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COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CBNRM) AND EMPOWERMENT AND RURAL DEMOCRACY

WHAT IS CBNRM?

CBNRM aims to create the right **incentives and conditions** for an identified group of resource users within defined areas to use natural resources sustainably. This means enabling the resource users to **benefit** from resource management and providing strong **rights and tenure over land and the resources**. CBNRM also supports the development of accountable, decision-making bodies that can represent community members and act in their interests.

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT BODIES

Across the region community-based organizations (CBOs) take different forms: community trusts in **Botswana**, Village Natural Resource Management Committees and Beach Village Committees in **Malawi**, conservancies and community forest committees in **Namibia**, Community Resource Boards and Village Action Groups in Zambia, and Rural District Councils and Ward Wildlife Committees in **Zimbabwe**. In addition, a number of other community or village-level committees are also involved in CBNRM in these countries. Across Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe there are at least **6,400** CBNRM management bodies, committees, community-based enterprises, and trusts, and at least **4.4 million** people involved in CBNRM activities.



Women use beeswax from a honey production site to make candles.
Photo credit: Janet Lowore

EMPOWERMENT

CBNRM provides opportunities for decentralization through which local communities can be re-empowered through the restoration of their rights and responsibilities over natural resources.

CBNRM in southern Africa is contributing significantly to **women's empowerment** by providing opportunities for them to assume leadership positions within the community.

In **Zimbabwe**, women now have higher rates of involvement in leadership in Wards and CBOs, and have increased their participation in community-based enterprises. In **Namibia** in 2011, 33 percent of conservancy management committees' membership was female, there were four female chairpersons, and 33 out of 66 conservancies (or 50 percent) had women running conservancy finances. Also, women held 22 percent of the 665 permanent jobs generated by conservancies. In Malawi, female-headed institutions are reported to be more accountable.

CBNRM AND EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment has been achieved through the following:

- ◆ Providing communities with secure rights over land and resources through legislation.
- ◆ Enabling communities to retain the income from sustainable resource use and enabling them to choose how to use this income.
- ◆ Supporting the development of accountable community institutions that can make decisions on behalf of local residents/resource users.
- ◆ Providing appropriate training and skills development to enable communities to manage their resources and engage in business activities.

RURAL DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Overall, CBNRM in the region is helping to promote rural democracy through devolved natural resources usage rights to community institutions, devolved decision-making (including decisions about the use of income), improved advocacy, and institutional development. It is important that CBOs are representative and accountable, and implement good governance—particularly when the income affected involves large numbers of people.

In several countries, there have been examples of mismanaged CBO funds, including fraud. One response to these governance problems is to call for more government regulation and intervention in CBO affairs. **But evidence from around the region shows that CBOs can manage their finances well if given appropriate assistance.** Governments and other support agencies should help CBOs to develop the mechanisms that promote good governance such as proper accounting procedures and transparent reporting of financial statements to community members.



Wildlife are an important revenue stream for many communities practicing CBNRM. Photo credit: Jeremy Keeton, DAI

KEY ELEMENTS IN CBO GOOD GOVERNANCE

Experience shows that the following are important elements for promoting good governance in CBOs:

- ◆ Holding regular elections for CBO management committees.
- ◆ Developing constitutions through strong community participation.
- ◆ Enabling community members to develop checks and balances on the powers of the CBO committee.
- ◆ Holding annual general meetings where financial statements and other important information is made available to community members.
- ◆ Ensuring approval of budgets by community members
- ◆ Opening separate bank accounts—one for use by the committee to cover budgeted operational costs, and one for spending on community benefits from which withdrawals can only be made with proper authorization.



A young baby hippo following his mother on the banks of the Mara River near the border with Tanzania. Photo credit: Global Water for Sustainability

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE CBNRM'S CONTRIBUTION TO EMPOWERMENT AND RURAL DEMOCRACY?

Governments in the region have developed policies that provide resource rights to local communities. However, these rights are often not clearly defined in legislation and sometimes remain vague. Only **Mozambique** has taken significant steps to enable communities to gain secure land rights and tenure.

*Decision makers need to ensure that communities **have land and resource rights that are clearly defined in legislation**, and that communities can retain income from resource use.*

CBNRM policies and legislation in the region usually provide for rights over natural resources to be devolved to CBOs. In many of these cases, the government and nongovernmental organizations help the community to establish the CBO and then assist the CBO to develop some form of natural resource-based enterprise. Often, however, little attention is given to governance issues within the CBOs that are established.

*Decision makers need to ensure that **participatory processes** are used and that **as many community members as possible** are involved in forming CBOs, electing CBO management committees, and developing constitutions. Ongoing technical support is then required to help communities develop their own democratic CBOs.*

Democratic, accountable CBOs need time to emerge. Much depends upon the extent to which community members demand accountability from their representatives. This is more likely when the income being received by CBOs is relatively high, or is perceived to be significant by community members. When this is the case, the community members take much more interest in holding CBO committees to account and are more likely to become involved in decision-making. **One of the most important lessons to emerge from CBNRM in southern Africa is that CBOs need time to experiment with different forms of governance to find out what works and what does not.**

Decision makers can help local CBO democracy to emerge by ensuring that government agencies establish systems to monitor CBO compliance with policy and legislation. If CBOs are not in compliance, procedures should be in place to ensure that the situation is rectified. Government needs to provide light-touch guidance and facilitation, rather than heavy-handed intervention that disempowers communities, reduces their decision-making authority, and removes choice.

The findings and recommendations provided in this set of Policy Briefs are based on stocktaking assessments of nearly three decades of CBNRM implementation in southern Africa. A report summarizing the findings of assessments carried out in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe as well as detailed country assessments can be found at www.frameweb.org/SASStocktakingReports.html.