CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CONSERVATION & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Nairobi, 27-30 July 2015

CONFERENCE SUMMARY
&
KEY CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT MESSAGES

Conservation organisations in Africa are faced with a growing diversity of environmental issues. Sustainable solutions to these problems will require actions to be implemented by strong organisations and communities with the skills, knowledge and data to undertake a broad range of technical and process-based activities. There are already a broad range of capacity-related initiatives in Africa that are working to tackle capacity building issues. This meeting provided an opportunity to review existing regional projects, exchange ideas, develop and enhance capacity networks, and formulate effective and lasting solutions to common capacity problems.

THEME 1 SUMMARY: PROTECTED AREAS (PAs)

Background to workshop

Protected areas (PAs) in Africa play a critical role in the conservation and management of some of the most diverse terrestrial and marine sites in the world. It is therefore essential that: (i) responsible PA organisations have the capacity to use available information to identify and designate optimal protected area networks, and (ii) PA directors, managers and staff have the skill sets needed to fulfil the stated goals of these increasingly complex institutions.

5 key capacity development messages from the workshop

1. In 2010, only 17% of 644 assessed African PAs were under '*sound management*', 31% had '*basic management*', 31% had '*basic management but major deficiencies*', and 22% were '*clearly inadequate*'. These findings point toward a range of core capacity development needs within responsible PA organisations.

KEY MESSAGE 1.1
Given growing pressures on the biodiversity and natural resources of PAs in Africa, individual and organisational capacity development gaps must be addressed with considerable urgency.

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2. African PA organisations face three broad capacity development challenges:

    (i) **Individual capacity:** enabling people to develop and use the competences required to do their jobs.

    (ii) **Organisational capacity:** establishing and sustaining entities able to deliver agreed PA goals.

    (iii) **Societal capacity:** creating an 'enabling environment' that politically, economically, and culturally recognises the values of protected areas and enables them to maintain biodiversity and livelihoods.

KEY MESSAGE 1.2
Methods for capacity development within African PAs must integrate capacity issues associated with individuals, organisations and wider society.

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3. It is essential that PA management is widely recognized as a distinct profession, with its own standards, systems and tools. 'Professionalisation' is a key area of capacity development for PA organisations, and professional levels must be clearly defined in relation to required core competences. The 'competency-based' approach to capacity development can complement, enhance and extend more traditional capacity processes. The approach defines a range of skill sets for particular goals and allows PA organisations: (i) to identify the professional competences required to deliver institutional goals, (ii) to measure current levels of individual and organisational capacity, (iii) to analyse and prioritise training needs, (iv) to develop training curricula, and (v) to evaluate the efficacy of capacity development actions. The competency-based approach allows for a high degree of flexibility, and recognise that there is not a 'typical' PA or PA manager (no 'one-size-fits-all' measure of competence).

KEY MESSAGE 1.3
Responsible PA organisations currently not using a competency-based approach to their capacity development, should access open-source competency resources and adapt them to their specific needs.

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4. To facilitate responsible PA organisation in achieving their capacity development goals, the IUCN-WCPA have established a '*Strategic Framework for Protected Area Capacity Development 2015-2025*' (SFCD). The framework provides information, methods and tools in four programmes: professionalisation, local communities, enabling and evaluation.

KEY MESSAGE 1.4

Responsible PA organisations must act co-operatively to engage with the SCFD framework and make use of the resources and support that are available to implement it.

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5. The diversity of recognised managers and stewards of protected areas has widened to include indigenous peoples, local communities, CSOs and private owners. The specific capacity needs and contributions of these groups are insufficiently understood or addressed. Conservation interventions and capacity development initiatives need to be developed specifically for/with/by these groups so that important considerations are not missed which will affect the long term effectiveness of conservation investments.

KEY MESSAGE 1.5

Methods of capacity development for indigenous peoples, local communities, CSOs and private owners need to be researched and communicated.

THEME 2 SUMMARY: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & RIGHTS-BASED GOVERNANCE

Background to workshop

The conservation of the natural environment and the resources it provides, are the concern and responsibility of all citizens of a country or region. However, the consequences of environmental degradation (and subsequent conservation or management actions) are *experienced* locally. This generates strong motivation for action based on local knowledge: ecological, social or cultural. It also allows decisions to be generated that have greater relevance and which are based on rapid reporting of changes to biodiversity or threats. Local communities therefore play a critical role in the conservation and management of natural resources. Sadly, they seldom derive socio-economic or livelihood benefits from its stewardship. Nor do they often have an equitable voice in decision-making or policy development processes that affect their well-being. The urgent need for greater community engagement has been widely recognised, and founded on a need to build community and CSO capacity in key areas.

5 key capacity development messages from the workshop

1. The conservation and sustainable management of natural resources requires a community with a shared vision of how goals can be achieved in an equitable and mutually beneficial way. *Engagement* is a method that allows community organisations to build relationships and implement actions that move the wider community towards social, economic, cultural or behavioural 'change'.

KEY MESSAGE 2.1

There is a need to collate and disseminate information on successful community-based conservation initiatives where capacity development has been focused on (i) engagement skills within the community organisation seeking to effect a particular change, and (ii) conservation skills and knowledge within the wider community.

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2. Community engagement will only be truly effective if it is long-term (beyond project duration) and achieves the required community change though a process of 'coordinated evolution'.

> **KEY MESSAGE 2.2**
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> **Community conservation initiatives must build capacity in community engagement that aims to 'mainstream' conservation and resource management throughout an engaged community.**

3. It is possible to identify 'attributes' that indicate a community is effectively engaged in conservation and natural resource management:

   • The presence of sustainable, equitable and supportive community organisations comprised of people with diverse skills and experience.

   • People within the community have positive views of (and are knowledgeable about), local natural systems, and take time to become involved in their management.

   • In relation to conservation and resource management, the community/local organisations have systems in place for governance, finance, benefit sharing, membership and disseminating information.

   • There are 'vertical' linkages between local organisations and 'outside' agencies (government or NGO) aimed at ensuring coherent policy development (based on wider experiences), and reducing financial risks.

   • The community-conservation systems in place are long-term (not project limited).

> **KEY MESSAGE 2.3**
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> **Community conservation initiatives need to develop indicators to measure the extent to which community engagement has been developed, not just measures of the achievement of ecological or management goals.**

4. The engagement, education and involvement of young people within communities are essential for the long-term sustainability and mainstreaming of community-based conservation and resource management.

> **KEY MESSAGE 2.4**
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> **There is a need to collate and disseminate information on community-based conservation initiatives involving methods for successful 'next generation' engagement.**

5. A community, no matter how 'engaged' are still subject to a range of local contexts that can inhibit or facilitate their conservation and resource management actions. Many of these will involve local government organisations and individuals.

> **KEY MESSAGE 2.5**
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> **To improve the 'enabling environment' of all community-based conservation initiatives, it is vital to ensure that the capacity development of local government is also a key focus.**

THEME 3: EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP & STRONG ORGANISATIONS

Background to workshop

Strong, committed and highly skilled leaders are a crucial element in the ability of an organisation or community to achieve its stated goals. Future leaders must be identified, supported and developed so that they can creatively and effectively engage with a wide range of difficult issues with limited resources.

Leaders must also be able to develop and maintain the operational efficiency and resilience of their organisations through building appropriate organisational structures, strategies, accountability and finances. Strong and vital organisations also need the ability to assess internal needs, plan and implement organisational development goals, and measure their progress using tangible metrics and indicators.

5 key capacity development messages from the workshop

1. **Leadership capacity development.** Many leaders of conservation organisations have considerable (sometimes unreasonable) demands put upon them. The isolation and burden that many feel could be overcome by the development of a professional body for African conservation leaders. This would allow them to communicate and share best practice, and to build capacity in appropriate skills. Conference delegates suggested 6 specific recommendations in relation to leadership capacity development.

KEY MESSAGE 3.1

✓ **Organisations should allow staff '*structured leave*' from everyday duties to develop their leadership capacity.**

✓ **Leadership development needs to be extended beyond the 'formal' higher education system and short term training. More appropriate, affordable and sustainable approaches might include peer-to-peer learning, e-learning materials, workplace learning opportunities.**

✓ **Experienced staff in organisations need mechanisms to pass on their knowledge and experience to less experienced colleagues**

✓ **Leadership development needs to address the need to create functioning *teams*.**

✓ **Leadership development needs to be provided via 'exposure' to other conservation initiatives.**

✓ **Recognition (through awards for example) can have a significant impact on an individual's professional growth, such schemes should be encouraged particularly those highlighting people not usually award 'targets'.**

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2. **Organisational capacity development.** Delegates identified 7 key characteristics of impactful and effective organisations. The best organsations have: (1) a culture and values shared by all staff; (2) a clear guiding strategy and long-term vision; (3) accountability to constituents; (4) strong leadership and governance; (5) put their staff first; (6) learn from experience and employ adaptive management; and (7) actively seek strategic partnerships. Six key recommendations were made for improving organisational level capacity development. Organisations need to….

KEY MESSAGE 3.2

✓ **Institutionalise their vision, and implement them through clear and accessible strategy.**

✓ **Avoid *mission drift* and be able to say no to projects, funding, groups, *etc*.**

✓ **Have transparent fundraising strategies focused on the vision (not funding body evaluation).**

✓ **Proactively share and effectively communicate organisational 'lessons learned'.**

✓ **Invest far more in effective internal and external communication.**

✓ **Build leadership capacity at _all_ organisational levels.**

✓ **Employ '*outside-the-box*' thinking i.e. creative ways of organisational capacity development.**

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3. **Partnership & funding.** The relationship between NGOs and their funders can often strained by the high levels of oversight and capacity required simply to administer and comply with project grants. There can also be pressure upon the smaller organisation's vision, which in applying for funds may have to embrace new areas of work to access funds. Smaller organisations within 'partnerships' can

also sometimes feel that they are merely "*agents to execute the project activities*" of the lead group rather than being true partners.

KEY MESSAGE 3.3

Conservation organisations need to build capacity in successful partnering techniques, whilst funders must adapt their granting models directly towards smaller organisations (without pressuring 'local' visions). In particular conservation organisations should:

(1) Proactively influence the donor agenda through lobbying and creating space for dialogue.

(2) Develop methods to achieve a diverse funding base for sustainability.

(3) Improve collaborations (not waste energy on competition.

(4) Build their business skills (with advice from the private sector) to build sustainable funding.

(5) Consider the best model for their initiatives to avoid the donor-dependency.

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4. **Measuring the impacts of capacity development.** Measuring the impact of organisational and leadership capacity development is a vital but difficult process. Quantitative and qualitative '*Monitoring & evaluation*' outputs can be used to measure: (i) return on investment by funders, (ii) changes in goal achievement, (iii) changes in staff satisfaction and achievement; (iv) ongoing capacity gaps; (v) best practice in a range of organisational processes. Six key recommendations were made for improving the measurement of organisational level capacity development. Organisations need to….

KEY MESSAGE 3.4

✓ **Create baselines against which capacity development can be measured.**

✓ **Improve internal capacity to measure capacity (or engage social science partners).**

✓ **Ensure 'balance' between quantitative and qualitative impact data.**

✓ **Consider longer term capacity development interventions – it takes time !!**

✓ **Utilise and share best practice and learn from other's mistakes.**

✓ **Increase and re-prioritise budget allocations for monitoring and evaluation plans.**

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5. In addition to the specific key messages from individual workshops on effective leadership and strong organsations, a number of over-arching recommendations were presented by Maliasili Initiatives and Well Grounded. These arose from their major published study called '*Strengthening African Civil Society Organizations for Improved Natural Resource Governance and Conservation*'*.

KEY MESSAGE 3.5

✓ **Improve partnership and investment models.**

✓ **Change the way organisation development support is delivered.**

✓ **Support new approaches to leadership development.**

✓ **Bolster investment in documentation and learning.**

✓ **Promote dialogue around fundamental issues of Civil Society Organisation's accountability, constituencies and sustainability.**

THEME 4: PROFESSIONAL E-LEARNING

Background to workshop

E-learning is defined as learning that utilises the internet and associated electronic technologies to access an educational curriculum outside of a traditional 'classroom'. Despite issues with internet access in some areas, Africa's rural community electrification and wider ICT network is expanding and improving rapidly. Freely available online e-Learning has the potential to provide continued professional development for a wide range of individuals and conservation organisations across Africa. Online training and knowledge exchange platforms allow much needed 'scaling up' of effort to complement more established delivery methods (e.g. attendance at courses). They also have the ability to reach professional end-users who: (i) live in remote areas, (ii) have limited financial resources, and (iii) need to access training material throughout their professional life (not just during an attended course).

5 key messages from the workshop

1. A range of universities and training institutes in Africa provide tertiary level courses relevant to conservation and resource management. Most are aimed at to pre-career undergraduates, but with some also offering professional development courses for career practitioners. However, the supply of courses is not currently keeping up with demand, and the cost of such courses is rising in many parts of Africa. Online courses can be a cost-effective, readily accessible alternative to more conventional learning systems.

KEY MESSAGE 4.1

A major gap analysis is required to understand the key area of conservation capacity development that would most benefit from e-Learning approaches and to ensure course provision is based on evidence of prioritised needs within the sector.

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2. Whilst e-Learning provides a range of major opportunities for capacity development in the conservation sector, a number of major challenges remain. **E-LEARNING PROVIDERS NEED TO….**

KEY MESSAGE 4.2

✓ **Ensure that online courses are able to facilitate interactions between students and academics.**

✓ **Devise courses that are able to include 'practical' sessions.**

✓ **Safeguard courses against cheating.**

✓ **Monitor and take action to reduce course drop-out rates.**

✓ **Seek accreditation and collaboration with relevant institutions.**

✓ **Develop capacity to measure the quality and impact of course designs and delivery.**

✓ **Lever available (and growing) Open Educational Resources (OER) provided by many players relevant to conservation audience.**

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3. Organisational capacity development. E-learning institutions need to….

KEY MESSAGE 4.3

✓ **Ensure appropriate and long-term ICT and internet infrastructure investment.**

✓ **Develop their quality assurance capacity (methods, contents, marking, communication, *etc*).**

✓ **Provide development and support for staff with little experience of e-learning approaches.**

> ✓ **Take advantage of the growing mobile technologies (cell phones, tablets, etc.) and increased mobile penetration in Africa's rural communities.**

4. Research evidence suggests that uptake of e-learning has been slower than expected in countries with lower *per capita* income (although it is unclear why). It has also been shown that uptake is higher in groups that have already taken part in formal education (not main target audience?), and the majority of e-learners are aged between 20 and 30.

> **KEY MESSAGE 4.4**
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> **E-learning courses to support professional and community conservation must focus course content, methodologies and marketing strategies toward identified key audiences and users.**

5. E-learning conservation courses have (so far) largely been developed in isolation and using available/known technologies rather than those that appropriate for the task. This has led to considerable 're-invention of wheels', problems with universal access, and a lack of coherence or relevance across the courses provided i.e. a lack of strategic provision within the sector, that is not based on identified conservation capacity development needs.

> **KEY MESSAGE 4.5**
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> **Conservation organisations need to identify and communicate their strategic capacity development needs to achieve high levels of competency and knowledge across the sector, as well as associated 'standards' required. They then need to work with course developers and providers to create highly relevant and coherent courses that produce capacity development and life-long learning at all levels within the conservation sector.**

THEME 5: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Background to workshop

It is hoped that the conference will lead to the creation of an informal '*Community of Practice*' that would focus on sharing experiences and identifying useful collaborative actions to build strong and effective conservation and natural resource management organisations in Africa. This would cover:

1   Capacity development practitioners.

2   Peer-to-peer learning among organisational leaders.

It is envisioned that such a network could have three main areas of impact:

1. It would provide much needed peer support when taking forward organisational and leadership development initiatives following the conference (including for those who were unable to attend).

2. It will provide a forum and a 'safe space' to test ideas, make use of experience and share available resources- relevant for both NGO and government agencies. Demand for this (and the need for such networks to be tailored regionally) has been identified through the CapacityforConservation.org website and broader collaboration.

3. It could take forward an agenda of collaborative work to be decided by the group, but which might include ambitions such as working together to convince major donors of the value of

investing in capacity development to enable sustainable conservation impact; developing complimentary ways to monitor and evaluate success of efforts in this area.

Key messages from the workshop

A Community of Practice has been proposed for supporting conservation capacity development across Africa. At the conference much enthusiasm was shown around this idea, support has been pledged to and 80 conference delegates requested to be actively involved.

There is much experience to build upon and lessons to learn for the development of communities of practice in the past. It is hoped that existing networks and structures can be used where appropriate. Seven lessons learnt from experience were shared at the conference:

> ✓ **Networks are useful when people participate through commitment to a shared purpose/driven by a clear shared goal**
> ✓ **Successful networks require co-ordination and good leadership is essential in ensuring a network thrives and reaches its objectives**
> ✓ **Networks are powerful mechanisms for sharing information and knowledge**
> ✓ **Building and sustaining effective networks requires time and effort**
> ✓ **'Giving and receiving' between the parties involved is at the core of a successful network**
> ✓ **Network members need to be valued**
> ✓ **Geographical and language barriers need careful consideration**

Delegates proposed the following ideas as useful purposes for such a community:
- Ideas exchange and peer review with others working to build capacity in the sector
- Combining voices to strengthen messages to support advocacy
- Mobilise resources and influence donors
- Coach leaders- provision of tools, mentor support, training resources
- Connect people and enable networking
- Encouragement and moral support

Many suggestions were gathered around how we could make such a Community of Practice work. These included making use of the CapacityforConservation.org website and creating an Africa section as part of that; identifying an African coordinating organisation who could drive ideas and do the administration; tapping into existing networks; create searchable online databases of interests and expertise. It was also recognised that language considerations may mean it may be useful to form geographical subgroups. Free social networking tools could be harnessed to get the network up and running initially (e.g. yammer/whats app etc).

It was seen as important to identify some focus for the group, and workshop participants were keen key issues are identified that can be worked on collaboratively. It was recognised that lots of ideas were generated over the conference, and many of these need follow-up and collaboration to see and solid outcomes.

In order to take this forward it was proposed that a small subset of the most enthusiastic workshop attendees make a plan to share with the wider group. Once that has support, funding applications will be made to support the network's development in the longer term.