

Scandinavian Seminar College: African Experiences of Policies and Practices Supporting Sustainable Development

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP IN THE RICHTERSVELD NATIONAL PARK
(SOUTH AFRICA)

By

Dr Robbie Robinson¹

Presented to the

Scandinavian Seminar College Workshop in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

(November 9 - 11, 1998)

ABSTRACT

The Richtersveld National Park lies in the north-western corner of South Africa and represents one of the major ecological areas not protected by the national parks' system prior to its proclamation. It is the first fully 'Contractual National Park'. The traditional land use is integrated in the management of the area and is in keeping with the South African National Parks' policy on contractual national parks. The reasons for the establishment of the area as a national park is described and its relevance to the conservation of the country's biodiversity covered as well as its contribution to the objectives of the National Parks Act of South Africa.

The conflict and resolution of problems are summarised as well as presenting the benefits derived from the partnership for the community.

The Richtersveld National Park is also considered in the broader context of challenges facing the national parks system in South Africa.

¹Dr Robinson is the immediate past Chief Executive of the South African National Parks and is currently an Environmental Consultant. Address - P O Box 470, Plettenberg Bay 6600, SOUTH AFRICA. Cell.: ++82 7721898. E-mail:<DrRobbie@icon.co.za>.

1. INTRODUCTION

As was the case in North America, the European pioneers during the nineteenth century dramatically reduced the wildlife (or 'game' as it is commonly referred to) in South Africa. The analogy goes further, as in both the USA and in South Africa the need to protect the pioneers from wildlife changed to protecting the wildlife from the slaughter of the hunters and the establishment of wildlife sanctuaries became evident (Siegfried and Lombard, 1996)

South Africa, however, lagged behind the USA in establishing protected areas and it was only on 13 June 1894, with the proclamation of the Pongola Reserve, situated near the present town of Piet Retief that the first publicly owned game reserve in Africa was created. Other reserves followed and the Sabie Reserve, the forerunner of the Kruger National Park was established on 26 March 1898 (Carruthers, 1995). The Pongola Reserve is no longer in existence but the Sabie Reserve is celebrating its centenary this year. Yellowstone National Park established in 1872 became the flagship of not only the national Parks of the USA but the world and South Africa followed suit by establishing the Kruger National Park in 1926. It too, has become a giant in protected areas (PAs) and is regarded as the flagship of South Africa's national parks.

During the twentieth century as the conservation movement gained momentum more PAs were established and today there are some 600 national parks and nature reserves included in South Africa's system of publicly owned protected areas. Although the original rationale for the setting aside of these areas was to protect the game other criteria including scenic beauty, natural features, marine and biodiversity are used as the system of PAs in South Africa evolved. The existing national parks and areas controlled by the South African National Parks are depicted in Fig.1.

2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RICHTERSVELD NATIONAL PARK

Starting as early as 1830 when Dr. E. Richter, an inspector of the "Rhenish Missionary Society", visited the area now referred to as the Namaqualand, there has been interest, intrigue, mystery, controversy and conflict over the Richtersveld.

The north-western Cape or Richtersveld region was originally inhabited by the San (bushmen) who were displaced by invading Khoi tribes about 1500 years ago. Archaeological artifacts have been discovered by early explorers and more recently by researchers providing evidence of the distribution and life style of early communities within the region dating back to this time. The resident local descendants of these tribes, known as the Nama, continue to utilise the

resources in the area, mainly through pastoral activities. Due to the uniqueness of the area it has been earmarked for conservation status of one sort or another since about 1970.

In 1975 the South African National Parks (Formally known as the National Parks Board of South Africa) started becoming involved in attempting to establish a national park in the area. The frustrations and disappointments of various parties not communicating their aims, desires and concerns with each other caused fear, mistrust and misunderstanding amongst the inhabitants of the surrounding area. It was only when the local residents were permitted to have a say, in the manner in which their communal land would be managed that the air cleared and a negotiated agreement was possible.

3. WHY A 'NATIONAL PARK' IN THE RICHTERSVELD?

To answer this question one firstly has to define the concept of a national park within the broad spectrum of conservation and the South African National Parks (SANP) has accepted the IUCN's 1969 definition which states:

"A national park is a relatively large area,

1. where one or several ecosystems are not materially altered by human exploitation and occupation, where plant and animal species, geomorphological or aesthetic features which contain a natural landscape of great beauty, and

2. where the highest competent authority of the country has taken steps to prevent or to eliminate as soon as possible exploitation or occupation in the whole area and to enforce effectively the respect of ecological, geomorphological or aesthetic features which have led to its establishment, and

3. Where visitors are allowed to enter, under special conditions, for inspirational, educative, cultural and recreational purposes."

The SANP in its policy statement of 1989 states that the South African system of national parks should represent the most important natural assets in the country.

The Richtersveld National Park (162 445 ha) is delineated by a complex geology and resultant geomorphology - the rugged Van der Sterr and Rosyntjieberg are mountains which form the western and southern boundaries respectively while the park is bordered in the north and east by the Orange River which is the international border between South Africa and Namibia.

The area is regarded as the only true mountainous desert region within South Africa and it supports a rich diversity of succulents. Some 50% of the plant species growing here are endemic to the Richtersveld, of which the 'halfmens' *Pachypodium namaquanum* and the

quiver tree *Aloe pillansii* are good examples. The veld-type is classified as Succulent-Karoo by Acocks (1953).

Large mammals are scarce, but a remnant population of Hartmann's zebra (*Equus zebra hartmannae*) occurs. Grey rhebuck, klipspringer, duiker and steenbok are still encountered while predators such as leopard, caracal and black-backed jackal are fairly common. The micro-habitats are plentiful which contributes to a diversity of herpetological species.

The Richtersveld region with its impressive scenic attributes, distinctive flora and other unique faunal components makes the area an ideal candidate for inclusion in the South African system of national parks.

4. AN OVERVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS RESULTING IN THE PROCLAMATION OF THE RICHTERSVELD NATIONAL PARK.

1. Recommendations submitted on 14 June 1972 in the final report of the CT-Working Group of the Republic of South Africa's National Programme to the International Biological Programme (IBP) states, inter alia, the following:

"(5) Conservation Area in the Richtersveld: The Richtersveld is an area of particularly attractive desert scenery and unique endemic vegetation which is threatened by collectors and by development. The Working Group recommends that the establishment of a large conservation area in the Richtersveld should be considered of national importance."

2. A letter was written to the Prime Minister of the RSA (15 August, 1972) by the President of the Wildlife Society of Southern Africa requesting that a national park be established in the Richtersveld. This was the first suggestion of the SANP's involvement in the area and is considered by the author as a very significant contribution by a body that has played a leading role in conservation in Southern Africa.

3. In an internal report (Nov. 1973), the Department of Agriculture strongly recommends that the Richtersveld be re-zoned. The National Veldtrust via its President, E. Adler, states, "A golden opportunity now presents itself to establish. A nature reserve and game park which will not only be of inestimable value to ecologists and scientists of many disciplines, but will also be a tremendous attraction to tourists"(Adler, 1973).

4. Edwards (1973, unpublished) regards the region's flora as unique and recommends its conservation.

5. On 28 November 1975 the SANP took the following resolution: 'That negotiations be started with the government departments concerned for the acquisition of land recommended in Annexure "M".'

6. Between 1975 and 1982 the SANP discussed the proposed national park with various state Departments and local committees and a Working Committee was set up to promote the establishment of the national park.

7. One of the most significant events that made the proclamation of the Richtersveld National Park possible was the amendment to the National Parks Act in 1973. This amendment enabled the NPB to establish contractual national parks; i.e. national parks managed in accordance with a contractual agreement and not necessarily State controlled. (This is explained below.)

8. The above amendment to the National Parks Act also enabled the SANP to establish 'Contractual National Parks' wherein mining and prospecting under certain conditions could be undertaken.

9. Contractual agreement achieved in 1988 between the following parties for ratification:

- i. the Minister of Environment and Water Affairs;
- ii. the Minister of Local Government and Agriculture;
- iii. the SANP; and
- iv. The Northern Richtersveld Management Board.

1. On 20 March 1989 Mr Willem de Wet, who acted on behalf of the community of the Richtersveld, applied for an interdict to stop the signing of the contract. The community was, however, not opposed to a park per se but felt that they wanted to be involved more directly and that the Northern Richtersveld Management Board had misrepresented them.

The negotiations that ensued involved:

- i. the Northern Richtersveld Resident's Association;
- ii. the Northern Richtersveld Management Board (the local authority responsible for the area);
- iii. the Department of Local Government and Agriculture in the House of Representatives;
- iv. the Department of Environment Affairs;
- v. the SANP;
- vi. lawyers acting for the various parties;

vii. advisors to the community which included environmentalists who supported the integration of the interests of local people and conservation;

viii. representatives of 'Surplus People Project'; and

ix. the broad interested community.

1. During 1989 three meetings (each lasting two days) were held in Kuboes and the assistance of Dr. Norbert Jurgens, a botanist from Germany and Prof. Eugene Moll, a botanist from the University of Cape Town (regarded as impartial persons) was enlisted to act as facilitators at the meeting.

The differences between the 1989 and the 1990 contracts can be summarised as follows;

i. Previously the term of contract was set at 99 years. This was changed to a period of 24 years thereafter 6 years written notice of termination.

ii. The 1989 contract made provision for three portions in the proposed national park. Portion A, 65% would be cleared of grazing stock within six months and subsequently B and C grazing would be phased out. In the 1990 the existing land-use was accepted and the following stock numbers agreed to: 4 700 small stock units on a permanent basis and 1 900 small stock units on a seasonal basis.

iii. An Advisory Committee from the SANP, the Richtersveld Management Board and the Department of Agriculture would determine the phasing-out of grazing in portions B and C. The 1990 contract made it clear that stock units would only be reduced on a voluntary basis when alternative land was made available to the pastoralists.

iv. In the 1989 contract, fifty cents per ha, per annum would be made available for national park purposes which would mean that after portion A was made available after six months, a sum of R50 000 would be paid to the Northern Richtersveld Management Board and followed by portions B and C as grazing was phased out. Whereas in 1990 contract provision was made for a Trust to be established consisting of three trustees appointed by the residents of Richtersveld. The full amount of 50c/ha/year or R80 000 would be paid to the Trust. Provision in the contract was made that the nature and extent of the lease tariff could be changed after 5 years had elapsed by the Management Committee.

v. Management and planning was the responsibility of the SANP in the 1989 contract whereas in the 1990 contract a Management Plan Committee was provided for consisting of eight members; four nominated by the SANP (not necessary employees) and four members elected at a public meeting in the Northern Richtersveld (one representative from the Northern Richtersveld Management Board, one

representative from the pastoralists and one from each of the two villages, Kuboes and Sanddrift, which are situated on the boundary of the park.

vi. The Management Plan Committee could decide future changes in land-use.

1. This new contract was prepared for a signing ceremony to have been held on November 10, 1990.

2. Minister Julies' (Minister of Health Services and Welfare) refusal to sign the Richtersveld National Park's contract two days before the ceremony was to have taken place - after all the arrangements had been made and expenses incurred - resulted in wide-spread resentment towards the Minister and the Labour Party which he represented.

After refusing to sign the contract, Minister Julies 'negotiated' with the communities of north and south Richtersveld to include an additional Clause which stated that the southern Richtersveld should also benefit from the establishment of the park. This, however, already corresponded to an agreement entered into between the two Residents' Associations of Richtersveld. All parties eventually agreed upon the contract after more than 18 months of persistent hard negotiations. The SANP and the Richtersveld community agreed to jointly draw up a management plan outlining how the SANP would manage the park for the communities, and the pastoralists would continue their traditional grazing of the area with a possibility of voluntary reduction of stocks should compensatory land be made available.

After negotiations, backed by the interdict, the SANP agreed that stock farmers (pastoralists) could continue to graze the area and that pastoralists who were prepared to voluntarily reduce the agreed upon stock units in the national park would be given compensatory land on which to graze equivalent amount of stock units.

3. On July 20, 1991 at a ceremony in Kuboes in the Richtersveld the formal signing of the contractual agreement took place.

Parties to the agreement were:

i. SANP;

ii. Minister of Environmental Affairs;

iii. Minister of Local Government and Agricultural in the House of Representatives in his capacity as trustee of the area for the benefit of the inhabitants in terms of the Rural Areas Act;

iv. Mr. Willem de Wet, a resident of the area in his capacity as applicant in the court case of 20 March 1989 to prevent the signing of an agreement to establish the park.

5. THE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT.

Due to various inhibiting factors, including the prohibition of prospecting, mining, inclusion of privately owned land in national parks; the National Parks Act was amended and promulgated in 1983. This amendment enabled the NPB to proclaim two sorts of national parks, i.e. national parks solely owned by the State and managed in accordance with the original Act, and contractual national parks managed in accordance with a contractual agreement. This latter facility was used in the proclamation of the community owned Richtersveld National Park.

The more important aspects of the agreement were:

In the preamble of the signed contract it is recorded that the parties agree to the establishment of a national park. The Minister of Local Government and Agriculture in the House of Representatives and the Management Board are prepared to declare a national park in terms of the National Parks Act. The State is prepared to make available certain State land for farming purposes to the Minister of Local Government and Agriculture, House of Representatives in exchange for the right to use certain land for the purposes of a national park. Mr. Willem de Wet desires that a national park be established in the area and is prepared to withdraw his court application. The SANP is prepared to develop and manage the national park and undertakes not to use expropriation as a means to obtaining access and control of the area.

The Minister of Local Government and Agriculture and the Management Board makes available land, about 162 000 hectares, for 24 years. The agreement will continue thereafter subject to 6 years written notice by any of the parties. The land is available to the SANP for the development and management of a national park in accordance with a management plan.

It is furthermore recorded that the State, represented by the Department of Public Works and Land Affairs, undertakes to make available to the Minister of Local Government and Agriculture an area of State land, comprising approximately 66 000 hectares. This land will be available for stock farming purposes in accordance with the management plan. The Department of Local Government, Housing and Agriculture in the House of Representatives undertakes to develop the State land in order that it can be used for stock farming purposes. Tenants presently occupying the said State land will vacate the land by the end of June 1991. In the event that the State land is no longer necessary for the purposes of this agreement, the State land will be returned to the Department of Public Works.

The purpose of the Management Plan Committee shall be to prepare a management plan for the park. The Management Plan will accept present land use until such time as such land use changes in terms of the Management Plan Committee, subject to the following condition that as regards stock farming, the parties agree to the following stock numbers: 4 700 small stock units permanently; 1 900 small stock units seasonally.

The SANP will pay an amount of 50c per hectare, i.e. approximately R80 000 per year to the Richtersveld Community Trust annually. The Management Plan Committee can amend the nature and amount compensated after the first five years. The compensation will be adjusted upwards every five years in proportion to the inflation rate. The SANP will establish a succulent nursery and the net profit will be paid to the Community Trust. Residents of the northern Richtersveld will get preference as employees of the park. The SANP agrees not to use expropriation as a method to acquire park area or part thereof.

The SANP and the Minister of Local Government and Agriculture of the House of Representatives will act as founders of the Trust. The three additional trustees will be further parties to the trust agreement. The Trust shall act as a charitable and/or educational institution. Within the discretion of the Trustees, the trust may itself perform the actual charitable and/or educational work or it may act as a conduit for the purposes of distributing its assets to other charitable institutions. The Trust shall be for the benefit of the inhabitants of northern Richtersveld, provided that half of the Trust's assets can be used for the benefit of the inhabitants of southern Richtersveld and/or Namaqualand. The Trust shall specifically be entitled to administer and apply the net income for educational purposes, the awarding of bursaries, acquisition, development and management of community centres, schools, creches, old age homes, clinics for the benefit and to the general advantage of inhabitants of northern Richtersveld, southern Richtersveld and Namaqualand. The Trust will not perform its charitable and/or educational work for profit. The Trustees will be elected by inhabitants of northern Richtersveld at a public meeting of residents called for this purpose.

The Trust is to seek exemption from payment of income tax.

6.A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RICHTERSVELD NATIONAL PARK(RNP).

Situated in the north-western corner of South Africa within the large loop of the Orange River bordering the Republic of Namibia (16o54'E to 17o24'E Longitude and 28o02'S to 28o29'S Latitude) the RNP (Fig. 2) represents the Succulent-Karoo biome and is the best example of a mountainous desert to be found in South Africa. A unique combination of environmental factors; climate, geology and geomorphology, have resulted in a magnificent remoteness and rugged mountain landscape with an exceptional wide diversity of microhabitats. This has promoted the evolution of a biodiversity far higher than would be expected in view of the aridity of the region. It is

especially the botanical diversity, much of which remains to be discovered and described, that has attracted international scientific attention.

The RNP is in close proximity to four villages (Kuboes, Sanddrift, Eksteenfontein and Lekkersing) and is one of the few remaining regions in South Africa where nomadic pastoralism is still practiced.

7. THE CONCEPT OF CONTRACTUAL NATIONAL PARKS

The concept of a 'contractual national park' is a conservation approach, which was totally new to South Africa and its conservation community and has been initiated and implemented by the SANP during the past decade with significant success.

An amendment to the National Parks Act (Act 23 of 1983) makes provision for areas in private, communal or government possession to be managed by the SANP in accordance to a contractual agreement between the proprietor and the SANP. Such areas are termed contractual national parks and are PAs with all the characteristics and legal protection of existing national parks.

8. DISCUSSION

Although South Africa has a well managed system of national parks; there is still much room for improvement. Highlights of the achievements of the SANP, were given at the World Conservation Congress in Montreal (Canada) in 1996 (Robinson, 1997), indicating that the system of national parks have proven extremely successful. However, looking back over the 31 years of my career in the organization, I would like to discuss two problems that inhibited the development of national parks becoming a truly powerful force in the New South Africa, as I maintain it should. These two, being the conflict between the two-tier governmental system and the impact of the 'Apartheid system'.

Two-tier governmental system.

Dr Jane Carruthers (1995) points out that after the original concern to have game reserves set aside it lost a lot of impetus after the Union of South Africa was established in 1910 due to conflict between the central and provincial governments. The responsibility for the protection of nature was allocated to each of the four provinces, while state land remained the function of central government causing conflict between these two levels. When reflecting on the history of the national parks one sees this conflict underpinning the development of the system even manifesting itself in the formation of the New South Africa.

Prior to South Africa's transition to a Democracy in 1994 while South Africa's interim constitution was being drawn up and the drafters of the constitution considered various submissions subsequently when the Constitution was finalised regarding the management and control of National Parks. The SANP (NPB) commissioned a working document on the ways in which a number of developed and developing countries approach the management and control of national parks in their respective countries which included the USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, India, Namibia, Malawi and Kenya. One of the main conclusions of this document was that, 'A general distinction is made in most of the countries between different categories of parks - such as national parks, regional/state/provincial parks, nature reserves, and local parks. The level of infrastructure development of these respective categories is markedly different in most cases - with national parks being the national "show case" and the main tourist attractions'. The SANP felt that national parks should remain under the exclusive jurisdiction of the national parliament and the government for the following reasons:

- * National parks, as the pride of the entire South African nation, should continue to be managed and protected in a manner which not only ensures accessibility to all, but which also conforms with international standards and principles regarding nature conservation and the management of national parks.

- * National parks are by definition national assets and should be managed for the good of the nation as a whole as well as the international community. This is illustrated by the fact that in numerous countries, amongst which the USA, Switzerland, Kenya, Namibia and Malawi national parks are treated as a "national" legislative matter due to their important to the whole nation and the international community.

- * There are numerous financial constraints, which require national support and participation in the management of national parks. Few of the current national parks in South Africa could exist without some form of government subsidy and cross-subsidization by some of the other national parks.

- * The growth of tourism in general and ecotourism in particular, and the important contribution national parks are making and can increasingly make, as earner of foreign exchange and as generator of internal tourism, requires that national norms and standards of management be adhered to.

- * The management and control of national (and provincial) parks should occur within a cooperative partnership in which the national government (parliament and cabinet), the SANP, provincial governments, the population in general and structures in civil society, participate. Much has already been done to form the foundation for such a cooperative partnership.

- * The management of national parks should be legitimate, effective and representative in order to ensure firstly that such parks are accessible to and enjoy the support of the population at large, and secondly that the most important ecosystems of the

country are identified, protected and managed in accordance with international norms and standards.

* In terms of international law the national government (cabinet and parliament) is compelled to ensure compliance with all treaties, conventions and other international agreements to which the country is a party. This also applies to nature conservation and parks. The national parliament and executive are therefore responsible for ensuring in regard to nature conservation in general and national parks in particular, that international norms and standards are adhered to in the management and control of such parks.

The final version of South Africa's Constitution did, however, exclude national parks from the list of powers and functions of the provinces (See s104 and Schedule 4 of the Constitution). The National Assembly of Parliament is the sole legislative source for legislation pertaining to national parks. However, the National Assembly will have to consult the Council of Provinces on matters such as national parks although the opinion of the Council is not binding on the Assembly.

Although the Constitution is clear on whose responsibility national parks are, the problem will probably remain and inhibit the system from reaching its full potential. There are now nine provinces with an even greater diversion of approaches to PA management.

'Apartheid System'

I use the term 'Apartheid system' in inverted commas because it is not only the Apartheid era that caused the problems encountered by national parks but the entire history of political situation in South Africa, including colonialism.

Until fairly recently, the dominant conservation ideology in South Africa was characterised by a wildlife-centred, preservationist approach which appealed mainly to the affluent, educated, mainly white, minority. It was an ideology largely inherited from South Africa's colonial past, which regarded the natural environment in Africa as pristine. And which later resulted in the development of protected areas as an environment, into which humans should not intrude, except as tourists. The country has a sad history of dispossession and forced removal of black communities in order to create protected natural areas and early game protectionists, and later the creators of the national parks, were hostile to the interests of blacks, legislating against African utilisation of wildlife (Carruthers, 1995)

In a 'Discussion document', two researchers for the African National Congress note that rural black communities had little say over the creation of conservation areas and many were removed by force to make way for game reserves. But they do not argue for existing conservation land to be redistributed. They contend that the survival of conservation areas will be best guaranteed by ensuring that local communities understand the reasons for their existence and receive appropriate benefits which include some share of revenue, compensation or appropriate alternative land (Liebenberg and Grossman, 1994).

From Carruthers' perspective, environmental protection can no longer be viewed as a moral issue, divorced from political reality. Game reserves and national parks form an integral part of state strategies of resource management. And in South Africa these strategies have been molded by pressures such as white self-interest, Afrikaner nationalism, ineffectual legislation, elitism, capitalism and the exploitation of Africans (Carruthers, 1995).

In order to address these problems the SANP has been very active in attempting to change these perceptions amongst all South Africans, especially amongst blacks. One of the major contributions by the newly constituted Board was the production of a 'discussion document' by Board Member Farieda Khan (1996).

In her document she comes up with the following broad principles which provide the context for the successful involvement of disadvantaged communities and which I feel are important to be considered by all interested parties seriously;

(I) Sensitivity to the legacy of apartheid, as well as its continuing impact, is a pre-requisite to devising successful public participation procedures.

(ii) It should be remembered that communities are not homogenous, but diverse entities with a mix of different experiences, opinions and expectations. Hence there is no single correct technique or blueprint for implementing public participation. What works in one community may not work in another.

(iii) All too frequently, techniques more suited to a 'first world' approach are applied indiscriminately in poor communities, usually with negative results. Inappropriate public participation techniques are extremely harmful, often either intimidating or antagonising the very communities they are attempting to involve. Hence public participation techniques should be both appropriate and responsive to local conditions, as well as being aimed at ensuring the broadly representative involvement of the local populace.

(iv) Informed decision-making by the public must be ensured through the implementation of a variety of techniques and strategies.

(v) It should be remembered that public participation programmes, particularly those aimed at historically disadvantaged communities, are time consuming and lengthy processes. Hence ample time to carry out these programmes should be allowed.

She also gives a list of strategies (Appendix 1), which she says, usually in combination with each other, have proven useful in encouraging the participation of historically disadvantaged communities.

I concur with Siegfried and Lombard with their views on the future of PAs in South Africa, 'The present protected-area system is seen by some as under threat in South Africa. In any event, its fortune in the heady political times ahead is far from clear or certain. South Africa is bowed under a heavy burden of a flawed social contract in the immediate past. Game reserves are viewed by a probable majority of South Africa's people as being socially irrelevant. The game reserves are unlikely to survive unless they can be made a part of serving South Africa's massive social debt.' (Siegfried and Lombard, 1997).

9. IMPACT OF THE PROJECT ON WOMEN

Due to the patriarchal nature of the Nama society women have not been included in their decision making process. However, this situation has changed dramatically since the establishment of the RNP. During the latter period, prior to the proclamation of the national park women were extremely active in all the meetings held and workshops conducted to enhance the participatory aspects of the project. The main driving force for their involvement were the activities of two ladies (Ms Lala Steyn and Ms Fiona Archer) who under the auspices of the Surplus Peoples Project (SPP) worked energetically for the rights of the Nama and instilled in their society the need for women to be heard and to be active and to make positive and constructive contributions to the future of the communities.

Both these women are highly regarded by the communities and their efforts have changed the structure of the Nama significantly. Although they are not directly involved in the activities of the Richtersveld anymore, Nama women are able to maintain their momentum and involvement in decision making.

The establishment of the RNP can be seen as the catalyst for the emancipation of women in the Nama society and although the SPP had a much broader objective the concept of a national park for the people of Richtersveld and run by the people of Richtersveld seemed to motivate them and the partnership between the South African National Parks and the communities of Richtersveld finally agreed to was a triumph to the activities of women seeking emancipation.

10. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

10.1 Economic benefits

The agreement reached in the establishment makes provision for the lease of land at 50 cents per hectare, which amounts to approximately R80

000.00 per annum. It also makes provision for the amount to be adjusted upwards every five years. The 50 cents per hectare was decided upon due

to the lease agreements with mining companies in the area paying this amount for mining and prospecting rights. These leases, however, were for small areas compared to the total area of the national park.

Besides a direct payment of R80 000.00 per annum, employment opportunities were created and other indirect economic benefits through the national and international exposure of the creation of the RNP has been very significant and eco-tourism opportunities have proliferated. Hiking trails, 4X4 trails, canoeing, rafting, camping and limited accommodation facilities have caused an upsurge in the visitation to the area and future prospects of additional influx of economic gains look prosperous.

Profits from the nursery will also be paid to Trust.

2.Social benefits

The impact of the project on women has already been alluded to above and the establishment of the national park has contributed to the entire upliftment of the communities.

By encouraging a 'sense of place' amongst the inhabitants of the Richtersveld, pride has been engendered into the society. Social workers in the area have been able to discern a more positive attitude to life, in general, and to the future, in particular.

The park has also added to security of tenure, empowerment and capacity building in a significant way.

3.Environmental benefits

The area, being a mountainous desert is environmentally sensitive and the uncontrolled mining activities as well as overgrazing of certain areas of the limited grazing by pastorlists have caused major environmental problems.

With the establishment of the RNP these problems are being addressed and a more holistic approach is being adopted.

One of the SANP's researchers is working very closely with the nomadic pastoralists in an attempt to conserve the area's biodiversity. His project is one of the pilot projects in the Partnership for Biodiversity Program. The ultimate aim is to produce a grazing management plan for the RNP, which will ensure the protection of the area's biodiversity.

By allowing the SANP to manage the RNP the communities are able to access environmental professionals with greater ease and this bodes well for the future of the park.

The park has been proposed as a 'World Heritage Site' and its establishment received a major international award from the World Wide Fund for Nature in 1997.

It has also captured the imagination of both national and international bodies as an important Transfrontier Conservation Area

11. LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

With the economic, social and environmental benefits being experienced by the inhabitants of the Richtersveld as well as them accepting ownership of the 'Management Plan' for the RNP the project has every chance of achieving sustainability in the long-term.

As eco-tourism develops and more and more employment opportunities are created the communities will become inextricably linked to the park ensuring its maintenance and survival.

12. LESSONS LEARNT AND POSSIBLE APPLICATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Many important lessons were learnt during the establishment of the RNP but I will concentrate on the ones, which seem to have broader application to other areas.

Conservation authorities must recognize they are perceived as a threat to communities and that a climate of trust has to be created for a project to be successful. To create the kind of climate conducive for constructive dialogue requires special skills in negotiation and conflict resolution and professional assistance is recommended.

Security of land tenure is of paramount importance and unless this can be assured and the interested parties made to feel comfortable it will cause endless problems. In the RNP case study the SANP contractually agreed to never use expropriation as a means of gaining access to the land proclaimed as a national park.

When negotiating with communities a consultative and participatory process should be adopted.

Providing direct financial benefits at the onset of the project proved helpful and the lease agreement provided this.

A lot of goodwill, excitement and interest were created by involving the communities in the drawing up of a 'Management Plan' for the park. It is important that neighbouring communities accept ownership of a management plan.

Amending the National Parks Act proved most useful to ensuring the establishment of the RNP and countries in the Sub-Saharan region could/should look at their current legislature pertaining to PAs to see if it is not the inhibiting factor in creating a better system for improving the conservation of biodiversity. In the South African situation it took considerable effort but finally the enabling legislature entailed a minor amendment.

13. CONCLUSIONS

The long process of negotiation, which finally led to the proclamation of the RNP on 20 July 1991, ensured a high degree of public awareness, giving the park a special significance in the history of conservation in South Africa. The RNP can be seen as a park managed jointly by the SANP and the communities of the Richtersveld for the people of Richtersveld and the South African nation. It promotes involvement of the inhabitants of Richtersveld in conservation of biodiversity that was not previously possible. The contractual agreement, which laid the foundation for the establishment of the RNP, was widely heralded as an outstanding example of what could be achieved by constructive and practical negotiations. Its unique characteristic was that SANP who are primarily interested in the conservation of biodiversity and the local communities came together to discuss the long-term survival of both the natural resources of the region and the different forms of traditional use of the natural environment. It was an important learning process for both groups resulting in a heightened sense of cultural identity by the Richtersvelders and an appreciation of traditional values by the SANP.

Realizing the needs and aspirations of the Richtersvelders as well as achieving the conservation objectives of the RNP will not be an easy task. But the fact that the various parties have agreed to jointly achieve this makes the RNP a key role model for a new approach to conservation in South Africa.

One of the biggest lessons learnt from the Richtersveld experience is that people in and around conservation areas must participate in the conservation process. It is only through dialogue and consensus between interested parties that conflict and mistrust will be avoided. However, I am also of the opinion that there is no one model that can be used in every case. The environment, culture of the people, their history, aspirations and perceptions will influence

the model finally developed for a particular area.

It is also noted that:

Trends in South Africa's social, economic, political, and cultural fields have in the past dictated the development and structure of national parks in South

Africa and will have a major impact on the way in which national parks will be established and managed in the future.

National Parks are unlikely to survive unless the majority of South Africans perceives them as contributing to the local, regional and national economies.

10. REFERENCES

Acocks, J. P. H. 1953. Veld types of South Africa. Mem. Bot. Surv. S Afri. No. 28.

Adler, E. 1973. A Golden Opportunity. Veldtrust. April.

Carruthers, Jane. 1995. The Kruger National Park - A Social and Political History.

University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg.

Edwards, D. 1973. Richtersveld ondersoek. Unpublished.

Khan, F. 1996. The participation of historically disadvantaged communities in

Environmental decision-making - A discussion paper. A discussion paper prepared for the National Parks Board, 29 July 1996.

Liebenberg, Louis and David Grossman. 1994. Towards a New Conservation Policy.

Discussion document prepared for the LAPC. 30.07.1994.

Robinson, Robbie. 1997. South African National Parks - Another view. In:

Proceedings of a Workshop on Protected Areas in Our Modern World held at

the World Conservation Congress in Montreal. Parks Canada - Ecosystem,
ISSN 1200 -3301: #5.

Siegfried, Roy and Amanda Lombard. 1997. The New Game. African Wildlife,
July/Aug.

APPENDIX 1

Khan's list of strategies

(Khan, 1996)

The following strategies, usually in combination with each other, have proven useful in encouraging participation of historical disadvantaged communities:

- ensure that feedback procedures are made known from the start of the public participation process;

- ensure that feedback procedures are implemented, as failure to do so, will taint the credibility of all succeeding public participating programmes;

- work with key informants or researchers drawn from the community;

- work in partnership with community-based and service organisations, as well as local institutions such as schools and libraries;

- where questionnaires are used, ensure that these are not rigid documents designed to simply compile a set of statistics, but that there is ample opportunity for respondents to express their opinions and concerns;

- where possible, administer questionnaires personally;

- ensure that the aim of any questionnaire is clearly understood by respondents and that it is 'user friendly', i.e. it is not lengthy, and that it is written in clear, simple language;

- ensure that the return of questionnaires causes no inconvenience to respondents;

ensure that all information relevant to a proposed project is made available to the public (this includes detailed scientific information) and that it is easily accessible;

ensure that all public documentation is written in simple, clear language, free of unnecessary jargon;

the issue of language within the multilingual context of South Africa is crucial - thus it should be ensured that all public documentation is available in the language/s spoken by the majority of the target community;

when public meetings are held, notification techniques should go beyond the mere insertion of notices in newspapers, or communication with NGOs fortunate enough to have an office equipped with a telephone or fax machine - techniques could include the use of community newspapers and community radios, as well as posters displayed at central venues;

where possible, hold combined meetings with local organisations, such as civil associations;

ensure that all public meetings are held in convenient, accessible venues, and at times convenient to as many people as possible;

ensure that all public meetings are conducted in simple, clear language, free of unnecessary jargon;

ensure that all public meetings are conducted in the language/s spoken by the majority;

where possible, hold several community meetings at different venues, in preference to a few large public meetings;

when appropriate, conduct personal or group interviews, or house meetings, in preference to larger gatherings;

when appropriate, environmental education strategies necessary to promote information decision-making, should be implemented as an integral part of the participation process; and,

ensure that, where consultants are used to conduct a public participation process, they have the necessary experience, staff and ability (especially linguistic) to reach all sectors of the public (Khan, 1996)