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Community conservation and participatory policy processes in southern Africa

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Policy context

Throughout southern Africa, governments have made policy changes that created the enabling conditions for CBNRM implementation.¹ These changes have focused on devolving rights over the use of wildlife to local communities and enabling the communities to retain the benefits from using the wildlife. Across the region these policy changes have taken different forms and have been driven by the political and historical contexts of each country. There are also considerable differences across the region in the extent to which the policies provide local communities with the authority over wildlife to take their own management decisions. In most cases the State retains considerable decision-making authority. Also in several countries, the State shares its income from wildlife with local communities rather than giving them the right to earn and retain the income themselves.

While experience suggests that CBNRM can be very effective when rights and responsibilities are clearly devolved, especially when combined with high quality but 'light touch' support, there have nevertheless been disappointments associated with insufficient commitment to the principles of devolution. In Zimbabwe the intended devolution of authority to

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community level did not fully take place and became stuck at intermediate levels of government such as district administrations. In most countries in the region officials have held on to power and not allowed the devolution of authority intended by policy to take place. In Botswana the government tried to remove the ability of communities to directly receive the income earned from hunting and tourism by issuing a new policy directive. The government could do this because CBNRM policy had not been backed up by accompanying legislation providing protection to communities from arbitrary decisions by officials and politicians. This shows how policies are not sufficient on their own to provide secure rights to communities and how they can be changed by the administrative stroke of a pen or touch of a keyboard. Similarly, hard-won progress in fiscal devolution in CBNRM under

¹ Community-based natural source management

a NORAD-funded programme in Luangwa Valley was based on project agreements between Norway and Zambia, but simply melted away when personalities in the Norwegian embassy and project were changed.²

Another problem regarding the CBNRM policy process in southern Africa is that policies are often made through top-down, bureaucratic decisions and in response to crisis or without the full benefit of information or advice from people who best represent the different stakeholders of CBNRM. A major constraint to community participation and communities getting full benefit from natural resource management is the lack of organisational structures at local community level. Also, capacity to lobby government effectively to promote CBNRM or to promote increased devolution of decision-making to local level institutions is lacking.

In general, then, the policy reforms do not provide sufficient authority to local communities, which CBNRM theory suggests is essential to promoting sustainable natural resource management. Also, in most cases, policies were changed without government enabling the intended beneficiaries – the local communities – to be involved in policy formulation.

This article presents two case studies of approaches to policy development in Zambia and Namibia. The Zambian case study describes mechanisms developed to increase civil society participation in policy development, and in influencing government to improve its policy and legislation, particularly through greater devolution of authority over natural resources to local communities. The Namibian case study deals with methodologies used to involve local communities in the development of new policy and legislation.

Case study 1: Policy tools for natural resources and CBNRM implementation in Zambia

The government of Zambia recognises the importance of natural resources management for the enhancement of economic development, and was one of the first countries in the region to promote CBNRM. However, despite much significant investment in 'policy development' by donors over the years, CBNRM in Zambia is not strongly rooted in formal policy. It has been driven by a constituency of poorly coordinated individuals, NGOs and donors with interests in promoting CBNRM, with bases in various departments (wildlife, forestry, fisheries), donor agencies (Norway, USA, Dutch, Danes, Finns, etc.) and geographic locations (Banguelo, Luangwa, Kafue, Western Province, etc.). So CBNRM in

Zambia is comprised of a number of isolated pockets of experimentation (e.g. programmes making up an alphabetical soup such as ADMADE, LIRD, COMACO, Mufunta CBNRM, CONASA, UNDP etc.) that are not underpinned by a coherent set of policies, are sometimes competitive in a negative way, and are vulnerable to self-interested interpretations of 'policy' and to changes in personnel in key positions in government and donor agencies. This gives rise to a paradox. On the one hand, CBNRM is well accepted by agencies responsible for fisheries, forestry and wildlife. On the other, agencies often put their self-interest ahead of giving communities unambiguous rights and benefits and seem, deliberately, to keep operational procedures unclear. For example, the new Zambian Wildlife Act 1998 establishes the structures and roles of the Zambia Wildlife Authority and Community Resources Boards in co-management arrangements for wildlife resource management. But it requires subsidiary administrative legislation on key issues such as revenue distribution, managerial rights and responsibilities, and participatory process and accountability mechanisms to translate it into an effective framework for CBNRM. However,

Box 1: Example of the de-link between policy and practice

With weak central leadership, CBNRM has 'bubbled up' in different ways in different locations. The Luangwa Integrated Resource Development Project, (LIRD), for example, was based on written agreements between the governments of Zambia and Norway rather than national policy, and was initially hived off from the wildlife department into the economics and planning ministry because the then President Kaunda, did not trust the wildlife department. The National Parks and Wildlife Service responded by establishing the ADMADE programme, which largely supported village scouts and used revenue sharing proportions that officially gave community leaders 15% of hunting fees for projects. The 1998 Zambia Wildlife Authority Act provided a legal basis for the formation of Community Resource Boards (CRBs). But it left a lot of operational details – including the principles of revenue sharing – ambiguous and open to interpretation by the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA). To survive financially, ZAWA, holds on to some 70% of the value of wildlife in communal areas (retaining 50% of trophy fees and 80% of concession fees). While the '50%' arrangement was 'agreed' at a 'participatory' workshop held by ZAWA, many stakeholders believed this was inequitable and unworkable. It was also clear that:

- the CRBs had no mechanisms for downward accountability to communities;
- mechanisms of upward accountability similarly were extremely weak;
- most of the revenues were being mis-managed; and
- CRBs simply spent money with no rules, principles, objectives or guidelines with, at most, 20% of revenues used effectively (largely for anti-poaching) and no participation or benefit anywhere below the CRB itself.

² Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

these administrative conditions have not been forthcoming. The Zambian Wildlife Authority keeps a significant amount of the revenues from communal lands for itself, thus undermining the intent of the Act (Box 1).

Recognising that these problems were general to Zambia, but also frustrated that the responsible agency seemed not to be listening, individuals, NGOs, and projects embarked on a strategy for improving the policy and framework for CBNRM.

The challenge was to develop and implement CBNRM policy and operational procedures where:

- the responsible agencies lacked capacity (e.g. Ministry of Environment) or had a vested interest (e.g. ZAWA) in capturing finances centrally;
- civil society was weak and divided; and
- local communities were neither confident, knowledgeable, nor politically organised to claim stronger rights and responsibilities for wild resources.

Processes adopted

Recognising the problems outlined above, several NGOs and donor-funded projects initiated a consultative process. At one level, they sought to increase the political capacity of communities by building a representative political association, the Zambia CBNRM Forum. At another level, they sought to develop the Natural Resource Consultative Forum as a means of bringing professionals and policy makers together.

The Zambia CBNRM Forum

During a consultative process, the USAID-supported Community Based Natural Resources Management and Sustainable Agriculture Project (CONASA), IUCN (The World Conservation Union) Zambia, WWF (World Wildlife Fund for Nature) Zambia and others recognised that there was no political mechanism for local people to express their priorities at a national level. CBNRM support agencies worked together to set up several representational regional CBNRM forums, with the intention of building a national CBNRM forum from the bottom up. The Zambia National CBNRM Forum aims to lobby for rights and revenues, and to inform national level policy dialogue through the NRCF (discussed below). However it is still in its infancy and has yet to become fully entrenched as an institutional mechanism at the grassroots level.

The Zambia Natural Resources Consultative Forum

The Zambia Natural Resource Consultative Forum is modelled on the Agricultural Consultative Forum, which proved highly effective at bringing together key stakeholders (NGOs,

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government agencies and private consultancies) to discuss and feed into national policies. Donor funds were earmarked for the NRCF in 2000, but it was only established in 2004 because of conflicts – and perceived conflicts – amongst the various players.

NRCF membership comprises professionals from a wide range of agencies involved in the sector, including the relevant government ministries and quasi-government bodies in the natural resources (NR) and tourism sectors, professional and interest group associations such as the CBNRM Forum and private-sector Tourism Council, NGOs, traditional rulers (who are particularly powerful and influential in Zambia) and representatives of key donors in the sector.

The NRCF is managed by an independent secretariat, answerable to the elected chair of the forum and to the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources (MTENR). A private firm, Development Services Initiative (DSI) did a large amount of the preparatory work for the NRCF, and was contracted to support it until it could be weaned off as an independent organisation.

NRCF is endorsed by the MTENR as a neutral platform for promoting stakeholder participation in natural resource management. Its mandate is to enable professional stakeholders to deliberate and inform Zambia’s NR policy, and in so doing increase both stakeholder input into, and the technical quality of, these policies and actions. The NRCF acts as forum for sharing information about on-going interventions in the sector, intending to enrich the policy formulation and development process and reduce levels of conflict, duplication and overlaps through increased coordination and sharing of ideas.

The NRCF does not replace existing membership bodies,

interest groups or forums, but facilitates close cooperation between them. Neither does it take over the strategic role of ministries responsible for natural resources, seeking only to coordinate and tap into additional knowledge and advisory resources to support the ministries' policy role. Moreover, the NRCF has a technical mandate and is not a political or a lobby group. To achieve this, the NRCF holds monthly stakeholder meetings, workshops or seminars, commissions key studies, and provides advisory notes to the relevant ministries.

The NRCF has four planned outputs:

- improved stakeholder participation and responsibility in the sector;
- formal advisory notes to the relevant ministries;
- the development of a stronger technical understanding of pertinent issues through discussion and contracted research; and
- sustainability by demonstrating its value to donors willing to fund it.

In its first year, the NRCF established itself as a technical body administered through democratic principles, elected a chair, hired a secretariat, and met every four to six weeks. It commissioned studies (e.g. of nature-based tourism in Zambia and a survey of poverty in the Game Management Areas) and submitted a policy advisory note on joint forest management which resulted in a statutory instrument putting participatory joint forestry into effect.

Case study 2: Promoting community involvement in CBNRM policy development in Namibia

At Namibia's independence from South Africa in 1990, the new government inherited conservation laws (promulgated in 1975) that gave white freehold farmers rights over wildlife so that they could gain economic benefit from use of wildlife through hunting, live sale of wildlife, meat production and photographic tourism. The devolution of these rights to white farmers had reversed a trend of declining wildlife populations on freehold land brought about because white farmers derived little economic benefit from wild animals that competed with their livestock for water and grazing. A multi-million dollar wildlife industry developed and wildlife numbers increased.

However, the same rights had not been provided to black communal farmers by the pre-independence South African authorities. Government would allow some game animals to be shot for special occasions like traditional feasts, but generally black farmers had little legal access to wildlife. At this time Namibia's Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism had begun to realise that successful conservation needed to recog-

Box 2: Socio-ecological survey methodology

A basic model for the surveys has evolved over time:

Survey planning

The surveys are planned to take place over a 10-14 day period and to be carried out as a team effort between government, community leaders and, where appropriate, NGO personnel.

Information sharing

An initial briefing is held at the start of the survey consisting of short presentations by participants on various relevant topics to begin the process of sharing information. Community members and leaders provide their perspectives and technical experts from government and other institutions provide theirs. This initial briefing establishes a participatory and interactive relationship between all survey participants

Ecological survey

Environmental scientists carry out an ecological survey if little is known about the state of the environment in that particular area. They carry out inventory work and assess the state of resources, the extent of human impact and utilisation and the potential for sustainable utilisation.

Socio-economic survey

The socio-economic survey is carried out by a joint team of government, community and NGO personnel through holding meetings at household, focus group, village or community level where appropriate. Care is taken to ensure the participation of women and other groups such as young adults, or marginalised groups such as the San. The aim is to listen and understand community aspirations, values and attitudes.

Report-back meetings

Several report back meetings are held by all participants during the survey. These meetings serve to review the methodology and suggest changes where necessary. They also provide an opportunity for identification/confirmation of the key issues or problems that need addressing.

End-of-survey workshop

At the end of the survey participants debate and agree on the key issues which need to be addressed for natural resource management. Proposals for dealing with these issues are then debated and agreed. If necessary, time is spent identifying areas of common ground and areas of remaining disagreement. An action plan and responsibilities for implementing the action plan are agreed upon.

Survey report and feedback

A report on the survey is compiled using the results of the survey as well as published and unpublished reports on social, economic and ecological aspects of the survey area. The report is then distributed to all stakeholders and feedback meetings held to discuss the report. Once all stakeholders are happy that it reflects the results of the survey the action plan can be implemented.

nise the human and social dimensions of natural resource management. However, if the Ministry was to engage with rural communities it needed some methodologies that could be used to break down years of mistrust and sometimes hostility between local people and nature conservators. The Ministry in conjunction with the Namibian NGO, Integrated

Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), jointly developed the socio-ecological survey technique as a tool for involving rural people in conservation (Box 2).

Unlike the Zambian example, key officials in the Ministry were highly committed to CBNRM and actively drove a participatory process that eventually set in place the legislative conditions for conservancy formation, although they also needed to bring on board a number of their colleagues. Socio-ecological surveys were used both to understand local aspirations and as an entry point to initiate projects in rural areas that established a partnership between local people and government in the management of resources such as wildlife, forestry, and fisheries. The surveys used methodologies similar to participatory rural appraisal and rapid rural appraisal. They aimed to facilitate an understanding by government officials of community attitudes and aspirations, and an exchange of knowledge between communities and technical experts. They proved invaluable for building trust and for initiating a joint understanding of problems and the joint development of solutions.

The early surveys (1990–1992) led to a realisation that if real community involvement and benefit was to be achieved, then Namibia's conservation policy and legislation had to be changed. Important results from the surveys were:

- although local communities did not like the way conservation was being imposed on them, and they experienced problems from predators and elephants, they did not want to see wildlife disappear;
- rural communities were aware of and wanted the same rights over wildlife as the white freehold farmers;
- rural communities were keen to gain economic benefit from wildlife and integrate it into existing livelihood activities and land uses.

These were important insights at the time because the prevailing conservation ideology viewed local people as poachers who wanted to eat the wildlife. There was little understanding that local people also valued wildlife for aesthetic and cultural reasons. Further, because of the separation caused by apartheid few white officials were aware of community aspirations and values. The surveys were less important for informing the advocates of policy change than for sharing knowledge and creating shared goals between local people and government officials, and for changing the national conservation narrative to involve previously disadvantaged communities as conservation partners. Shared goals included conserving wildlife, and incorporating wildlife use and tourism as part of local rural development, and provided a platform for cooperation and policy development.

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Hands-on learning by policy makers participating in pilot communities provided an important grounding for policy and administration decisions, and for rehabilitating relationships with local people who were alienated by the pre-Independence hostile conservation approach. Moreover, common participation builds common commitment, while officials designed a shared methodology that could be used in different situations to build consensus about mutual objectives and joint action plan.

Based on the survey results, the MWCT and various partners then worked at the community level to develop local community-based projects and at the national level on policy and legislative reform. A number of projects were developed with donor support that focused on generating income for communities from wildlife-based tourism, involving communities in wildlife monitoring, preventing poaching, and establishing liaison and cooperation mechanisms with MWCT staff (Box 3).

As the socio-ecological surveys had been carried out in only six wildlife-rich areas in the north-east and north-west of the country, MWCT held a national workshop in which it aimed to get broader input from traditional authorities and other community leaders from around the country. This workshop confirmed the results of the socio-ecological surveys and provided a strong mandate for the MWCT to move ahead with policy and legislative reform. MWCT developed a policy document which laid out the rationale for devolving rights to local communities and the mechanisms for achieving this. The Ministry submitted the policy to Cabinet for adoption as a national policy and with a request that Cabinet give the go-ahead for the development of new legislation to put the policy into effect. Cabinet gave its approval and the Ministry began the process of amending legislation so that black communal farmers could receive the same rights over wildlife as white freehold farmers.

Box 3: Examples of projects and activities resulting from socio-ecological surveys

- With support from WWF-US, in the West Caprivi Game Park the San community established community game guards who were responsible for wildlife monitoring and preventing poaching. A community-run campsite was established to bring some income from wildlife and tourism to the inhabitants. A community committee was established to manage the game guards and the income from the campsite and to liaise with park officials. A zoning plan was agreed which created multiple use areas where people lived, and core conservation areas where there would be no settlement. A project field officer was appointed to assist in liaison between the government, local people and NGOs and build the capacity of the community committee.
- In the Nyae Nyae area in eastern Namibia, the survey led to a reduction of hostility and suspicion by local people towards the government conservation agency. With funding from the Biodiversity Support Programme, community game guards were appointed, a joint liaison committee between local people and conservation officials was established, a researcher was appointed to work with local people on addressing problem animal issues, and a liaison officer appointed to foster continued improved relationships and communication.
- In response to community requests, officials worked on developing policy and legislation that would give the communities the same rights over wildlife as white freehold farmers. Lessons from the community projects that resulted from the surveys were used in policy development. These included the need for communities to define themselves rather than using artificial administrative boundaries, and the need for flexibility in policy and legislation to take into account the different needs of different communities and socio-ecological circumstances in different parts of the country. Government held a number of additional consultations at national level, and new policy and legislation was passed. The result of the policy and legal changes is that in 2006 there were 44 community wildlife and tourism management bodies called conservancies in Namibia. In most of these conservancies wildlife is increasing. In 2005 the conservancies jointly earned close to US\$3 million from sustainable use of wildlife and other natural resources and from tourism.

At the same time a number of lessons were being learnt from the projects that had been initiated with local communities in the field. Ministry personnel working on policy and legislation were also involved in the management of these projects and were able to use these lessons and experiences to feed into the policy process.

The key principles to emerge from this process are as follows:

- the survey process provided a platform for local communities to express their views and aspirations regarding wildlife conservation;
- the surveys led to the realisation that communities and

government had a shared agenda regarding wildlife conservation;

- the surveys provided a clear indication of community wishes that could drive the policy development process;
- ongoing field activities with local communities provided important lessons for policy development;
- those developing policy had sufficient links to these field activities for policy to be grounded in local-level experiences as well as in the theory of CBNRM and common property resource management.

Conclusion and lessons learnt

Both case studies demonstrate attempts to find practical and logistically feasible ways of enabling participation of stakeholders in the policy process. However, the type of process followed depends very much on local circumstances. In Zambia, where buy-in from key state agencies was not convincing, the approach taken was to build structures to enable local communities and professionals to participate more actively in the policy process. In Namibia, where government commitment was stronger, a policy process was followed that provided government with a clear direction and mandate from local communities and, enabled government to move on with the detail of policy and legislation, but with emerging lessons from the field guiding government's ongoing work.

Academic prescriptions for policy development advocate elaborate mechanisms to ensure the participation of stakeholders throughout the process, and structured approaches to ensure consensus at all stages of the process. This is fine in theory, but almost impossible in practice: in countries with large illiterate populations, and geographic remoteness and distances exacerbated by poor infrastructure, how does even a willing government involve local people in the policy process and avoid domination by special or élite interests? Indeed, over-elaborate and time-consuming processes are expensive and may ultimately lead to a state of 'participatory paralysis', which anyone familiar with a plethora of talkshops that lead to negligible policy or implementational change will recognise. Too often participation becomes an end in itself, and is ticked off as accomplishment in project reports. Often little is achieved because consensus over the minutiae of the last clause of the policy is particularly elusive where there are no practical examples from which to learn.

Indeed, the southern African experiences suggests that the initial innovation or quantum change in policy seldom results from overly participatory processes, although participation becomes important later for consolidating gains or

making further policy adjustments. Much of the policy reform in southern Africa was initiated by individuals or small cohorts of people, almost always involving key government officials. They created legislative or administrative space to experiment with devolution, then participated actively and adaptively with pilot communities. They used the success of these pilot programmes to change the national narrative and sometimes to further advance the legal and administrative foundation for community conservation.

Although the end points are similar (i.e. the legal empowerment of local communities to manage and benefit from their wild resources), the process by which devolutionary policy has been developed has varied greatly even within a fairly cohesive and well-networked region like southern Africa. In Zimbabwe and Namibia, insightful government officials changed the primary legislation to catalyse CBNRM. In Botswana, a donor-funded project created administrative conditions for the same, with some contemporary signs that this progress will be reversed. In the absence of committed central leadership, locality-specific programmes have 'bubbled up' in Zambia and Mozambique under the championship of various individuals, donors and officials.

The common themes are set out below.

- Key individuals make an enormous difference in the itera-

tive process of pilot experimentation and policy change.

- The policy end-point principles are similar in all the countries mentioned.
- Strategies to getting to these end-points, however, differ enormously, a contrast illustrated by the cases of Namibia and Zambia.
- Getting pilot programmes started and making sure they work is probably a necessary step before highly participatory policy processes can be effective or grounded in reality.
- There is inevitably strong opposition to empowering communities so that proponents of policy change need to be highly opportunistic and innovative, and often have to make strategic compromises.
- Change is very difficult unless strategically important individuals within government either drive it or are willing to allow others to do so. This suggests that the strategy employed by donors and/or NGOs of by-passing 'difficult' agencies is unlikely to succeed.

Perhaps the most important lesson we have learnt is that policy statements can be misleading. They suggest that things are happening when they are not. The sustainability of effective CBNRM depends on changes in primary legislation that entrench the rights of communities to manage, benefit from and dispose of wild resources in law.

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