

Time to put theory into practice

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Many of us have worked in and visited numerous parks in Africa, and most of these times are associated with glorious and wonderful memories of these amazing reserves. And I am also sure there are many of us who have had these wonderful memories shattered, when a recent visit to a particular park or news on a park suggests that everything is in a state of disarray, with buildings and roads neglected, vegetation hammered from the heavy pressure of game, off road driving and wood collection or totally infested with invasive plants and the wildlife is being poached left, right and centre. Similarly, many of us know of protected areas that are just really parks on maps and that exist in the legislation ('paper parks'), but offer little real protection. In reality, except for the 3 game scouts who sit under a tree all day with little ammunition, unserviceable rifles, and who poach the very wildlife they are supposed to be protecting, it would be difficult to guess that it was a game park or nature reserve. All this, while their manager spends most of his time attending meetings and busying himself with non essential issues, usually outside of the park. But who can blame them, when they have not been equipped or trained appropriately or managed consistently and according to clear achievable objectives? This is unfortunately the sad reality of many of Africa's protected areas, which are under threat and exposed to mismanagement and degradation. It is thus no wonder that there has been an urgent call to find ways of ensuring effective management of protected areas.

Currently the management of protected areas largely depends on the quality and drive of its management staff and the resources available to them, but what protected areas really need is some structured system that will work towards set objectives and targets. A system that will identify risks within each protected area and set objectives to address these risks, address conservation concerns, clearly define roles and responsibilities, determine and promote best practices, reduce liabilities, identify gaps, help ensure legal compliance and provide a framework which will allow for regular monitoring and continual improvement. A system that would achieve and maintain effective management, regardless of the quality of its managers.

The good news is that GRAA has developed an excellent tool that can do all of the above and it can even be used as a tool to actually implement those complicated Integrated Management/Development Plans that become the burden of many managers. This wonderfully useful and practical tool is known as PAMS, which is the acronym for a Protected Area Management System.

For several years PAMS existed in theory, while it gained support and endorsement from senior representatives of organizations such as the IUCN South Africa, DEAT, WESSA and EWT. At the same time it was promoted and well received in publications and presentations at various workshops and symposiums. In 2007, the time came when **theory was put into practice**. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) agreed to implement PAMS in its Invasive Alien Species Programme with the idea that should it prove successful, it could be further expanded into other functions across the organization. With just over a year having gone by since its approval within EKZNW, it can now be said that with the implementation of PAMS, the Invasive Alien Species Programme is now outcomes focused, well co-ordinated, well implemented and making the best use of tax-payers money in order to ensure effective, efficient and transparent management of invasive alien species within EKZNW protected areas. The use of PAMS in this way showed that the system is very easily adapted, and in fact is ideally suited for conservation programmes of this nature (alien plant control programmes, wetland rehabilitation programmes, land-care

initiatives, etc) and not only for the management of protected areas. PAMS could thus also be accurately referred to as a 'Programmatic Audited Management System'.

Further good news is that 2008 will bring about the adoption of PAMS into the Selous-Niassa Wildlife Protection Corridor Project, which is an international conservation project linking the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania with the Niassa Game Reserve in Mozambique. Negotiations are also currently underway for the adoption of PAMS into another major Transfrontier Conservation Area initiative in Africa.

So, you are probably wondering what PAMS actually is, and what makes it so unique and effective. PAMS is based largely on the ISO14001 EMS approach and includes the same basic components, but contains some different emphases and specific requirements unique to conservation. In short, it contains essentially the same basic key components as does ISO14001, such as Planning, Implementation and Operation, Checking and Corrective Action and Management Review. Under each of these components there is a list of criteria that needs to be met or put in place. Thus by simply having all these criteria in place, it creates a management system that identifies risks and sets objectives to address the significant risks. It assists to clearly define roles and responsibilities, addresses conservation concerns, determines and promotes best practices, ensures competency at different levels, reduces liabilities, identifies gaps and ensures the measurement of implementation and outcomes of management actions through auditing and evaluation. Cumulatively, they provide the framework that drives continual improvement and ensures effective management.

Those of you who are familiar with ISO 14001 may be thinking, how does PAMS actually differ from ISO14001? Well, ISO was essentially developed for industries and thus ISO 14001 and its auditors have a very 'brown' environmental focus, and concern themselves with issues relating to energy consumption, waste management, oil & chemical spills, etc. ISO monitors things such as production inputs and outputs, and overall often results in a huge paper trail which arguably doesn't always add as much value as it does workload. ISO is also inflexible in the sense that some requirements have to be met because of rigid global standards which demand mandatory conformance, regardless of their significance in the specific situation. Most importantly, ISO places little emphasis and provides little guidance on some biodiversity conservation issues. Conversely, PAMS is more simple, basic and its primary emphasis is on conservation issues. For example, issues such as veld condition, burning regimes, invasive alien species, erosion, and red data species need to be addressed and monitoring requirements again focus more on 'green' issues such as vegetation & animal monitoring, collection of weather data, Thresholds of Potential Concern/ Limits of Acceptable Change. Similarly, with issues relating to emergency preparedness, ISO 14001 focuses on issues like big spills and emissions while PAMS looks more at emergencies like uncontrollable veld fires, floods, erosion, the presence of highly invasive alien species and disease outbreaks. PAMS is flexible, and can cater for specific requirements, for example if something can be shown to not add real value it can be motivated and 'exempted' from the system in a given situation. PAMS can be simplified to suit the scale and capacity of individual organisations. So, as you can see, ISO 14001 was developed primarily with the concept for implementation in essentially transformed environments by people with a strong focus on 'brown' environmental experience and expertise (many of whom are from Europe and other developed countries), whereas PAMS was developed for 'greenies' in Africa by 'greenies' from Africa with many years of conservation and environmental experience.

So, where to from here? The medium to long term goals are to implement PAMS in numerous African protected areas and conservation programmes and thus we are actively seeking new areas and/or projects in which to implement the system. We have also discussed the establishment of a Protected Area Stewardship (PAS) Council, and have obtained in principle approval of this proposal from some of the leading conservation agencies in southern Africa, through which conservation authorities can attain certification of their protected areas. Thus, although the main objective of PAMS is to act as a tool to help and ensure effective management, the option of certification could also be obtained at a later stage. If required, this could include 3rd party certification of outsourced tourism and/or hunting agents against the relevant PAS standards.

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