

Protected area management planning

Paul Clarke (1999) observed that African national park management plans have often lain unused or, in any case, have been unusable. My observations, based on management planning experiences in several eastern and southern African countries, support this view: further experience in the Middle East and in South-east Asia suggests that these circumstances have not been confined to Africa. The thoughts that follow have appeared in one form or another in numerous unpublished consultancy reports over the past 10 years and have their origins in ideas first discussed by Bell & Clarke (1984).

Clarke (1999) highlighted several weaknesses in planning: insufficient attention to budgets; unrealistic assumptions of management capacity; poorly formulated objectives; excessive detail deferred for further study; failure to allocate responsibilities for implementing plans (making subsequent monitoring impossible); undue emphasis placed on specific aspects of management; institutional instability; and absence of systematic procedures for producing management plans.

I believe that at least two further weaknesses have bedevilled management planning and its subsequent implementation: absence of clear direction from policy-making levels; and a want of imperative within plans.

Planners may experience the absence of a clear policy direction when trying to extract decisions from directorates on purposes and management objectives for individual Protected Areas (PAs). Directorates often seem to expect planners to do the job. However, as Bell & Clarke (1984) put it, producing a management plan is not 'a separate part of the business of the agency, to be carried out by a specialized section or officer. It is essentially the business of the agency and the initiative must come from the top and the appropriate decision-makers at each level. The agency should not set up a planning section and say, "Give us a plan." The agency directorate must create its own policy structure and then hand it to the planners and say, "fill in the nuts and bolts".'

Management plans should reflect adopted policies, representing the value system of the managing agency (ideally set out in a system plan), together with numerous views and decisions taken at several levels by stakeholders inside and outside of government. Management planning is essentially a corporate activity involving numerous people (including wardens and others who will later implement the plans), but the initiative must come from directorates, who should

approve overall objectives for each PA. Within the planning process, the planning officer is a catalyst, identifying and mobilizing stakeholders, organizing and facilitating the planning process, and assembling the final product. He or she should not be the arbiter.

Want of imperative in PA management plans manifests itself partly through the weaknesses identified by Clarke (1999), especially those that contribute to making plans unusable; however, there are at least two other factors. First, plans often include numerous recommendations, which dilute their authority. I believe that a management plan should (with one exception) contain *no* recommendations. By the time a plan is written, all recommendations should have been sifted, evaluated, judged for desirability and practicability, and matched with realistic assessments of available resources. Those selected should be incorporated into the plan as *instructions* to the warden and the relevant co-workers. A management plan should not prescribe what *might* be done but *what the agency has decided it can and will do*. The single exception is where changes to PA status are desirable but cannot or are unlikely to be achievable during the life of a plan: for example, where statutory amendments such as boundary changes appear desirable. This type of recommendation can be included in a short section of the plan set aside for that purpose. Second, management plans (whether they comprise instructions or recommendations, realistic or otherwise) rarely look like practical working manuals and are rarely presented to wardens with firm commands from the directorate to implement.

Some suggestions follow, based upon experience, which may help to further the development of plans that are practical, authoritative management manuals.

First, a management plan should be as short and as simply worded as possible, consistent with being comprehensive and comprehensible. It must be understandable to those entrusted with implementing it. It should not be a compendium of information or a minor dissertation, which, judging from numerous extant examples, is a common failing. Simplicity helps to minimize the time taken to prepare plans and reduces costs, gives them greater clarity and makes for pain-free reading by potential donors. Management plans comprise descriptive and prescriptive sections, and many descriptive sections need occupy no more than a few lines or a single paragraph. Others will probably not exceed a page. Descriptive sections must not get bogged down in detail. Physiography, flora and fauna, for example, need be given only generalized descriptions. A volume

of information may be available on the flora of a PA but the management plan is not the place for it. All that is needed after the generalized description is a list of relevant references.

Second, goals and objectives must be identified and prioritized. 'The identification of the management objectives is the most essential and crucial stage in the planning process' (Alexander, 1993). This should precede all other stages of management planning and must be approved by the directorate before further work is allowed to proceed.

Third, the prescriptive sections of management plans should be target-orientated, spelling out specific management and development targets in a form that allows progress to be monitored and measured. They should comprise binding instructions to wardens and other relevant officials.

Fourth, monitoring progress in implementation is an essential element of management, identifying where corrective action is needed when programmes stray off course and where improvements may be made in future plans. Monitoring and evaluation also provide bases for assessing individual ability, which can be reflected in career progress. A mechanism should also be in place to evaluate the success of management plans in general and to assess the extent to which their objectives are being achieved. If they fall short of expectations, the fault may lie in inadequate implementation but could also lie in the design of the plans themselves. Evaluators should be asked to assess the reasons for this and to make recommendations for corrective action.

Fifth, management plans should be sufficiently flexible to allow for change during their working life, which may be necessary as a result of unforeseen changes of circumstance—both advantageous and disadvantageous. Some amendments may be minor, involving perhaps only a single page; others may be more radical. Flexibility will be facilitated if plans are bound in loose-leaf form, so that pages can readily be removed and replaced.

Sixth, within a country, there are at least three advantages to adopting a standard format for management plans.

- On the assumption that all future management plans will be prepared by a word processor, the basic layout of a standard format can be set up on disk in the form of a management plan master copy. All section headings could be pre-set, as could some pages or parts of pages that bear similar or identical texts in all plans.
- The standard layout should serve as a checklist when assembling data during the management planning process.
- As members of the agency become familiar with the

standard layout, they will be able to find their way around management plans for all PAs more readily. This simplifies the task of understanding a new management plan in the case of, for example, the transfer of a warden from one PA to another.

Seventh, following issue to wardens and other designated officers, management plans should be treated as accountable documents. Each copy should bear a unique serial number and records of their disposal be maintained at directorate headquarters. Holders of management plan copies should be responsible for keeping them up to date, according to amendment instructions that may emanate from the directorate from time to time. When the holder of a management plan copy hands over control of a PA to a new warden, the management plan should be included in the hand-over process. The outgoing warden should brief the incoming warden on key issues, progress made in implementing the plan and give an assessment of obstacles (if any) to implementation.

Eighth, a formal planning system should be designed and adopted by the agency, which includes mechanisms for preparing management plans, monitoring their implementation and making amendments where needed. Responsibilities for carrying out these tasks must be identified, as also must the procedures for approval, adoption and amendment of plans by the directorate.

Finally, some brief comments follow on community involvement. Communities that live within the vicinity of (or inside) PAs are among the stakeholders referred to above and should, therefore, participate in the planning process. Members of these communities often depend heavily upon resources in the PAs and encroach upon them, clear land for cultivation, graze livestock, hunt, fell trees, gather non-timber forest products and start fires. As human populations grow, demand for resources rises. Biodiversity suffers. Forging links with local communities is seen as a way of ameliorating or diverting these adverse pressures. For the warden, of course, participatory management may not in itself be an objective: it is a strategy to overcome specific obstacles.

Various schemes have been either discussed, designed or introduced in Africa and Asia, which aim to establish beneficial links between local communities and PAs. The rationale is that if people's dependency upon resources within the PAs is lessened or if tangible benefits are generated for them from the areas, their support and co-operation will be secured. However, evidence that these schemes are successful in conserving biodiversity is hard to find and some commentators have expressed scepticism: MacKinnon (1994), for one, wrote, 'Rich and powerful individuals and organis-

ations are far more capable of protecting their own resource bases than are rural communities. For example, there is little illegal cutting of timber or even poaching in Indonesian timber concessions compared to what happened in nature reserves'. To this may be added the large privately owned conservancies of Zimbabwe, whose owners (some of them very wealthy) appear to manage their wildlife efficiently and profitably.

There are at least seven possible types of linkage between PAs and rural communities.

- *Public relations.* Persuading people to appreciate the values of biodiversity and act accordingly, although this may not be easy when their survival depends upon behaving otherwise.
- *Consultation.* Discussion with local people to identify problem areas and a means of addressing them to the benefit of the PA and people.
- *Deriving benefits.* Ways in which local people may derive tangible benefits from nearby PAs are identified and encouraged (for example, small-scale businesses to earn money from tourists or employment by the agency).
- *Revenue sharing.* A proportion of a PA's revenue is shared with local people.
- *Resource harvesting.* Local people are allowed to harvest selected resources from within a PA. This must inevitably affect biodiversity but the extent will depend upon the agency's capacity to plan, monitor and control, and to keep harvesting within sustainable or, at least, acceptable limits. This may be more easily said than done.
- *Participation in management.* Local representatives sit on management boards. Part of the warden's capacity to manage will be eroded. Decisions are more likely to be made on non-technical grounds. Sustained use may be difficult to ensure.
- *Transfer of management.* A PA is handed over to a local community to manage.

In spite of doubts that have been and are being voiced about the values of community participation, I argue that local communities (as one of the stakeholder groups) should *always* be brought into the management planning process for *all* PAs. Their needs can then be taken into account, their local knowledge brought to bear and avoidable conflicts headed off. This includes PAs that may ultimately be managed and policed intensively.

During the planning process, options for linkages between PAs and local people should be evaluated and selected, each case according to its merits. Selected linkages, which may include one or more of those listed above, should then be defined in management plans and provision included, where appropriate, for monitoring.

However, some PAs may exist that harbour unique resources or resources of such fragility or importance that the only effective way to manage them is through firm professional control, with only limited or no local participation and no harvesting rights. A parallel may be drawn between this type of area and national museums or art galleries. These PAs are, in effect, outdoor museums in which unique or otherwise interesting phenomena (species, ecosystems or geomorphological sites) are preserved *in situ* for posterity. Governments may have to take them under full state control as 'jewels in the heritage crown' that have at least national, if not globally, important values.

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Towards consensual park management planning in Africa

In the discussion on park management planning in *Oryx* **33**, Clarke (1999) expressed his concerns on the costs of management plans (MP) in Africa, their poor quality and their lack of application. Although I agreed with most of his individual arguments, I found Clarke's overall conclusions unconvincing as they are only based on a selection of MP failures. The discussion would become more constructive if positive experiences with park management planning ('best practices') were included. And, if they do not exist, would we not be better off without park management planning?

Instead of considering management planning as the production of a (bulky) document, it might be useful to consider it as a process in phases: (1) reaching a consensus on main management issues; (2) formulating the MP, based on this consensus and an analysis on less