

The State of NGOs in Post-apartheid South Africa: Changing Roles in Conservation and Development

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty alleviation and environmental protection were placed on the international stage once again with the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) meetings held in Johannesburg, South Africa from August–September 2002. During the Summit, a remarkable gathering of policy-makers, academics and activists met to negotiate the future of development practice and its implications for environmental sustainability. Although the consequences of these meetings are unclear and contested, the WSSD contributed to nearly thirty years of attempts to merge economic concerns with environmental protection under the mantra of sustainable development. Sustainable development, which is commonly defined as “[meeting] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, 43) has quickly become the trope for international development and sparked a significant amount of attention in professional and academic circles (Redclift 1987; Adams 1990, 2001; World Bank 1992, 2003; Bebbington and Thiele 1993).

Although the success of sustainable development is one of great debate (Lélé 1991; Lewis 1991; Adams 1995), a marked achievement has been the advancement of conservation on a global scale. Sustainable development’s insistence that environmental protection can occur in conjunction with economic growth has expanded the scale of conservation in the developing world and sparked a growth of research into diverse strategies that encourage the involvement of local communities and organizations in ownership and management (McCay and Acheson 1987; Western and Pearl 1989; Brandon and Wells 1992; Bruce, Fortmann and Nhira 1993; Hulme and Murphree 2001; Adams and Mulligan 2003). Since sustainable development presses for conservation along with an actively engaged civil society, attention is needed therefore to determine how civil society organizations advance the principles of sustainable development through their participation in conservation projects.¹ Additionally, there has been extensive research