

Community conservancies in Namibia: An effective institutional model for commons management?



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Common property resources (CPRs) remain of great significance for livelihoods among rural and poor communities of the world. CPRs are particularly important because in many contexts they remain resources of last resort since they provide grazing, timber, wood fuel, thatching, fruits and other products for domestic use and income generation. Access to collectively-managed resources is important for poor rural households and yet many governments continue to pursue policies that undermine the livelihoods of those most dependent on CPRs by privatising them or entrenching monopoly and state control over them. Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) policies have been developed and implemented in a number of southern African countries, including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia. The experience of Namibia provides important lessons for how to implement policies which provide tangible benefits for rural communities living on communal land.

Introduction

Common property resources (CPRs) remain of great significance for livelihoods among rural and poor communities in sub-Saharan Africa and many other parts of the world. CPRs are particularly important because in many places they remain resources of last resort, providing grazing, timber, wood fuel, thatching, fruits and other products for domestic use and income generation.

Given the livelihood and biodiversity importance of CPRs, it is necessary to engage in debates about policy options for their sustainable and equitable management. For such debates to be meaningful, an enhanced understanding of a number of issues must be developed, namely the status, availability and impact changes of CPRs; the range of institutions for managing the CPRs; the experiences of such institutions and how they operate in different settings; as well as their effectiveness in achieving sustainability, equity and productivity goals.

Access to collectively-managed resources is important for poor rural households and yet many governments continue to pursue policies that undermine the livelihoods of those most dependent on CPRs by privatising them or entrenching monopoly and state control over them. There is a need to devolve responsibility for management of CPRs through the granting of secure tenure rights/ arrangements to a range of local-level structures such as village bodies or wildlife conservancy groups. In some developing countries officialdom has resisted transferring full management rights to poor communities. Such resistance or failure to formally recognise 'local communities' as legal entities, with management powers and capacities, can only risk creating the conditions for further encroachment on CPRs, threatening their continued existence, or handing them over to outsiders through privatisation.

In response to some of these challenges, some sub-Saharan countries have developed institutional models for

effective and sustainable CPR management. In southern Africa, several leading community-based natural resource management programmes have been developed. These include Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources (Campfire), Zambia's Administrative Management Design (Admade), Namibia's National CBNRM Programme, and Mozambique's Tchuma Tchato project. In South Africa, a number of approaches have been developed, including providing legal recognition of certain communal property institutions; contract park arrangements negotiated between the state and rural communities with land claims in protected areas; and joint ventures between communities and the private sector.

The success of these projects varies between countries in terms of how effectively and sustainably they manage common property natural resources. Because Namibia's conservancies have been comparatively successful, important lessons may be drawn from these experiences on appropriate community institutional models and effective CPR management.

Conservancy instruments in Namibia

After independence in 1990, Namibia underwent tremendous policy and legislative reform aimed at addressing the legacy of racial imbalances and inequities across many sectors, particularly access, use and ownership of natural resources. Wildlife-based tourism is a strategic and important high-value resource and a major foreign currency earner for the country. Recent reforms have seen the inhabitants of communal areas enjoying more benefits from, and improved rights of access to, this resource.

The Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1975 conferred ownership of huntable game exclusively on white commercial farmers while all wildlife on African communal land was declared state property. Consequently, commercial

landowners experienced a wildlife boom and many commercial cattle farmers diversified their activities to include game farming. In the communal areas, wildlife was subjected to unsustainable harvesting by trophy hunters, the state and communal people, resulting in a serious decline in the aggregate number of animals and the number of species (Skyer 2003).

Commercial farm holding was not suitable for the newfound game enterprise. Pressure from commercial farmers wishing to expand their access to the lucrative wildlife industry gave rise to a government policy on conservancies which was adopted in 1992. The policy, designed for commercial areas but also extended to communal land, made it possible for freehold farmers to combine their land for joint management and equitable profit sharing. Implementing the 1992 policy on communal land presented a challenge because of the land and resource tenure position of people living on such land. To deal with these shortcomings, a policy specifically designed for wildlife management, utilisation and tourism in communal lands was promulgated in 1995. The new policy provided the necessary institutional conditions for common-pool resource management (MET 1995).

The 1995 conservancy policy and 1996 amendments to the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1975 together mark an important milestone in the management of common pool resources by rural communities in Namibia. The new policy and legislative framework gave communal area residents legal rights over wildlife and tourism once they had formed legally-recognised conservancies.

Community conservancies

A community conservancy consists of groups of neighbouring communities on communal land who have pooled resources for the purpose of sustainably conserving and using wildlife. The objective of conservancies is to promote sustainable use through co-operation and improved management. The conservancies are operated and managed by members through a 'conservancy committee'.

To register a conservancy, a community applies to the relevant government ministry and is expected to meet at least the following conditions:

- ▶ a list of names of the conservancy committee members and ordinary members
- ▶ a statement and map setting out the boundaries of the conservancy
- ▶ a constitution outlining the objectives of the conservancy committee
- ▶ other relevant information that may be required by the ministry.

A conservancy must have rules spelling out how it will operate and is required to have management plans. Wildlife use rights are limited to huntable game only, and special permits are required for other protected game. Legal ownership for the wildlife remains vested in the state, although communities bear management responsibility and rights over the wildlife in their conservancy.

Today, there are 29 registered community conservancies, with more than 38 000 members representing over 95 000

communal residents, and covering a total area of more than 74 000km² (Nacso 2004).

The experiences of Namibia's community conservancies were strongly influenced by the common property resource management thinking of the late 1980s. The ideas and design principles for CPR management institutions helped address policy questions and issues on the devolvement of common resource rights to a group subsisting on state land. In the case of community conservancies, some of these design principles revolve around CPR management institutions, namely:

- ▶ agreed operating and resource use rules
- ▶ defined resource user membership
- ▶ defined boundaries for the resource
- ▶ the ability to control compliance with rules and enforce them
- ▶ legitimacy from the resource users and the state.

Management impact

Namibia's protected areas cover about 14% of the total land area of the country and the expansion of communal conservancies is bringing more land under active natural resource management. At the end of 2003, communal conservancies covered 9% of Namibia, and freehold conservancies a further 5%. These brought the total land surface of the country under conservation management to 27% (Nacso 2004).

Resources across most rural areas are now better managed, and game populations, habitats, biodiversity and the environment in general have improved under the conservancy management regime. Most of the registered community conservancies are located around national parks, thus creating buffer zones that provide important wildlife movement corridors between national parks (Skyer 2003).

Game populations have notably increased over the years as a result of the advent of community conservancies. For example, plains game in north-western Namibia has shown a substantial increase. In 1982, there were only 1 000 springbok, 1 000 oryx and 1 000 Hartmann's zebra in this area. By 2002, the numbers of these species had increased to over 100 000, 35 000 and 14 000 respectively. Owing to successful wildlife resource management in community conservancies, the Namibian government is encouraging integrated natural resource management that includes community forestry management initiatives whose institutional arrangements are compatible with the conservancy model (Jones, undated).

Livelihood impact

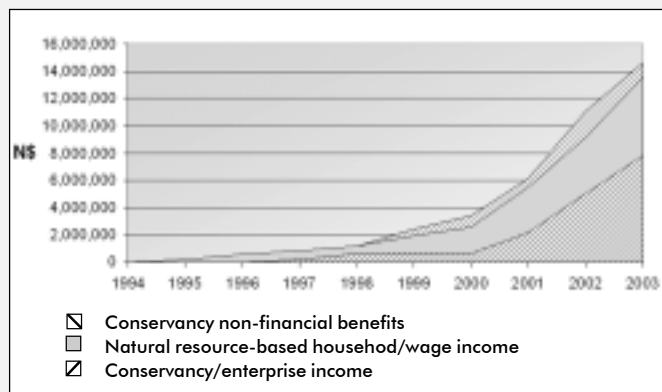
In livelihood terms, CBNRM in Namibia has contributed much in assets and resources, the development of policy and institutions, and addressed vulnerability. Human capital, social empowerment and institutional development are important foundations for households, communities and policy makers to build on.

Namibia's rural communities have taken advantage of the devolved rights and economic opportunities offered by the state's conservancy instruments to improve their livelihoods. They are benefiting from wildlife and tourism through a range of activities, including quota harvests (agreed with the line government ministry), trophy hunting, proceeds

from live game sales, and tourism concessions where conservancies can enter into agreements with private entities and establish tourism facilities within their boundaries.

Communal area residents are benefiting both directly and indirectly from community-based tourism (CBT). The benefits of CBT range from informal and casual employment, proceeds from concession leases, community-owned and operated enterprises such as campsites and craft businesses, and joint venture enterprises between private business and local communities. The communal areas of the north-west and north-east regions of the country are significant players in national tourism, attracting 25% of all visitors and accounting for up to 8% of the economic value of the national tourist industry (Long 2004). Figure 1 shows a steady increase in benefits that are directly accrued to conservancies and related activities outside of conservancies, totalling over N\$14 000 000 at the end of 2003 (about US\$2.3 million).

Figure 1: National CBNRM Programme benefits 1994–2003



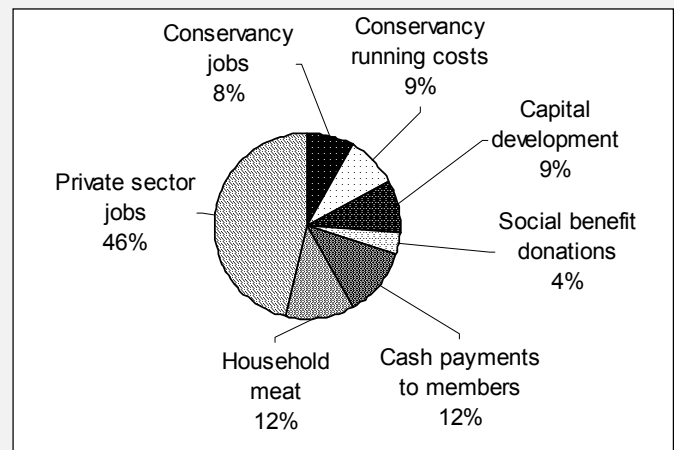
Source: Nacso 2004 (US\$1=N\$6 at the end of 2003)

Community conservancies decide how they spend their income by either paying dividends to individual households or using the income for community development projects. Through conservancy enterprises, many rural communities are benefiting from new economic opportunities.

A total of about N\$6 353 000 was earned from conservancies and paid out in 2003. Part of this amount was earned in previous years, and part of the 2003 earnings will only be spent in coming years. Proportions of the money allocated to different categories of expenditure in conservancies are shown in Figure 2.

The Wildlife for Livelihoods Diversification (WILD) project research reveals that community participation in tourism generates benefits and costs that are both financial and non-financial, and experienced at individual or collective levels. It is estimated that, in 2001, the total income generated from tourism in Kunene, Erongo and Caprivi regions was about US\$18 million. However, some of the tourism impacts and benefits on livelihoods are intangible and therefore difficult to measure and monitor. These include training and capacity building of community residents, career mobility opportunities, cultural pride and increased environmental awareness that leads to improved natural resource management. The costs associated with tourism establishment and community participation are also difficult to quantify, namely conflicts over enterprise ownership and

Figure 2: Allocation of income from conservancies



Source: Nacso 2004

benefits distribution, frustration at slow flow of benefits, and the opportunity costs of time (Long 2004).

Whilst people's livelihoods are essentially focused on income and food security, there are opportunities to diversify income and food sources and a variety of ways in which improvements can be made to their overall productivity. CBNRM is one such way since it offers a focal point for combining sustainable natural resource use and management with other aspects of economic and social development in communal areas. However, there is a need to support conservancies to create better links between existing livelihood practices and collective CBNRM gains.

Conclusion

The Namibian policy and legislative framework is comparatively supportive and enabling for effective common property management arrangements by rural communities. This can partly be attributed to the meaningful inclusion and active participation of communal people in initial surveys and the subsequent development of the policy. Namibia has also learnt from the experiences of her neighbours and drawn lessons from to better inform policy and practice in this sector.

A key strength of the Namibian conservation policy is the direct granting of wildlife use rights and full benefits to a community conservancy as opposed to channelling them through local government structures. Zimbabwe's Campfire programme faltered as a result of local government interference. The free hand of the community in decisions to form a conservancy, direct management, and free choice in deciding how the proceeds are spent provide strong incentives for sustainable and sound resource management.

However, the challenge with the community conservancy model of Namibia is the lack of communal or group tenure over land. Tenure arrangements over communal land are customary land rights on one hand and rights of leasehold on the other, which are administered by traditional authorities and land boards respectively. The two structures exercise their authority and consent over each other. This lack of land and full resource tenure makes it difficult for conservancies to stop non-members from grazing their livestock in conservancies.

There are also challenges in respect of the consistency of policy interpretation and application. For example,

community conservancies are required to apply when they wish to utilise huntable game on their land and yet freehold farmers are not required to do so. If CBNRM is to be sustainable in the long term, people living on communal land need secure and exclusive group rights. Mechanisms for granting such resource rights to communal people need to be clarified and the legislation and policies regulating all natural resources need to be harmonised with one another.

Given the impact of conservancy management activities on neighbouring conservation activities, there is growing need for trans-conservancy boundary co-ordination and joint planning, as well as co-ordination with other resources and overall rural development plans.

The conservancy institutional design principles and model implemented in Namibia also provides useful lessons for the management of other resources, notably inland fisheries and forestry.

Important as this may be, it should be recognised that CBNRM is but one way to address the various rural development challenges faced by national governments. Other sectors have a role to play alongside CBNRM and the sum total of these, and the ways in which they link, co-ordinate and integrate with CBNRM is important for long-term solutions to tough problems.

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The Co-Govern project

‘Co-Govern’ is a project that promotes common property in Africa by facilitating dialogue between researchers and professionals working on resource tenure issues in order to define a set of clear policy options. The programme is funded by the European Union, and is co-ordinated in southern Africa from PLAAS by Munyaradzi Saruchera. Other partners include the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), England; Groupe de Recherche et d’Action sur le Foncier (GRAF), Burkina Faso; Resource Conflict Institute (RECONCILE), Kenya; International Development Studies, Roskilde University, Denmark; Caledonia Centre for Social Development Land Programme, Scotland; Centre for International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric), Agricultural University of Norway.

Broad project objectives are as follows:

- ▶ To examine the changing status and availability of common property resources in the east, west and southern African sub-regions. This will be done by drawing on existing research, reviewing experience with different forms of institutions for managing these resources and their effectiveness in achieving sustainability and equity goals. From this Co-Govern aims to identify clear policy options and their implications.
- ▶ To investigate current processes of legislative and policy change affecting land and common property resource management in the three African sub-regions, and identify how lessons from local practice can inform and influence policy design and implementation of interventions relating to land matters. This is intended to enhance opportunities for different stakeholders to engage with and influence the outcome of policy and implementation processes.
- ▶ To communicate on land matters and CPR management through a variety of networking activities which promote exchange, dialogue and analysis.

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PLAAS engages in research, policy support, post-graduate teaching, training and advisory and evaluation services in relation to land and agrarian reform, community-based natural resource management and rural development.

This is the first of a series of Co-Govern policy briefs published within the PLAAS series