periods covered by sub-leases for consecutive periods of one, three, five and a further five years, respectively. This arrangement is designed to protect the communities from mismanagement, corruption or maltreatment, giving them ample opportunity to opt to change their

joint venture partners. An unintended consequence, however, has been that this system has served to encourage extortion and bribery. In relation to STMT, controversy has arisen where the joint venture partners selected by the Trust management have not been the ones who tendered the highest sub-lease payments, raising unanswered questions about how and why the joint venture partners were chosen.

Although community level benefits are undoubtedly valued by residents of Sankuyo, experience elsewhere has shown that household and individual benefits, such as direct employment, are more highly valued. Community level benefits, such as schools and clinics, do not provide people with their daily needs. In Sankuyo, where cattle rearing, formerly an important component of livelihoods, is now banned under Botswana's veterinary zoning regulations, employment is likely to be even more important. Although Santawani Lodge is only creating 12 full-time jobs in phase one, eventually this is anticipated to increase to 23 as phase two comes on stream. In total the Trust's conservation based enterprises directly employ around 70 people, including 40 women. The total population of Sankuyo is around 400 and on average in Botswana family size is 4.85 people. So, in Sankuyo there is likely to be around 80 households supported by 70 full-time jobs in the conservation based enterprises owned and managed by the Trust. However, the salaries, even including profit-related bonuses, appear to be very low; at the lodge on average these are around US\$70 per month. This is low by African standards but even lower when related to Botswana's per capita GDP of US\$9,200.

The justification for investing public money in the Santawani Lodge project was the promise of combining poverty alleviation with achieving conservation objectives. The conservation goals included securing the migration corridor between the two nearby protected areas, conserving elephants and controlling poaching. It was envisaged that the conservation goals would be achieved by providing tangible incentives for the local community to engage in sustainable natural resource management practices, for example by securing critical land in the migration corridor and through the implementation of anti-poaching measures. In this way it was anticipated, in the words of the original project document, that the benefits would 'increase human tolerance to key species of wildlife such as elephants, baboons, giraffe, buffaloes, and zebra'.



To fund specific conservation activities it is intended that 5% of the gross operating profit from the lodge will be ploughed back into activities such as provision of more waterholes, reforestation and others as determined by the area-wide conservation plan for Sankuyo. There are two types of risk associated with this approach. Firstly, funds intended for the conservation fee may be channelled to other purposes, such as providing individual or community level benefits. Secondly, activities to be supported by the fund require careful evaluation and vetting. The Environmental Impact Assessment Report for Santawani Lodge, commissioned by the Four Corners Initiative, highlights the possible adverse affects of providing artificial water holes in the area. It points out that providing water points in hitherto waterless areas tends to attract water dependent species such as impala and wildebeest, which can modify the habitat to the detriment of rarer species such as sable antelope. Nonetheless provision of water holes is amongst the proposed 'conservation' activities.

Lessons Learned

For the Santawani Lodge project to be a success, justifying the investment of public money, it needs to meet both poverty alleviation and conservation objectives. In fact, in the long-term both are intimately connected – if the wildlife resource diminishes the *raison d'être* for the lodge will be lost. It is too soon to judge whether the project has been successful in terms of these two objectives. Early indications are that the community lodge is operating successfully and that benefits have been distributed widely in the community but neither detailed financial information nor feedback from community members is yet available. One area of potentials concern is that there appears to be no formal agreement committing the community to abide by the proposal to channel 5% of gross profits to conservation activities. A lesson for future projects is that the conservation logic of the enterprise should be an explicit part of the formal financing agreement between the donor and beneficiary community.

The business model implemented for the Santawani Lodge is unusual in that the community opted to manage and run the facility themselves rather than following the more usual route of sub-leasing to established commercial operators. This model has the advantage of channelling far more of the benefits to community members but also has considerably greater risk attached. Unless the community can effectively market, manage and maintain the lodge and the associated land

allocations then little or no benefits will accrue. In this regard the Santawani Lodge project and the Sankuyo community possess a number of qualities and features that can perhaps be considered as essential, or at least highly desirable, for the success of similar community managed project. These include: the product offered satisfies consumer requirements and meets a real and growing demand; established institutional capacity in the form of STDT, which has been in existence for 10 years; prior experience of managing community owned enterprises, specifically those in the tourism sector; experience within the community of working in other lodges and hotels within the Okavango region and in Santawani Lodge when it was under private sector management; existence of complementary tourism infrastructure such as airstrips and tour vehicles; availability of very significant community owned savings (US\$50,000 derived from sales of the community's hunting quota) allowing the community to match donor investment; low density population level and relatively small number of beneficiaries; located close-by a world famous wildlife tourism attractions (Okavango Delta is a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and also within easy reach of the regional tourism hub at Maun; residual goodwill resulting from 25 years operation under the previous lodge operators; access to business advisory services and training through the Four Corners Initiative and AWF'S Conservation Services Centre in Kasane, Botswana; strong incentive to engage in wildlife-based enterprises due to being located within a newly created cattle-free zone; and an enabling and supportive policy and institutional environment. In addition Santawani Lodge complements the community's other conservation based enterprises.

(Endnotes)

¹ Although Botswana has a relatively high per capita GDP – almost 80 times that of the poorest African countries – wealth distribution in the country is very skewed: 47% of the population live below the poverty line and unemployment is 23.8%. Source: CIA, The World Factbook, 2005.

² C. Stevens and J. Kennan (2005) Botswana Beef Exports and Trade Policy. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK



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