

# PROJECTS

## *Linking livelihoods to conservation*

**L**inking people's livelihoods to natural resources, with the objective of conserving the resource and associated ecosystem, is nothing if not complicated. David Thomas of BirdLife International notes that 'conservation depends on sustainable livelihoods – and vice versa. Poverty is not just a matter of income or nutrition. In its broadest sense, poverty involves a lack of access to decision-makers, a lack of information and a lack of rights to access and manage natural resources' (Langley 2005). The rationale of linking conservation and development is to engender support for conservation among local communities, by involving them in management and decision-making and by providing benefits to offset the opportunity costs of protection (Matthew & Goodwin 2001).

The concept of linking livelihoods to conservation originated in the rest of Africa long before South Africa bought into the idea after democratisation in the '90s. In South Africa, the past 15 years of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) have centred on

using tourism as a means to divert benefits to local people. But these efforts have been frustrating, with communities generally seeing little benefit and much of the focus being on areas that are already highly protected, resulting in the conservation value being generally perceived as redundant.

We have also not done enough to learn from the other African countries that are now seen as leaders in the field. Take Kenya, for instance, where I recently spent two weeks with CBNRM programme managers from other BirdLife Partners in Uganda, Nigeria and the UK. Kenya has developed a model, called Site Support Groups, that has been very successful in mobilising community groups living around Important Bird Areas (IBAs), developing their capacity to generate a livelihood off the resource while simultaneously taking responsibility for actively managing and conserving the environment. This has, of course, also been South Africa's objective, as it is for any community-based conservation programme. Kenya, however, has managed to diversify its strategy by using

multiple-income generating activities from different natural resources, and making communities more resilient to change.

What makes modern CBNRM so dynamic yet challenging is that it involves multiple disciplines. This started with the gradual introduction of social scientists to conservation some 10 years ago. We now realise that when we link livelihoods to conservation, we are also dealing with economic markets, and so we need expertise in sociology, conservation and economics. We need to understand the social and cultural dynamics of the local people, as well as the macro- and micro-economic conditions, if we want to successfully link people's livelihoods to conserving a natural resource or environment.

BirdLife South Africa's newly established Community-Based Natural Resource Management Programme takes cognisance of all the above factors, and plans to use the large BirdLife International network to share and learn from other countries.

The purpose of the BLSA CBNRM Programme is to develop the capacity of local communities to manage important biodiversity sites in order to significantly enhance the status of the sites, while at the same time enhancing the people's livelihoods through sustainable and economically viable income-generating activities.

The programme aims to establish and maintain sustainable community-based conservation projects at three of South Africa's most important and threatened biodiversity sites. Appropriate social and economic assessments will be done at each site to ensure that the projects are locally relevant and accepted. The projects will include the development of community participatory conservation-management strategies. Training and skills development will focus on ecology (site monitoring), socio-economics, awareness raising, and project-management skills. The development of key income-generating opportunities in communities will be stepping stones to self-employment and self-sustainability of disadvantaged individuals and communities. Community-based networks will also be established to strengthen conservation management and experience sharing.



*The Klipspruit Wetland in Soweto, with informal settlements on its banks.*