The future of conservancies and agriculture in South Africa

By Saliem Fakir, IUCN (World Conservation Union)-SA, Guest Lecture.

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1. Let me first thank you for the invitation to present a few views on the relationship between conservancies and agriculture. It was a topic suggested for me by At Kruger. The Conference is timely, as conservancies are a growing phenomena in South Africa, and in some parts of Southern Africa, like Namibia. In Namibia for instance the legal framework allows for the establishment of community-based conservancies. From these arrangements communities can have special rights and access to wildlife. There are three types of conservancies: agricultural,[1] industrial and urban conservancies. Conservancies are becoming an important feature of rural, and urban landscapes, and represent a collective form of management by consent.

2. This even more so in the context of the greater expansion and intensification of urban sprawl. In 25 to 30 years from now, much of South Africa and Africa for that matter will mainly have an urban population. It is likely to reach anywhere, between 60-70% of the population. While modern agriculture has made it possible for the world's population to be fed, it has increasingly encroached upon important eco-systems in an unsustainable manner. It has led to complex ecosystems being converted to simplified systems, reduced biodiversity[2], caused damage to soils, and increased the level of alien invasive infestations. In parts of the world where many poor people are still dependent on wildlife and wild resources agricultural expansion threatens their livelihood through the destruction of biodiversity.

3. Expanding agriculture in a manner that protects ecological systems and biodiversity ensures that humans are able to derive greater benefit from both systems. Some conservationist have as a result introduced the concept of landscape ecology, or bioregional planning, as a tool for managing the complexity of multiple uses that humans have subjected natural resources. These tools are increasingly being seen as the next phase in the management of biodiversity. This is in recognition of the fact that the scope for ever expanding the protected area system is limited and too expensive. In some countries in Africa, protected area systems can constitute 20-30% of the land-space. Reason alone alludes to us that as population numbers increase, so will conflict between people and protected areas. Therefore alternative management

[1] This refers to a group of farms or natural areas on which neighbouring landowners have pooled resources for the purposes of conserving wildlife or natural resources on land which involves combining all their property. The area needs not be pristine, as it can be established in areas of intensive cultivation of livestock farming.

[2] The official definition under the CBD is :" …the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and ecosystems".

systems have to be found to strike a balance between human and environmental needs. Further, not all biodiversity can be conserved under a protected area system, more needs to be done outside of this system.

4. It is within this context of the larger picture that we must look at the role of conservancies. Conservancies in South Africa will provide an important link between biodiversity protection in protected areas, and the challenge of ensuring the conservation of biodiversity in non-protected areas. This is a gap both in our national and provincial legislation. I do think there is a need for a special policy and legal framework for conservancies to be more formalised, like we have established for Water User Associations in the Water Resources Act. However, I do think that the move in this direction is also dependent on the extent to which conservancies become politically and more socially acceptable by the broader South African society. It has to bridge the divide between a movement that is predominantly white led, to encompassing black interest in South Africa. It should ensure that it is not perceived as new forms of apartheid under the guise of conservation. All the good work that is being done if conservancies do not have legitimacy, and does not become the passion of all South Africans. One of its key challenges, performance measures, is to find creative and honest ways of bridging the divide.

5. Conservancies also provide a potential opportunity to develop new kinds of technologies and methods for more sustainable forms of agriculture. They are ideally suited for this, because of the more supportive environment for these ideas, a available pool of expertise, and the fact that these new ideas or approaches are more likely to be accepted within conservancies than mainstream agricultural systems. If, you like, conservancies can be the 'kibbutz' for improved and environmentally friendly forms of agriculture. They could serve as centers for innovation for sustainable practices. The development of sustainable forms of agricultural practice[3] is founded on the view that much of plant, animal, and microbial diversity today is to be found on farms, and require special attention through the co-operation of farmers.

6. One particular idea that comes to mind is envisaging a role for conservancies around the protection of valuable agro-biodiversity. About 75% of the world's genetic diversity for the most important crops has disappeared from farmers' fields. This erosion of genetic diversity increases the vulnerability of the world's agricultural systems to new threats. As At knows, this is a passion of

[3] There are numerous definitions of what constitutes sustainable agriculture. The works of Dankelman and Davidson (1998) perhaps provides a more comprehensive view. They suggest that sustainable agriculture must meet the following basic requirements:

Equitable access by all farmers to fertile land, credit and agricultural information.
The maintenance and support of independent agriculture over which farmers, both women and men, have control.
The development of cultivation, food processing, and food storage methods that ease the intense demands on women's labour.
A high degree of species diversification to maintain flexible cropping patterns.
The conservation of fertile soils in which organic matter is recycled.
An appropriate use of water and fuel resources.

mine and his. And, he I have met, because of collaborative work we have done in the area of agro-biodiversity. I find the social setting of agricultural conservancies conducive for the establishment of a network of in-situ agro-biodiversity systems across the country. In the Peru, seven communities from the Quechua communities, have embarked on a pioneering project to establish a community 'Potato Park', to ensure the survival of the genetic heritage of the Andes.

7. The initiative is uses as its planning tool an integrated landscape model in line with IUCN's Management Guidelines for Category V of its Protected Areas management system. The Park will help conserve native plant genetic resources-including landraces and wild relatives of domesticated plant and animal species-linking with it as well, the preservation of traditional knowledge. What is an additional pioneering effort is to link other kinds of economic activity to the agrobiodiversity initiative. This would include agro-ecotourism, marketing native crops, and capacity building in sustainable agriculture and ecosystem management. There are now attempts by various institutions to establish legal mechanisms within Peruvian Law to formally recognise the Potato Park.

8. For their efforts in expanding the responsibility of conservation to farmers, or game ranchers, the conference must consider a package of possible incentives that could spur more initiatives in the creation of conservancies. Creative financing of conservation remains a big challenge for conservationist. It is a topic that is to be discussed at the IUCN World Parks Congress in September of this year. In managing the countries natural resources for prosperity, there should be some reward, as this effort does come at a cost for both the State, and private owners. Both the State and private owners need to find innovative incentive schemes to promote self-motivated initiatives.

9. Finally, I also want to try to locate the question of conservancies and agriculture in the context of a larger debate. The essence of the debate is contained in a book published by IUCN and Future Harvest. The title of the book is: 'Common Ground, Common Future: How Eco-agriculture can help feed the world and save wild biodiversity', written by Jeffrey McNeely and Sara J Scherr. Eco-agriculture is a conceptual frame or a tool for identifying ways in which agriculture and biodiversity can co-exist. The report recognises the limitations or restrictions of protected areas, and is even suggestive, based on its evidence that some kinds of biodiversity would do better on farming land than in protected areas. I will not go into the details of their work, but participants are welcome to visit the IUCN website (www.iucn.org) if you interested in finding out additional information.

10. The central challenge that the book seeks to address is how to meet agricultural demand, tackle rural poverty and minimise the impact of agricultural activities on biodiversity in the 21st century. The Book draws on 35 case studies that have developed innovative ways of linking ecosystems management with agricultural production needs. One key conclusion of the report is: " *This approach recognises that ecosystems must be managed as a whole, with*

protected areas seen as reservoirs of wild biodiversity in a matrix of land that is managed to enhance habitat value, while also providing a range of benefits to people, from food supply and income to environmental services'. It makes the following key recommendations for the integration of agricultural and conservation objectives:

Reduce land conversion by increasing productivity.
Expand wild biodiversity reserves. New or expanded biodiversity reserves can be established in agricultural regions, especially where the environmental or other services they provide can clearly benefit farmers in surrounding lands.
Develop habitat networks on non-farmed areas. The many non-farmed areas in agricultural landscapes can be integrated into networks, to support or expand the habitat of wild species.
Minimize agricultural pollution. Farmers can minimize pollution of wildlife habitat, by reducing and managing agro-chemical use and farm wastes.
Modify resource management practices. Farmers can modify their management of soil, water and vegetation resources to enhance habitat quality in and around farms.
Integrate Perennials into agricultural systems. Integrating trees, shrubs and perennial grasses into agricultural landscapes can mimic the natural vegetative structure and create more habitat niches for wildlife.

In Conclusion:

Conservancies must be encapsulated in a larger vision that involves the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Farmers must play a bigger role in biodiversity conservation.

It must be recognised that conservancies are likely to be accepted more if they demonstrate that they are contributing to South Africa's social programme.

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