

**SITUATING ZIMBZBWE'S COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT PRACTICE IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
FRAMEWORK**

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Abstract

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Zimbabwe was developed to be the natural resource management practice and has managed to garner support from both government and non-governmental organizations. Natural resource management regimes are being shaped, or reshaped towards, creation and promotion of local resource governance. This thrust is in fulfillment of the new development approach that endeavours to achieve sustainable development, by promoting the creation of local institutions in the management of natural resources. However, the practice in Zimbabwe shows a lot of disjunctures from the demands of sustainable development framework. This paper examines the operative systems and tries to see how far they satisfy some of the tenets of sustainable development.

Introduction

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) is fast replacing the conventional state controlled natural resource management regimes and is ushering in a new resource governance dispensation where local institutions are highly promoted as an effective natural resource management regime. Zimbabwe, like any other country that is signatory to the Kyoto Protocol's Agenda 21, is trying to implement some of the provisions of the global agreement and is promoting formation of local Agenda 21 plans in fulfillment of some of the tenets of sustainable development. What remains to be empirically proved is how far these operations had satisfied these tenets.

The Evolution of CBNRM

CBNRM is a new governance system in natural resources that advocate for creation of local institutions to take charge of the natural resource management. Their evolution can be traced as far back into the Agenda 21 of the Kyoto Protocol, which came up with a resolution to form local Agenda 21 plans. These plans were seen as the only way-out of the spiraling environmental degradation. This international agreement stressed the promotion of local institution in the management of natural resources. All the world leaders at the summit unanimously agreed to the criticality of roles played by local institutions and the civic society in the management of resources (Haris & Makiko, 2002; Leach et al, 1999)

Government and non-governmental organizations started to shape and reshape their operation in line with the provisions of this protocol. Their functions started to move away from centralized and outsider driven approach to one that is more supportive and advisory, giving local institutions the central role of managing the resources. This resulted in formation of user groups, which were supposed to develop into co-partners in the management of natural resources. Communal Area Management Project For Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) is the local initiative aimed at involving local people in the management of resources. These institutions were supposed to develop into management authorities fully in charge of their resources, meaning that they were supposed to control access and utilization of these resources (Cambel et al, 1996).

The major reason for the formation of the CBNRM regime was the growing signs of dwindling effectiveness of the government and its agencies in the management of natural resources (Bond, 1995). Governments, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, were suffering from the ever-spiraling budget deficits and did not have the required and qualified human capital

that would allow them to effectively management their environments. This was compromising their ability to manage the environment sustainably. There was also a growing realization that the conflict, inducing a law enforcement approach, used by most governments, was a big hindrance to sustainable resource management, as it created conflicts between users and law enforcement agents.

Establishment of local institutions and the involvement of local people in the management of the local environment were seen as the only logical way out of the ever-growing problem of resource degradation and the costly government protectionist natural resource management regimes (Murombedzi, 2003). CBNRM programs were aimed at giving local people a clear mandate to manage, own, and utilize their resources. For these programs to succeed, they were supposed to be accompanied by devolution of power from government and para-government institutions to local communities, thereby giving them full control over their resources (Cambel et al, 1998).

Another reason that could be tied to the formation of CBNRM programs and the formation of local institutions responsible for management of resources was the growing realization of the important role that local indigenous technical knowledge can play in the management of natural resources. This group of knowledge had for long been sidelined in preference of the scientific management methods, which are now seen to be insufficient to sustainably manage the resources. Local people are regarded to be more cognizant to the intricacies of local ecological processes and practices, and are also regarded to have greater interest to sustainably to manage these resources, hence are better placed to manage resources than any distant corporate organization (Brosius et al, 1998; Antonio, 2001).

The concept of CBNRM, so far, had developed to be more than just an abstract issue to attract the attention of international organizations that are pouring a lot of monies into the idea. They had found the concept of indigenous, community, customs, tradition, and rights as a useful concept that can promote local empowerment and improve natural resource governance (Brosius et al, 1998).

In Zimbabwe, and other Sub-Saharan countries, the concept of CBNRM is a huge welcome development in the face of the institutional vacuum, created by their colonial masters and further perpetuated by the post-colonial governments. These regimes had destroyed traditional institutions that were responsible for management of natural resources by creating centralized state controlled management regimes (Murombedzi, 1998). They failed to create institutions that could sustainably manage our resources and environmental degradation, especially in communal areas was symptomatic to institutional breakdown (Madzudzo, 1998). The protected areas did not show any better signs, as specie diversity was at greater risk inside these areas than outside (Murombedzi, 2003; Cliffe, 1986). So CBNRM was, therefore, seen as the only to achieve sustainable resource management, especially through restoration of roles of traditional structures and processes in the management of resources.

According to Murphree (1999), CBNRM programs were molded around the notion of giving ownership or custodianship of wildlife resources to small groups/communities, which were seen to be better placed to manage them, just like in the privatized land. This concept had worked well in the private lands when plot holders were given custodial powers over animals in their lands. This success story prompted the government to try and extend this scheme to communal areas. The major reason was that best conservation practices could be

realized if strong proprietary rights were given to people; working as incentives for them to preserve resources under their jurisdiction.

CBNRM Practice and Sustainable Development Framework

The CBNRM practice in Zimbabwe was molded around the principles of sustainable development. Its major thrust was to promote resource utilization by present generation in such a way that does not compromise the opportunities of future generations. However if we try to situate the Zimbabwean practice into the framework of sustainable development we are going to see that there are a lot of disjunctures. This paper is going to limit its scope to the following variables of sustainable development:

- (i) How holistic is it?
- (ii) How people-centered is the practice?
- (iii) What are the opportunities for macro-micro level linkages?
- (iv) How economically sustainable they are?

CBNRM: Its Holisticness and People-Centeredness

Sustainable development is build on the foundation that all development initiatives should be people-centered, meaning that all development initiatives should try in all ways to articulate the development needs defined by the people. Most importantly the concerned people themselves should initiate the development initiatives. People should be the starting point of all interventions through an analysis of their development opportunities and constrains, then external assistance will come in to help them overcome these constrains and take advantage of the available opportunities (Chambers, 1993; Ellis, 2000). According to the

Department for International Development (DFID, 1999), development projects that are people-centered should have the following features:

- (i) Begin by analyzing people's livelihoods;
- (ii) Fully involve them and give special respect to their views;
- (iii) Focus on the impacts of different policies and institutional arrangements upon people's households;
- (iv) Stress the importance of the influence of policies and institutional arrangements in promoting the agenda of the local people.

The CBNRM programs in Zimbabwe seem to show a departure from these principles. While on the surface they preach that the programs are molded inline with the principles of sustainable development, in reality the practices are typical of a top-down, and they are implemented in a typical center-periphery style. There is very little involvement of local people in coming up with development initiatives. Where they are involved, it is more in the initiation stage where they are just involved to rubber-stamp decisions made elsewhere. They only enjoy the privilege of initiating development plans while the state and its agencies retain the role of approval, implementation, and fiscal control of these development projects (Mandondo & Mapedza, 2003). Decision and development programs are made in the "Ivory Towers" of government offices and then implemented in the periphery. This creates fertile grounds for conflict as beneficiaries of development projects feel they are not the owner of the project (Stockil, 1999). The problem often associated with this approach is that the development plans do not usually suit the realities on the ground and this renders them unsustainable. If development initiatives are fashioned in line with the specific conditions of that area, there is a greater likelihood that they are going to succeed and their sustainability is

enhanced. Most CAMPFIRE programs in Zimbabwe had failed because the concerned beneficiaries do not feel to be co-partners in the development ventures and they see them as government or council business (Murombedzi, 1999).

These programs are also accused of being supply-led rather than demand-driven, and the ideas had originated from international development circles and are often implemented on terms and conditions usually associated with their allies in state bureaucracies (Mandondo & Mapedza, 2002). Therefore given their places of origin and the agendas they are pursuing, it is very difficult to satisfy the demands of sustainability because it calls for development initiatives that come from the people and external help (who only come in to help the people realize development initiatives.) Development should address the agenda of the local people, and essentially it should be from within the concerned people. The CAMPFIRE programs, according to Mandondo (2000), are based on the deep green ethos and values of the global western environmental discourse. It was conceptualized within the framework of western culture, hence it is supply led, insular, domineering, and conditional. One major problem associated with such a development approach is that it offers very little room for other alternatives. They offer no room for empowerment without strings attached. CBNRM in Zimbabwe continues to be driven by external policy interest rather than responding to the dynamics of the local people (Murombedzi, 1999; Brosius et al, 1998; Turner, 2004). Wildlife interests in this country had managed to displace the local economic imperatives where conservation issues have taken absolute and overriding imperatives giving very little attention on its impacts on the local population. This has resulted in local resentment, to the extent that CBNRM programs are so uninspiring and their conservation roles had not been achieved. The programs had failed to motivate local people into conserving the wildlife.

The process of decentralization had not been done in a way that could allow effective local participation, since it does not give them full control over the development projects that are under their jurisdiction. Communities do not have enough power to make decisions that concern their development. The CBNRM programs' devolution process was not done in a way that gives power close enough to the local people to allow them to make decisions that affect them and their livelihoods (Murphree, 1999). The Rural District Councils are still running the affairs of the CBNRM programs. They are the ones that are responsible for collection of revenues and they are also the ones that determine how much is given to the communities involved. However, councils are not the producers and managers of these natural resources in the way they are seen as exploiting the local people. This practice forms a fundamental discrepancy and there is need for urgent redress, especially by putting in place a legal instrument that give local people power to manage their resources. The present situation where the rural district council monopolise the authority, management, and benefits relegates local communities to just producers, thereby rendering the program unsustainable (Murphree, 1991).

Another problem associated with locating decision-making power in rural district councils is that they are not close enough to the realities on the ground; hence, they are bound to make decisions that mismatch the local conditions and environments. If people are given the opportunity to make decisions that affects their livelihoods they are more likely to come up with decisions that take into account the local environments. There is need to create institution that goes beyond rural district councils and come close enough to the people, most ideally at ward or village level. Communities involved in CAMPFIRE programs continue to struggle for control over their resources while the government continues to recentralize

power in its agencies (Mandondo & Mapedza, 2002). This will then afford them to own these development initiatives and allow them to participate in the development process as stakeholders. This will enhance project sustainability because they will have the feeling that they are the owners of the projects and they had been accorded their rightful position as stakeholder in the development process. The situation in Zimbabwe, where communities do not view themselves as joint owners of wildlife resources, is not healthy for sustainable development. They have developed a negative attitude towards wildlife management issues because they believe that these programs are government and rural district council programs; not theirs (Murombedzi, 1999). This attitude has made wildlife management programs inferior to other livelihood strategies because people think that they can build livelihood strategies from other sources other than wildlife.

The Macro-Micro level linkages

The importance of macro-micro level linkages emanated from the observation that development initiatives were disconnected. Policies, services, and people's lives showed disjuncture, which in most cases resulted in very little services reaching the people, especially the ordinary people. In most occasions, development initiatives focus on macro or micro level giving, a disjointed approach to development. In sustainable development, there is need for a higher level of policy and planning processes to be informed by lessons learnt and insights gained at the local level. This will give local people a stake in policy and will increase the overall effectiveness of development initiatives. The macro level (policy) need to be based on a sound understanding of people's livelihoods, which will in turn result in

micro level operation, being properly linked to the local organization and influencing policy so that development initiatives do not develop into islands of excellence in a sea of poverty.

A closer look at the macro-micro level linkages shows a lot of departures from the provisions of the framework. In most cases, decisions made at each level do not support or compliment each other. The framework calls for decisions at the macro level to be informed by decisions at the micro level (the bottom-up approach). The Zimbabwean practice seems to be completely the opposite, where decisions are made in the “Ivory towers” of government offices and implemented in the periphery, in a typical top-down approach. The operative legislative instruments in this country reinforce this system. Laws that are passed do not take into account the operating traditional systems that are used by local people to manage the resources. The biggest setback is that the legal system does not recognise local communities as the owners of natural resources. This responsibility is located in the government and para-government organizations, such as the rural district councils, Forestry Commission, and the then Natural Resource Board. In such a scenario, local communities are left in a very vulnerable legal status, which means that whatever they are going to do as local communities in an effort to manage resources do not have a legal basis and hence is not enforceable. This encouraged resource degradation (Rihoy, 1995; Mandondo & Mapedza, 2003; Murombedzi, 1999). One good example to illustrate this vulnerability is the case that happened in Bulilimangwe, Matebeleland North province. The local people had devised local by-laws that were supposed to govern harvesting of mopani worms. These by-laws regulated access and utilization of these worms. When they tried to implement them, the local rural district council, who are legally recognized as the owners of the area, said that they do not recognize the by-laws and hence were not enforceable (Mandondo & Mapedza, 2002). This encouraged

open access to these resources and rendered the utilization unsustainable. The operative legal systems should try and accommodate the operations of local people, and this can only be achieved when there is participatory formation of legal structures. In this way, the national and sub-national institutions that form the management systems will reflect the local practices, which in turn reflect the micro-macro level linkages. If these linkages are created, this will create the platform for sustainable resource management. It is very important that the legal system is owned by people themselves and people should be seen driving benefits from these legal instruments for them to be sustainable. This will also give legitimacy to the institutions.

CBNRM and Economic Sustainability

The issues of economic sustainability are some of the major drawbacks of CBNRM programs. For a project to be regarded economically sustainable it should be self-sustaining after the initial credit input, and it should be robust in the face of financial shocks, like high inflation, volatile interest rates, and devaluation of currencies (UNDP, 1999). Sustainability also entails continuing long-term for a system to reproduce itself or even expand over time. It is the sustenance of available outputs for human consumption and, therefore, its capacity to keep the same contribution, or even increase its contribution, to human welfare and well being (Ellis, 2000).

The economic benefits of CBNRM programs to communities involved are so marginal to the extent that they are not worth pursuing. While at national and district level the financial accrual looks so impressive, the situation is so pathetic at household level (Cleaver, 1999; Dzingirai, 2003). Very little is benefited by individual households as

economic benefits of wildlife management. Most of the revenues (80%) are used at both national and district level, while very little (20%) trickle down to household level (Bond, 1995). There are, therefore, no incentives for the local people to participate in community based natural resource management programs (Rihoy, 1995; Murphree, 1991). The situation is further worsened by the fact that local communities do not have financial autonomy in these programs because government or rural district councils handle most of these issues. There, they are not in a position to contribute on how much they should get from these programs. According to Murphree (1991), community based natural resource management in Zimbabwe can only succeed if local communities are given genuine proprietary rights over their resources. These rights should include the right to use resources, determine the mode of usage, and most importantly, fully enjoy the benefits therefrom. This is crucial, as it will encourage communities to participate in these programs.

The opportunity cost of devoting land to community based natural resource management programs is very substantial, as very little is realized financially by households. According to Dzingirai (2003), these programs are far from empowering and enriching the local communities; they are, rather, exploiting and marginalizing them. Their contribution to the improvement of well-being of local people, both materially and financially, is very negligible to the extent that the practice is seen as cloaked with empowerment rhetoric (Cleaver, 1999). These programs constituted a constraint on the ability of local communities to accumulate through arable expansion and livestock acquisition. The programs failed to prove that they are a more viable form of livelihood strategy, as it had continued to be financially inferior compared to them; compared to farm income constitute, only 20% (Bond, 1995). This does not paint a very good picture as a viable livelihood strategy; hence is not

unsustainable. What needs to be done is the programs need to at least manage to give these people a form of livelihood so that they can fall on it.

Conclusion

While a lot had been done in an attempt to empower local people in the management of local environment, a lot needs to be done to satisfy the demands of sustainable development. There is a need to create institutions that are more local that manage local resources. The present situation, where local institutions are marginalized on resource governance, is futile to sustainable resource management. There is need to promote and empower local institutions, such that they are in charge of resource management. There is also need for total devolution of power and responsibilities to the local institutions so that they take full control of resource management. This devolution should be accompanied by capacity building, where local institutions are given skills and expertise to run and manage resources. The present scenario, where devolution is done only as far as rural district councils, does not bring management responsibilities close enough to the people. Rural district councils should release power to the local communities so that they determine how resources are used and also enjoy more benefits from these programs. Government and para-government institutions are racking the majority of benefits from wildlife management schemes, leaving local people who are the managers and producers of wildlife to scrounge for meager benefits. This does not augur well with the tenets of sustainable development, which demands that the beneficiaries of development initiatives should be seen pocketing the economic benefits of development projects. The situation is going to improve if there are close linkages between the local people and government. What is more important is that the

government and its agencies should be informed by the operatives at the local level, such that when they are making their policies and laws they incorporate the reality on the ground. The present situation, where the center holds the prerogative of formulation of policies and laws and implements them on the periphery, is not good for sustainable development because there is imposition of development initiatives, and worse still, there is a greater likelihood that the development initiatives will not fit the situation on the ground. This will more likely result in poor performing projects and a delay in realization of development objectives.

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