

## CBNRM SOUTHERN AFRICA

Report on a networking visit to the Fisheries Co-management Programme, Mangochi District, Malawi and the Richtersveld National Park, South Africa, May 2000

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### Introduction

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) programmes and projects across southern Africa are increasingly advocating the development of partnerships between communities and other stakeholders. This form of management is broadly termed co-management. It basically involves the sharing of authority, power and responsibility between local groups and other stakeholders, such as government departments, private sector companies and NGOs. Evidence of co-management emerges when one examines the stalwarts of CBNRM in southern Africa, the wildlife and habitat conservation programmes promoted in Botswana (NRMP), Zambia (ADMADE), Zimbabwe (CAMPFIRE) and Namibia (LIFE). These initiatives have all been characterised by partnerships between communities, government, NGOs and private sector companies, such as government conservation agencies and tourism and safari hunting operators.

As part of my work on the CASS/PLAAS regional CBNRM research and communications programme, I initiated a research study to assess the value of co-management as a model for local governance. The study, primarily a desk study, would focus on three longstanding co-management models in southern Africa. It was felt that site visits to the respective cases, as well as in-depth interviews with key informants in the particular co-management project (communities/government agencies/NGOs/private sector) would add great value to my analysis. In March 2000, I was awarded a networking visit by the programme to pay short visits to the sites in question.

Due to logistical difficulties, it was decided to focus on two cases: co-management of the Richtersveld National Park in South Africa and fisheries co-management in Malawi. I was not able to visit the third case, based in the Okavango Delta in Botswana.

### Main objectives of the visits

In this study, I will be assessing the benefits of joint governance of natural resources, manifested in the growing number of co-management cases in southern Africa. During my visits, I attempted to address the following questions:

- o What were the primary motivations for entering into a co-management arrangement?

- o Who are the main actors involved in co-management?
- o Whose interests are represented on co-management bodies, such as joint management committees?
- o How is the co-management arrangement structured?
- o How are management decisions made?
- o What is the balance of power between local and state actors?
- o Have there been any changes, both positive and negative, since the implementation of joint management and decision-making?
- o What is the future of the co-management arrangement?
- o How does CBNRM and co-management link in with broader local development initiatives, such as decentralisation?

The underlying question of this study is to assess whether co-management arrangements enhance the abilities of local actors to collectively manage their natural resources with resourcefulness and adaptability? The cases that I have selected are indicative of many co-management arrangements in that they are essentially partnerships between local groups and state agencies. The fisheries co-management arrangement in Malawi exists primarily between the Fisheries Department and the local fisher communities, while the conservation co-management case is a partnership between the South African National Parks Board and a local community. The cases also have a sufficient track record to enable the observation of the outcomes of co-management arrangements. The South African initiative was established in 1991 and the Malawian initiative in 1993.

The study visits to the two sites were undertaken in April 2000 (South Africa) and May 2000 (Malawi). It has proved invaluable in developing an understanding of the way in which the co-management projects function. Despite the existence of numerous studies on these two cases, firsthand observation of the areas has sharpened my insights tremendously. I would recommend though that for purposes such as mine, i.e. a visit to cases to complement a desk study, it is very difficult to spend such a short time in looking at a very complex arrangement. In all, I spent 7 days in Malawi and 4 days in South Africa. However, I am spending some additional time in the South Africa case as it is more accessible.

#### Lake Malombe and the Upper Shire River Fisheries Co-management Programme

Inland fisheries is an important economic activity for many rural dwellers in Malawi while fish is the most important source of animal protein for the majority of

Malawians. Artisanal fisheries are also much more important than commercial fisheries in the lakes of Malawi. International studies of the artisanal fishery conducted at the beginning of the 1990s found that fish stocks of the most economically important species, locally known as chambo, had collapsed. One of the key recommendations arising from these studies was the adoption of participatory fisheries management and thus much greater involvement of the artisanal fisheries sector in management. The Participatory Fisheries Management Programme (PFMP), a multi-donor funded project, was initiated in 1993. Lake Malombe and the Upper Shire River (Mangochi District) were selected as the pilot areas for testing the PFMP that would involve local-level institutions in the management of the fishery. Local-level institutions, known as Beach Village Committees (BVCs), were formed and incorporated a range of actors such as village heads, gear owners, crew members and local villagers. The main task of the BVC was to open channels of communication between the fishers and the Fisheries Department. The ultimate aim of the PFMP was to work towards self-regulation of the fishery. The BVCs are involved in disseminating information about fishing regulations (mesh size, closed season and closed areas) to fishers. They also provide community inputs into annual fisheries management meetings where fishing regulations are developed. In some instances the role of BVCs has extended to enforcement of fisheries regulations. The BVCs are not legal entities and have, according to the law, no rights to confiscate the illegal nets. This is one of the key problems that hamper the process of co-management in the area.

The primary motivation for entering into the arrangement was, for the Fisheries Department, to conserve the fish stocks by involving fishing communities in management. For the fishing community, the motivation was to restore and strengthen the fisheries resource, which forms the basis of most livelihoods in Mangochi district. During my visit and from the numerous reports on the area, it became clear that the co-management arrangement is not functioning as planned. There are concerns from the BVC members about lack of support and training; corruption in the police force (involved in enforcement); and that the views of the fishing communities are not taken seriously by the Fisheries Department. The commitment made by the Department to compensate fishers who had to purchase new nets had not been fulfilled but instead a rural finance company offering loans to fishers has been brought into the process. Also, BVC members feel that they should receive a sitting allowance and transport costs for attending meetings. Within the fishing communities there is evidence of conflict between traditional leaders and the BVCs who are bringing a new source of authority into the village. There are also allegations of poor feedback to communities. The Fisheries Department, particularly the extension officers that work closely with BVCs, are aware of the difficult task that BVC members face, such as a lack of compliance with fisheries regulations. There is also no clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the various actors: the Department, the BVCs and the recently formed Fisheries Association that is tasked with co-ordinating BVCs in the district.

These conflicts raise serious questions about the ownership of the co-management initiative: do the fishing communities see this arrangement as one in which they are partners in both authority and responsibility with regard to fisheries management. The power balance still rests largely on the side of the Fisheries Department. The intention of the PFMP was to initially develop a participatory management system along the lines of co-management but to eventually move towards greater self-regulation. Much will have to be done to achieve this. However, while the chambo stocks have not recovered since the implementation of the PFMP, it appears that none of the other species has diminished to the extent of the chambo. Compliance with fisheries regulations has been successful to a degree but non-compliance is still common.

The most important benefit of the programme according to BVC members, local villagers and Fisheries Department personnel has been the development of a relationship of trust between the partners. Despite all the problems within the structure of the co-management initiative, there is a general feeling that the arrangement should remain in place. Local government changes, involving a process of decentralisation, are also being implemented in Malawi. It is hoped that integrated, district-level planning could address the development issues of Malawians in a more effective manner. This could be a very important process to address the serious socio-economic pressure that many fishing communities are facing, such as a lack of alternative income-generating activities.

Respondents and various researchers working on fisheries co-management have raised a number of recommendations aimed at improving the co-management of the artisanal fisheries. The pilot programme, the PFMP, has come to an end, but its philosophy has since been extended to the whole of Malawi and currently receives support from the German-funded National Aquatic Resource Management Programme (NARMAP). Amendments to the national act affecting fisheries in Malawi have also made provisions for user involvement in fisheries management. It is therefore important that the lessons of the PFMP be drawn upon to strengthen the implementation of co-management in Malawi. These include broadly:

- o To involve more fishers in the BVCs, this should include both gear owners and crew members;
- o To build closer links between traditional leaders and institutions (such as the Beach Chairmen) and the BVC;
- o To address the issues of resource tenure and the legal status of BVCs, particularly in relation to the role that BVCs should play in enforcement;
- o To provide support and training to BVC members;
- o To build monitoring and evaluation systems into the programme;
- o To assess the distribution of benefits from fisheries management e.g. fisheries licence fees to go to communities;

o And to address allegations of corruption in the police force.

One of the most critical factors in co-management is the issue of ownership. Has the local fishing communities' involvement resulted in a greater sense of ownership and accountability with regard to fisheries management? It has improved the relationship between the state and the local fishers, but has not impacted significantly on strengthening local governance of natural resources.

The Richtersveld contractual national park

The local communities of the Richtersveld, an area rich in mineral and plant resources, entered into a contractual agreement with the then National Parks Board in July 1991. This agreement was a milestone for the implementation of new conservation policies and practices in South Africa. This biologically rich area, situated in the northwestern corner of South Africa, had long been earmarked as a potential conservation area. The mountain desert environment, with its associated natural endowments, is said to have the most biologically diverse representation of this particular biome. With substantial support from the wider conservation community, the National Parks Board (NPB), now known as the South African National Parks (SANP), entered into negotiations to establish a contractual national park in the Richtersveld. In August 1991, the 162,445 hectares Richtersveld National Park (RNP) was proclaimed.

Livestock farming forms an important source of livelihoods, but the mountainous terrain and mining concessions in the mineral-rich area, reduce the amount of land available for grazing. Communal use of the grazing lands is widespread in the Richtersveld. Vehement opposition from the Richtersveld communities to the establishment of the RNP in 1989 led to a court interdict on the eve of the signing of the agreement between the NPB and the local authority. The communities were not satisfied with the compensatory mechanisms, or with many other conditions as set out in the agreement with the local authority. After lengthy negotiations, an agreement was finally reached in 1991. This agreement addressed community concerns and culminated in the signing of a contract between the NPB and the community of the Richtersveld. The contract agreement specified a number of conditions for the management of the park, such as the establishment of a joint management committee, the improvement of infrastructure in the area and the payment of lease fees to a community trust.

According to the contractual agreement, a Management Plan Committee (known by its Afrikaans acronym, BPK) was set up to guide the management of the park. The park also accommodated the seemingly competitive land uses of conservation, grazing and mining within its borders. Agreements were reached that existing mining operations could continue and that local stock farmers would be accommodated within the park. There is also an increase in community-based tourism initiatives that can be traced to the existence of a national park in the area. Though the park has brought important benefits to the Richtersveld, critical questions have emerged as to whether the park is

truly a co-management arrangement.

Criticisms relate to the fact that some conditions set out in the contractual agreement have not been effected. The first issue relates to the functioning of the BPK. There are many problems, such as a lack of active participation in decision-making by community representatives of the BPK, as well as poor feedback to communities. The community representatives also have to attend BPK meetings at their own cost and distances between the Richtersveld towns are very long. The poor functioning of the BPK relates both to a lack of capacity to participate in decision making, as well as a lack of community interest in the park. The BPK is seen as an ineffectual committee but at the same time community attendance at elections or feedback meetings is poor. Frequent changes in park management do not facilitate continuity on the side of the SANP and it becomes difficult to build the rapport required for the BPK to function effectively. The fact that the BPK continues to meet is a sign that all is not lost and that the Richtersvelders are still willing to make the park work.

The second issue relates to the development of a management plan for the Richtersveld, which, nine years since the signing of the agreement, has not been concluded. This is critical as the tenuous relationship between conservation, mining and stock farming, needs to be informed by sound management guidelines. While these are not in place, transgressions by the resource users cannot be effectively monitored and rectified along agreed lines. Thirdly, the failure of the SANP to deliver on the promises made during the signing of the agreement impacts on the low status that the park holds for the people of the Richtersveld. However, many of the promises made by the SANP were unrealistic and beyond the scope of a conservation agency. This has had serious implications in creating a perception that the park had not delivered on its promises.

There are at present a number of initiatives that provide an opportunity for restructuring the co-management agreement in the RNP. Transfer of communal lands to the Richtersvelders and local development planning processes provide opportunities to strengthen the role of the BPK as a community structure. While the transfer of land to the community could enhance their ownership and strengthen their proprietary rights over the park, the second process offers an opportunity to integrate conservation plans into development planning. Furthermore, the suggestions that have been offered by respondents and researchers to strengthen community involvement in the management of the park include:

- o To clarify the objectives of the park and build awareness of the benefits of co-management;
- o To equip community representatives on the BPK with the skills to participate effectively in park planning;
- o To enhance the status of the BPK as a management body in the area;

- o To draw on civil society and donor organisations for technical support and advice;
- o To integrate the park into the broader development planning processes that are currently being undertaken in the area;
- o To involve the youth in the park, through environmental education programmes;
- o And to tie the park into community conservation initiatives, such as the proposed community conservancy.

In principle, the process of NPB-community negotiations should have led to community-driven co-management of the RNP. However, poor representation of community interests on the joint management committee results in the conservation agency being, in practice, the lead partner. This is in stark contrast to the principles that underscored the establishment of the park. To the people in the Richtersveld, the park is seen as a 'paper park'. The opportunity for stronger local governance is being encouraged in the area and there is an awareness that the park is not functioning as people would like it to. The challenge lies in using the opportunities that are available to strengthen co-management of the park.

#### Key lessons for co-management in southern Africa

These two cases hold important lessons for the development of CBNRM programmes that are premised on joint governance or co-management. The contexts of the two co-management cases are very different. Mangochi district in Malawi has a sub-tropical climate, it has a very high population density and the fisheries make a crucial contribution to the people's livelihoods. On the other hand, population density in the arid Richtersveld is very low and livelihoods are based on mining, farming and tourism primarily. However, the lessons that can be drawn from these cases can help to build stronger co-management institutions. Key lessons relate to:

- o The motivations of the partners for entering into the contractual agreement are important as there was scepticism in both cases that the motivations of the state partner relate solely to natural resource conservation. In this way, community partners feel as if their objectives and needs are not prioritised.
- o There should be congruence between the objectives and the implementation of co-management arrangements. In both cases, lack of clarity on the roles, responsibilities and status of the management authorities (BVC and BPK), has weakened these institutions.
- o It is imperative that unrealistic expectations and promises are not made by either state or community partners. By not fulfilling promises made during negotiations, the relationship of trust that is essential to co-management can be seriously damaged.

o Legal support can raise the status of a co-management regime considerably and assure community institutions that they have governmental support. A related issue is that of resource tenure, which in the South African case is much clearer than the Malawian case. If the theory that strengthened proprietary rights (be they communal or private) will enhance resource management holds true, then strong tenure regimes can become an incentive for sustainable resource use.

o While co-management theoretically combines the strengths of the various parties, the issue of training and capacity building has been raised in both cases. This applies to both government and community representatives as most government personnel are not schooled in participatory management whereas community representatives feel that they lack technical and management skills.

o It is assumed that by involving local-level institutions in co-management local representivity, accountability and transparency will result. However, far too little time is spent to evaluate whether all local interest is represented on structures or whether adequate feedback mechanisms are in place.

These lessons will be important in developing new co-management arrangements. One respondent in Malawi noted that the co-management projects initiated in the early 90s were trailblazers of this new model. However they also made many mistakes. What should happen, he feels, is that these mistakes are addressed and noted when embarking on the establishment of joint forest management, wildlife co-management or fisheries co-management throughout the region.

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