

**The History of Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe:
A Chronicle of How Sustainable Resource Management Has Remained an
Elusive Concept**

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Abstract

The history of natural resource governance in Zimbabwe can be traced as far back as the pre-colonial era when local institutions were fully and solely in charge of resource management. They had their fair contribution to resource management but also had their problems. The colonial and the post-colonial regime came in each with its set of institutions, but all fell short in creating institutions that could sustainably manage our resources. This article traces the historical institutional failures, which mainly hinges on their failure to fully involve the local people and create local institutions that could sustainably manage our resources. The paper also highlights some of the gains made towards sustainable resource management made by these different institutions and the areas that need improvement in order to satisfy the tenets of sustainable resource management.

Introduction

Natural resource management (NRM) in Zimbabwe can basically be classified into four regimes, each with its distinct management style, which translates into a measure of its effectiveness in management of natural resources. These four basic regimes include, the pre-colonial, the colonial, the post-colonial and the new thrust of community based management systems based on the Kyoto Protocol. It is very difficult at the moment to say there are institutions that can sustainably manage our resources in Zimbabwe. Institutions have come and gone so are governments and their governance systems but the problem had remained and it seems there is no answer in the nearest

possible future. What this means is that we are going to stay with the problem of natural resource degradation for a longer period than anticipated.

PRE-COLONIAL ERA AND NRM: Management or Non-Management?

The history of natural resources in Zimbabwe can be traced as far back as the pre-colonial era when this country had resources, which attracted many foreigners including the likes of Charles Rudd and Robert Moffat. This period dates back to the pre-1890s when traditional institutions were the chief natural resources management systems in this country. The chiefs and traditional beliefs formed the institutions that were responsible for management of natural resources. The chief assumed the role of head of the community and had land allocation powers and was also the custodian of traditional values. In so far as the natural resources management was concerned, there were traditional systems and practices that helped to preserve natural resources. The management regime was basically characterized by their deep commitment societal interest, which amounts to deep reverence of societal good (Dore 2001). Under this set there were areas, which held religious, and social values and these areas were strictly protected and remained in their natural state for a long period. These areas included sacred groves, and pools and the various shrines. Sacred pools played a very important role in the conservation of wetlands while shrines and sacred grooves were responsible for forest conservation. Most shrines were used as places of worshipping and they remained in their natural state for long periods and most of them were converted into conservation forest e.g. Matopos Game reserve and Mavhuradona game reserve (Murombedzi 2003). There were regulations that regulated harvesting of forest. Only dry wood was to be collected for firewood and some trees with social significance were preserved. Also fruit trees and large tree were allowed to remain in fields to provide shade fruits and fodder. Certain resources were restricted because of their scarcity and their particular value to the group (Katerera 2001)

The indigenous people possessed a very vital knowledge base that was characterized by deep virtues of moral being, ethically based, spiritually intuitive and above all holistic (Dore 2001). It was these virtues that formed the basis of natural resource management regimes in the pre-colonial period. They developed cultural beliefs and taboos that formed the foundation for natural resource management. Natural resource conservation strategies were inter-wound in these cultural beliefs and had been able to regulate their sustainable utilization. These beliefs and taboos formed codes of behavior that ensured sustainable natural resource utilization. In this set up the ancestors and founding spirits were the custodians of natural resources and wildlife and their utilization was supposed to be done in accordance with the agreed codes of behavior that vary from society to society. Societies, social conformity and religious sanction fostered compliance to natural resource management regimes. Any violation of these codes of behavior was said to induce some disasters such as droughts, famines or diseases (Resource Africa 2002, Gunther 1999). Destruction and

intrusion of forests was believed to anger spirits, which would result in inducement of conflict between people and wild animals and also result in withdrawal of bounty of land and its resources. These informal institutions for thousands of years had been intact and managed to regulate natural resource utilization not only in Zimbabwe but Africa as a whole (Gunther 1999). People utilized their resources in a sustainable manner even though their whole livelihood depended on natural resources. They used their environment for their food, firewood and raw material for weapons. Although meat formed the greater part of indigenous people 's diet, the harvesting of wildlife did not degrade the environment (Murombedzi 1990). Not all animals were hunted, some animals were considered to hold special societal values hence were not hunted for example one was not allowed to hunt animals of his totem and there was a certain group animal such as baboons and monkeys, which were not allowed to be hunted. The hunting did not adversely affect the population of big game even though wildlife products constituted important commodities (Murombedzi 2003)

Sacredness played a crucial role in conservation of natural resources. Things such as sacred grooves were seen as representing pre-colonial forest conservation. They formed the patchwork of forests that remained undisturbed by human activities. Sacred pools were also used to conserve wetlands. All these practices played a very important part in resource management. They formed an embodiment of ideas, concepts and categorization that were able to be produced and reproduced into a set of practices that formed the backbone of natural resource management and a body of law called customary law which had both procedural and substantive rights (Katerera 2001). What remained important in the environmental management institutions of this time was that they better integrated traditional and social cultural traits and hence were given moral and political legitimacy at the local level (Kayambazintu et.al. 2003). This enabled them not only to be stable but also enduring for such a long time.

Contrary to many scholarly views (e.g Dore 2001) that the farming practices of the pre-colonial era rendered the environment vulnerable, the practices showered elements of environmental conservation. Practices such as inter cropping, which was the main traditional farming practice had its advantages that can contribute to conservation of the environment. Mixing of various plants e.g. grain, beans, pumpkins and root crops helped in conservation of water and soil as well as suppressing growth of weed. It also had the potential to reduce the risk of plant failure (Resource Africa, 2002). Some of these pre colonial ethnology and environmental management practices were so entrenched in the lives of indigenous people that they survived long into the colonial period because of their continued relevance in conservation of natural resources (Murombedzi, 2003). The vestiges of pre-colonial natural resources management efforts were obliterated by the colonial regime but most of the efforts formed the greater part of today' s protected areas not only in Zimbabwe but in Africa as a whole. Areas such as Matopos National Park and Mavhuradonha in

Zimbabwe, Kalahari game reserve in Botswana and Mamili national park in South Africa, (Murombedzi, 2003)

However some scholars (e.g. Murombedzi 2003, Resource Africa 2002 and Karerere 2001) are of the opinion that the pre-colonial natural resource management regimes offered very little for sustainable resource management. They argued that structures of these institutions did not allow sustainable natural resource management. This is basically because they did not allow exclusive use rights (Dore 2001). The regime did not augur well with the principles property right regime, that of exclusivity. He further argued that in Zimbabwe's communal areas grazing could be used without excluding any member of the community hence did not offer lasting solution to sustainable resource use and hence a fertile ground for resource degradation. This is true when viewed under conditions of burgeoning human and livestock densities. He also argued that resources in the pre-colonial period were in abundance, which did not give any incentive to create rules that govern use of these resources. The supply was perfectly elastic which means the cost of enforcing exclusive rights far exceeds the benefits. Land was so abundant that communities use one piece land and then move to the other when soils are exhausted. He criticized these regimes for loosely carrying a complex association of wisdom, continuity, propinquity that gave them resilience and power. Unless they have exclusive rights over natural resources, people do not have the incentives to sustainably manage them.

However what Dore did not want to believe is that farming systems by Shona communities had developed a character of intensive and continuous farming especially in the vlie areas as observed by Scoones and Wilson (1989). They had also acquired large herd of cattle, which by early 1900s were nearing one million. These developments call for management systems that ensure sustainable resource utilization or else there will be rampant degradation of resources. Murombedzi, (2003) argued that to think that there was no need for natural resource management in the pre-colonial era is a gross under estimation of the roles played by institutions of that time in the management of natural resources. The traditional values and practices had immense contribution to preservation of natural resources and most of their efforts formed the protected areas of today. What remain clear and undisputed from the two opposing camps is that during the pre-colonial period there was no major environmental crisis and what remains the point of academic discourse is the effectiveness of the institutions of that time in natural resource management. Whether it was by coincidence or by design that the people of that time co-existed harmoniously with their environments remains to be empirically proved and verified.

Some scholars are of the opinion that the traditional structures of the pre-colonial era were not clearly defined and very weak and therefore offered very little in terms of natural resource management. The practices were so diverse and varied that it is very difficult to generalize this made them so difficult to apply across societies and communities (Katerere, 2001).

The colonial period and NRM

The colonial period in Zimbabwe dated back as far as 1890 when the British South African Company was formerly granted the Royal Charter of incorporation from the British government, which effectively streamlined the chains between the British government and the British South African company (Murombedzi, 2003). The charter was first restricted to Matebeleland and later extended to include the whole of Mashonaland. The central feature of the settler government was expropriation of land and other assets such as livestock from the indigenous people. This mode of expansion resulted in displacement of indigenous people from their land into fragile and marginal lands called reserves. The population in these reserves swelled to unsustainable levels and the signs of environmental degradation started to emerge in the early 1900s (Dore, 2001).

The emergence of environmental degradation in the reserves was greeted with a divided understanding, which was characterized by mud slinging and finger pointing. The white attributed it to poor farming methods practiced in the traditional cultivation, which was mainly characterized by breaking up and scratching of soil, broadcasting of seeds and lack of crop rotation. The blacks on the other hand were blaming it on the inadequacy of land. The whites responded to this by introducing centralized villages aimed at improving the agricultural practices of the Africans. This was coupled by promotion of use of organic fertilizers and continuous crop cultivation. This however did not help much in arresting the ever-growing environmental degradation that was occurring in the reserves. According to the 1938 National Resource Commission the situation in the reserves resembles a serious crisis. There was over stocking which was causing untold natural resource degradation. (Dore, 2001). Some of the land was already degraded beyond rehabilitation. The government of the day swiftly responded to this by promulgating the Natural Resource Act of 1941, which introduced coercive conservation methods and empowered authorities to carry out compulsory destocking exercises. This was again strongly resisted by the local people as it was seen as destruction of their wealth and again yielded very little in terms of improving the conditions of environment especially in the reserves. The Godlonton Commission of 1941 reported that there was over population in the reserves and the situation in some of the reserves was that they far exceeded their carrying capacity. The report said that 24 reserves were 5% overpopulated, 19 were 50%-100% over populated, 19 more were 100% over populated. The administration had again to respond to this via a promulgation of another act, the Land Husbandry Act of 1951. The major aim of this act was to try and avert the fast spreading poverty and try to arrest the ever growing ecological decline (Murombedzi 2003,1990, Katerere 2001). It also wanted to modify the land holding system in the communal areas by giving some communal farmers individual land holding rights and transferred land allocation powers from the traditional leaders and centralized it in the state.

Prior to this, the state had made attempts to conserve the environment through promulgation of various statutory instruments but this was not meant to benefit the communal areas. Its major focus was in the alienated lands. The first such attempt was the promulgation of Game Law in 1896, (Masona in Murombedzi, 2003). The law wanted to regulate utilization of wildlife through issuing of licenses and permits to privately owned land. It wanted to curtail the growing export of game and prevent commercialization of game. This was followed by the 1899 Game preservation Ordinance No. 6. The ordinance empowered administrators of Mashonaland and Matebeleland to declare birds and animals to be specified and protected. It spelt out times and seasons within which it was prohibited to kill pursue or shoot game without a licence. It also classified some of the animals as Royal game and were not be killed, hunted or captured. These animals include elephants, giraffes, hippopotamus, white rhino quagga, kudu and ostrich, (Murombedzi 2003). The colonial government showed their seriousness in natural resource management in 1929 when they promulgated the first act , which provided for better preservation of both game and fish, the Game and Fish Act of 1929. The act was meant to give protection and preserve game and fish and further protected certain fauna of the then Southern Rhodesia for educational purpose. This act empowered governors to form game reserves and appoint game wardens and rangers to manage these reserves. It also centralized issuing of licenses to the Minister of Agriculture and lands. As a result of this act the first game reserve, the Matopos was formed in 1929 (Murombezi, 2003).

A series of other acts were promulgated in the following years such as the Parks and Wild life Act (1949), Natural Resource Act (1942), Forest Act (1948), Parks and Wild life Act (1975). Despite the proliferation of these acts the problem of sustainable resource utilization remained problematic and unsolved. The failure can flatly be leveled on the approach that was used by the colonial government. The system was inherently command and control with very little input and consideration of the communal people. The values and priorities of the communal people were not allowed to inform policies and environmental remedial measures adopted by the colonial government. This therefore meant that the natural resource management initiatives were imposed in a top-down fashion and as such were not people centred and hence can be regarded as imposed models which were characterized by lack of common vision, stiff competition, no community involvement, no sharing of ideas and benefits and most importantly characterized by conflict between government and local communities (Katerera, 1999).

This approach to natural resource management had a lot of structural defects as it wrongly specified the problem, mistakenly explains the causes and therefore the results that flow were inappropriate and had wrong emphasis (Cliffe, 1986). A skewed power relationship and level of involvement also characterized this natural resource management regime. The communities were found in an unfortunate position in these skewed relationships, they were found in a situation where they were supposed to be highly involved in resources management but with very little power over

these resources, (Katerera 1999). This mismatch between the power at hand and the level of participation could easily dilute the spirit of collaboration and breed fertile grounds of conflict. In such a situation it compromised sustainable resource management. Sustainability can only be achieved when the people at the grassroots are involved and all the initiatives are people centred and holistic where multiple actors are allowed to input in the policy making process (DFID, 1999).

The fundamental problem created by the colonial government was that it displaced local people from their land and this resulted in appropriation of natural resources by the state, which resulted in the emergence of elements of open access system to natural resources. Individuals started to invade the commons as a collective sense of proprietorship, (Antonio, 2001). People started to involve themselves in activities of subversion in the form of poaching, illegal harvesting of forest products and breaking of infrastructure such as fences. This created fertile grounds for unsustainable resource utilization since people had no sense of ownership of resources. This approach to resource management does not allow space for other potential partners to participate as stakeholders in the decision making process and this caused a lot of problems in the protected areas. It emerged that there was greater biodiversity outside the protected areas than inside and species inside these protected areas were becoming increasingly threatened and their habitat became severely isolated, (Murombedzi, 2003, Antonio 2001).

NRM IN The post-colonial EPOCH: Early PHASES

The post-colonial government inherited the colonial government structures of natural resource management with minimum changes despite the divergent general ideological differences. The ideology in natural resource management was generally inherited as it was in the colonial era. They continued to blame the tenure system for resource degradation and this resulted in continued resource degradation, (Murombedzi, 1990). Traditional institutions that had a fair record in management of natural resources continued to be sidelined when decisions on natural resources were made. This was worsened by the political position of traditional leaders who were accused of supporting the colonial regime hence the new government tried by all means to disempower them through creation of parallel structures such as the Ward Development Committees and the Village Development Committees. The problem with these structure is that they are elected bodies who are accountable up-wards and not to their constituencies and also to compound this the legal framework does not recognize their role in the management of natural resources, (Katerere 2001). However government knew the important role the traditional institutions can play in sustainable natural resource management. They tried to restore the powers of chiefs through the promulgation of Traditional Leaders Act of 1998 (Chapter 29:17). The act claimed to restore the chief's powers but issues of natural resources management remain located elsewhere in the government and its agencies such as the government departments, ministries and local authorities, (Katerere, 2001).

The chiefs were therefore relegated to just a ceremonial leader whose duties were to just enforce statutory laws. The technical and managerial agencies of the government retained the responsibility of natural resource management.

NRM in the post-New Millennium era

Towards the turn of the century there was a new thinking in the natural resource management. This new thinking was a product of the Kyoto Protocols Agenda 21, where there was a global agreement on the criticality of local communities and civic society's involvement in the management of local environment (Hari and Makiko, 2002). The conference advocated for formation of Agenda 21 plans at local level. There was a general consensus on the fact that sustainable environmental management can only be realized if initiatives involve local people. There must be creation of co-management regimes or sharing of responsibilities of management of natural resources among national governments, local governments, civic society and local communities (Leach et.al. 1999).

This management regime came as a realization that state and its institutions were failing to effectively manage natural resources in the wake of declining fiscal and human capital resources. As a result of these constraints, the environment was increasingly being exposed to general degradation. In most African countries community based natural resources management regimes are seen as a respond to institutional vacuum created by colonial and post colonial governments, where these governments had effectively eradicated the traditional institution that were responsible for natural resource management (Murombedzi 199, Bond 1995). This system can also be seen as a transplant of the practices that were in the commercial farming areas where the 1975 National Parks and Wildlife Act gave the farm owners proprietary rights over the wildlife in their individual farms. The system was a very good success and the post-colonial government thought it was worth extending this practice to the communal areas (Murphree 1995)

This new thrust was characterized by a marked the departure from the centralized and state controlled management regimes which had overwhelmingly failed to sustainably manage natural resources. The focus of this new thrust was to shift from the law enforcement strategies, which was mainly characterized by conflicts between users and government to more organic institutions which evolve from the people and which are for the people (Katerera 1999, Campbell et.al. 1996). This approach is aimed at empowering grassroots institutions to make decision concerning utilization and access to natural resources at local level by giving rights to control these resources. In this way, governance of natural resources at local level is promoted because it enhances transparency, responsiveness and accountability. The overall effect of this approach is to enhance the livelihoods of people and ensure sustainable resource use.

The new regime has gathered tremendous support from transnational lending institutions that are trying to promote a new version of environment and social advocacy, linking social justice and environmental management agenda. They have been pouring huge sums of money into these movements and in some cases they have been used as a pre-condition for development aid. There is a general belief that sustainable natural resource management lies in community based institutions (Brosius et.al 1998) Local people are regarded to possess vital technical and environmental knowledge that can be utilized in the management of natural resources. They are more cognizant to the intricacies of local ecological processes and practices that put them in a better platform to sustainably manage the resources. They are also the people with greater interest that the state or any other distant corporate to sustainably manage the resources.

CAMPFIRE Initiative and NRM in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the Communal Area Management Programme For Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) has been the flagship of community based natural resources and attempts had been made to replicate the programme in some parts of Africa. The programme is a culmination of 1998 amendment of the National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1975 where the minister was empowered to give rural district councils appropriate authority over wildlife in their areas of jurisdiction, (Murphree 1991). The programme registered remarkable success in generating income at district level and in some instances had developed to be the cash cows of rural district councils. The revenue base of most rural district councils, which were characteristically lean, registered increases in some cases by four folds, (Murphree 1991). Rural district councils formed national CAMPFIRE councils to try and lobby for their interest at political centers and also to try and capitalize on the wave of success generated. Beside the financial benefits there were a host flow of other benefits that were accrued from CAMPFIRE programmes and they include, game meat, money for projects and control of problem animals, (Madzudzo 1998).

The much-celebrated success of CAMPFIRE programme seems to be very hazy if it is examined against the principles of sustainable natural resource management. There seems to be problems inherent in the procedural and substantive issues of the approach. The first problem is the origin of the concept of community based natural resource management on which the programme of CAMPFIRE is founded. This concept was founded by international organizations i.e. multi-national lending agencies and Non Governmental Organizations. This therefore makes it difficult for them to be congruent with the current livelihoods strategies, social environments and the ability of local people to adapt. This is a very fundamental aspect that helps to define the sustainability of a programme because sustainability can only be achieved when policies and institutional arrangements are influenced to promote the agenda of the poor, (DFID 1999). As far as the CAMPFIRE programmes are concerned there is very little component of local values as they reflect

the deep green ethos and the values of global environmental discourse and scientific culture, (Mandondo 2000). The approach is therefore conceptualized within a culture, which is supply-led rather than demand-led and is characteristically top-down. The approach is therefore procedurally flawed and falls short in satisfying the principles of sustainable natural resource management framework, which calls for people, centred projects. They should be defined by the people themselves and external assistance should only come to help them overcome their constraints and take advantage of the opportunities that are around them. CAMPFIRE programmes, because of their inherent western culture are failing to address the issues that directly affect local communities. In this way they are seen to be insular, domineering and conditional hence offers very little chance to think for alternative forms of empowering without the green string attached, (Mandondo 2000) In this case community participation is conceptualized in an instrumentalist mode where community participation is just for environmental conservation without tangible benefits accruing to the participants. Under such circumstances people are compelled to act rationally and resist or abandon these projects, as they will pursue other activities that supports their livelihoods.

Decentralization- Centralization Confusion and NRM

Another handicap of the CBNRM is that there is no micro-macro link. Initiatives at the local level are not supported by initiatives at the macro level. This is true when we take a look at the legislative provision of natural resource management in this country. The local people are not empowered by the laws of this country to manage the resources. Decentralisation of power goes only as far as the district councils and not to the real users and managers of resources. Communities are therefore denied the legal authorities to manage common resources (Rihoy 1995, Murombedzi 1999, Mapedza and Mandondo 2003). Their legal status is very vulnerable because their practices and by-laws are not recognized by the operative legal system. Traditional values and practices had been denied chances to inform the operative legal provisions so they reflect and accommodate local practices. A good example is that of the harvesting mopane worms in Bulilimamagwe. Local people had put in place by-laws that govern harvesting of these mopane worms but find it difficult to implement them because the rural district council did not recognize them. This created open access to these resources and is likely to cause unsustainable resource utilization. Even the CAMPFIRE Act does not give the local people legal mandate and fiscal autonomy to the local people in the management of resources. This power remains centralized at rural district councils (Mapedza and Mandondo 2002). The communities who are the producers and managers of wildlife do not have much say in the management system other than producing the wildlife. Their role has been relegated to that of just initiating project plans while the state and its agencies retain the responsibility of approval, implementing and fiscal control. This is rather a continuation of the defective top-down approach to resource management, which is likely to use some level coercive power. Under such systems of resource governance, it is very difficult to achieve environmental

sustainability mainly because the interest and priorities of the local people are not considered in decision-making. It is the integral demands of sustainable development framework that the priorities and values of the local people should be at the center of any decision making process.

The Zimbabwean situation is that the local people are persuaded to venture into community based management schemes by the little generated funds which are then used as the carrot stick to encourage households to conserve natural resources but the real benefits are very negligible (Murombedzi 1990). What CBNRM programmes had managed to do is to displace the local economic imperatives where wildlife interests had taken precedence over local livelihoods.

The performance of CBNRM programmes in terms of actual revenues accrues at household level is one of the reasons why these programmes are failing. While the figures at national and district levels look very impressive the situation at household level is very pathetic, (Bond 1995, Madzudzo 1998, Murombedzi 1999, Dzingirai 2003). Compared to other livelihood strategies, wildlife revenues constitute a meager 20% of the farm income and there seems to be no link between cost and benefits of wildlife management especially in communal areas, (Bond 1995). The cost of living with animals has in most cases far exceeded the benefits especially when evaluated against the amount of crops damaged and animals lost to wildlife, (Turner 2004, Madzudzo 1998). The rural district councils are also accused of retaining most of the revenues generated in the CBNRM programmes since they are the ones that monopolises the discretion of deciding how much is passed to the local communities. According to Dzingirai, (2003), the CAMPFIRE programmes are far from empowering and enriching the poor they rather exploit and further marginalise them. These programmes actually had constituted a constraint on the ability of households to accumulate through expansion arable land and acquisition of livestock (Murombedzi 1999)

Conclusion

It seems it has been a very long march to sustainable natural resource management and the march is inevitably continuing. The search for institutions that can sustainably manage our resources is continuing because all the tried institutions seem to be defective. The institutions that come with the Kyoto Protocol have the framework of sustainable resource management and hence some indicators of the ability but there seem to be a problem with the implementation of the provisions of that agreement. There is great reluctance to release power to the local communities so that they are in full control of their resources. This means that they should not only be consulted when coming up with development issues , but they should be stakeholders in decision making at all levels. Most importantly they should enjoy the benefits of their initiatives not in part but fully. It is only when the local people are fully empowered to manage resources and they fully enjoy the full benefits of their efforts that we can start to think of sustainable resource management. The issue of

community empowerment has been given a leap service. Powers remain centralized in government and para-government institutions and local communities continue to wait for the chance to be in full control of their environment.

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