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A participatory methodology for community-based land and resource use planning: a case study from Tanzania

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• Introduction

This paper provides a short account of a participatory methodology used in the development of land and resource use plans. This methodology overcomes constraints imposed when traditional processes focusing on technical issues such as land use capability are employed. Moreover, it allows stakeholders to develop their own land and resource use designations and encourages local-level resource management. The outcome of the process is, we argue, a more sustainable and appropriate land and resource use plan.

• Background

For centuries the Lake Eyasi basin in Tanzania's Rift Valley has been inhabited by a small hunting-gathering community (the Hadza) whose complex understanding of the local ecology enables them to cope with the harsh environment.

However, since the middle part of this century land and population pressure in surrounding areas has meant that agriculturalists (the Iraqw) and pastoralists (the Barabaig) are migrating into the area in search of 'open' lands. The result has been significant land loss for the hunting and gathering group, environmental decline of the fragile dryland ecosystem (eg. habitat loss and wildlife decline, deforestation, and overgrazing), and increasing land and resource use conflict.

To address this situation, a land and resource planning process was initiated by an international NGO in consultation with representatives from the Hadza community.

The process was undertaken for an area of approximately 150,000 hectares in the western zone of Mbulu District. Three core villages formed the primary focus of activities. Each village is inhabited by one of the three groups. The western zone of Mbulu District has largely been ignored by District authorities for several reasons. Physically, the environment is harsh with little potential for agricultural use. Although located in an area of high population density, the zone remains isolated partly due to a steep escarpment that has hindered the construction of roads. One of the greatest barriers to community involvement in this zone is based on the attitude of government workers. Most Tanzanians consider hunter-gatherers and pastoralists as 'backwards' and 'primitive'. The zone has a long history of forced settlement schemes that impose agriculture as the

Hadza and the Barabaig are now reluctant to discuss matters with the District authorities when their viewpoint has been excluded for so long. Activities were thus implemented where possible through the District government in an effort to further collaboration and support.

The need for a participatory approach

There is an emphasis in Tanzania on the demarcation and titling of villages and the development of Village Land Use Plans (VLUP). However, methods for undertaking VLUPs are not well developed, and where they do exist, focus on technical issues and are developed outside the village. The result is a land and resource plan that overlooks critical socio-economic and ecological interactions and that has had little input from those most affected by the process. A participatory approach allows a more sustainable and appropriate planning process to be initiated. If

stakeholders can develop their own land use maps, workable management systems are more likely to be created. Overall resource management activities can be improved by combining technical analysis of land and resource systems with the participatory development of land and resource plans.

A participatory approach to the land and resource planning process was considered essential. There were several reasons for this:

- only a few members in the Barabaig and Hadza community able to read or write;
- resource use patterns necessitating cooperation and dialogue in the development of a broader resource management plan;
- making land and resource interactions more complex. It was felt that PRA approaches would allow a deeper understanding of these issues. Moreover, a flexible approach was needed since the nomadic lifestyle makes scheduling of activities difficult; and,
- trust between the communities and the District authorities was critical. Listening and creating dialogue were key elements of the methodology.

To meet these challenges, several participatory methods were used, including participatory mapping, focus group meetings, semi-structured and open interviews, community transects, and seasonal diagramming.

• **Planning process description**

After introducing the project to stakeholder groups, participatory mapping helped to outline physical and spatial aspects of land and resource use (eg. important wildlife areas, grazing areas), and specific sites of importance (eg. dry-season spring sources). Materials used when mapping were chosen by the participants and included seeds, bark, rocks and leaves.

Mapping activities then led to broader group discussions about various land and resource uses and the key problems associated with land, people, and water resources. No limits were placed on the number of people who could participate. However, while the number of men and women were roughly equal, only a few women would speak on a regular basis. Consequently, focus group discussions and mapping with women as the primary participants were also undertaken.

Having gained an insight into land and resource use issues from the initial mapping and group discussion activities, a second series of mapping activities was initiated. The objective was to facilitate a more focused discussion on demarcating certain areas for specific uses, to clarify the areas of land and resource use conflict and to develop ways to overcome them by adapting resource management systems. In this context, the role of land rights was brought up by the participants who also raised the need for having some tool to protect their resources raised. Throughout the mapping process, other methods were used to verify, enhance, and improve the information gathering and discussion process (eg. transects, seasonal diagramming, interviews).

Through these activities the stakeholder groups developed land and resource use plans for their village territory. The groups are able to present the rationale behind the decisions and this helps them to support their plans. The need for resource management and conflict resolution systems can also be addressed. For example, the Hadza and Barabaig communities have already developed an informal management system for using certain springs in the dry season. Such management systems can be formalised with greater precision through plan development. And as each village completes and agrees to the plan, it can be passed through the ward and district government levels for approval, official status, and legal recognition.

• **Lessons learned and insights gained**

The process proved both challenging and illuminating. Outlined below are several lessons and insights gained during the planning process.

participants placed relevant landforms on the map, it was a straightforward process to identify the significant land use areas for their traditional economy.

- will help overcome problems that arise from the fact that village boundaries bear no resemblance to actual land use. This is of particular importance in this context given that two of the three groups are nomadic.

• **Conclusions**

It is our belief that allowing stakeholder groups to develop their own land and resource plans enhances the sustainability of those plans. This reduces many of the shortcomings of a strictly technical approach to land and resource planning, such as the focus on land capability to the detriment of other important socio-economic and cultural factors. A participatory approach encourages the use of indigenous ecological knowledge and places decision-making capacity in the hands of groups most affected by land and resource changes.

For policy development, this implies that land and resource use is best directed at the local level. Imposing environmental management strategies from national or even district levels can be detrimental. Consequently, a methodological process based on dialogue and trust is the way forward for promoting local participation.

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part because the Hadza have detailed geographical knowledge of their traditional lands. They are accustomed to navigating using physical markers. Once