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'People are not Happy' – Speaking up for Adaptive Natural Resource Governance in Mahenye

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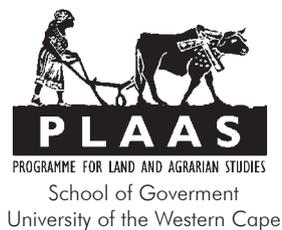
'People are not Happy' – Speaking up for Adaptive Natural Resource Governance in Mahenye

Evolution and resilience in the face of adversity, or another case of community based natural resource management (CBNRM) in crisis?

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Abstract

This paper explores the ongoing events surrounding the CAMPFIRE project of Mahenye in Zimbabwe within the context of the recent discourse of crisis within community based natural resource management (CBNRM) and crisis within the country itself. Despite Mahenye's geographical isolation and small size, it has played an influential role in the history and practice of CBNRM nationally and internationally over the last two decades.

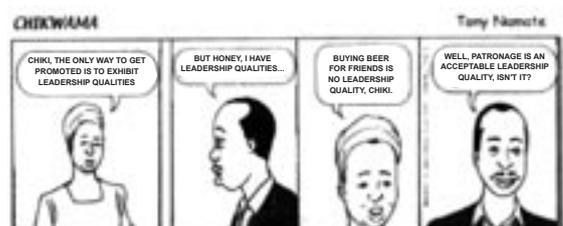
Through an analysis of the perspectives and stories of the people of Mahenye and other stakeholders, it explores whether the current problems encountered in Mahenye are manifestations of crisis or whether they represent positive evolution and resilience in the face of adversity. The evidence suggests that CBNRM is a process of applied and incremental experiments in democracy, which is of particular value because of the interaction of tiers of governance over time in an adaptive process. Despite the manifest problems within Mahenye, evidence suggests that CAMPFIRE has had a positive impact in terms of empowering local residents, providing them with incentives, knowledge and organisational abilities to identify and address problems and constraints and to identify where external interventions are required. This analysis illustrates that CBNRM is a political process and that implementers and policy advocates need to appreciate power relations and political landscapes in the quest for better governance.

The paper concludes that there are two critical elements requiring further attention by implementers. Firstly, there is need to restructure the economic mechanisms of CAMPFIRE in the face of the current national economic crisis. Secondly, there is a need to focus on and develop mechanisms that tackle the practical governance arrangements between the first and second tier institutions, in order to break down the existing social and politically constructed stalemates.

From the Daily News 4/12/02



From the Daily News 6/07/01



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Mahenye Ward in the south-east periphery of Zimbabwe in Chipinge District covers only 210 km² and has a population of less than 1,000 households. However, its impact and reach over the past two decades in the history and practice of community based natural resource management (CBNRM) nationally, regionally and internationally belies its size or remoteness.

In the early 1990s Mahenye was the reference point for a widely influential publication, *The Lesson from Mahenye: Rural Poverty, Democracy and Wildlife*, that drew on the CAMPFIRE and pre-CAMPFIRE initiatives of the ward and its people to articulate the links between local democracy, development and natural resources (Murphree 1995). Murphree was not alone: many others throughout the 1990s also upheld Mahenye as one of the prime exemplars of CAMPFIRE as a successful sustainable development model (Borrini-Feyerabend 1997; Child, Ward & Tawengwa 1996; Child 1995; Peterson 1991; Zimbabwe Trust 1991). This recognition culminated in a follow-up case study undertaken in the late 1990s by Murphree on Mahenye's diversification in natural resource management and income generation by mixing sport hunting with eco-tourism ventures (Murphree 2001). In this the ward's entrepreneurial history was documented, its story of a positive message of success in the face of bureaucratic constraints was detailed and the need for further devolution from the existing scale of authority held at district level to be vested at ward level was persuasively argued.

The key factors identified by Murphree in this paper were 'the insights, ingenuity and commitment of socially dedicated individuals in positions of influence or leadership, balanced sources of traditional and popular legitimation,' an 'enlightened private sector', a capacity for flexibility and acceptance of innovation, and intra-communal cohesiveness resulting from:

'... in-group solidarity rooted in history and reinforced by perceptions of external differences ... Like any community, Mahenye has its internal differentiations but these have been contained by a sense of collective communal interest. The importance of this cannot be overstressed ...' (Murphree 2001)

The lessons from Mahenye drawn since the early 2000s to the present have ranged from the ambivalent questioning of elements of CBNRM to direct critiques of the full devolution model. For example, Munyaka and Mandizadza (2004) present more hesitant conclusions than earlier authors about the benefits and needs for devolution of authority from district to ward level. In contrast, Balint and Mashinya (In press) and Balint (2005) are direct in arguing for caution in any promotion of full devolution:

'Our study reveals the decline of a promising CBNRM programme. We found that the Mahenye community no longer receives the flow of significant social and economic benefits reported in earlier studies.' (Balint 2005)

Their concerns include the concept of 'community' in CBNRM and how much authority should be devolved to communities. They ask, 'how can an independent, democratic, participatory governing process be helped to survive in a traditional, hierarchical, feudal society?' and speak of 'community members ... now alienated, disillusioned, angry and scared' and of 'outsiders who should be overseeing the project ... [who] are blind to the problems'. Furthermore, the CBNRM initiative has been 'hijacked by the family of the traditional chief and proceeds ... skimmed off by the ruling clan'.

This is a very different discourse about Mahenye, its CBNRM initiative, the key factors driving it, the lessons and questions to be drawn from it and what the wider lessons could be. It presents a completely contrasting view (to the point of being almost unrecognisable) of the same small ward, its inhabitants and their social dynamics, in the short space of five years.

The narratives and counter narratives¹ about Mahenye and its CBNRM initiative matter not only because of their direct effect on the people of the ward, their survival and their future livelihoods; they also matter because (as with earlier stories and lessons from Mahenye) the ward's impact reaches far beyond a peripheral zone of Zimbabwe. The recent narrative of crisis in CAMPFIRE in Mahenye Ward, in questioning the 'model' of full devolution of natural resource governance, in local elite capture of benefits and decision making, in the strivings for participatory democracy, in resilience and adaptability, also have relevance in other arenas. These range from the academic or policy debates on the crisis in CBNRM in southern



Africa (see Section 2), on devolution in CBNRM, on the contested evolutions of democracy in Zimbabwe or the region and on wider issues of natural resource management and human livelihoods.

The challenge for scholar-practitioners is to seek a way forward within the narratives and counter narratives of the field or academia. As noted by Mandizadza and Munyaka (2004) in an assessment of the 'crisis in CBNRM' narrative,

'All the arguments ... point to parts of the problem; it's now time to start contributing to the solution ... there is more that can be done to make it work.'

That encapsulates the core practical aim of this paper, which draws on over a month of field work in Mahenye in 2005 and the wide range of narrators and narratives that emerged. It is far less a forensic identification of the problems in Mahenye than an attempt to draw out the stories told by people of the ward (and outside) that might contribute to solutions.

It first introduces the frame of the research. Secondly, it places Mahenye in the national, regional and global context of CBNRM, with a particular emphasis on the political economy aspects of devolution, democracy and development in CBNRM. It identifies the broader national political context (particularly of the past five years) that has influenced new realities in governance, land, economics and natural resource management in Zimbabwe, and provides a brief review of the history of Mahenye from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. The third section examines the available factual evidence about developments in Mahenye from 2000–2004 along relatively conventional institutional, economic and devolutionary lines. The fourth section is the heart of the paper and attempts to tell the stories of Mahenye, primarily through the voices of local stakeholders (but also at district and national level), in which the present is put in the context of the past, different narratives of the current situation are presented and different scenarios for change are offered. The fifth section is a discussion of these narratives to pull together common threads and factors, and the sixth is a conclusion offering potential options for 'the more that could be done to make it work'.

1.2 Study methodology

This paper is based on interviews, primary research and secondary sources. Research in Mahenye was initiated by one of the authors who spent one month living in the ward in August 2005. He focused on familiarising himself with the day-to-day lifestyles, concerns, characters and aspirations of the people of Mahenye, holding both informal discussions and formal semi-structured interviews with

people living and working there. This was followed by a one-week visit by all the authors in October 2005, during which initial research was verified and further interviews and analysis undertaken. Wherever feasible, findings were also triangulated to ensure the credibility of the information shared by interviewees. Field level research was complemented by interviews with relevant government officials, politicians, donors, NGOs, academics and private sector representatives at both district and national level who are either currently (or formerly) involved in CAMPFIRE implementation, analysis and policy development. A detailed description of the methodology forms part of a doctoral dissertation of the first author and is available on request.

In total, over 100 semi-structured interviews were conducted over a four-month period. More than 50 of these were with people in Mahenye. Given the sensitivity of the information collected, the authors have withheld the names of most interviewees. In Mahenye a representative mix of people was interviewed. These included those who are currently and were formerly involved with the CAMPFIRE committee, traditional leaders and others in positions of authority, government employees (like teachers and health workers), employees of lodge and safari operators, private business people and subsistence farmers.

The authors acknowledge that we, like previous researchers in Mahenye, have our personal or research biases. Two of us have some practitioner experience, one during the 1990s 'ordered polity' period in Zimbabwe, with personal involvement in CAMPFIRE institutional development activities in Mahenye in that era; and one in the more eclectic governance and pilot CBNRM evolutions of Mozambique. Of the three of us, one is a Zimbabwean, with the experience and insights gained by living through the recent complex years.

The approach we adopted – letting others tell their stories rather than working with a pre-defined, structured academic agenda – was intentionally chosen to minimise bias. This approach forced us to hear, acknowledge and move some way towards understanding the complexity and nuanced interpretations of the situation than would otherwise have been possible. When specific facts or incidences were revealed within stories we made every effort to verify these, but we were just as interested in understanding why people perceived and interpreted events in particular ways, how these events had affected their lives and what mitigating action they planned.

On a cautionary note, the detailed village level findings of this study cannot be generalised to all CAMPFIRE projects in Zimbabwe. However, we believe that our analysis of the implications this has for effective CAMPFIRE outcomes does have some lessons and policy implications for CBNRM, both in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.



2. Mahenye in Context

2.1 CBNRM – Regional/Global

Since early 2000 there has been a growing perception in southern Africa and internationally that the well-known CBNRM initiatives of the region are in some form of crisis. The nature and extent of this crisis has been the subject of e-mail discussion groups, workshops, seminars, papers and books, but there appears to be little consensus as to whether CBNRM is indeed in crisis and, if so, what constitutes the crisis and how to address it (Hutton, Adams & Murombedzi 2006; Dzingirai & Breen 2005; Turner 2004; Murombedzi 2003; Murphree 2001; Roe et al. 2000).

Despite the variability, it is possible to identify areas where there is common agreement among analysts and practitioners that CBNRM is facing real challenges. Foremost among these is the consensus that lack of progress in devolving genuine authority to local communities is the greatest challenge currently facing CBNRM. CBNRM advocates and practitioners are in agreement that the overall success of CBNRM strategies relies on the transfer of power to local communities (devolution) and the development of representative and accountable local institutions² but they also agree that there has been relatively little progress in devolving powers (Ribot 2004; Murphree 2004; Murombedzi 2003; Jones & Murphree 2001).

What has been witnessed instead is decentralisation to local government structures (Ribot 2002; Shackleton & Campbell 2001; Katerere 2001) with varying levels of democratic legitimacy or accountability. Murombedzi (2003) sums this up in noting that most CBNRM initiatives that characterise themselves as ‘devolved’ ‘reflect rhetoric more than substance’ and that in reality they continue to be ‘characterised by some continuation of substantive central government control and management over natural resources rather than a genuine shift in authority to local people’ (NACSO 2003). As noted by Murphree (2000) the result is that CBNRM ‘has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and rarely tried’.

This paper aims to explore this full devolution crisis by illustrating that CBNRM is an ongoing process intimately affected by the national and local political, social, economic and environmental context; and that fundamental to the unfolding of CBNRM initiatives are issues of power and politics.

2.2 CAMPFIRE – National

Over the past 20 years the CAMPFIRE programme – like Zimbabwe itself – has seen dramatic fluctuations in its fortunes and in the way

in which it has been perceived. CAMPFIRE was initiated in the 1980s as a strategy for wildlife management developed by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. By the 1990s it was embraced as a holistic approach to environment and development, endorsed by the Government of Zimbabwe, local and international NGOs and drawn upon as a source of inspiration for natural resource management regionally (Fabricius & Kock 2004; Jones & Murphree 2001; Western & Wright 1994).

Since 2000 it has frequently been portrayed as the archetypal example of CBNRM in crisis (Dzingirai & Breen 2005; Katerere 2001). It has witnessed the growth, followed by the demise, of a coordinated, multi-skilled and expert group of institutions and individuals committed to the implementation of the programme, collectively known as the CAMPFIRE Collaborative Group (CCG) (Rihoy & Maguranyanga, In press). It has grown from an initiative affecting two to three districts, to one in which 52 of the country's 57 districts are involved (Child et al. 2003). During the period 1990–2003 it was the recipient of approximately US\$30 million in donor funding from a variety of international donors (Balint & Mashinya, In press), all of which have now withdrawn, leaving the programme largely unfunded.

It is now widely recognised that, in practice, CAMPFIRE has been a process of decentralisation of control to Rural District Councils (RDCs), rather than one of devolution to sub-district level semi-autonomous institutions (Murombedzi 2003; Child et al. 2003; Bond 2001; Mandondo 2000; Roe et al. 2000). Such 'aborted devolution' has been identified as the prime challenge for CAMPFIRE and is indicative of the need to move on to what Child (2004) calls 'second-generation CBNRM' in which clear authority and responsibility over decision making on fiscal or authority issues is shifted to the smaller scale of producer communities, rather than partially through sectors of national or local government.

There has also been a growing chorus of voices raising a cautionary note about devolution as a panacea. Research from other countries in the region (Rihoy & Maguranyanga, In press; Shackleton et al. 2001), elsewhere in Zimbabwe (Balint & Mashinya, In press; Mandondo 2001) and globally (Ribot 2002, 2004), indicates that the development of local level resource management institutions that are not accountable to their constituents (such as those usurped by local elites) can be as serious an impediment to effective community management of natural resources as decentralised control through local government. An approach to devolution challenges that moves beyond the 'full devolution' focus or the observations of local elite distortions or the problems of accountability at the local level has emerged from CBNRM scholars over the past six years. This was propelled by a paper by Murphree (2000) that tackled interaction



between jurisdictional scales and institutions in natural resource governance. It pointed out that scaling down to be sustainable also requires scaling up. In this paper and elaborations on it (see Martin 2003 and www.sasusg.net) the emphasis is that devolution is not an exercise in isolationism, but a process of finding local regime inter-dependence within the larger setting of inter-dependence at many scales. The key elements of the ‘scaling down, scaling up’ approach are:

- The principle of delegated aggregation: Local jurisdictions *delegate upwards* aspects of their responsibility and authority to collective governance of larger scope (like RDCs) in which they continue to play a role.
- The principle of constituent accountability: Each institutional tier above the community level is *accountable downwards* to the constituency that empowered it.

In the CAMPFIRE context the above perspective starts with the people of a ward, village or ‘producer community’ who delegate upwards to a CAMPFIRE committee, RDC or national government to effectively tackle jurisdictional, functional or ecological scale aspects; but who retain the right to accountability from this delegation of authority – whether by committee, chair of committee, local or traditional government, RDC or others. Devolution remains the ‘cardinal input’ (see Murphree & Mazambani 2002) but a hierarchy of institutions based on delegation from, and accountability to, the producer community provides the linkages and democratic governance process to resolve either local, district or national misappropriation of funds or power. If earlier phases of CAMPFIRE can be (over) simplified as emphasising economic instruments, sustainable use or local institutional development, the shift here can be characterised as moving to emphasise a process of practical democratic governance (or true federalism) with its focus on how authority should be delegated and accountable between scales. If CAMPFIRE in this context is fundamentally about experiments in and piloting of democratic governance, then it is firmly lodged in issues of national and local politics. It is this thread of politics, people and the levels at which they interact that runs through this paper and is returned to in the final sections.

As of late 2005 there were some indications that RDCs were beginning to respond to demands from their local constituents for at least greater fiscal devolution. Guruve RDC is leading the way in this regard with the recent agreement that three wards within this district will receive funds directly from the safari operator rather than through the RDC as in the past (Taylor, pers. comm. 2005). Chipinge RDC has in the past enabled direct payments from lodges in Mahenye to the local CAMPFIRE Committee (MCC) and has indicated

willingness to facilitate direct payments from the safari operator to the MCC once the current problems of fund misuse are resolved (chief executive officer, Chipinge RDC, pers. comm. 2005). These moves are tentative steps towards greater devolution and appear to have been set in motion as a result of demands from the RDC's local constituents. Five years ago, Chitsike (2000) identified similar strong demand for greater authority and rights at a sub-district level emerging in other communities around the country.

The evolving situation of potentially greater downward accountability to Mahenye Ward by Chipinge RDC (or by Guruve RDC in its context) may well prove significant in determining the future direction of CAMPFIRE. Precedents are being established and new challenges of local scale governance and elite capture have emerged that suggest a need for upward delegation of certain functions (see also Rihoy & Maguranyanga, In press). The outcomes will have an impact for the future of CAMPFIRE and possibly in CBNRM initiatives elsewhere.

2.3 National context

As noted above, at least part of CAMPFIRE scholarship has moved on to place CBNRM centrally in the context of applied democratic governance, operating within a political as well as the conventionally more emphasised technocratic context. Therefore, unlike the work of Balint and Mashinya (In press), our research intentionally aims to explore the situation of CAMPFIRE in Mahenye within the broader politico-economic context of Zimbabwe.

The country has undergone significant and far-reaching political, economic and social upheavals since the mid 1980s when CAMPFIRE was first introduced, and since 2000 has descended into one of crisis. Its relatively strong economy has been reduced to the weakest in the region (Hill 2005; Bauer & Taylor 2005). Once reasonably stable political conditions are now characterised by civil unrest and political repression; a previously well-functioning bureaucracy is in tatters, while respect for basic democratic principles, the rule of law and human rights are limited in their observation (Harold-Barry 2004; Hammar & Raftopoulos 2003).

Zimbabwe (once a darling of the international donor community) has become a pariah and has exhibited many of the attributes of 'disorder as a political instrument' in which political actors and elites seek to maximise their returns on the state of confusion and uncertainty (Chabal & Daloz 1999). This decline has had significant impacts on many different elements of the CAMPFIRE programme, including the process of policy making, the economic benefits available from sustainable use, donor or private investment, governance arrangements and implementation capacities of both NGOs and government agencies. The following draws out some of



the economic, political, policy and civil society contexts that we believe are relevant to (and appear often reflected in) CAMPFIRE and evolutions in Mahenye.

Economic status

The realisation of CAMPFIRE-related financial revenue and economic incentives is linked to macro-economic dynamics and whether these allow for continuation or improvements in revenue generation, encourage revenue 'capture' by RDCs and political economic elites or constrain opportunities for growth. The economic climate is equally important for generation of revenue through private sector participation, concession leases and investments in tourism.

The negative macro-economic and political environment in the post-2000 period presents major challenges for the generation of CAMPFIRE revenue. Between 2000 and 2003 Zimbabwe's GDP plummeted by 30% and the trend has continued; manufacturing has declined by 51% since 1997 and exports have fallen by half since 2001 (Dell 2005). With an inflation rate of 1700%, Zimbabwe now has the highest rate of any country in the world (see www.zwnews.com). Dell (2005) estimates that the proportion of the population living below the official poverty line has more than doubled since the mid 1990s, standing now at about 80%.

The political and economic turmoil has led to the collapse of the tourism sector. Nemarundwe (2005) highlights the negative impacts of this economic climate on CAMPFIRE. Its potential to generate income through tourism is affected, and community investment projects resulting from the programme are undermined as price fluctuations make a mockery of budgets. Hyperinflation also compromises the financial activities and economic viability of CAMPFIRE projects, erodes financial benefits and value, and, given the cycle in which payments of household cash dividends from CAMPFIRE revenue activities takes place six months to a year after activities have occurred, the loss of cash benefits to inflation is massive. Finally, in the absence of many other income or taxable options, the current situation is further increasing the RDC's dependence on CAMPFIRE wildlife revenue for survival.

The current economic environment is thus extremely disruptive to CAMPFIRE. This is compounded further by urban-rural migration and increased pressures on the rural natural resource base resulting from the difficulties experienced by urban dwellers in securing employment (the estimated unemployment rate is 80%) and the attempted eviction of many urban dwellers in mid 2005.

Political characteristics

The extreme economic and political problems that now face Zimbabwe can best be analysed and understood in the context of its history

(Raftopoulous 2004). Zimbabwe emerged from almost a century of white rule, following a long and violent liberation war that ended in 1980, fought largely over land. Since 1980 the political priorities of the government have been dominated by reversing decades of racially-biased inequalities in land, resource and asset distribution (Hammar & Raftopoulous 2004; Jones & Murphree 2001). As the ruling party slogan 'the land is the economy, the economy is the land' implies, struggles over land have been at centre stage throughout the colonial and post-colonial period.

Since 2000 the mix of land and race has formed a volatile political cocktail dominating all aspects of economic, political and social life (Murombedzi & Gomera 2005). This struggle over land and its resources is central to understanding the political dimensions of natural resource management in Zimbabwe, and explaining why it receives such a high degree of political prominence. The politically charged environment in which natural resource management finds itself has significant implications for CAMPFIRE. Wolmer et al. (2003) point out that wildlife management in general is viewed with suspicion as it was considered to be 'a ploy of whites to forestall land acquisition and justifying multiple and extensive land holdings'.

By the 1990s it had become clear that the grand aims articulated by the state following independence had yet to be realised, and many of the significant gains of the reforms had slowed down or reversed. Poverty levels were increasing and new local governance arrangements were attracting criticism (Makumbe 1998). By the late 1990s the political legitimacy of ZANU-PF was coming under increasing scrutiny, culminating in significant and escalating electoral challenges and civil unrest. The response on the part of the party-state was increased authoritarianism, violence and repression of political opposition, leading to the creation of a climate of fear and intolerance (Raftopoulous & Savage 2005) and a breakdown in the rule of law (Bauer & Taylor 2005; Hill 2005).

Concerted efforts by the ruling party to consolidate rural support were undertaken, most significantly through the 'fast track' land reform process (Keeley & Scoones 2003) but also through the introduction of the Traditional Leaders Act (TLA) in 2001. This restored legal powers and authority to chiefs (a shift from and unclear addition to the previous policy of democratically elected local governance at village and ward level) and is in essence a replica of colonial strategies towards the traditional leadership with the effect of co-opting the traditional leadership to ensure political penetration of the state and ruling party into rural landscapes.

In broad political terms, Zimbabwe can no longer be described as an ordered political polity (Chabal & Daloz 1999) in which political



opportunities and resources are defined explicitly and codified by legislation or precedent. Of relevance to the latter discussion on politics in Mahenye CAMPFIRE, a further national feature is one of persistent political stalemate, whether internally between parties in Zimbabwe or in relation to regional or international efforts to facilitate political compromise or consensus to address the economic and humanitarian crisis.

Civil society

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Zimbabwe witnessed the growth of NGOs and a strong and vibrant civil society. NGOs received generous support from donors and worked to support government programmes. CAMPFIRE exemplified this (Duffy 2000) and the CAMPFIRE Collaborative Group (CCG), a joint facilitating structure of both government agencies, NGOs and academic institutions, played a key role in implementation until 2000 (Rihoy & Maguranyanga, In press; Child et al. 2003). However, the shift in the political landscape of Zimbabwe immediately prior to 2000 resulted in major opposition by civil society organisations to a government-led constitutional amendment. From 1999, some segments of civil society began to challenge the government on land, electoral and human rights issues. This challenge was treated as a sign of political defiance warranting the repression of NGOs, and the government introduced the 2005 NGO Bill which considerably curtailed NGO functions and independence. This volatile political climate translated into a difficult operational environment for civil society, particularly in any area of governance and in involvement in rural development (Raftopoulos & Savage 2005; Bauer & Taylor 2005).

The impact of this marginalisation of civil society on CAMPFIRE has been profound. Members of the CCG formerly played a key role in capacity building at grass-roots level (Child et al. 2003). Members of the CCG also fulfilled a critical role as 'honest brokers', providing neutral arbitration in instances where community-level polarisation stalled progress in programme implementation. As of 2003, because of the political backlash against civil society, NGOs have been prevented from playing any significant role in implementing CAMPFIRE (Rihoy & Maguranyanga, In press). Compounding this implementation marginalisation has been the loss of access to funding that has been experienced by NGOs throughout Zimbabwe as a result of donor withdrawal arising from the political situation.

Policy context

While there are legitimate criticisms of the environmental policy-making process in Zimbabwe prior to 2000 (Scoones & Keeley 2003; Mandoondo 2000), the country did have a relatively well-functioning and effective bureaucracy (Hill 2005). After 2000 the situation

changed dramatically, as described to us by one former senior government official:

'Since the turmoil started in about 2000, Zimbabwe's bureaucracy hasn't functioned because it wasn't clear who was in charge, or where power lay. Bureaucrats were unable to function because we were unsure who we would have to answer to or who we would offend in the process. The result was that no one made any decisions or took any actions.'

Once again, this has had a profound effect on CAMPFIRE. CAMPFIRE is based upon principles of sustainable use (SASUSG 1995). The discourse upon which sustainable use is based has solid scientific and rational underpinnings. It is primarily a technical exercise, with the goal of economic productivity lying at its heart. Successful wildlife management relies on its ability to produce marketable surpluses while maintaining the resource base. The resulting implementation approach assigned key regulatory and monitoring functions to technical arms of the state, in the form of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, now known as the Wildlife Management Authority (WMA), to ensure environmental sustainability. However, the scientific approach that formerly drove policy making has now been replaced by a racially charged and politically biased populist moral discourse about 'the return of African soil to Africans' adopted by the ruling party. The clearest example of this is in the government's revitalisation of the land reform process under the fast-track approach, which pushed aside many of the standard planning approaches in favour of the populist mobilisation of 'land invaders' (Scoones & Keeley 2003), an aim of which was to boost the ruling party's waning popularity.

The result of this radical shift in how policy is developed and implemented in the wildlife management context is that the WMA's ability to regulate and monitor resource use and provide programme oversight has largely been undermined, as to do so could lead to retribution from powerful political forces. The leading role that powerful ruling party politicians have assumed within the wildlife management industry in Zimbabwe (a major source of rare foreign exchange) has recently been the subject of national and international media coverage (see Hammer 2006). As noted by Gibson (1999) from observations of wildlife resources in post-independent Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zambia, the increasing central government and political elites control of wildlife has become

'...another source of goods which an incumbent party could distribute Political actors in all three countries regarded the primary benefits of wildlife policy to be distributive goods and not the collective good of conservation.'



2.4 Mahenye: description, history, people and CBNRM evolutions, 1982–2000

Environmental characteristics

Mahenye Ward is located at the southern end of Chipinge District, bordered on the east by Mozambique, to the west and south by Gonarezhou National Park and Chiredzi District, and to the north by Mutandahwe Ward, also in Chipinge District. It has a low average rainfall of 450–500 mm supporting dry land cultivation of grains only in good seasons, but its relatively low population density – 20 people/km or half the district average – has ensured that the lowveld habitat has remained relatively intact (CSO 1992; Booth 1991).

Historical context

The historical background of the ward has been extensively traced and documented (Child 1995; Murphree 1995; Zimbabwe Trust 1991; Peterson 1991; Stockil 1987). The following account is compiled from these sources. The population of Mahenye is from the minority Shangaan ethnic group, for whom hunting was traditionally a major component of their livelihood strategies. Their culture had evolved well-defined regulatory practices to make off-takes sustainable.

Many of the current inhabitants of Mahenye were evicted from their traditional lands prior and up to 1966 as these areas became incorporated into the Gonarezhou National Park. Following independence in 1980, strong hopes that their land would be returned to them were dashed when the new government indicated that its priority was to gain the foreign exchange brought into the country by tourists and the national park. This resulted in heightened resentment towards Gonarezhou and wildlife, manifested as increasing incidences of illegal resource use as people sought illicit ways in which to assert their traditional resource rights and livelihoods.

In the mid 1980s an informal agreement between the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWM), a local safari operator and the people of Mahenye enabled some of the benefits from elephant hunting in the area to be returned to the villagers. After long negotiations and having overcome many bureaucratic hurdles, DNPWM eventually agreed to build a school and grinding mill in 1987, drawing on these hunting revenues.

Throughout the early negotiations, all those who have traced this history note that the people of Mahenye showed remarkable social cohesiveness, patience and restraint in the face of a slow and bureaucratic decision-making process.

Socio-political characteristics

Murphree (2001) notes that Mahenye's geographic position has contributed to its isolation. Neighbours to the east are in a different country; to the south is a national park, while those in the west are in a different province. Thus Mahenye retains administrative isolation from those in its immediate vicinity. Perhaps most significantly is that within Chipinge District itself, the people of Mahenye are ethnically discrete as they are the only Shangaan-speaking people in a district otherwise made up exclusively of the Shona-Ndau ethnic group.

The people of Mahenye are culturally, politically and administratively distinct from their neighbours, which Murphree (2001) concludes led to the development of a strong level of intra-communal cohesiveness – then largely manifested around the institution and individual occupying the role of chief – and a sense of collective communal interest.

Legal status and institutional basis for CBNRM

The granting of Appropriate Authority (AA) status to Gazaland District Council (now Chipinge RDC) in 1991 provided the legal mechanism through which the people of Mahenye were able to benefit from natural resource management activities in their ward. In order to ensure effective management of the resource base and an accountable and representative local level management structure, the Mahenye CAMPFIRE Committee (MCC) was established in the late 1980s.

The operations of the MCC are governed by bylaws (commonly referred to as 'the constitution') which were developed following lengthy consultations with the general community, traditional leadership and local CAMPFIRE leadership (Silas Makanza of Zimbabwe Trust, pers. comm. 2005) and are still frequently referred to in CAMPFIRE discussions today. While neither the MCC institution nor the bylaws have formal legal status they are (or were) strongly legitimised by use, precedent and acceptance by the various CAMPFIRE-related bodies. These bylaws outline the objectives of the institution, the roles, responsibilities and terms of the office bearers and general members, and stipulate means through which accountability to the broader membership are to be assured. They include:

- The holding of regular annual general meetings (AGMs) for transparent disclosure of management and financial activities by the MCC post holders to the community.
- The holding of annual elections (via secret ballot by Mahenye households) for post holders in the Mahenye CAMPFIRE Committee (MCC) such as that of chairman, vice-chairman, finance manager and others.



The bylaws are a written, widely known and understood representation of the standard to which the MCC should adhere. They represent an important benchmark against which to measure and exert accountability for the activities of the MCC, its post holders and the operation of CAMPFIRE at the producer community scales ('downward constituent accountability' in the context of Murphree 2000, discussed previously).

The institutional linkages and networks between authorities and across jurisdictional and functional scales were also well developed over this period and broadly followed the principles of upward delegation to tackle functional needs with downward accountability. During the early 1980s the primary decision-making institutions in the ward were those of the traditional authority (through the leadership of chiefs, headmen and *sabhukus*) working in a closely coordinated relationship with those of the democratically elected 'modern' political and development institutions structures such as the Ward Development Committees (WADCOS) to the higher scale of the Rural District Councils. In the 1990s, by virtue of its elected basis and development importance locally, the MCC also became a powerful institution. The private sector, originally represented by one individual (who had also facilitated early CBNRM evolutions in the ward between the various bodies) also had significant influence (Murphree 2001). Strong linkages between the MCC and national players' network in capacity building, 'honest brokering' and technical wildlife management advice existed with NGOs (WWF, Zimbabwe Trust, CASS-University of Zimbabwe), the national CAMPFIRE representative and advocacy body (CAMPFIRE Association) and the state wildlife sector (DNPWM).

Economic basis of CAMPFIRE in Mahenye

One of Mahenye's progressive attributes during this period, compared to most CAMPFIRE wards, was its diversification in revenue from solely sport hunting incomes to joint enterprises in the eco-tourism sector. In the early 1990s the RDC, on behalf of the people of Mahenye, entered into a joint venture arrangement with a private tourist operator, the Zimbabwe Sun (now Rivers Lodges of Africa) for the construction of two lodges – Mahenye Safari Lodge and Chilo Lodge – catering to a high paying tourist market for game viewing and photographic safaris largely benefiting from easy access to the nearby national park. Under the terms of the 1996 agreement, land was leased from the RDC for a 10-year period. The lodge operator was paying 8% of gross revenue for the first three years, 10% for the next three years and 12% for the final four years. Initially revenue earned was paid via the RDC, but in 2003/4 a more direct allocation was made to the MCC. In principle this represented a significant step in

fiscal devolution (albeit if undertaken in an informal way) but was a decision subsequently reversed at the request of the RDC.

The income potential from these lodges was considerable from the mid 1990s and by 1997 generated twice the income of sport hunting and was responsible for more than tripling the overall income for Mahenye CAMPFIRE between 1994 and 1997 (Murphree 2001), yet the downturn in tourism in Zimbabwe since 2000 has meant that the real financial returns have become limited and sport hunting has returned as the largest revenue source. Despite this, the lodges have still brought considerable benefits, most notably in the form of employment. Currently, out of a total of 37 staff employed, 32 are from Mahenye, including one in a management position. The construction of the lodges has also led to improved local infrastructure such as transport links, electrification, bore-hole construction and telephone connections.

For much of the 1990s and since 2000 the primary form of income generation for the MCC has been from the safari hunting concession in the Mahenye/Mutandahwe area. CAMPFIRE revenue in the period 1992–1997 from sport hunting was around US\$15-20,000 (largely from elephant hunting) with the total revenues achieved in the late 1990s from both hunting and lodge tourism reaching around US\$ 40,000 (Murphree 2001). On average in this period the allocations from total revenue to household dividends were consistently around 50%, with around 20% allocated for RDC administration costs (essentially a tax)³, 2% for the CAMPFIRE Association and the rest roughly shared between MCC managed development projects (such as grinding mills) and wildlife management costs (drawing on data in Murphree 2001).

The household dividends of about US\$15-25 were significant in comparison to other CAMPFIRE areas (median of US\$4.49 – see Bond 2001) and an important incentive for driving CAMPFIRE institutional change and supporting local household incomes. A number of interviewees in this current research had vivid memories of the cash dividends of the late 1990s as being key contributions to the family's ability to purchase goods and food in drought years or enable the payment of school fees.

Overview

In summary, the evolutions of CBNRM institutions and economic arrangements during the period of two decades largely concurred by the late 1990s in practice (if not formal legal arrangements) with devolutionary principles. Namely, the MCC as a transparent, democratically elected body with considerable if not fully devolved authority and a clear accountability to a constituency of local members. In addition, there was evidence of the equally important



dynamics noted by Murphree (2000) for CBNRM of linkages and delegated functions upwards from the producer community MCC scale to those scales and entities at district, national agency, NGO and private sector. If Mahenye Ward had been a precursor to the core values of devolution in CAMPFIRE, it could by the late 1990s also be characterised as a precursor to, and example for, the further evolutions of scholarship of the ‘beyond devolution’ views (Rihoy & Maguranyanga, In press) and to more nuanced recognitions of practical democratic politics in CBNRM through crucial upward linkages and networks between scales and institutions based on delegation and accountability.

It is worth stressing that this resulted from a happy congruence of a number of disparate factors. These included local level features (such as strong leadership in local institutions, whether MCC or traditional authority); the incentive drive from the economic success of Mahenye CBNRM that reinforced political investment and support by the RDC or economic partnership with the private sector; and a wider framework built from an ‘ordered polity’ political and economic environment that drew favourable reaction from state agencies, and a supportive NGO network. The background to how such positive, reinforcing dynamics could apparently reverse into stalemate, with the benefits of devolution being questioned – not least by the people of Mahenye – is examined in the next section.

3. Mahenye 2000–2005: Institutions and Economic Incentives

3.1 Institutions, management and local governance

Since 2000 there have been significant shifts of power within and between institutions in Mahenye, as well as the major shifts in macro-economic and national political context noted earlier and returned to in section 5.1. One outcome of these shifts has been the dramatic demise of CAMPFIRE in the view of the overwhelming majority of local inhabitants interviewed, and summed up as follows by one woman:

‘CAMPFIRE used to be for all the people, now it’s a family business.’

The demise of CAMPFIRE in Mahenye, its core local institution (the MCC) and dramatic falls in the value of household dividends coincides with and has been strongly influenced by four related local events:

- the death of the highly respected old Chief Mahenye in 2001 and replacement by his son, the current chief

- the complete change of MCC office bearers (on the explicit instructions of the new chief), following the flawed MCC elections of 2001, including the appointment (not election) of the chief's younger brother as chairman
- the election of a new councillor for the ward
- the re-tendering of the hunting concession which has led to ongoing conflict and the widespread belief among most local stakeholders that the operators currently bidding for the concession are blatantly competing among each other in their attempts to illicitly 'buy off' the chief and MCC to ensure preferential treatment.

These changes have effectively removed the strong local leadership whose commitment and accountability were (Murphree 2001) formerly such a distinctive feature of Mahenye. These included the chief, headmen and respected elders, the school headmaster and other teachers and an elected leadership including the councillor and members of the MCC. Collectively, these people provided a leadership structure that was balanced in its sources of traditional and popular legitimation.

Local power and authority has shifted away from the delicate balance established between traditional and elected democratic institutions and the leadership of these structures, and has become concentrated into the hands of core local elite focused around the traditional leadership. 'Honest brokers' in local dynamics whether of the private sector, NGO, state, RDC or other have become rare, ineffectual or sidelined. As many people in Mahenye said, the result is that they now have their own 'dictator'. The important point in the following discussion is the premise that it is not the institution (rules of the game) of either the MCC or customary authority that are causal, but the distortion of the rules of both by particular forces since 2000 that have permitted local elite capture and perpetuated stalemate, contrary to the delegation and accountability mechanisms that existed in the past. It is this stalemate, distortions to institutions and the 'particular forces' that have led to this that are at the core of many of the narratives from Mahenye in the next section.

Management of CAMPFIRE in 2005

The effect on CAMPFIRE of the shifts in the balance of power between institutions and distortion of the rules within institutions has been dramatic. The MCC, once viewed by the Mahenye people with pride as contributing to the overall development of Mahenye and to the livelihood needs of individual families, is now widely perceived as an institution that mismanages and abuses CAMPFIRE community funds for the personal enrichment of the chief and his clan. This



has included the use of project vehicles for personal transport, the privatisation of the general store, grinding mills and other CAMPFIRE projects, and access to scarce employment opportunities at the lodges being mediated by the chief's family. Enabling this situation has been the dismantling of those locally developed and mandated mechanisms that ensured that CAMPFIRE was a participatory process, representative of and accountable to the people of Mahenye.

The demise of democratic procedures

Although it has no formal legal basis, the MCC is, according to its constitution, responsible for carrying out management functions, employing local staff to monitor wildlife, poaching and hunting activities of the professional hunter. It sets budgets and is responsible to general community meetings for its activities and planning. Prior to 2000 MCC board members were democratically and transparently elected (once every two years) at open AGMs, and presentation of incomes and budgets openly made with all decisions regarding use of revenues collectively taken at these meetings.

But only two AGMs have been held since 2000, both of which were poorly attended⁴. Elections for committee members have not been held at any AGM since those of 2001. The current chairman was never elected but was given this position by the chief after his predecessor (who had been elected in the 2001 elections) left the village after allegedly misappropriating CAMPFIRE funds.

On the rare occasion when AGMs are still held, their function is now very different from the accountability basis outlined in the constitution. According to the MCC chairman himself,

'...we use AGMs as a way to tell the community how the committee and traditional leaders have budgeted and spent CAMPFIRE money and other things. It's where we let them know what their leaders are doing for them.'

Regular monthly planning meetings of the MCC are still held, known as 'First Friday' meetings. The original committee of seven has been expanded to 12. In addition to MCC members, these meetings are now also open to all members of the traditional leadership, the councillor and the ward coordinator, totalling 44 people. Minutes of the meetings for the years 2004/5 illustrate that discussions are dominated by issues relating to the selection of the safari operator and what is perceived to be the undue influence of the RDC in the process. Moreover, it is at these meetings that 'elections' are now undertaken for new membership of the MCC, with candidates for membership nominated exclusively by existing MCC members, normally the chairman. Income and budget transparency to the household level has evaporated – as revealed in the quote from the

chairman, the mentality of the leadership⁵ is not based around collective decision making by/with the people or accounting for actions and decisions (active and interactive) but informing the people (whose role is passive).

3.2 Shrinking incomes and economic incentives

Balint and Mashinya (In press) maintain that 'on the economic front, the project's two primary sources of income, hunting revenue and lodge receipts, are both to some degree buffered against external shocks' and conclude that the significant reductions in the economic incentives currently being offered by CAMPFIRE arise primarily from local level mismanagement and corruption.

While our own research confirms that significant funds are being lost as a result of local level problems, it also indicates that the higher 'leakages' are occurring in a chain of transactions with a cumulative erosion of revenue prior to household dividend payments. The major leakages come from national economic distortions. Primarily, these losses result from

- the loss in value that occurs when converting foreign exchange to the massively over-valued Zimbabwe \$ (which can result in loss of up to half the value)
- the loss in value resulting from annual inflation rates as high as 1700% when revenue remains stored in bank accounts for up to a year before household dividend payments are made.

This has very significant implications for CAMPFIRE, implying that the cash-based approach upon which it has traditionally relied to provide the economic incentive for resource management is of limited viability in the current economic context of Zimbabwe. Table 1 illustrates the dramatic declines in individual household revenues from 1996–2004, as well as the decline in funds allocated from overall revenue to household dividend.

Throughout the 1990s, annual allocations to household dividends were consistently around 50% of total budget, ranging from 48% in 1992 to 55% in 1997 (Murphree 2001). Since 2001 there has only been one allocation to household dividends. This took place in May 2004 and was on the basis (according to the official figures submitted by Chipinge RDC letter on 23/11/04) of a total revenue earned (2003) of Z\$40,118,791.⁶ The household dividend amounted to a cash payment (in principle) of Z\$6,100 per household. But Z\$6,000 was deducted from each household prior to payouts, for a 'district development levy' by the traditional authority, the validity of which has never been verified, resulting in an actual cash in hand dividend of just Z\$100 (US\$0.03). As stated by one interviewee:



Table 1 Household dividend payments and proportion of overall revenue, 1990s and 2004

	1996	1997	2004
Household (HH) Dividends	Z\$183 US\$18.67	Z\$442 US\$27.63	Z\$100 (Z\$6,100)* US\$0.03
Proportion of overall revenues allocated to HH dividends	50%	55%	0.2% (14%) ^

* The actual HH dividend received by people was Z\$100 (US\$0.03) after an unclear local 'tax' of Z\$6,000 was deducted prior to payouts.

^ In proportion of overall revenues allocated to HH dividends the percentage prior to the 'tax' was +/- 14%. The actual cash dividends for the household totalled Z\$89,400 (894 HH x Z\$100) which represents only 0.2% of the Z\$40,118,791 noted as total revenues by the RDC records.

Source: 2004 – this research and 1990s data adapted from Murphree (2001).
Exchange rates based on Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe data.

'Z\$100 even then wasn't enough to buy one match, and most didn't know about it. I don't know anyone who even went to the [MCC project] office to collect their money.'

As a proportion of the overall stated revenues, this sum of 'actual cash in hand' dividend represented less than 1% (0.2%) compared to the 50% averages in the 1990s.⁷ Meanwhile, those who attend the monthly MCC meetings get a sitting allowance of Z\$15,000 per session, refreshments and transport. As the MCC meetings are potentially open to the 44 people as detailed above, total annual costs of these can in theory exceed Z\$13,200,000, plus transport. This is in stark contrast to the total dividend payout in 2004 of Z\$5,453,400.

The situation relating to income and budgets in 2004/5 is highly complicated not only by the state of the internal MCC accounts reviewed during this research, but by the payments from the lodges and hunting sectors bypassing a central revenue record system at either MCC or RDC level and with unclear contractual or financial agreements.

The most lucrative source of income has been sport hunting and this has been mired in complexity. In 1997 Tshabezi Safaris won the concession for a five-year period. In 2002 the hunting concession was tendered again and once again awarded by the RDC to Tshabezi Safaris. The fact that no contract has been in place since 2002 is one of the causes of the conflict surrounding the hunting concession.

During this tender process disputes have broken out which are still ongoing between and within various interest groups within the community of Mahenye, with the RDC, and between three competing private sector operators. As of late 2005 the formal contract had still

to be awarded. The resulting uncertainties and competition between the various stakeholders has been one of the driving forces enabling a powerful local level elite to co-opt the power and resources of the MCC for their own political and personal financial ends. As a mirror of national power and politics, the local elite situation appears to be an 'instrumentalisation of disorder' (Chabal & Daloz 1999) in which this elite, by serving as community and lucrative resource gatekeeper, 'vanguard' leadership with powerful political capital and connections, can maximise its access to benefits through disorder. By maintaining disorder and their gatekeeper status, the local elite is successfully playing off the private sector members against each other, monopolising the considerable benefits of patronage and ensuring that the rules of the game (clear contracts and transparent payments) remain sufficiently obscure to prolong a stalemate.

Whatever the accounting and contractual complexity, the simple facts are that the households in Mahenye are getting no meaningful economic dividends from CAMPFIRE, in stark contrast to the 1990s. The widely held belief in Mahenye of corruption, misuse and abuse of funds and power by the MCC resulted in a written request from the Mahenye ward councillor to the RDC requesting an internal audit, which was carried out in April, 2004. This audit demonstrates that the picture (also observed in Balint & Mashinya, In press), concerning abuse of funds, infrastructure, equipment and employment opportunities by those who now control CAMPFIRE is clearly grounded in fact. The report, which as of September 2005 had not been made available to the public, concludes:

'The marginalised communities are not benefiting as much from the projects and it is apparent that the privileged few now stand to benefit. Recommended systems and procedures have been ignored, most likely deliberately.'

The outcome of this situation is that all of those interviewed noted that there is no longer any independent local institution that represents the interests of the people or to which the grievances of the people can be aired. All discussions and decisions now take place at the chief's *dare* (assembly meeting).

This is the background of radically changed institutions, local governance and politics and economic incentives against which the following section of narratives is set.

4. Stakeholder Narratives

'Vanhu varwadziwa, havana kwavanochemera'
– People are not happy, but they don't know where to complain



4.1 Background

Given the competing interests at stake it is perhaps not surprising that the narratives surrounding CAMPFIRE in Mahenye differ among the various stakeholders, and that different scenarios for change are identified by these groups. In very broad terms the stakeholder groups at a local level can be identified as

- traditional leadership and current MCC members
- general community members
- the private sector

Other external stakeholders include the RDCs and NGOs such as the CAMPFIRE Association. However, as the following discussion indicates, this simplistic breakdown of players hides an overlapping and constantly shifting array of perceptions, alliances and networks. This section relates the stories that each group shared with us, highlighting the concerns and issues dominant within each group. Wherever possible they are presented in their own words.

4.2 Traditional leadership

The traditional leadership in Mahenye consists of Chief Mahenye, two headmen and 29 kraal heads. Given the co-option of the MCC by the chief and his immediate family (as of September 2005 every member of the 12-person MCC was a relative of the chief) we identify these institutions here as falling within the same stakeholder group even though there are very clear 'fault lines' developing between individuals and sub-groups.⁸ Despite this close association of the chief with the programme, he claims to have no direct relationship with it, although he is outspoken in his support, noting that:

'CAMPFIRE has been here a long time and brought many good things but it needs changes. The main problem is that money from hunting goes to the RDC first; it should come directly to Mahenye. Also, the RDC want to interfere in who we select as our hunter.'

The narrative constructed by both the chief and the MCC chairman is one of a successful programme that has brought development to Mahenye while protecting the natural resource base and upholding local culture and traditions. They identify some problems with the programme but attribute them to external agents and technical deficiencies in the implementation process; what they portray as the greed and inefficiency of the current safari operator, coupled with the unwillingness of the RDC to commit to fiscal devolution and local level decision making regarding the selection of safari operators. They acknowledge that there have been problems with financial accountability in the recent past but are confident that they have now

put mechanisms in place to address these, in the form of a finance sub-committee of the MCC.

However, with the exception of these two individuals, the eight other members of the traditional leadership and MCC interviewed (including the person responsible for financial accounting and record keeping) presented a less rosy story by identifying failures in leadership, financial management and governance – and detailing several instances of abuse and misuse of funds and MCC assets by the chairman – coupled with the technical and administrative problems identified by the chief and chairman as being the most significant impediment to the programme. A senior member of the Chauke family said,

'The situation at the moment is a free-for-all. Soft drinks, sitting allowances, free transport, Christmas parties, nothing like before when things were run properly. It is corruption and bribery (undyire). But those of us with the authority to do something can't because this dispute is in our own clan. Does a son question his father? Someone from outside must step in, either the RDC or CAMPFIRE Association. We made sure an auditor came but now the council (RDC) do nothing, they must remove the culprit, even make arrests. Council is letting us down.'

Reinforcing this accusation were the voices of two members of the newly established finance sub-committee who noted that 'they are still hiding the books' as they were prevented from overseeing or having any control of the finances. Demanding access to information was not an option as this would simply result in their removal from the committee and possible expulsion from the area. The general sentiment of anger and resentment against the chairman was further articulated by the ward councillor who is generally perceived to be working in collaboration with the chairman, despite the fact that it was he who requested the RDC audit. He independently echoed the sentiments expressed above commenting that:

'The problems are the fault of the chairman, who overrides the financial committee. The people are unhappy and the problems are getting worse. If funds come direct here now they will just be stolen. If there is an election today the chairman and committee will be thrown out, people here know the problems and their rights.'

4.3 General population

Of the 52 people interviewed in Mahenye, 32 can be broadly referred to as 'general population' in the sense that they did not belong to the other stakeholder groups. However, this hides a diverse mix of



individuals. Those interviewed were roughly representative in terms of age, ethnicity and gender and included teachers, clinic staff, former MCC members, Wildlife Management Authority staff, lodge employees and general store owners. However, the majority of those interviewed were subsistence farmers.

The story told by everyone in this group had at its centre disappointment and disillusionment with the current situation, but also a sense that events were still unfolding and that they collectively had at their disposal means to address the current problems. This group unanimously identified poor leadership, governance issues and the misappropriation of power by the MCC as the root cause of their problems, but there was also concern and confusion articulated about the private sector tourism operations, the role of NGOs and the role of the RDC.

For over 10 years CAMPFIRE was portrayed to us as a source of local pride and confidence as well as development. It was considered to have been a genuinely representative process. The majority of ward residents had considerable information concerning the nature and extent of their rights, technical details (for example, the value of individual species) and the nature of income-generating ventures in their area, in which they enthusiastically participated and benefited.

People articulated trust in and respect for their leaders at that time, crediting them with having brought about this success. On many occasions they specifically mentioned the former chief, former councillor, former MCC members, the private sector partner and NGOs formerly active in the area. There is universal agreement over the cause of the problem:

‘Our troubles started when the old chief passed and [the former MCC chairman] and the others were pushed off the committee and [the current incumbent] was made chairman for life.’

But they are constrained to act because:

‘People fear to challenge the chairman. This is challenging the chief and would result in losing land or even being chased from the area.’

A widely anticipated outcome of this is that:

‘People will go back to poaching because there’s no benefit from wildlife otherwise.’

There is also a common view that:

‘The RDC has more power, they should do something.’

There is little that people can do overtly, but they do have covert means of expressing their displeasure and translating this into

political statements. Identical versions of the following story were recounted by several different interviewees:

'The chief had been told by the District Administrator that everyone must vote ZANU and then he would get a vehicle. We were told to do so, but everyone here voted MDC to get back at him. He couldn't do anything about that because it was a secret ballot. We hoped that the chief wouldn't get his vehicle and realise that everyone was aware that he was allowing our CAMPFIRE money to be lost.'

Thus there is a remarkable level of agreement among the majority of those in Mahenye on the basic situation and how it should be resolved. However, beyond this common understanding there is the complication of ongoing conflict between the MCC, the safari operators and the RDC over the re-tendering of the hunting quota. There is a strong perception among the community members that this conflict is being used by the MCC as a smoke-screen to cover its own misconduct.

Some in the community do not trust the current sport hunting operator, Tshabezi Safaris, who is blamed for failing to conduct problem animal control (PAC) and for failing to maximise returns on the quota, thus reducing the revenue for Mahenye. However, others are aware that the MCC negotiated with Tshabezi directly to ensure that a proportion of payments were made in kind to avoid payment passing through the RDC. These 'in kind' payments amounted to Z\$42,109,360.22; almost the same amount as that paid via the RDC for the concession in the period 2002–2004 (Commission of Inquiry report 2005).

The MCC chairman maintains that this benefited the community as the 35% administration fee for Council was not subtracted. However, it is the common local belief (upheld by the RDC audit, research by Balint & Mashinya, In press, and our own) that those funds and assets that went directly to the MCC, such as vehicles, donations for the general store, materials for bridge construction and monies for school uniforms, have been misappropriated by the chairman. It was also commonly alleged that a rival operator, who is currently tendering for the Mahenye concession, was bribing the leadership with money, meat, beer and the construction of a house for the chief, in an attempt to favour the bid.¹⁰

Private operators in the area are not trusted, despite the fact that many believe that the MCC is manipulating them to its own advantage. This lack of trust is compounded by the fact that the MCC chairman is employed by the lodges as their community liaison officer.



'If you want to get a job at Chilo [the lodges] or even Tshabezi as a housekeeper, you have to see the chairman and you will be made to pay a goat or some money.'

The positive relationships with the operator of the lodges, identified by Murphree (2001) and many people in Mahenye, have, at least for most interviewees, now broken down:

'He's no longer an honest broker, just another operator out to make sure he benefits at the expense of the people. He doesn't know what happens here, he talks only to the chief and chairman.'

This belief is fuelled by the perception that the decreasing financial returns from the lodges are a result of attempts on their management's behalf to defraud the community.¹¹

Despite large-scale disillusionment with the situation, the majority of interviewees identified a core strategy to solve their problem. This strategy involves appeals to the RDC as the only institution with the legal and political authority, legitimacy and mandate to intervene and assist in the restoration of local institutional structures that are accountable and representative of the local constituency. Thus the collective demand is for the RDC to accept its responsibilities as the agency granted appropriate authority (AA) and act accordingly to ensure that the 'CAMPFIRE constitution' (established and secured by precedent bylaws of the MCC) and democratic functioning local institutions (the MCC under the rules of the bylaws) are in place. Essentially, the action demanded is that elections should be held for the posts of the MCC – under the secret ballot and transparent rules of the existing bylaws – after four years of these basic rules having been blatantly flouted.

Only after this demand has been met do people want to see financial devolution with revenues coming directly to the local institutions. One formerly influential MCC member sums up the situation as follows:

'There's a lot of talk from the committee about 'devolution' but if the RDC lets funds come direct to them they will disappear in days along with the rest of our money. We would like to see funds coming directly but not at the moment, our problems have to be sorted out first. The RDC is the only one that can help us do this. They are legally responsible as the holders of AA, and they must accept their responsibilities.'

Local people are collectively indicating that the RDC has an important role to play in fostering the conditions that will ensure their

empowerment. They could do this by providing neutral arbitration in a situation that at present cannot be addressed locally, owing to the current levels of distortion and complicated politics.

People are clear that CAMPFIRE, by providing them with information about their rights and those of the other institutions involved, has provided them with the confidence and basis to express demands to the RDC:

'People are very much aware of their rights and obligations and they know this because the old committee used to bare all things and read the constitution in public at AGMs and other meetings, we also know from this what the RDC should be doing.'

However, this does not imply that the RDC is viewed entirely favourably in Mahenye and mounting frustration was articulated by many. The RDC is perceived to be primarily concerned with ensuring maximum income from the hunting operations to meet its own financial needs at the expense of the people. The delays in re-tendering are seen to be the result of the RDC trying to negotiate more favourable terms. These delays are bringing it into disrepute and fuelling damaging rumours about its motives:

'We know Chipinge RDC is aware of all the problems but they don't assist, they are getting something from this.'

'Tshabezi hunted in the area without a contract because he managed to bribe officials at the RDC. Now the intention of the council is to take over the running of CAMPFIRE because it generates so much money.'

The most striking element of the narrative is the level of agreement on the nature of the problem (local elite capture and distortion of the MCC and its core rules and roles) and how it can be solved (RDC intervention as an obligation of AA status, but not RDC as a substitute for MCC the institution of the bylaws). Despite problems (and dangers), the people of Mahenye continue to demonstrate the remarkable level of 'intra-communal cohesiveness' and capacity for expressing 'constituency demands' identified in Murphree's past scholarship.

4.4 The private sector

Private sector interests consist of the operator of the two lodges, River Lodges of Africa (RLA); the existing safari operator, Tshabezi Safaris; and Zambezi Safaris, who is tendering for the quota. Representatives of the Lodges (RLA) and Tshabezi were interviewed and told a



common story of how, since 2000, it had become increasingly difficult to have a professional relationship with the community.

While they are both aware that there are conflicts about the level of accountability of the MCC to general community members, both still use the narrative of ‘the community’ and their actions are guided by the understanding that the MCC represents ‘the community’. Ultimately, the primary concern of both is the national economic and political system which is leading to a decline of tourists and threatening their businesses, although this is clearly more of a threat to the lodges than safari operations.

Tshabezi’s story is one of wasted time, money and effort, a breach of trust and unprofessional conduct by both the RDC and the MCC. They are concerned with contracts going unsigned, lack of clarity on where responsibility lies or what the proper procedures and mechanisms for tendering should be. They fear that the current situation is leading to further degradation of a resource base that is already under pressure.

‘We thought people were genuinely interested in the development of the area and so invested directly here, but it’s been a waste. We’ve negotiated contracts at a local level because that’s what the theory is all about, but we should have been talking with the RDC. Now there’s a conflict between the community and the RDC over allocation of funds and we are caught in the middle and made to look like the bad guys.’

The story told by representatives of the lodges differs slightly, as may be expected given the long-term investment the company is making in the area. As demonstrated in their promotional materials, the CAMPFIRE programme and its development and conservation benefits are an integral component of their marketing strategy. The discourse of CAMPFIRE – ‘participation, community benefits, local cultural traditions and incentives for conservation’ – is embedded in the management strategies and rationale of the lodges and their staff. Although they are aware that there may be problems, these tend to be down-played:

‘We do tend to have our heads in the sand and don’t really know the details but we know the current chief is working in his own self-interest, leading the programme away from where it’s supposed to be going. But there are no indications that anyone is going to pose a direct challenge to the royal family. It’s the chief himself who will have to make the changes. To the extent that we get involved locally we do so through the legitimate structures, those of the chief and his family.’

Thus, despite RLA being aware of misappropriation of funds and conflicts within the community, they continue to attempt to negotiate new contractual arrangements through the office of the chief as evidenced in the submission of a 'Concept Document Proposing a New Partnership' to Chief Mahenye, copied to the MCC, in late 2002. In this document it is proposed that:

'A new company should be formed with shares issued to the community and the private sector. ...The community will be expected to elect to the board of the new company the required number of directors appropriate to the community's shareholding in the company.'

The proposal ends with a reminder of Mahenye's historic value to the CAMPFIRE programme:

'In 1982, Mahenye Ward pioneered the conservation concepts that later became enshrined in the CAMPFIRE programme. There is an opportunity to take the lead once again in conservation and sustainable development programmes by growing the partnership between the community and the private sector.'

Implicit in this document is the assumption that the chief and the MCC were the legitimate and accountable representatives of the people of Mahenye. According to our interviewees it was very clear even by this date that this was not the case. One explanation for this stance is that it harks back to a story line appropriate to the institutions of the 1990s, irrespective of the individual leadership changes from 2000 and the evolution of deep distortions that removed their local legitimacy. An alternative explanation, given by several members of staff who are from Mahenye, is that the reaction of senior management to local events has been one of pragmatic acceptance of the new political realities now prevalent at local and national scales.

'The new chief doesn't seem to understand that getting benefits from us is a privilege and not a right. He comes here and demands beers and other favours. He demands far too much from us and threatens if we don't honour, because the general manager is white and he can be associated with MDC! We cannot retrench the chairman because he is such a powerful individual – removing him from the payroll will be disastrous to our relationship with the chieftainship.'

4.5 The RDC

The role of the RDC includes formal awarding of the hunting concession following an established process of advertising and



competitive tendering. As well as having a legal obligation in this regard, they also have a financial incentive to ensure that the process is efficiently managed as they are recipients of 20-35% of the income as an 'administration' fee. In theory, tenders are evaluated both in terms of financial value and on qualitative considerations, with the expectation that RDCs take into account the views of the wildlife-producing ward. However, an independent commission of inquiry undertaken in 2005 at the request of the Chipinge RDC indicates that established procedure and competitive bidding processes have not been adhered to. The result is that there is

'no clear relationship between the value of the resources and the total amount paid by the safari operator in terms of the contract'.

Following a written request from the Mahenye Ward councillor, backed up by anonymous letters from Mahenye residents, the RDC undertook an independent audit of the MCC in 2004. As recounted above, this audit clearly revealed the validity of accusations of mismanagement and misappropriation of CAMPFIRE funds by the elite within Mahenye.

It is against this background, (armed with comprehensive knowledge of both the conflict regarding the hunting concession provided by the commission of inquiry and financial mismanagement provided by the audit) that the RDC's story of Mahenye is told.

According to the RDC's CEO, the situation is 'a big mess' that has come about because 'one individual is no longer accountable', and is bringing the RDC into disrepute.

'Chipinge is proud of being the birthplace of the CAMPFIRE concept, but now we are failing to live up to our reputation. We view it as a priority that things are put right.'

The RDC's chosen strategy has been to analyse two elements of the problem: lack of accountability and conflicts between the community and the safari operator.

'And now we will approach the issues in stages. Our first priority is to sort out the problems with the safari operators. Once this is done we'll address local problems of representation. Elections with a secret ballot need to take place, and new safeguards developed to make sure authority isn't abused.'

They are well aware of the demands for greater fiscal devolution. The CEO says,

'Personally, I don't have a problem with the hunting fee going directly to the community, but we have to sort out the abuses first and the decision isn't only mine to make.'

The story then from the RDC is that they are aware of problems and are in the process of making a measured and responsible decision about how to proceed, in order to respond to the demands and needs of their constituency. Given such a reasonable response, it is fair to speculate why there has been so little action. The audit – which clearly illustrates fraud and corruption – was carried out in August 2004, and the commission of inquiry took place in May 2005. And yet by October 2005, despite the CEO acknowledging that it was a priority for the RDC, no action had been taken. This may simply be a result of bureaucratic ineptitude, but once again it is possible to identify alternative reasons.

Chief Mahenye's position provides him with networks and outreach into politically powerful national factions that may influence the strategies adopted by and the nature of the relationship with the RDC. For example, the Deputy Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development, (who additionally holds a leading post within the state-approved traditional chief's institution) has attended meetings with the Mahenye CAMPFIRE committee at which discussions related to securing greater financial devolution from the RDC. The chief has also worked closely with the former District Administrator of Chipinge (himself now a Member of Parliament) to influence the Mahenye vote for the ZANU-PF MP candidate. These personal national networks and political affiliations provide a level of complexity in local power struggles that it is beyond the scope of this research to explore in detail. However, they have a real impact on the balance of power between the RDC and traditional authorities and this may at least partially account for the reluctance of the RDC to take any decisive action to date.

4.6 The NGOs

The marginalisation of civil society from policy making and implementation in any sphere that relates to governance in the politically contested rural areas (described in a previous section) has had significant impacts on Mahenye CAMPFIRE. The consequence of this marginalisation is that the former CAMPFIRE Collaborative Group (CCG) members (particularly NGOs such as WWF and Zimbabwe Trust) who formerly played key roles in institutional development within Mahenye are no longer able to do so.

Balint and Mashinya (In press) criticise NGOs for this, noting that 'the withdrawal of outside agencies responsible for oversight and assistance may be more to blame for this decline than the ongoing national turmoil'. This glosses over the reality that one of the many results of 'the national turmoil' has been to marginalise and exclude NGOs from playing their former roles, partly through denying them access to funds but also by removing their mandate. Contrary to the



findings of Balint and Mashinya (In press), those field staff who we interviewed and who had formerly operated in Mahenye were aware of the current situation in Mahenye. However, they not only had no means and resources with which to address the problem but also felt intimidated to try to do so. As expressed by one NGO officer formerly active in the area for a decade:

'[Our friends] in the RDC tell us Mahenye is a mess, the chief and chairman have taken over. I hate to hear it after years of working with them, but with no vehicles, no fuel, and no reason to go there, what can we do? Anyway, I'm known as MDC, the chief is ZANU-PF, it wouldn't be good for my health.'

The one NGO that is still highly active in CAMPFIRE implementation is the CAMPFIRE Association (CA). They are familiar with the current situation in Mahenye, not least because the CEO was a member of the commission of inquiry. They are involved with the RDC in seeking a solution to the problems based on their understanding that:

'There are a lot of undeclared interests at play in Mahenye. There's need to identify the root cause of the problem and sort out the institutional problems. We strongly felt as a commission that there was need for changes in tenure of office, to elect a new committee.'

As in the case of the RDC narrative, there is also a sense of deadlock in taking actions or decisions in the discourse of the CA; particularly given this is precisely the institution taxed (literally, given that CA membership fees are deducted from Mahenye revenue) with the task of linking the producer communities of CAMPFIRE with district and national agencies and with the overall coordination of the programme.

A final set of narratives are those of recent researchers of CAMPFIRE in Mahenye. The narrative in Munyaka and Mandizadza (2004) is largely devoted to a binary view of the pros and cons of full devolution in a fairly conventional structural discourse that maintains, 'the community of Mahenye is still in a power battle with the Chipinge RDC'. Effectively, this follows a similar narrative to that of the MCC chairman and chief noted earlier. From field work in mid 2004, Balint (2005) and Balint and Mashinya (In press) are more focused on the narratives in academic research of the weaknesses of local level institutions in CBNRM and, as in this research, find a rich seam of local level corruption and local elite appropriation of benefits.

Their analytical conclusions emphasise Mahenye CBNRM challenges as primarily being local in context and cause (rather than linked to, or a function of, wider national political or economic distortions and crisis) and specifically around a narrative of contrast

between 'democratic' modern systems and their perceptions of Mahenye's customary forms of governance and society.

*'How can an independent, democratic, participatory governing process be helped to survive in a **traditional, hierarchical, feudal society?**' (Balint 2005; emphasis added.)*

Their conclusions are within the academic narratives of political ecology that is sceptical of idealised local community democratic institutions in CBNRM. From research in Mahenye they argue

'...for caution in promoting full devolution of authority, particularly in the absence of safeguards to protect the broader community interest' (Balint and Mashinya, In press).

5. Discussion

In discussing the issues of CBNRM, democratic governance, institutions and economic incentives in Mahenye, a good place to begin is to recognise the complexity of the current situation both in Zimbabwe and in Mahenye, but also the extent to which there is remarkable congruence and depth in the narratives of local, district and national scales about the reality of the challenges and the most urgent next steps to take. At the crux of the discourses are a multi-tiered and interrelated set of politically and socially constructed stalemates inhibiting those steps from being taken and permitting evolutions to occur. As summarised in the previous section by an interviewee, 'people are not happy, but they don't know where to complain'.

We also need to start with a particularly important acknowledgement about 'practitioner-scholars'. The people of Mahenye have been in the CBNRM business for more than two decades (far longer than we or most other researchers) and in the wildlife management business and local governance business for longer still. This maturity comes through clearly in the narratives outlined in the previous section, and suggests the need for caution in extrapolating from current weaknesses an inherent institutional or inherent structural set of governance or societal problems. It argues against elevating a crisis at one point in time in Mahenye Ward to a generalised set of conclusions about the local political economy of CBNRM.

In this context our best guide is to follow the narrative structure of the residents of the ward; identify the nature of the problems, the factors and contributing causes, the historical context, the scenarios for change involving new alliances or re-activated networks, and the concrete options available to break down stalemates. In short,



provide a contribution to ‘make a plan’ – that most enduring adaptive philosophy of Zimbabweans.

5.1 Local governance, CBNRM institutions and historical precedent

One of the paradoxes and strengths of the case of Mahenye, clear in the narratives from various sources, is the extent to which the ward, the dynamics of its governance and its institutional evolutions place it not just as a precursor to CBNRM in the region in 1982. Mahenye also reached a phase in the mid to late 1990s of practically implementing the more recent scholarship that stressed multi-tiered governance linkages (Rihoy & Maguranyanga, In press) and jurisdictional and scale principles involving upward delegation/ downward accountability depending on political agency, ecological and social scale requirements (Martin 2003; Murphree 2001). It had in that decade moved beyond the ‘chicken and egg’ structural dilemma of full devolution as prerequisite for CBNRM versus fragile local common property regime as cause of failure of CBNRM.

The egg had produced the chicken and the chicken produced the egg in a context of happy congruence where the strength of the local society (one not mired in feudal, hierarchical conditions but mixing the modern with the customary) had linked up to scales and institutions of the state, private sector and NGOs with powerful economic incentives and political capital supporting these evolutions. The challenge was to come from 2000 with the series of connected local and national events that generated the dramatic distortions to economic incentives, political dynamics and local leadership. The informal and precedent basis of the ‘Mahenye Constitution’ was inadequate to counterbalance this profound shift. In simple terms, the devolution-jurisdictional egg was hatching out in a much rougher neighbourhood.

But it is important to stress (as do the majority of the local narratives from Mahenye, which speak of resilience and knowledge of the past strengths of their institutions) that this does not preclude the ability to react or adapt. From 1982–1991 there was a precedent of tackling significant challenges. This, plus the fact that the widely agreed-on strengths of the institution up to 2000 were achieved, gives hope that the scenarios and strategies for change envisaged by most Mahenye people can engage with the crisis of today.

5.2 National to local links, mirrors and influences

While our research concurs with that of Balint and Mashinya (In press) in that problems in Mahenye do indeed reflect ‘local failures in governance and capacity’, we believe that their assertion that this is the primary cause of problems, with national levels issues being

peripheral, fails to reflect the situation facing Zimbabwe since 2000 and that local governance is being significantly affected by national governance issues. As the following discussion highlights, the situation is far more complex than a 'Mahenye in isolation' analysis would imply.

The situation in Zimbabwe, where political events of recent years have resulted in the promotion of institutions and individuals associated with the ruling party, while those affiliated with opposition parties and politics have been marginalised, has been comprehensively documented by many analysts, both Zimbabwean and foreign (Raftopoulos & Savage 2005; Bauer & Taylor 2005; Harold-Berry 2004; Hill 2005; Amnesty International 2004; Hammar & Raftopoulos 2003). In this regard the Mahenye situation mirrors the national, profoundly impacting on the balance of power between various Mahenye institutions as well as determining which individuals continue to play active roles within institutions, based upon their political affiliations.

One of the most significant legislative changes promoting shifts in the institutional dynamics and balance of power within Mahenye has been the Traditional Leaders Act (TLA) of 2001, which has strengthened the power of traditional authorities nationally while also bringing them under the influence of the ruling party, ZANU-PF. Until the passing of this Act, post-independence policy had strengthened the role of RDCs at the expense of traditional authorities. The TLA is a significant shift in direction, empowering chiefs, headmen and *sabhukus*, not least in terms of natural resource management. It provides for and demarcates the borders of ward and village assemblies to 'consider and resolve' all issues relating to land, water and other natural resources. Crucially, the Act does not provide land rights to the assemblies and it does not give them any legal status beyond being sub-committees of council. A common interpretation of the TLA is that it aims to co-opt traditional leadership to ensure political penetration of the ruling party into rural areas. This Act has not only enhanced the authority of the chief locally but has also changed the nature of the relationship between chiefs, RDC and the private sector.

Other changes which have influenced events in Mahenye include the creation of new and powerful institutions representing the party at local level. These include the ward coordinator (an employee of the Ministry of Youth, Gender and Employment Creation), while formerly relatively insignificant institutions, such as the ward chairman of ZANU PF, have taken on new prominence. Compounding this is that the modern development structures and their representatives, notably the ward councillor, have also come increasingly under the influence of and are accountable to the ruling party and are under



sometimes violent pressure to represent party interests in rural areas (See Hammar 2003 for a detailed account).¹²

But changes in the national context have not only been legislative or administrative. The year 2000 saw a dramatic and public shift in the political dynamics of Zimbabwe, culminating in an increase in politically motivated violence and in the collapse of the 'rule of law' (Raftopoulos 2005). This situation was undergirded by a racially and populist moral discourse about the return of African soil to Africans, adopted by the ruling party, which served to marginalise and vilify whites and, by inference, political opponents of the ruling party. At local levels this often translated into violent persecution and marginalisation of MDC supporters and, according to Wolmer et al. (2003), introduced a suspicion of wildlife management as it was considered to be 'a ploy of whites to forestall land acquisition and justifying multiple and extensive land holdings (p.8)'.

Many of those interviewed noted that the impact in Mahenye has been to support the process of marginalisation of key figures who were known to be opposition supporters from decision-making roles and a further reinforcement of the powers of the chief. Or as expressed by one interviewee:

'People cannot make their concerns public for fear of being labelled opposition supporters.'

Thus the relationship between the traditional and ruling party institutions has fundamentally changed, with the result that power and influence of traditional authorities has been enhanced but at the expense of increased dependency on the ruling party. In Mahenye all power is vested in the chief (as distinct from the institution of customary authority) whose position is secure because of the mutually beneficial relationship and endorsement from ZANU-PF and the other newly created or co-opted institutions such as the MCC under the current chairman. The new roles acquired by the chief and his family translate into real power over and above what was traditionally extended to them.¹³ For example, one respondent noted that he was unwilling to publicly declare his dissatisfaction with CAMPFIRE and the MCC chairman because

'The chairman is on the grain procurement and distribution committee and this gives him more power especially given this drought year. If you complain about CAMPFIRE, you may end up not getting food rations'.

The national context has enabled the chief to translate his newly enhanced legal position *vis-à-vis* natural resources and his new position as powerful ZANU-PF representative to divert the claims

of others and validate his own claims over these resources, thus expanding his control over development in Mahenye. One of the first actions undertaken by the chief on his ascendancy in 2001 was to ensure that CAMPFIRE and its benefits were brought under his control.

One of the curious features of the narratives and realities at the Mahenye scale is the degree to which they mirror national contexts. The increasing centralisation of power, factionalisation, the instrumentalisation of disorder for economic gain by elites, the distortion of institutions, the vanguard mentality towards the constituent electors, and the creation of a stalemate with few 'honest brokers' has remarkable reflections at other scales, and specifically, the national one. That CAMPFIRE Mahenye shows some sign of being able to break the stalemate is possibly a harbinger of future scenarios at other scales. At least the current process supports the perspective that in CBNRM there are powerful elements of, and lessons for, applied democracy and that governance evolutions are not only a one-way street from above.

5.3 Economic factors - CAMPFIRE incentives

The narratives and realities of Mahenye illustrate that the local and national institutional distortions are also present in the economic context. The dramatic fall in institutional norms are spectacularly illustrated by the decline in household dividends, between the late 1990s and 2004, from around US\$20 to a mere three cents. The real decline of the proportion of revenue allocated to household dividends fell from around 50% to less than 1%. Effectively, the ward residents (beyond those employed in the lodge/hunting industry and the elite of MCC) are getting no economic returns from their wildlife management or recompense from the costs of living with wildlife. In fact, the economics of wildlife management in Mahenye currently favour individual, illegal or unsustainable incentives. As one youth noted,

'If people kill a duiker or impala they can make Z\$100,000 (US\$ 4 at mid 2005 rates) from the meat or can exchange for getting mealie-meal.'

He also elaborated on the economics of palm wine or *utchema*. He gets paid Z\$5,000/litre, harvests up to 20 litres a day and can make as much as Z\$500,000 a week (or US\$20/week). Again, this method enables exchange or barter for food or other assets. He is proof against inflation and can diversify between cash and barter.

This is in contrast to the formal, bureaucratic and minimal returns from CAMPFIRE revenue mechanisms, which are now effectively a long pipeline of massive leakages, exposed to foreign exchange losses, inflation at the world's highest rates, *ad hoc* taxes, fraud and



minimal transparency. The paradox is that Mahenye's main resource is elephant hunting, which is in high demand. The elephants in Mahenye ('produced' in the nearby national park) are prime trophies in an international context and have a consistently high value in US\$. Crude estimates¹⁴ can be made of the potential US\$ value from Mahenye's elephant quota and the potential household dividends. Where the potential revenue in 2003/4 was US\$39,000 with a household dividend of US\$21, the actual dividend was US\$0.03.

The combined revenue disbursed as household dividend for the 894 households in Mahenye in 2004 was therefore a total of US\$27. *Thus in effect, the stakeholders of Mahenye sold US\$39,000 worth of elephant for a return of US\$27, which represented a more than 99% loss in revenue.* This clearly makes no economic sense (and even discounted local corruption leakages). The huge losses due to macro-economic factors, exchange rates and inflation would argue that the ward and the RDC are being seriously prejudiced by maintaining a mechanism suited to a previous economic environment.

No businessman in Zimbabwe would currently be undertaking transactions of foreign exchange assets into a pipeline of such destruction of value but, like the youth interviewed, would be looking for rapid turnover, barter of assets for assets of equal value or, in this particular case, perhaps retain a foreign exchange account system.

These realities present opportunities (and urgencies) for re-thinking the Zimbabwe \$ cash base economic incentives of CAMPFIRE's past. They also present strategic options for alliances between ward level, RDC and new private sector economic exchanges (given the shared lose-lose position of all stakeholders) that could be mechanisms for promoting the breaking down of the current constructed stalemate.

5.4 Networks, patronage and power

By 'capturing' CAMPFIRE in Mahenye, the traditional authorities have created a powerful patronage tool for themselves through which they can construct and reproduce power relationships and perpetuate their authority. CAMPFIRE provides the means to develop a strong network of loyal supporters. This begins with the enrolment of other members of their extended family as MCC members, ensuring that they receive significant financial benefits in the form of sitting allowances, access to valuable transport and prestige. The chairman and chief have ensured that these people are beholden to them. By extending the First Friday meetings to include all members of the traditional authorities and other party-endorsed positions, such as the ZANU-PF chairman, ward development officer and councillor, this network has been extended to all those in positions of authority in the village. The network is extended outside family by the manipulation of scarce and valuable employment opportunities

within the CAMPFIRE project itself. For example, posts for game monitors, grinding mill operators and shop assistants, among others, are now decided upon exclusively by the MCC.

The same is true of jobs with the private sector operators who, by wilfully maintaining the façade that the chairman of the MCC represents 'the community', give him leverage over who is appointed to these positions. Other benefits that the chairman extends to his network members include the provision of credit at the grinding mills and CAMPFIRE stores, provision of personal loans (most of which remain outstanding), and other forms of preferential treatment, such as not standing at grinding mill queues. By consolidating their positions of power in other institutions outside the MCC, the chairman and chief can threaten retribution to any who question their decisions, not just in the form of losing the benefits that have been forthcoming from being part of their network, but also through the potential loss of access to food aid, land or being labelled an opposition supporter. This last threat can also be extended to private sector operators and the RDC through the manipulation of their national political networks.

Thus the chief and chairman would appear to have built themselves an unassailable position of power and authority. Yet this is clearly not the case. There is unanimous condemnation of the chairman (many, particularly the traditional authorities, were careful to draw a distinction between the chief and the chairman) and unanimous agreement on the need to find a solution to the current problems, even though such a solution would probably lead to them losing their privileged positions as network beneficiaries.

But although there is widespread discontent, the situation within Mahenye remains a socially and politically constructed stalemate with no local means of sufficient agency or power to break the deadlock. Therefore people have identified alternative mechanisms to assist them to solve their problems. The long and successful history of CAMPFIRE in the area has ensured that there is considerable local knowledge about the process, including a thorough understanding of the roles, agency and responsibilities of various institutions. Thus while the RDC is widely distrusted on the grounds that it has its own agenda in relation to the safari operations and securing its own revenue, there is nevertheless clear recognition within Mahenye that it has a legal responsibility to step in to break the local stalemate and that it has the (albeit so far latent) political agency and state-party linkages to do so.

It is generally recognised that this consists of two different but interconnected activities. Firstly, addressing issues of local governance and secondly addressing fiscal accountability and revenue efficiency (such as the controversy over the sport hunting



contract and the major leakages of revenue earned). Only once these issues have been resolved do the majority of people in Mahenye want to see greater fiscal devolution occurring. That is to say, their scenario for change is a sequence of events in rebuilding a process of devolution based on responsibilities and authority but also with linkages of strategic delegation and practical politics to get there.

5.5 Building accountability - linking the local and district

The narratives suggest that one of the most significant impacts of CAMPFIRE over the last 15 years has been to empower local people by making them aware of the value of the natural resources in their areas and the extent of their rights to these, while raising awareness of mechanisms through which they can exercise these rights.

Mahenye illustrates that community members can have the knowledge, confidence and organisational awareness to counter local elites who are usurping power and undermining democratic local decision making and to articulate demands to their political representatives at the district level to assist in resolving the problem. Thus despite the fact that local political mobilisation has had to be largely covert to date – due to fear of reprisal – it has nevertheless created space for political negotiation between the local and district level and has served as a catalyst to two external and damning investigations. This could ultimately lead to greater accountability of the RDCs to their local constituents.

Allied with a strategy of practical politics in a win-win approach to the revenue and economic incentives for the residents of the ward, the RDC and the private sector, the potential for breaking the current stalemate certainly exists.

6. Conclusions and lessons

‘The very nature of nation states is such that people will never be free of the regimes they create or tolerate but neither will the state ever be free of the demands of the people for whom they act. Getting the balance right is what current democratisation in the subcontinent is all about. As each step is taken towards enhancing the proprietorial interest of the ordinary citizen in current land reform, the nature of state power itself is altered, each time settling a little nearer to the landholder, who in turn is forced and empowered to be a little less passive in his or her relation to the state. It is arguably from these kinds of developments that tangible improvements can be made, both in the formal processes of democracy, and in social relations more generally.’ (Alden Wily 2003)

Alden Wily's analysis, albeit in the context of land reform, stresses elements that, from this research, we would conclude as being key to the situation in Mahenye; that CBNRM is a process of applied and incremental experiments of democracy; of value because it involves not a single 'holy grail' of full devolution or 'ideal democracy' but the interaction of tiers of governance over time in adaptive processes. What could be construed as a 'failure' or 'crisis' at any one moment is in reality part of an ongoing development that, in this case, contains the seeds of opportunities for rural people to develop organisational mechanisms and abilities through which they can articulate their demands. The analysis, as drawn out in the narratives presented here, demonstrates that CAMPFIRE has had a real impact in terms of empowering local residents, providing them with incentives, knowledge and organisational abilities to identify and address their own problems, recognise the constraints that they are operating within and identify where external interventions are required.

It is apparent that alliances and boundaries are formed in CBNRM, and when situations change these alliances and boundaries shift and reconfigure the landscape of governance and politics of natural resource management. The situation currently facing Mahenye is, in the stories of the residents themselves, just a snapshot of a moment in time. Their eye is on the future and how to bring about an outcome that is favourable to all people in Mahenye and not just to the temporarily powerful local elite. Thus what an observer may view as a 'crisis' is viewed by many local inhabitants as part of an ongoing contest for control over resources within which lie opportunities for positive change.

The situation in Mahenye illustrates that CBNRM is a political process, and therefore implementers and policy advocates need to understand power relations and the political landscape in their quest for better governance and socio-economic and political empowerment and be strategic in engaging with these. There are political risks involved in CBNRM. It is the recognition and translation of political capital into a political tool for mobilising power and bringing demands to bear on relevant authorities that ensures that local communities influence CBNRM policy and enlarge both the political and policy spaces for participation.¹⁵ While in Zimbabwe RDCs are notoriously associated with 'capturing' CAMPFIRE benefits (Bond 2001; Child et al. 2003; Katerere 2001; Shackleton & Campbell 2001; Roe et al. 2000) the evidence from Mahenye indicates that in the current context of Zimbabwe, RDCs could provide a system of checks and balances at the local level that could prevent capture of the process by local elites.

But our argument goes further than simply acknowledging the vital role of local government and addresses the broader issue of



democratisation. Local government has a vital role to play in ensuring democratic outcomes. Mamdani (1996) argues that *'participatory forms (empowerment) that stress the autonomy of a bounded group – only to undermine any possibility of an alliance-building majority-based representation – can justify and uphold the most undemocratic forms of central power'* and draws upon various cases studies to illustrate what *'began with an emphasis on participation [and] ended up with a warlord'*. He concludes that *'to create a democratic solidarity requires joining the emphasis on autonomy with the one on alliance, that on participatory self-rule with one on representational politics'*.

Put simply, a properly democratic system requires the effective linking of the local and national. CBNRM provides a means and incentives by which this can be done. Mahenye, although based on informally legitimised institutional foundations (the bylaws) was in the process of doing this in the late 1990s. Now, in more complex times, it retains the potential to do so again and provide new lessons to those that invigorated the practice and theory of regional CBNRM in the past.

We maintain that the longstanding 'devolutionary' discourse that has dominated CBNRM debate within southern Africa does not accommodate the realities of the highly politicised context in which CBNRM occurs. Rihoy & Maguranyanga (In press), in a comparative analysis of the CBNRM policy process in Botswana and Zimbabwe, illustrate that the role of local government in actor-networks is crucial to sustain CBNRM in the face of threats to recentralise, which serve the interests of some political economic elites. The emphasis on devolution that has dominated CBNRM debate has often polarised the issue of governance and the potential positive aspects between first and second level tiers of governance; in other words, the relationship between producer wards and RDCs, in Zimbabwe's case. It would be more productive to focus on understanding and developing viable local governance regimes that enable rural constituents to demand accountability from local government structures. Focus in scholarship in CBNRM could perhaps benefit from the kind of analysis we have attempted in this paper; of looking beyond devolution (the often simplistic discourses of devolved versus centralised governance) to a recognition that issue, context and circumstance should be allowed to determine the use of structure.¹⁶

Contrary to perspectives of Mahenye as another example of CBNRM in crisis, our interpretation of Mahenye narratives is an optimistic one of evolution and resilience. At the local level, there is ample evidence that many of those factors which Murphree (2001) identified as decisive to their overall success are still present; notably that of intra-communal cohesion, but also resource richness, social energy, flexibility and evolution, and acceptance of risk. But it also

provides evidence that CBNRM is evolving and has empowered local communities with the means and incentive to engage and negotiate with their local government representatives. But if this process is to gain strength within the current context of Zimbabwe, new creative thinking will be required.

Two crucial elements need further careful attention by the implementers and analysts of the programme if the '*people are not happy, they don't know where to complain*' appeal is to be answered.

- Firstly, there is need to structure new approaches to the economic mechanisms of CAMPFIRE that can produce win-win incentives between stakeholders.
- Secondly, there is need for mechanisms that tackle the practical governance arrangements between the first and second tier institutions that can progressively break down the current social and politically constructed stalemates.

7. Postscript

In the last quarter of 2005, an Annual General Meeting was held in Mahenye. Tempers flew. People accused each other of lying. There were veiled threats of violence. Most villagers present made open submissions that there were institutional problems troubling CAMPFIRE.

With the assistance of the Rural District Council, local elections were held and a new committee was elected. These local elections entirely removed the previous committee and traditional leadership from CAMPFIRE. CAMPFIRE is now being run in line with the provisions of the Mahenye CAMPFIRE bylaws.

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9. Footnotes

- ¹ Narratives and counter-narratives draw on the work of Emery Roe (see Roe 1991) and are used to explore the significance of particular sets of ideas or discourses or stories, the ways that they are contested and evolve; and how they provide plausible explanations and can persist in the face of even strong empirical evidence against their story lines (see Adams and Hulme 2001 for more discussion). Used here for stories from or about Mahenye (and told by policy makers, academics, local officials and community members) they are not necessarily the 'truth' but more importantly, valid as their own explanation for reality and its causal features.
- ² This paper defines devolution in accordance with the definition provided by Murphree (2000). He interprets devolution as 'the creation of relatively autonomous realms of authority, responsibility and entitlement, with a primary accountability to their own constituencies'. Quite distinct to this process is that of decentralisation which Murphree defines as 'refer[ing] to the delegation of authority and responsibility to subordinate and dispersed units of hierarchical jurisdiction, which retain

- a primary accountability upward to their superiors in the hierarchy.'
- 3 Murphree 2001 notes about the RDC allocation of 20% + of overall revenue for 'administration': 'It is difficult to argue this figure represents actual administration expenses by the Council for the Mahenye enterprise and this figure can more properly be considered a council tax on Mahenye's revenues.'
 - 4 The population of Mahenye is approximately 6000, comprising 894 households with an average of six people per household. It could therefore be anticipated, and indeed it was the case throughout the 1990s, that approximately 1000 people would be in attendance at an AGM. While no minutes of AGMs have been kept since 2000, the most generous estimates for attendance at each of the two AGMs since this date were put at 200–300 people.
 - 5 A mentality essentially similar to that adopted in the 'democratic centralism' model of one party states and justification for the 'vanguard party/leadership' institutions (see Anstey 2005 for discussion of such governance models with regard to CBNRM in Mozambique.)
 - 6 It is worth noting that an attempt to triangulate this 'official' figure of overall revenues with those of the MCC finance officer, or the private sector available records/statements, produced wildly different amounts (in the range of Z\$ tens of millions) suggesting a high level of lack of transparency or chaotic financial controls.
 - 7 There is also a large (three times) discrepancy between the official figure of RDC that Z\$15,015,943 was disbursed as HH dividend and the actual (prior to development tax) dividend disbursed by MCC of Z\$5,453,400 (calculated from HH payment of Z\$6,100 x 894 households).
 - 8 The MCC chairman is also employed by River Lodges of Africa – the operator of the existing two lodges in the area – as their 'community liaison officer', which further obscures loyalties and perceptions.
 - 9 This comment is also a powerful summary of the now highly politicised Zimbabwe rural landscape and the distortions of three normally separate institutions – the chief (traditional authority), district administrator (civil servant) and ZANU-PF (political party) – which have become interlinked.
 - 10 This house was demolished at the height of the controversy over the re-tendering process. Several interviewees noted that its demolition followed the realisation that building a house for the chief was problematic because it would bring the political interests of those in power locally into conflict with their external political patrons. Essentially it represented the private sector (*a murungu*) trying to buy out a state representative. This was



in flagrant contradiction of the newly politicised and racialised discourse of the ruling party.

- 11 This perception can be traced to a/ the actual decline in revenues being paid due to actual declines in lodge income; b/ the mechanisms of payments made being directly often to MCC elite/chairman (without transparency to the wider community) and c/ in a complex accounting process with prior major value deductions for services rendered for vehicle repairs, tyres, advances and so on, that are focused on 'assets' of the MCC elite/chairman. Such combinations fuel perceptions among the people about the lodges' behaviour, which, in the absence of transparent information, results in the breakdown of trust.
- 12 The actual or attempted co-option of the RDCs by the ruling party is an open secret in Zimbabwe. In Chipinge, a big sign outside the RDC HQ announces the HQ of ZANU-PF.
- 13 Following an internal audit conducted by the RDC on CAMPFIRE in Mahenye criticised the programme and, by implication, the traditional leadership, the chief had notices put up in buildings accessed by the public which declared that 'every committee in Mahenye must be led by *chaukes* (people from the chief's family).
- 14 Estimates of 'leakages' in 2004 – elephant hunting only:
 Assumption 1: Five elephants were on quota and shot in 2003/4; trophy fees US\$10,000 (see Campfire 2002 data) for + 20kg elephant and US\$ 4,500 for smaller.
 Assumption 2: Conservative estimate (WWF-SARPO 2002 Mahenye hunt records) of three elephants X US\$ 10,000 + two elephants x US\$ 4,500 = total Mahenye Campfire revenue from elephant hunting of US\$ 39,000.
 Assumption 3: 50% of revenue used for HH dividend (as was case prior to 2000) = US\$ 19,500.
 Assumption 4: Number of households in 2004 is 894 = HH revenue of US\$ 21.81.
- 15 Luckham et al. (2000) advanced the need to exploit existing or open new 'political spaces' to ensure that participatory democratic politics are promoted in emerging liberal democracies. These 'political spaces' take 'those forms of political activity and organization that constitute individuals as equal, active and responsible citizens as opposed to subjects of the state' and 'those political opportunities [that] exist or can be created for citizens to gain access to the public sphere and hold governments and state elites accountable within it' (p. 26). This statement highlights the need to create political space and conditions that resist elite capture and suppression of marginal and poor groups through mechanisms for accountability and fair representation.
- 16 The authors are grateful to Marshall Murphree for this insight.

