

## Outcomes of community engagement in community-based natural resource management programmes



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Although the last century has witnessed exciting strategies in resource management in the form of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), these developments are more incremental than revolutionary. CBNRM falls into the wider development debate on the role of the state, particularly in the context of the development of Africa. Stakeholders, located at different levels along the international, national and local continuum, have differing views on this debate based on their experience and ideologies. These positions determine the form and practice of CBNRM, through negotiation, contests, collusions and intrigue. Case studies of the implementation of CBNRM in Zimbabwe and Botswana show both opportunities in terms of community benefit and wildlife conservation, and risks in the form of domination of communities by NGOs, the state and the private sector.

### Introduction

CBNRM has become such a dominant part of development discourse that a focus on local group participation in natural resource management in which *bona fide* members receive benefits has come to be seen as 'the right thing to do'. In practice, however, the objectives of the plan and the processes that emerge are not always congruent (North 1990). CBNRM plans neither guarantee particular outcomes nor a satisfactory chain of events that must occur as part of the implementation process. There is little reason to celebrate changes in natural resources management strategies in southern Africa as revolutionary, as many pro-CBNRM commentators would make us believe; rather, these are incremental in practice (Hulme & Murphree 1999). Consequently, to regard such changes as definitively community-based is not only a misnomer but may lead to a crisis of expectations.

The 1980s marked increasing dissatisfaction with state-centric natural resource management policies that had hitherto guided conservation practice. A bleak tale of resource degradation characterised most of the countries in the South: soil erosion, declining biological diversity in terrestrial and aquatic resources, increasing desertification and an aloof or alienated rural populace. This sad picture is attributed to state dominance in resource management. To obviate this state ineptitude, experts, especially from the North, made strong cases for the involvement of local groups in the management of natural resources. Local groups, to these advocates, had the advantage of

being rule-bound communities, making them malleable and robust resource management institutions. The state was seen as bad at managing natural resources and the community good.

A focus on the community was thought to be democratising because it assumed that local groups would take charge of the natural resources that they were in contact with every day. This was seen to be democracy from below in practice – the missing ingredient in developing country governance. It is easy therefore, to understand why donors gave the approach so much support. It addressed the political, conservation and developmental desires of a wide spectrum of actors. However, several questions emerge from such a perspective: what happens to the political economy that has shaped the context in which these local groups currently find themselves (Khan 1995)? Do external interests share the same vision of the role of the community? Is the community isolated from the regional, national and international processes that influence other developments within the state?

This policy brief examines the efficacy of the community concept in explaining outcomes of planned intervention in general and CBNRM more specifically. The primary aim here is to illustrate the point that a development project involves the interaction of a broad network of actors and interests. Local and supra-local actors seek to promote their interests in intervention programmes. An important way they do this is to promote or protect those institutions that enable them to realise their interests. For this reason,

we argue that an analysis of the institutional landscape may help us understand how outcomes are configured.

## **CBNRM in Zimbabwe**

Through the Parks and Wildlife Act of 1975, the racially segregated Rhodesian state allowed the mostly white owners of land held under private tenure to commercially exploit wildlife found on their lands. In general, this institutional change led to increased interest in conservation among white commercial farmers because wildlife was no longer a nuisance to them; it now had some commercial value. Because the Act was restricted to private land, Africans did not benefit because they neither had control over land nor could own any land. At the time of Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, wildlife made very little contribution to the livelihoods of residents of communal areas save for occasional poaching by some residents of frontier areas. In fact some rural households sought to exterminate wildlife because it was considered to be one of the causes of poor harvests.

After independence, the Act was amended to allow rural district councils (RDCs) to commercially exploit wildlife on communal land. This made space for the establishment of the Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). CAMPFIRE aims to promote conservation of natural resources in areas held under communal tenure. It is a CBNRM initiative that organises defined groups to collectively manage natural resources in an area and offsets the transactional costs incurred by these local groups by giving them financial and other material benefits. The programme assumes that local communities will be motivated to conserve the resources because they benefit from them in the same way that private landowners were motivated.

At face value, CAMPFIRE satisfies the conservation objectives of the state at the same time as satisfying the needs of local communities. However, it cannot really be seen as CBNRM unless the state agencies are benign, disinterested parties. Also, its notion of being 'community-based' is problematic because communities are not homogenous. Rural households cannot collectively adopt the objectives of a programme such as CAMPFIRE. The programme therefore excludes certain parts of the community and it excludes actors that may operate at the local level.

In some ways, conditions in communal areas are similar to those on private lands, but there are a number of crucial differences which have an impact on the conservation objectives of programmes like CAMPFIRE. Wildlife is a fugitive resource, not a captive one. Decisions about cropping patterns, labour investment, disposal of products and use of farm and off-farm income are at the discretion of individual households in both private and communal contexts. These decisions affect the transactional and opportunity costs that a management unit chooses to incur

in respect of conserving wildlife. But in a private land setting, the wildlife is privately owned, and in a communal area it is not. Households in communal area are therefore less likely to invest in wildlife conservation.

Boundaries on freehold farms are clearly marked on maps and physically demarcated with fences in most places. Apart from marking boundaries, the fences can be used to hem in, and claim property rights over, any wildlife within the confines of the farm. This capacity to own wildlife was one of the major institutional changes that emerged from the Parks and Wildlife Act. Private land holders responded to changes related to wildlife management mainly because decision-making over benefits and costs took place within the individual ownership unit. In the communal areas, boundaries exist and are recognised, but they are not as fixed as those on private lands. In contrast to lands held under private tenure, natural resources like wildlife, pastures, forests and rivers are neither privatised to any household nor to any grouping. These resources are common pool resources ideally under the control of informal institutions. Wildlife is a fugitive resource and this is all the more so in communal lands where fences for common pool resources seldom exist. Under such conditions of free movement, households cannot effectively claim ownership over the wildlife even though they may want to. It is clear in such contexts that attempts to define producer communities are at best difficult and at worst futile. Even if an attempt is made to functionally define such a community, it is quite clear that the emerging management unit may serve to create rather than settle disputes over resource sharing and juridical control.

The CAMPFIRE programme is definitely more complex than economic incentives and conservation as the government's policy document on wildlife suggests (DNPWLM 1991a). The producer community seems to be more imagined than real. At the policy level the RDC is considered a co-owner of the wildlife with the community. Even if we were to accept that the RDC is simply an institution of local government, research clearly shows that there is a disjuncture between the theory and practice of decentralised rural governance (de Valk & Wekwete 1990). In a feasibility study of wildlife utilisation in the Tsholotsho District, Murphree (1989:9) says:

*We also heard complaints about inadequate communication and decision-making channels between the (Rural District) Council and the wards, and between the councillors and communities. "There is a communication gap – between the Council and the wards", said one informant. This is not a complaint confined to Tsholotsho and can be encountered in many communal lands.*

Campbell et al. (2001) note competition between the RDCs and the communities that they purport to represent as a serious problem in the CAMPFIRE approach to CBNRM. Such observations call for a critical assessment of how the CBNRM prototype operates in a scenario where the

RDC is involved. In reality such a planned development programme involves multiple actors and by implication multiple interests. Perhaps it can be argued that the wildlife policy implicitly ensures that an empowerment process is in-built in the methods; the RDC will involve the producer community. Cheater (1999), however, advises us to view such assumptions of benevolent outsiders with caution. An analysis of the outcomes of CBNRM initiatives such as the CAMPFIRE programme call for more careful investigation of the implementation process.

### **CBNRM in Botswana**

The CBNRM model adopted in the 1990s in Botswana was inspired by the CAMPFIRE experience. The Natural Resources Management Project (NRMP) was a bilateral venture between the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the government of Botswana. The NRMP aimed to involve rural people in financially productive management of wild resources, both as managers and beneficiaries. The underlying hypothesis was that giving rural people a financial stake in the benefits derived through conservative (sustainable?) use of wild resources would provide them with incentives to conserve those resources.

The NRMP spent the period 1990–1993 on developing the strategic formulation of an appropriate national approach to CBNRM. Botswana's civil society sector was small and more or less centralised in the capital Gaborone. It also seemed that rural people themselves did not have the technical, organisational and management skills needed to manage natural resource management projects effectively. By 1993 the NRMP had decided that local level management would best be facilitated by assisting rural villagers to establish legally representative community-based organisations (CBOs). It was further decided to endow these CBOs with management rights over significant wild resource areas, and then to assist them to enter into joint ventures with private sector partners. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) and its NRMP advisors were expected to play a key organising and facilitating role. This approach was finally ratified in 1995 by the government, and a co-operation agreement around the initiative was established between the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing.

The joint venture partner in this relationship would be a 'for-profit' tourism company that would operate more or less jointly with the village residents. Over time, the private sector partner was expected to transfer technical and management skills that would enable its rural village partners to manage the resource base on their own. In theory, the joint venture partner would provide field equipment, material, capital and expertise needed in a concessionary operation, while the community sector would provide the concessionary area.

The details of how profit-sharing or other methods of remuneration had to be worked out before any joint venture was established, and community organisations would choose their partners after a tender process. The tenders were facilitated by the District Council Planning Office, representatives of the DWNP, the Land Board, and advisers from the Natural Resources Management Project. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), comprising representatives from these offices, was established to short-list and advise community trusts on the selection of a joint venture partner. The final choice of the partner would be made by the membership of the community trust acting through a review committee.

In almost all cases where the joint venture model has been followed, the CBOs have opted for a straight sub-lease to a safari concessionaire. The concessionaire pays a large annual concession fee, and any manner of other financially valuable considerations. These include:

- a certain percentage of employment opportunities being filled from among the village community
- agreed shares of meat from hunts
- free transportation
- a promised number of small enterprise grants to the community organisation
- assistance with small development projects within the village or villages
- the construction of community trust facilities in the village
- electrified fencing of agricultural fields for village residents
- a funeral fund for village residents.

The ability of a CBO to provide its sub-leasing partner with a concession area and hunting quota depends on it maintaining its representative and accountable standing as a legal entity. It must also act in conformance with its deed of trust and any other conditions and agreements. These are stipulated in terms of the CBO's management plan that forms the basis of the Land Board's allocation of a head lease for the concession area's resources, and the DWNP's issuing of the annual hunting quota for hunting concessions. Normally community trusts have been organised on the basis of a simple deed of trust with an executive board of trustees drawn from the residents of the village and representatively elected.

'High-stakes' opportunities have been created through CBNRM in the northern community trusts of Botswana. These high stakes have created a complex arena in which elite factions contend for control within the village or community trust. The contest for control comes to be played out through the strategic manipulation of village opinion, leading to the practical disenfranchisement of ordinary people, except as pawns, from the 'community' and ultimately to the disempowerment of the common people to act as effective participants in civil society – much

less as committed conservators of wild resources. If elites have a predilection for becoming knaves, then what makes the commoners perpetual pawns?

## High stakes and elite co-option

This structuring of the CBNRM arena has created major incentives for town-oriented rural elites to once again turn their eyes to the villages. This caused many people who had settled in towns to frequently return home to participate in the community trust. Income from sub-lessee concessionaires to the community sector through the various forms of remuneration during the latter half of the 1990s generally exceeded P500 000 (approximately US\$100 000) per year in formal payments. Since 2000, total fees and formal financial commitments payable to the community trusts for hire of their concessions and exclusive rights to resources have been on the order of P1 000 000 per year.

During the start-up phase for CBNRM from 1996, residents of some villages reported that members of the elite who were employed in the safari industry were encouraged and given incentives by their employers to attend community trust functions. They also got involved in the activities of the community trust to try to ensure that their employers stood a better chance of winning a tender. But gaining formal control of a community trust and its resources provided far greater potential gains than any incentive an outside agency could provide.

Within the community, elites stood the chance of gaining control of:

- vehicles and transportation
- processes leading to the allocation of employment opportunities
- processes leading to the allocation of training opportunities
- processes leading to the allocation of citizen hunting licences
- the allocation of meat derived from concessionaire hunting activities
- the implementation of village-level benefit programmes (including such conditions as allowing or disallowing the granting of credit in trust-operated general dealers and tuck shops and the use and equipping of other trust-owned facilities)
- the expenditure of large and small sums of money (as well as executive control over the means of expending and accounting for such funds).

As a broker with external agencies, elites stood the chance of gaining control of:

- the responsibility to control the decision-making processes and flow of formal information leading to the allocation of community concession areas
- the ability to negotiate with concessionaires and representatives of the private sector regarding temporary exceptions to the joint venture agreement, as

well as for interpretation and amendment of formal agreements

- the right to negotiate, treat, 'define the situation' and to represent the community stance with officers of government and donor agencies on behalf of the community sector.

Each of these parameters of control can be handled in ways that produce significant advantages for those responsible for their management and execution.

It is nearly impossible for short-term social research to detect the extent of class and wealth differentiation in any given village. More importantly, it is difficult to discern the extent to which informal power relations and influence affect decision-making by ordinary people. Further it is difficult to predict how and under what conditions incentives will arise, within changing social and economic contexts, for changes in behaviour that are antithetical to the common good. The public display of influence is normally shielded, and is likely to be discerned only during crises of control, when the stakes are high. In contrast, programme research is seldom done. When it does take place, it is done once under pressure of time and resources by people who may not be clear of what they are looking for at the outset.

The situation is worsened by the relatively uncritical publications on CBNRM in Botswana. Where they have identified problems in governance, these writers have assumed that these issues can be resolved through remedial training. This contributes to the impression that problems are superficial 'teething problems' rather than fundamental structural problems with the CBNRM model that has been adopted. Although there is great promise in CBNRM for biodiversity conservation and for empowerment of the rural sector, the fact that the same governance problems arise in various community trusts that something is wrong.

As practitioners we are learning what to look for: how to anticipate problems in the structuring of CBNRM processes, how to enable rural people to recognise the possibility of these problems arising, and how to plan for and manage them. We have seen that rural people can acquire new skills and learn to apply them in a relatively short time if they are freed from the fetters of patron-client politics. The Kgetsinya Tsie experience, based upon a series of inter-group associations linking independent five-person resource user groups, and the experimental Shorobe Tebelopele Trust and its Kuchachaa photographic enterprises are both experiences in fundamental decentralisation into localised five-person management units. Neither involve concessions or the generation of a 'big pot' of money. Both have been developed over relatively long start-up periods involving 'transformative education' and both seem to have been relatively resistant to elite politics. But

experimentation takes time and focus, and it is not clear that the agenda and time frames of international donors will allow for this. Nor is it sure that the mood of those responsible for policy will allow the time needed to redirect the structure and process.

Despite the fundamental nature of the problems, however, it would be an error to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Though we have no proven assurance in the case of Botswana that the CBNRM hypothesis is valid – that is, that ‘giving rural people a stake in the benefits of wild resources will create genuine incentives to sustain and conserve them’ – it is a concept that makes good socio-economic sense. Those in national and local government given responsibility to promote the smooth implementation of CBNRM have often personally agonised that they may not be doing a good job, that somehow the failures of Botswana’s CBNRM approach may be their own failures. Instead, they should recognise that ‘the model’ that they have been tasked to implement is fundamentally flawed. The joint-venture model creates profound perverse incentives for co-option and manipulation that, in the context of rural society and culture, and the immersion of rural people as marginal players in a rapidly evolving cash economy, make any efforts to promote participatory, equitably-empowering development meaningless.

There has been no test of the CBNRM hypothesis in northern Botswana. It ought to be fairly tested, and ordinary people, including the poor, ought to be given a reasonable chance to play a genuine role as conservators and remunerated managers of wild resources. We have learned a great deal about the strengths and weaknesses of rural people and of rural society and culture. It is time to use what has been learned, and to redesign the vehicle for CBNRM on wholly new lines, from the foundation up. Of course, the major difficulty in this planning for change will then be the question of how will the rural sector be represented?

## Conclusions

CBNRM is critically influenced by its producers, distributors and consumers. The donor fraternity considers it a truism that rolling back the African state and its various manifestations is a pre-requisite for development; transparency, accountability, efficiency. As a result, any development initiative is best done by the donor itself or by local partner NGOs on behalf of the community. Donors assume that the presence of NGOs, regardless of their (dis)honesty and competence is an assurance that development will take place. With the same line of reasoning, the NGOs find it necessary to create new institutions at the local level, in the form of committees or CBOs. These local organisations are an attempt to re-invent the local resource management institutions that were weakened by the colonial and postcolonial state.

The state at local and national levels considers itself to be the legitimate provider to communities and it is therefore opposed to any attempts by donors and NGOs to sideline its efforts. As an actor, the state uses its advantages as ultimate custodian of natural resources, designer and implementer of legislation, the development agenda and more permanent status to undercut the good intentions of CBNRM. The state generally provides minimal support to NGO initiatives, if any, and the spectre of government taking over an initiative is always present.

The private sector, mainly in the form of safari operators, has an intercalary status. It is in CBNRM as part of its business as well as the fact that this sector has always been the traditional user of wildlife for commercial purposes. As business people they use all possible ways to advance their interests, some morally and ethically questionable. Some of the practices contribute to the nature of CBNRM on the ground. CBNRM in southern Africa is based largely on safari hunting or consumptive tourism of mega fauna. The private sector, for historical and organisational reasons, has been the most efficient at exploiting this option. However, the private sector is not a community development enterprise, primarily, and will therefore shrewdly ensure that it remains in business. This takes place against a background of poverty-struck, sometimes illiterate and heterogeneous villagers and a state that is either suspicious of CBNRM, or sees natural resource exploitation as a revenue source. As the dominant players, the state and the private sector will survive in the CBNRM arena, the community is less likely to benefit.

This is not to suggest that communities are not active agents. Although constrained, communities will try to salvage what remains from the benefits of the safari operator and local authorities. This may be in the form of protection from wildlife, game meat from safari hunts or employment opportunities. In some cases, the community will align itself with the state and try to get it to play ‘the father’s role’ in patron-client relationships. Should CBNRM appear to be too complex, communities return to their other livelihood strategies, some of which may compete with or complement the goals of CBNRM.

Another feature is the ubiquity of the NGO, not the state, as the driver of the CBNRM. Why is this a pattern common to all CBNRM programmes? NGO participation in CBNRM is a microcosm of the broader development debate. The presence of NGOs in CBNRM is due to the availability of donor funding. Donors fund this area because they doubt the capacity of the African state, they believe the involvement of the private sector is essential, and they see communities as clients in need of a patron. However as the experiences of southern Africa in general show, donor funding are fickle and, if they dry up, the efforts of NGOs will also dry up. This will leave local communities exposed, leaving the state to determine the

nature of decentralisation in general and CBNRM in particular. The sequence of this scenario is: state control of resources, seemingly vibrant CBNRM with the support of a donor, a suspicious or envious state, and a return to state control when the donor leaves.

CBNRM involves a multiplicity of actors at various levels. CBNRM policy and implementation is therefore a nexus of various interests within and outside the community. The community should be viewed not as a homogenous entity, but as a complex unit with various functional and organisational features. CBNRM raises the question of the role of state and non-state actors in development. Lastly, actor choices are in the short term a product of their reading of the environment but that there is a distinct pattern or path in terms of choices made.

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