



# AFRA

## ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL ADVANCEMENT

NEWSLETTER 4 (Feb. 1990)

### KOSI BAY NATURE RESERVE: THE PROBLEM OF CONSULTATION

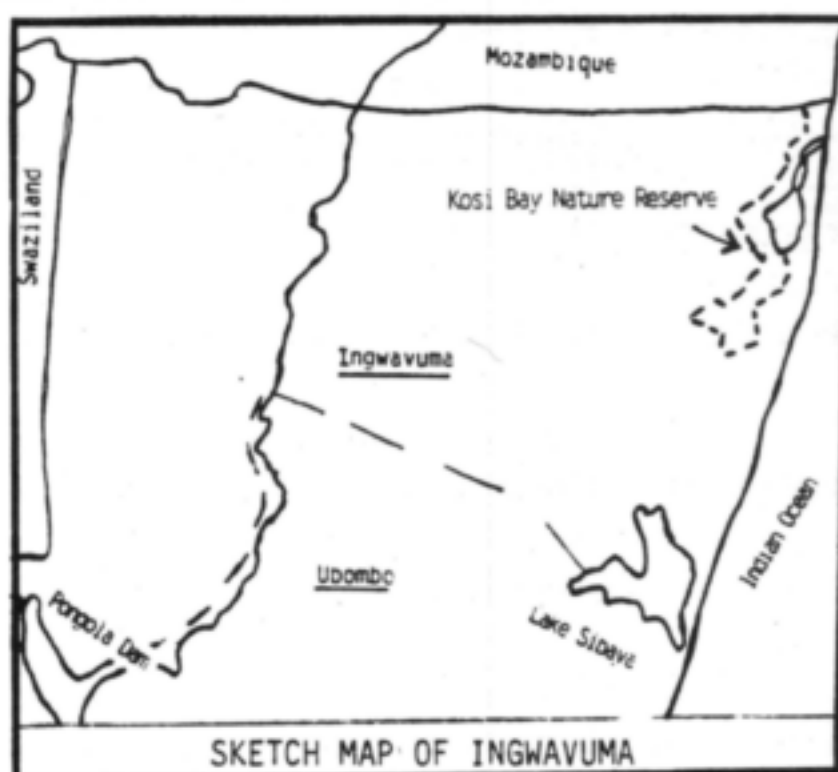
The Kosi Bay Nature Reserve (just under 11 000 hectares in extent) lies on the coastal plain of Ingwavuma, in northern KwaZulu. It is a region of great natural beauty, which includes most of the chain of lakes, swamps, pans and marshes of the Kosi Lakes system, whose fauna and flora are varied and unique. The people of Kosi Bay (Thonga and Zulu speakers) have been fishing, farming and harvesting the rich natural resources of the region for centuries, and have successfully adapted their techniques to the sub-tropical environment.

But the people of this remote, rural district - who are largely dependent on migrancy - are extremely poor. Conservationists and planners are warning that severe environmental degradation is occurring.

These concerns led to the proclamation of the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve in August 1988 by the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (the Bureau).

The Bureau claims that its conservation policies are human-oriented and that they generate economic benefits for the local people. The Bureau's 'Environmental policy statement', says - quite correctly:

**'Conservation in any area will only be successful if the people of the region see it as to their benefit to participate'.**



SKETCH MAP OF INGWAVUMA

Yet in practice, Bureau policies have generated considerable antagonism from the local people. They claim that they have yet to see any material advantages, and that the Bureau is threatening to remove those people whose homesteads now lie inside the boundaries of the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve. One of their main criticisms is that they have not been properly consulted.

**The tragedy is that present practices are creating a negative view of conservation in Ingwavuma, and are therefore jeopardising the long-term future of the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve, and of all conservation policies in KwaZulu.**

# THE KOSI BAY NATURE RESERVE

## Establishment of the Reserve

The Reserve includes the Malangeni Forest Reserve which was proclaimed in 1950, but whose boundaries had become obscure. The Malangeni Forest is the largest concentration of swamp forest in South Africa, and is vital to the ecology of the Kosi Lakes system. The local people have cultivated gardens in the swamp forests for generations, but in recent decades, it is claimed that certain farmers have begun to clear more of the swamp forest for commercial banana production.

The need to protect the swamp forests from unrestrained clearing is not disputed. However, the methods that were used to establish the Reserve, and the subsequent actions of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (the Bureau), have caused considerable grassroots resistance in the area. In August 1989, a group of 12 informal leaders from Ingwavuma publicly proclaimed their opposition to KwaZulu conservation policies and their desire to secede from the KwaZulu Tribal Authority. This move was followed in November by the formation of an organisation called *Isididi* (the Thonga word for the small hut in which the harvest is stored) to protest about the creation of the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve.

**What has provoked this resistance by the community to KwaZulu's conservation body?**

### Reasons for resistance

The Bureau has claimed in its policy statements that it works through a policy of consensus and that communication is vital to convince people that conservation will benefit them. In the creation of the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve, the Bureau has worked through the official Tembe-Thonga Tribal Authority structures, which consist of **salaried** chiefs and their appointed councillors and headmen.

*But the Bureau's belief that it has consulted the community by working through the formal channels is misplaced.* The current Tembe-Thonga chief in the 1960s highlighted the ambiguous nature of his position when he said that he felt like a man sitting on a mountain on either side of which were people - his people and the government - and neither side of which could see each other's point of view. Lack of genuine communication between the authorities and the people is evident in the reaction of the latter to the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve.

Complaints by local people about their inability to get the Director of the Bureau (Mr. N. Steele) to discuss their problems are common. According to Mr C.T. of Kwamazambane, the community have had communication problems with Ulundi over conservation since 1987 when they sent a delegation to see the Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, but were told to speak to the Director of the Bureau:

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**'We tried to meet with [Mr] Steele to discuss this issue, but he would not meet with us. ...So many times Mr Steele has been asked by the community to address us, but he fails to come to meetings or he refuses to answer questions.'**

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In May 1988, 3 community members of the Swamp Committee (which recommends restrictions on swamp farming outside the Reserve) resigned at a Tribal Authority meeting. According to an observer, they say they resigned because they felt they were not being adequately consulted by the Bureau. At another meeting on 7 March 1989 a community member asked who constituted the Swamp Committee now that the 3 community members had resigned. The reply by the Minister of Works was that the Committee still had a quorum and that it **'was recognised by Ulundi.'** The fact that the people felt that they were no longer represented by this Committee was ignored by the authorities.

Mr. G.N., one of the Swamp Committee members who resigned, said in December 1988:

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**'The primary problem is that the Bureau didn't discuss with the community which land was to be set aside for conservation. It's not that the people are against conservation and want to destroy indigenous trees. We have lived for years with nature. Nature must be conserved but not to the detriment of the people.'**  
[N.Witness 10.12.88; S.Tribune 11.12.88]

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A member of the Kosi Bay community speaks at the meeting of 7 March 1989.  
Photo : John Woodroof, Sunday Tribune

Even amongst Tribal Authority members there is dissatisfaction with the way the Kosi Bay Reserve was proclaimed. The official minutes of the 11.11.88 meeting of the Compensation Committee (which decides how people who have to move are to be compensated) indicate that Mr Solomon Tembe, the Chief Induna, questioned the legality of the proclamation, said that he found its implementation a problem and wished to dissociate himself from it. In December 1988 Mr Tembe is reported to have said that :

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**'the Bureau is not acting with the consent of the Tribal Authority.'**

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Mr J.M., a local induna, has also opposed the Bureau.

The official minutes of the Ingwavuma-Ubombo Regional Development Planning Working Group meeting of 16.3.89 confirm poor consultation. These record the lack of response by the Bureau's Director to certain questions that had been sent to him

on behalf of the community. When it was suggested that the community follow the official channels through the Tribal Authority, the minutes record the following:

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**'A member of the community said that the issue had been raised many times at those other forums and the answers had either not been forthcoming or had been confusing. For this reason the issue was being raised at the Working Group.'** The chairman then suggested that letters be written. **'He was informed that this had been done before and taken to the highest authorities but no reply had been received.'**

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Further discussion revealed that the Tribal Authority had already been to Ulundi over this matter but without success. A member of the Committee then suggested that the matter be closed for the Working Group because it was 'too sensitive.'

# THE KOSI BAY NATURE RESERVE

## **The need to establish new consultative structures**

Conservation will not succeed in the long-term if the people affected by it are not genuinely and extensively consulted. But if effective consultation with the local people of Kosi Bay is to take place, then alternative methods of consultation to the tribal authority structures will have to be found.

The International Union on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) has encouraged conservationists and planners to consult local people and to bring them in as **joint partners** - both in the planning and implementation of schemes.

The need for this has been highlighted by Garth Owen-Smith and Margaret Jacobsohn who recently initiated an Endangered Wildlife Trust funded project in Namibia amongst a community of pastoralists at Purros who had been adversely affected by the creation of a game reserve (about which they were not consulted). A tourist levy is charged and the pastoralists have chosen a committee to represent them and to decide how the money should be spent.

Decisions are made at communal meetings which women are encouraged to attend, for, as the organisers write, they 'have a large input into family decisions, and as distributors and de facto controllers of food and other goods they wield considerable domestic power.'

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**Owen-Smith believes that this system of representation and open meetings will prevent corruption and autocratic decrees by traditional chiefs.**

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Owen-Smith and Jacobsohn argue for the need to create new institutions or 'interfaces' between

conservation officials and local people in South Africa. But they warn that that any 'such liaison body must have on it those locals the people themselves choose to represent them.' According to Owen-Smith, **the Purros experiment is likely to survive political change because it was accountable to the people.** [E.W.T.Symposium, 1988; W.Mail 17.11-23.11.89; N.Witness 21.9.89]

In addition, the World Conservation Strategy (WCS II), 1988, has emphasised that communities should have the option of modifying 'their subsistence way of life, combining the old and the new in ways that maintain and enhance their identity while allowing their society and economy to evolve.' This process, however, should not be forced on communities by outside agencies.

**The only way to ensure that these principles are followed, and that the long-term future of conservation schemes is guaranteed, is to engage local people as joint planners and managers, and to work with the individuals chosen by those communities.**

The powerlessness of people adversely affected by the creation of the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve is by contrast revealed in the following comment by Mr R.M. of KwaZibi, whose homestead falls inside the Reserve and who was told that he and others would have to move some time:

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**'Now I am just waiting to see what will happen. We have not got the power to fight the government about this. I am very confused. Everybody is confused about what is happening.'**

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*[Subsequent Newsletters will deal with the controversial question of the removal of people from the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve, and the creation of the Tembe Elephant Park]*

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