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## Large Carnivore and Community-based Conservation in Namibia

*"If we human beings learn to see the intricacies that bind one part of a natural system to another and then to us, we will no longer argue about the importance of wilderness protection, or over the question of saving endangered species, or how human communities must base their economic futures – not on short-term exploitation – but on long-term, sustainable development."*

- Gaylord Nelson



If only we can see those intricacies, but we don't, although we sometimes feel like we do, once we go into the environment. The fact remains that we argue on many levels about the importance of nature – the environment around us, and so forth. Despite these controversies, conservation, whether it is for living or non-living natural resources that we have been endowed with by nature, is what fascinates me the most.

Growing up as a child in the African thorn-bush Savanna of north-central Namibia, I had a close connection with nature and the environment. Nature became a big part of my life, but it wasn't until the later years of my high school career that my passion for the environment and environmental studies grew. Three years into my college studies, my strong interest in the field became structured, developed, and more refined, which made me decide to pursue my undergrad in Environmental Studies. The field in itself is a very broad field, but I hope to focus on conservation.

With a diverse spectrum of wonders from wildlife, geophysical features, and cultures, Namibia is not only known as the 'Cheetah Capital of the World and home to the largest number of free-ranging cheetah, with  $\pm 20\%$  ( $\pm 3,000$ ) of the world's wild population (Marker, 2007), but also one of the last refuges for the rapidly declining population of lions in Southern Africa (Clarke *et al.* 1992). There is also a wide distribution of leopards that are found throughout the country. This supports Westbrook's (2002) statement that Namibia is Africa but Africa with a difference because of its biodiversity that makes it stand out among the other Sub-Saharan African countries.

With my experience and studies in Tanzania, and the research project I did at CCF, I hope to write my thesis on the focal questions – 'How have the relationship between Non-governmental Organization (NGO) conservation efforts and local people affected communities and large carnivore conservation? Do they share mutual understandings and goals? Why or why not? Are the outcomes of the relationship leading to the preservation or restoration of viable populations of large carnivores, their habitat and prey base conservation implications?'

Having those as my thesis questions, and a hypothesis that Namibia's large carnivores' (the three big-cats of Africa – cheetahs, lions and leopards) conservation efforts are not sufficient to sustain viable populations of them – the objectives of my thesis are to answer the following questions:

- What is conservation?
- What are the different conservation strategies?
- What are the conservation objectives?
- What are the conservation implications on the natural resources?
- What are the implications on the humans' populations and their relationship?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of predator conservation?

In the process of writing my thesis, I hope to also:

- give an overview of Namibia and its history
- look at the country's conservation history
- look at the three big cats of Africa, in Namibia and see what has been done about them as far as conservation is concerned – critique and give conservation management suggestions and recommendations
- look at community based conservation and how it could be incorporated with predator management, the shortcomings and ways forward
- suggest ways in which predator conservation could be improved (according to what has worked and what has not work in past) and to
- suggest conservation management strategies