



Celebrating the International Year of Biodiversity with Success Stories from the Field - Protected Areas Pay in Namibia

26 JANUARY 2010 | Protected areas have long been the cornerstone of conservation efforts throughout the world and the GEF has been a major investor in protected areas since its inception. The global community's achievement of protecting 10% of the earth's terrestrial surface area within protected areas is arguably the signature accomplishment of the Convention of Biological Diversity. However, creating and demarcating protected areas is the easy part.



All countries are challenged to find creative ways to finance the management and administration of protected areas in order that these crown jewels of conservation can actually meet their conservation objectives.

In Namibia, the GEF is funding a protected area project (Catalyzing Sustainability of Protected Area Systems: Strengthening the Protected Area Network (SPAN), www.span.org.na) implemented by UNDP and executed by the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism that is addressing this issue head-on, and early signs from the project are encouraging.

[Click here to see a Map of Namibia's Protected Area Network](#)

[Watch the Namibia's National Parks Photo Gallery](#)

Namibia lies at the heart of the species-rich Namib-Karoo-Kaokoveld Desert, one of the WWF's Global 200 Ecoregions. The country has a high level of endemism and is an evolutionary hub for groups of organisms including melons, succulent plants, false spiders, geckos and tortoises. Namibia has established an impressive system of state-managed protected areas as the centerpiece of its conservation program. Namibia's conservation efforts have also made the country a stronghold for populations of large animals such as black rhinoceros (almost a third of the world's population) and cheetah.



The protected area system comprises 20 national protected areas, covering 17 % of the country's 823,680 square kilometers of terrestrial area. The GEF project is designed to maximize the full potential of the protected area system by: 1) improving the policy framework for financial support for protected areas, 2) increasing management capacity, and 3) implementing new protected area management partnerships.

“The SPAN Project has provided us with the necessary resources and expertise to realize the vision of our protected areas. The Namibian Government has come to understand, through the Project interventions, the importance of our protected areas not only for conservation but also as engines for economic development, and subsequently increased its annual investment in our protected area system by over 300% in the last four years. Moreover, the SPAN Project has created an awareness amongst the Namibian public of the importance of the management and development of protected areas, critical habitats and important plant and animal species in order to preserve biological diversity and ecosystems for use by present and future generations of Namibians and to generate global benefits. It also brought us inspiration, innovation and new thinking about protected area management.”

Ben Beytell, Director, Directorate of Parks and Wildlife Management, Ministry of Environment and Tourism

The project has achieved impressive results to date, none more so than the economic analysis undertaken and associated advances in protected area financing. A comprehensive analysis of the protected area system indicated that protected areas contributed 3.1-6.3 percent of the GDP through park based tourism only, without including other ecosystem services values, and the economic rate of return on the government investment over 20 years was as much as 23 percent if the tourism concession potential is fully realized. Using these study results, the Government increased the annual budget for park management and development by 300 percent in the last four years. The Ministry of Finance also agreed to ear-mark 25 percent of the park entrance revenue to be reinvested in park and wildlife management through a trust fund, providing up to \$2 million in additional sustainable financing per year. In addition, the National Policy on Tourism and Wildlife Concessions on State Land was approved by the Cabinet in 2007, to maximize the economic potential of protected areas. In the last two years since the policy has been implemented, more than 20 new tourism and hunting concessions were approved, generating over \$1 million per year as fees payable to the Government. A majority of these concession rights in protected area granted to

communities neighboring these areas, thus directly benefiting local people from revenue and jobs created from the concessions. Finally, park business plans were developed for six national parks, enabling the park managers to define costs and identify and execute ways to meet those costs.

If protected areas make money in Namibia, clearly they can elsewhere. It's time we started managing protected areas as economic assets not just biological ones.

Project Facts: Duration: 2006-2012, GEF grant US\$ 8.550 million, Co-finance US\$ 33.677 million, Project cost US\$ 42.227 million.

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Editor's note: To celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity, every two weeks we will highlight a GEF project that is creatively addressing the challenges to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. These examples of good practice in conservation and sustainable use will demonstrate the contributions that biodiversity makes to local and national economies and that halting the loss of biodiversity is indeed possible.