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Progressing Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe

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KEY LESSONS IN PROGRESSING CBNRM IN POLICY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE IN ZIMBABWE

The following lessons emerged from a workshop held in Harare in May 2014:

- a) Emphasis needs to shift from decentralisation towards full devolution beyond the Rural District Councils (RDCs) alongside the increase in capacity of local level institutions (including RDCs) to fulfil original roles and obligations.
- b) Transparency of CBNRM processes is needed, including an equalling of power between the institutions of accountability and investors involved.
- c) Partnerships between central government, local government, communities, and investors are needed to ensure suitable and equitable communication is received by all parties.
- d) It is vital to increase project emphasis on alleviating poverty and reducing the need for communities to focus solely on their survival so that they can be fully involved.

Key recommendations

- CBNRM should be a process by which local communities gain access and use rights to, or ownership of, natural resources. Increasing security and clarity of land tenure is necessary.
- Increase the regard of local people as partners in the CBNRM process with their interests to be respected - not as passive victims.
- De-modernise CBNRM with shifts away from domination by bureaucrats to a more equal footing between central government systems and the traditional systems.
- To repair fragmented government policies and sectors, consolidate stakeholder participation in natural resource management and environmental conservation together under umbrella discussions.
- Decriminalise livelihood strategies so that people are free to pursue livelihoods that supplement CBNRM.
- To increase the downward flow of benefits, hold government and local level institutions more accountable to local people.
- Streamline, clarify, and input the required legislation and legal structures necessary for CBNRM to take into account the highlighted recommendations.
- Next step: get all stakeholders on the same page about what CBNRM means, requires, and results in.

Background

Zimbabwe is ushering a new era of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). It is moving away from place-based wildlife management initiatives to more internationally linked forestry carbon projects which focus on the sequestration of carbon through conservation of forests and the subsequent trading of carbon credits. Learning lessons from the varied and complex history of Zimbabwe's main CBNRM project – the **Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resource Use** (CAMPFIRE) – is necessary to ensure a successful progression of environmentally and socially just CBNRM in Zimbabwe. As such, the Sustainability Research Institute (University of Leeds with funding from the University of Leeds Sustainable Agricultural Bursary and the ESRC) and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (University of Zimbabwe with funding from STEPS, IDS Sussex) held a workshop at CASS TRUST, Harare, in May 2014 titled “*Progressing*

CBNRM in Zimbabwe”. The aim of the workshop was to progress debates from the traditionally observed contradictory literature and analysis on the successes and failures of CAMPFIRE into ways forward given the new CBNRM context emerging within the country. The workshop was attended by a range of professionals from policy-making, practice (at both local and national level), and research in the CBNRM arena who together discussed how to progress CBNRM, both theoretically and practically, given the rise of international emphasis on climate change mitigation and the emergence of subsequent new CBNRM-based projects (i.e. REDD+, co-management etc.). The workshop ultimately identified multiple lessons, including those listed above. It also flagged related areas of urgent focus.

Occurring in a background of landlessness and poverty, CAMPFIRE aimed at integrating biodiversity conservation and rural development through the

commercial use of wildlife resources in former tribal reserves (through the 1982 amendment to the 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act) [1, 2]. On paper, CAMPFIRE still remains one of the most innovative CBNRM programmes in the world because of its perceived success in directing policy and rewards to poorer people. However, studies and experiences, as outlined in this brief, **echo a decline in the effectiveness and performance of CAMPFIRE projects**. It is imperative for policy makers and practitioners alike to understand the criticisms of CAMPFIRE and apply these as lessons for improving the CBNRM approaches in Zimbabwe, especially in relation to the new CBNRM projects already being implemented in the country.

Distilled insights to come from the workshop are as follows:

1. Emphasis needs to shift from decentralisation towards full devolution beyond RDCs plus necessary increase in capacity of local level institutions (including RDCs) to fulfil original roles and obligations:

Since the 1980s, Zimbabwe has decentralised the management of natural resources [3]. The CAMPFIRE program decentralised control over wildlife to Appropriate Authorities (usually the Rural District Councils (RDCs) under existing legislation), with some policy guidelines providing for further devolution to sub-district administrative groups, i.e. wards [9, 10]. However, decentralisation of authority over CAMPFIRE decision-making and control has not been enough [11]. **The lack of further devolution to the village and community limits the achievement of the original CAMPFIRE objectives and threatens its long-term sustainability** [7].

Decentralisation in CAMPFIRE has been partial and conditional in some cases due to limited land tenure security resulting in RDCs and state agencies offloading the costs of natural resources management to local communities while retaining the control of associated

benefit streams. Thus, the decentralization process has marginalised communities in management of wildlife projects and enjoyment of benefits. Moving forward, **the emphasis should shift from decentralisation to a devolutionary process which should be intensified**. This should involve the government giving legal status to groups below the RDCs and for them to be recognised as legal entities capable of gaining Appropriate Authority. This will allow for communities living in communal lands - '*producer communities*' - to be able to obtain user rights to wildlife and fully participate in wildlife management, and likewise for other resources as project focus changes [12]. This will also allow communities to establish community game ranches, communal conservancies and community trusts unto which further devolution of authority can be made.

Moreover, there is need for the establishment of an efficient technical extension services and administrative oversight that allows for good governance and capacity building of the local people in common property management. This point is stressed because there is a significant problem with elite capture of benefits whereby those in positions of power co-opt the benefits destined for the producer communities themselves [11, 13, 14].

2. Improved transparency of CBNRM processes including an equalling of power between the institutions of accountability and the private actors involved:

Accountability and transparency are other aspects that can play an important role in improving local attitudes towards conservation. Accountability of stakeholder representatives and of management structures to their constituents is essential for effective local-level natural resource management. The decentralisation process that has occurred thus far in Zimbabwe is such that it has garnered upward rather than downward accountability. **The lack of**

capabilities at the local level has reduced the need for transparency in governing processes [15, 16]. Where it occurs, transparency generates trust, and buy-in of CBNRM processes, especially among local people who are used to being excluded from management by local authorities and investors. Going forward, CBNRM will have to apply itself to this ensuring that local people, through their representative leadership, take part in the many negotiations concerning CBNRM projects. **By giving sub-district community entities legal status and official recognition with the CBNRM process – alongside socio-economic development and satisfaction of basic needs – communities will have increasing capacity to hold more powerful actors, from RDCs to investors, to account.** Furthermore, communities themselves will be expected to be transparent, holding each other to account, without fear or favour [5].

It is important to note, however, that transparent collective local governance institutions are highly unlikely to emerge overnight, particularly where institutions are newly created and take time to evolve. They can also be unlikely to emerge where there is a tradition of institutional closeness as is perhaps the case with Zimbabwe's traditional authority systems [5, 17]. An important element in taking CBNRM forward will have to be a long-term outlook, not the expectation of quick wins.

3. Partnerships are needed to ensure that suitable communication and information are received by all parties on how best to implement and manage projects:

As Mandondo [18] explains, it is not easy to bring together the variety of different actors involved in natural resource management, yet establishing such partnerships is key to achieving good local governance and providing suitable communication and information exchange. The current disconnect in information and communication between many of the actors involved in natural resource management in Zimbabwe has

increased issues in the process of ensuring decision-makers gain a realistic understanding of reality on the ground. This in turn hampers the resolution of key community and programme issues. Partnerships require “reciprocal, constructive, and respecting relationships between actors whereby they [actors] work successfully together for mutual benefit” [5]. However, in Zimbabwe, **recent studies have shown that partnerships are far from being formed resulting in a detrimental lack of shared information and communication key to successful outcomes.**

Causationally, the ‘governance gaps’ identified by Harrison et al [5] both underlie and cause these lacks of partnerships at the local and district level – there has been the cutting out of traditional actors, lack of RDC capacity and the reduction in central government involvement, lack of relationship between Chiefs and Councillors, overarching power control of private actors, and the continual lack of involvement of local communities. Without these partnerships, unreliable information will continue to misinform project designs and management, inefficiency will continue to plague the implementation process, and there will be few opportunities for people to build knowledge, skills, participation and accountability – all key for good local governance of natural resources management.

4. Need for increased emphasis on alleviating poverty and reducing the need for communities to focus solely on their survival:

In Southern Africa most CBNRM programmes have been initiated in areas with high poverty. The need to support rural development and address poverty issues was also a driving force [19]. In Zimbabwe, CAMPFIRE's emphasis was on using natural resource management to drive rural development in areas where conventional agriculture was limited by low rainfall and climatic variability. Murphree [20] described CAMPFIRE as firstly a programme of

rural economic development, secondly a programme of community empowerment and democratisation, and thirdly, a conservation programme enhancing sustainable use.

During the phases when it was most people oriented striving to balance people's interests against those of conservation, CBNRM had some buy-in from local people [21]. At some point this balancing of interests changed with a shift to more focus on conservation and resultant frustration on the part of communities. This is where we are now. Going forward, **CBNRM needs to put emphasis on material concerns of people, ensuring that people benefit appropriately in the process. In doing this, CBNRM must avoid making speculative, or easily misinterpreted, promises as was the case with CAMPFIRE.** This leads to unrealistic expectation with negative results. Future projects using the concept of CBNRM in Zimbabwe must ensure that people benefit from the contracts, both financially and in kind. More particularly and for good uptake by local people, future CBNRM deals must protect local livelihoods – whether agriculture, foraging or hunting - than be the basis of their destruction [22].

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The Sustainability Research Institute conducts internationally recognised, academically excellent and problem-oriented interdisciplinary research and teaching on environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability. We draw on various social and natural science disciplines, including ecological economics, environmental economics, political science, policy studies, development studies, business and management, geography, sociology, science and technology studies, ecology, environmental science and soil science in our work.

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