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**The Governance of the Natural Resource Commons Within Local
Authority Structures :
The Case of Beitbridge Rural District Council In Zimbabwe**

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Introduction

This paper looks at the implications of the Zimbabwe Government's policy of decentralization at two levels of governance: firstly of rural people and secondly the communally based natural resources.

Conflicts arise because of the generality of the concept of "decentralization". The government has stated its commitment to the concept but what it means has largely meant the delegation of some of central governments functions and responsibilities to local authorities. Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) concerned with natural resource management however go further to view decentralization as devolution and empowerment of local communities through the establishment of resource governance systems, and capacity building at the local level.

Whereas the goal of effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable management may be common to both government and NGOs the process of achieving it requires ongoing communication in the policy arena at the national and local level.

1.0 The Governance of Communal Resources on Semi-Arid Rangelands

1.1 The Problem

Almost half of southern Africa is classified as semi-arid to arid. These rangelands evolved under a wildlife system. About 2000 years ago domestic livestock was introduced creating a multispecies system of wildlife and livestock. Since colonization about 150 years ago domestic livestock has largely displaced wildlife.

Figure 1 - Comparison of standing crop biomass in southern Africa.

Livestock numbers today dominate wildlife biomass. Many extensively managed rangelands today have much reduced biodiversity. Domestic livestock can be easily owned, used, and marketed. But, while the livestock is a private property the rangelands remain an 'open access' resource, belonging to everyone and no-one in particular. Although wildlife is more unique and has a comparative economic and ecological advantage it is not felt to be useful.

Unless these issues are addressed wildlife will become a relic of the past outside of a few specially protected areas. Communal people in semi-arid and arid areas lack adequate legal, institutional, economic and technical resources to conserve both their rangelands and their wildlife. Fundamentally, they lack the incentives to do so (Cumming 1993).

Current thinking on common property natural resources management advocates the need to decentralize management to clearly bounded producer communities. It is argued that local people should be involved in planning and implementing projects and that enhanced economic benefits of resource utilization should accrue directly to them. Unfortunately, these good intentions often fail to achieve sustainable natural resource management and utilization (Murphree 1993:5). The actual outcome is often the co-optation of local elites and leadership for derived programmes. "Decentralization" turns out to become "*just another layer of an already obstructive bureaucratic hierarchy that governs natural resources management*" (Murphree 1994:405).

Articulating good intentions for the local governance of communally utilized natural resources is the easy part. It is harder to create new institutional arrangements that will really modify behaviours on the part of both individuals and national governments. The sources of "value" in natural resources have to be clear and institutional arrangements are needed which recognise and distribute part of that value to those who undertake the hard work of resource management and conservation. This requires that questions of how to value resources, define policy, design property regimes, institute legal structures, decide equity, and arbitrate differences and disputes must be addressed (Bromley 1994:443).

2.0 The CAMPFIRE Programme in Zimbabwe

2.1 The Centrality of Resource Ownership and Use

Under the colonial State all rights to legally exploit wildlife were removed from rural communities. The obligation was on the State to protect it. Since independence in Zimbabwe this policy has been reversed. The present wildlife management policy introduces the concept of "sustainable use" and encourages an integration of conservation and development objectives. Essentially, sustained use of wildlife necessitates two conditions:

- i. Clearly defined property regimes - who is entitled to what.
- ii. Established use values for natural resource eg. what is wildlife worth.

Without wildlife ownership and trade in wild species there cannot be a positive economic incentive to develop and conserve wildlife as a land use. The intention of Zimbabwe's 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act is to re-empower local communities with valuable wildlife use rights. The actual policy which guides the act on this issue is the **Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources**, well known by the acronym CAMPFIRE.

Figure 2: Map of Campfire Areas

CAMPFIRE areas are commonly adjacent to unfenced protected areas. Both are usually found in semi-arid areas. This establishes an incentive to maintain large integrated habitats, but only if communities perceive the resource as both valuable and theirs.

The CAMPFIRE policy is based on the insight that as long as wildlife was State property the communal people would not invest in it. Once a communal property it can compete for a place on the rangelands with domestic livestock. CAMPFIRE is controversial because it advocates the devolution of authority over wildlife to the lowest accountable level of rural community and it encourages unfettered trade in wildlife species.

Devolution of authority over wildlife without trade would be pointless. However, the right to trade has had to be vigorously defended in the face of international pressure. At the global level an ideological struggle persists between "utilizationists" and "preservationists". This debate is manifest, for example, in the Biodiversity Convention where "northern" NGOs tend to advocate protection while "southern" governments emphasise sustainable use. The few "southern" NGOs that participate in these international forums tend to support sustained use by local communities. CAMPFIRE advocates, government and NGOs, maintain that protectionist trade bans deprive rural communities in Africa by reducing the incentives to conserve wildlife. Consequently, the monospecies tendency will reign supreme; the opposite effect to the one both

ideologies support.

While the trade issue is controversial internationally the devolution of resource entitlements is equally so locally. Although the intent of CAMPFIRE was to empower rural communities with "rights of access" to wildlife, the only statutory way to reach those communities was through the local government authorities, or Rural District Councils. Communal land in Zimbabwe and all the resources on them are legally State resources. They are neither private nor common property despite the fact that 'on the ground' rangeland forage resources (graze, browse, water) are effectively privatized by livestock owners who assert access (Metcalf, 1995).

The Zimbabwe government devolved authority over wildlife to communal people through their local authorities, which are also land authorities. These statutory authorities based on democracy are superimposed, often uneasily, over the traditional authorities (chiefs and headmen). Formally, customary authorities have been coopted by the state through local authorities. Informally, traditional authorities often hold legitimacy in governance of land and natural resources (Metcalf, 1994).

2.2 Communal Tenure and the Forage Commons

A property rights regime ideally should define who can (and who cannot) do what with a particular property in question, and under what circumstances. Resources which allow animals to survive are the most important resources for a majority of people in semi-arid areas. These forage resources (graze, browse, water) are in principle communal property. Livestock being private property effectively privatizes forage resources to those households which own most livestock.

CAMPFIRE presents wildlife as a valuable communal resource with a valid claim on communal forage resources. Competition for these resources, between livestock and wildlife, and between livestock owners, is highlighting the need for land use plans based on a clear tenurial rights regime which consolidate rules of access and provides for a management mechanism capable of allocating scarce resources productively, sustainably, and equitably. An exchange mechanism is needed which can market forage "produced" to resource "user groups", within a co-management context of communities of interest set within local authorities. A new policy, and attendant institutional framework, must assure both community interests, such as food and social security, as well as enable individual households to access resources and accumulate wealth. The CAMPFIRE concept, by redefining forage as a public group property, can advise this process.

The complex relationship between communities, the state, and the natural resource base has to be worked through in an ongoing policy reform process. Beitbridge District in southern Zimbabwe is involved in such a process and the Zimbabwe Trust, an NGO has also been involved.

3. The Beitbridge Experience of CAMPFIRE

Figure 3 - Map of Beitbridge

Beitbridge District contains about 7,000 square kilometres of communal land, home to over 60,000 people. The Limpopo river provides a southern boundary with South Africa and the Shashe River the western boundary with Botswana. Wildlife habitat is mainly found near the riverine habitat, adjacent to the protected areas of the Tuli Safari Area and the Kruger National Park in South Africa, and privately owned game ranches. Wildlife habitat within the communal area probably only amounts to about 6% of the communal land (400 sq. kms.). However, that riverine habitat is traditionally used by livestock owners as dry season (winter) grazing hence the need for clear definition of 'ownership' of forage, wildlife, and land use zoning in the temporal and spatial dimensions.

3.1 The Devolution of Wildlife Benefits

Beitbridge District's wildlife in 1991 was worth over ZW\$ 250,000 on the international sport hunting market. In 1992 Beitbridge was in a position to distribute that revenue. At that point the District Council had an important set of choices to make that would determine whether CAMPFIRE would provide an incentive to establishing community-based resource management regimes, or not. The Zimbabwe Trust and other NGOs provided a strong community "empowerment" advocacy.

- i. Distribution of benefits. Should the District Council distribute benefits equally to all wards in the district or focus the benefits on the specific wards where the animals were hunted. It was decided, in accordance with CAMPFIRE principles, that benefits would go down to the specific villages, within wards, from where the wildlife came. Some villages received substantial rents for providing wildlife and this provided a very positive incentive to them to regard wildlife as a good use of forage resources.
- ii. Use of benefits. Would the Council attempt to control the use of the revenue in order to encourage particular types of development project like social infrastructure (schools, clinics) and income generating projects. It was decided to allow the village community to have free choice over the use of the revenue. In one case the community chose to take some money in cash dividends to the household and invest the rest in a grinding mill.
- iii. Management of benefits. The Council supported the village to establish its own CAMPFIRE bank account.

These three decisions ensured that the authority which the State had granted to the local authority was passed on to local "producer communities". Other districts did not

devolve the authority as unequivocally. It is clear from hindsight that where benefits were devolved local villagers have had far more incentive to evolve their own management institutions. The core principle of CAMPFIRE is that authority over resources and management of them should be united in one place - the "producer community". When authority was held by the State but effective management was with communities, common property institutions defaulted to 'open access' use and abuse. When devolved authority is re-centralized by the local authority the result has been the same.

3.2 CAMPFIRE's Multiplier Effect: Livestock, Wildlife and Communal Rangelands

When wildlife was State property livestock management was perceived as the only viable productive use of the communal forage resources. Once wildlife benefits were devolved to "producer communities" the possibility for wildlife to compete or complement livestock as a range management system existed. Both wildlife and livestock need forage resources. Consequently, the introduction of wildlife as a common property resource begged the question of the 'ownership' of the rangelands, or forage commons.

The districts primary production base consists of the vegetation and water resources. As long as the rangelands remain an 'open access' resource, livestock owners have a free and unregulated access to forage resources. Although CAMPFIRE began as a communal wildlife programme it has rapidly become a catalyst for rangeland management reform. It should be remembered that all attempts by the State hitherto to reform rangelands have failed. Usually the State has started with the premise that communal rangelands are degraded because they are overstocked. The prescription has been for destocking but no external State agent has ever been able to enforce destocking which is hugely unpopular and divisive.

In reality, the communal rangelands are not permanently overstocked. The critical feature of semi-arid rangelands in a tropical climate is the variable fluctuation of annual rainfall. Consequently, carrying capacity varies annually. Over several good years stocking levels rise. But, if a few drought years follow the communal lands experience massive overstocking and consequent high mortality rates. the critical issue is the need for a system which can assess carrying capacity at the end of each rains and determine necessary offtake. This has never occurred for the simple reason that livestock being private property are subject to individual management strategies. This is the essence of the 'tragedy of the commons', that no collective decision-making and regulatory system exists for communal rangeland management.

The introduction of wildlife as a communal production system, through CAMPFIRE, has introduced a common property institutional process and raised the need for one to exist for forage resources. The land management debate in Beitbridge district currently centres on this issue.

3.3 Tenure and Equity : The Individual Within the Community

For as long as communal land resources are both formally State and informally customary lands, authority and management will be compromised, and open access tendencies will thrive. With the local authority being a land authority private property regimes can only exist in a co-management context. Consequently, it is perhaps appropriate to envisage a village (a district sub-unit) having public group tenure while resource use groups (eg. livestock owners) negotiate their private group tenurial niche.

Rangeland management is largely livestock management characterised by collective ownership of land and individual family ownership of livestock. Were forage resources to be public group property to a village of closed membership then as the public custodian of the forage resources it would be incumbent on the village resource corporation to negotiate access rights, with all claimants having private individual and group access rights.

An institutional model for communal natural resource management, exemplifying CAMPFIRE follows in figure 4:

| | |
|--|---|
| RURAL <u>DISTRICT</u> COUNCIL (Resource proprietor Financial controller) | RDC - Conservation Committee (overall natural resource management body) |
| <u>WARD</u> COMMITTEE (WADCO) (Resource proprietor Financial coordinator) | Ward Natural Resource Committee (producer community management body) <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted black;"/> Ward Resource User sub-committees (grazing, water, fishing, wildlife, etc.) |
| <u>VILLAGE</u> COMMITTEE (VIDCO) (Resource proprietor Financial manager) | Village Natural Resources Committee (producer community management body) <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted black;"/> Village Resource User sub-committees (grazing, water, wildlife, etc.) |

The essential features of this institutional model are:

- 3.3.1 Common property rights (tenure) reside with the whole community organised within the local authority structure (RDC). Those rights are devolved contractually through a lease stating rights, obligations, and penalty clauses from the district through the ward to the village committees.
- 3.3.2 The District Council, the Ward and Village Development Committees would charge their respective Natural Resource Committees (NRCs) with the

management responsibilities for governing the joint (undivided) natural resource commons. These are the management units for the 'producer communities'.

- 3.3.3 As management bodies the Resource committees should be executive not policy making. The Resource Committees could present recommendations on rules and sanctions but the main committees should resolve issues. The aim would be to develop executive expertise in the Resource Committees and allow the mother bodies to be body corporate for the resource commons. This is necessary to avoid conflict between authority and management functions.
- 3.3.4 Natural Resource user groups could be organized as sub-committees of the Resource Committees and held accountable to them. Users are accountable to owners eg. livestock owners (users) to rangeland owners (producer community)
- 3.3.5 The management of all natural resources would be through the District Natural Resources Committee (NRC) and report to the Rural District Council.

Such an institutional arrangement would provide a communal natural resource property regime within the local government framework and establish a market mechanism to mediate the interests of social security and cohesion with those of individuality and wealth accumulation.

The flaw in this design relates to the common dilemma of the influence of wealth and power elites on the democratic process. The majority of livestock is owned by a minority of the community. That minority dominates the leadership of both the traditional and democratic authorities. Those who own the majority of the livestock, the 'cattle barons', are not motivated by a multispecies land management system which threatens their free and open access to the rangelands. It is the old conundrum of why would the rich tax themselves to the benefit of the poorer members of society ?

Livestock owners have a vested interest in ensuring forage use is open to themselves at minimum cost but they also have an interest in excluding access by 'outsiders'. If the village were empowered with proprietorship of all forage resources they, as leaders, would preside formally as well as informally over the resource. Were they to agree to a village levy on their own use of village forage they would have greater control over the resource on which their livelihood depends. Further the public purse they contribute to would be locally accountable to them as residents and members of a village resource corporation (Metcalf 1994).

The local power elite have customarily been accountable, to the point of social cohesion, to the community. A fiscal arrangement would provide a formal rather than patrician approach to the issue. Once the patricians realize they will be more than fully represented in a village resource corporation, because of their wealth and status, they may well even advocate taxation as then they can control access and get a grip on

more predictable and sustainable future.

The worst case scenario would be perpetuation of the blurred boundaries between formal and informal authorities, resources, and resource producers and users. In such circumstances, as at present, the rainfall variability of the semi-arid areas remains the resource manager, which humbles management effort.

4. Conclusion - Resource Tenure and Democracy

In rural Africa the most important issues relate to access to land and natural resources. In semi-arid and arid areas the primary production of the land is vegetation. Forage resources can be utilized by domestic livestock and wildlife in an either/or and a both/and situation. As a private property livestock appeals to all households in a position to accumulate private wealth, usually not more than 40% of a rural community. The rest of the community is mainly involved in reproducing a subsistence existence. Wildlife, as a common property, has appeal to poorer people who are able to harvest little otherwise from forage resources.

Democracy looks good in theory but when the leadership positions are all dominated by a centralized party hierarchy sometimes customary leadership seems more representative and accountable. A chief may be more accountable to a local community than a councillor, or member of parliament. In reality they are both a feature of local governance. But what needs governing is not so much the people in isolation but the people in relation to the communal area resource base.

Communal property rights related to rangeland resources in semi-arid areas are a major substantive issue facing civil society. If the wealthy are allowed to privatise forage resources then minimally they should meet the conservation cost. This is not extracted anywhere at present. Beyond the conservation cost is the possibility of a balance between the individual and the communal good being found. This cannot be prescribed exactly, but the Beitbridge example indicates that an institutional arrangement may be possible which would establish both a decision-making and a market forum where conflicts can be resolved and a consensus achieved. If rural communities in semi-arid areas can balance the needs of individuals, communities, and the communal rangelands then the prospects for a sustainable civil society would be much enhanced.

NGOs can advance this process through technical and institutional support and also by advocating a balance between equity and accumulation objectives, between the good of the community, the good of the individual, and the good of the environment.

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