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BOTTOM UP DEVELOPMENT IN DECENTRALIZED COMMON PROPERTY REGIMES:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF TWO DISTRICT COUNCILS IN SOUTHEASTERN ZIMBABWE

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The Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) in Zimbabwe seeks to substitute decentralized management and control of natural resources, especially wildlife, for centralized ownership and control. The preservation and utilization of Zimbabwe's natural resources through the CAMPFIRE program involves some important issues in addition to decentralization including conservation through utilization, and sustained development. A fifteen minute presentation can not begin to cover even one of these issues. I am focusing on decentralization because I was struck by the frequency with which leaders at the national and even district level continue to question the degree to which people at the community level are competent to make decisions about common property resources.

Decentralization of common property resources raises the question of how far and to whom. There are no simple answers. But there are many potential recipients for decentralized control, each with a case for maintaining controls at particular levels or within some existing institutions. The greatest devolution of management would be to socio-governmental units with the least formal structures - the village and the ward. These people are most familiar with the wildlife and the practical realities of its management. The two cases I will report demonstrate that when permitted, local people demonstrate skill in program implementation. Maintaining control at this level, however, involves further devolution of authority to the community level and communities achieving effective linkages with higher authorities while developing appropriate management structures. This has yet to be demonstrated.

This study compares two districts with decentralized CAMPFIRE programs in the Zimbabwean southeastern low veldt. These are Chipinge District in Eastern Zimbabwe along the Save River and next to Mozambique, and Beitbridge District in southern Zimbabwe along the Limpopo River boundary with South Africa. Much of the distance between these two districts consists of Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park which forms a long buffer zone along the border with Mozambique reaching almost from the Save River to the Limpopo.

Chipinge District's wildlife program centers on Mahenye Ward which fits like a wedge between Mozambique on the east and Gonarezhou National Park on the southwest. Many of the Shaangan people of Mahenye Ward inhabited the National Park until 1965 when they were removed to create a protected wildlife area. From the outset, the park was surrounded by people who were removed from the park, and who considered

the park their home. Further, while these people practice some agriculture, they are primarily dependant on hunting as a major source of subsistence.

Both before and after the establishment of Gonarezhou Park, the Shaangan people were largely ignored by the colonial government. This isolation enabled them to continue to practice their traditional subsistence patterns of hunting in the park which they still considered to belong to them.

With independence, the new government established district councils over the formerly African Tribal Trust lands, and the Mahenye people elected a councilor to the Chipinge District Council. But the new government was no more ready than the previous one to return the national parks to the people. Poaching intensified, and the Shaangan viewed the National Parks Officers as their enemy, the people who had taken their land, and who jailed them for taking the animals they needed for their survival. Further, they pointed out that the National Parks officers readily come to the Mahenye community searching for poachers, but there was little effort being made to prevent wild animals from Gonarezhou coming into the communal lands across the river from the park, damaging crops, eating domestic animals and even endangering the lives of the people.

At a critical meeting in 1982, it became apparent that control of the wild animals was a more immediate concern for local people than ownership of the park. Five years before independence, the white Rhodesian government gave white land owners the right to wildlife on their lands: Appropriate Authority in the terms of the legislation. This had resulted in a widespread development of wildlife on private land for profit. A person familiar the use of wildlife by white landowners asked the Mahenye people if they could allow elephants to come into their area from the national parks if they could sell some of the elephants as they did their cattle. He pointed out that cattle and goats occasionally damaged crops, but that people accepted this damage since they could sell their cattle and goats, or use their meat. The Mahenye people indicated an interest in this possibility, but insisted that the National Parks would never agree.

When the issues at the Mahenye meeting were reported to the Director of National Parks, he issued a one year trial hunting permit for two elephants to be shot in Mahenye, provided that both animals were sold to foreign clients for foreign currency. In August, American clients shot two elephants in Mahenye Ward. Over 500 local residence came to share in the distribution of the meat which was carried out in traditional fashion through the chief and sub-chiefs. At this gathering, and at future distributions of meat from hunting operations, the safari operator made a full report of the wildlife program to the chief and the assembled people. This form of informal face-to-face structure between the people and the safari operator continues today.

Following this meat distribution, the National Parks anti-poaching raids showed a major decline in poaching activities. By 1983, the Mahenye people voted to move seven villages from a long island in the Save River, so this area could be devoted exclusively to wildlife, and form a base for expanded safari hunting. This is a remarkable development from people who had lost most of their land to wildlife

only twenty years earlier. By 1986, this resulted in an increased wildlife population in the communal lands and after evaluation by the ecologists of National Parks, the hunting quota was increased to four elephants and an equal number of other animals.

The hunting program in Mahenye was an overwhelming success, and the people were very pleased with the meat from safari hunting. But as time went on, they were increasingly suspicious that the safari operator and the politicians were making money off of the wildlife program. Prior to Campfire, funds from wildlife went first to the central treasury. Local communities could request these funds only after having a project approved by their district council, by the ministry of local government and finally by the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

The lack of community control over funds produced by wildlife and the lengthy delays resulted in local people seeing little relationship between wildlife conservation at the local level, and benefits to the community from wildlife. Major efforts were required to convince the Chipinge District Council that revenue from wildlife should be returned to the producing ward. District Councilors, like villagers, tended to see money coming from the central government as government largeness, not as a product of wildlife conservation and utilization. Only with the continued support for the local community by the National Parks and Wildlife Department was the council finally convinced that there would be no money for anyone if funds were not returned to Mahenye. Finally in 1987, five years after the wildlife program began, Mahenye got its first check for wildlife proceeds which made possible the completion of the first school the community ever had. But while the district council used the funds from wildlife shot in Mahenye to purchase construction materials to send to complete the Mahenye school, control of funds and actual decisions on projects remains at the district level. Only three years later, in the elections of 1990, many of the councilors of the Chipinge District Council were not returned to office, and revenue from Mahenye were again in danger of being transferred to other wards by the new council. A new effort in education of the district council was underway when I left Zimbabwe in August.

The informal procedures which were effective in linking the safari operator to the local community were ineffective to meet the bureaucratic needs of the district council and other governmental agencies. But district council did not seem interested in assisting in developing the needed local institutional structures at sub-district levels. Nor did the district council establish continuing policies to support local community wildlife initiatives.

The problems experienced by Mahenye were important factors in the Department of Parks and Wildlife developing the CAMPFIRE program which would decentralize wildlife programs in communal lands as had been done for private lands in 1975. The CAMPFIRE program permitted district councils as the smallest unit of local government to receive the same Appropriate Authority which has previously been granted to the owners of private lands. The bypassed the central treasury, and allows funds to go directly to the district council. Unfortunately, it was through a misunderstanding of the requirement of appropriate authority which

led the 1990 Chipinge District Council to attempt to utilize at the council level the funds generated by the wildlife program in Mahenye Ward.

By 1989, enough district councils in Zimbabwe had received appropriate authority to permit the formation of a CAMPFIRE Association composed of district councils authorized to manage their own wildlife programs. These districts were clear in their understanding that central to the CAMPFIRE concept was the return of revenue from wildlife to the producing communities. But there remains a great deal of variation in the interpretation of what is the producing community and in the role of the district council in distributing revenue to units below the district level. Many of these district councils with a major wildlife resources in many wards have established rather massive programs, most of which remain centralized at the district council level.

In the spring of 1991, new ground was broken in the Zimbabwe CAMPFIRE program by the Beitbridge district council with distributed both the funds and the decision making responsibility to the village level. Beitbridge is like Chipinge in that much of the district is over populated by both people and domestic animals mainly goats. Like Chipinge, the most remote part of the district remains less populated by people and domestic cattle and has a wildlife resource base. The counterpart to Mahenye for Beitbridge District is the Chikwarakwara village while lies just across the Limpopo River from South Africa's Kruger National Park. Here the people experience wildlife incursions from Kruger as the people at Mahenye do from Gonarezhou. Whereas Mahenye produces all the safari wildlife revenue in Chipinge, in Beitbridge, Chikwarakwara produced 87% of the wildlife revenue in 1990.

Beitbridge was one of the most recent districts in Zimbabwe to develop a wildlife program and to receive appropriate authority. The first successful year of safari hunting was 1990, and revenue was reported to council in 1991. But unlike the Chipinge District Council, both the Chairman of the council and the senior executive officer had been active in the CAMPFIRE Association and were familiar with the principle of returning revenue to the producing ward. But Beitbridge council went beyond other CAMPFIRE Districts in voting to distribute revenue directly to the major producing villages thus insuring that the maximum revenue went to the areas where wildlife remained. With 87% of all the wildlife in the district coming from one village area, the council felt is essential to reward this village for a successful program in order that other villages and wards would be encouraged to support wildlife preservation. If the revenue had been returned to the ward level, the actual income would have been greatly reduced on a per capita basis.

But whereas contact was weak between Chipinge district council and Mahenye community, in Beitbridge, the decision by the District council was taken by the Chairman of the council and three other councilors when went to meet with the people in the producing ward of Chikwarakwara. In Mahenye, the local community had only been asked to recommend projects for funding with their wildlife money. In Chikwarakwara, the people were asked to consider how they would divide their money between possible household distribution and community

projects. In many parts of Zimbabwe, district councils have maintained that the people cannot plan such matters for themselves. The one previous distribution of funds to households was done by a district council at the request of a ward committee. Two full days of meetings show a remarkable degree of village understanding of the alternatives they needed to consider. The people of Chikwarakwara voted to fund first the two major community development projects of a grinding mill, and school improvements. These were the same projects adopted in Mahenye with their wildlife money. But the remaining money was to be distributed to each household. Considerable debate was required to establish an acceptable definition of household. Further, the community decided that all households which received wildlife money, must immediately, and in front of everyone, pay up to date the household school construction fees for the past five years.

The community decision in Chikwarakwara was implemented the following day, when the district administrator and other officials arrived with \$60,000 Zimbabwe dollars in an open wire basket so everyone could see the money and witness the division. This also was in marked contrast to Mahenye where the district council only showed the people of Mahenye a check which had to be returned to the district council to be cashed. Further in Mahenye, the community grinding mill remained under the control of the district council, whereas Chikwarakwara established a community committee to direct the operation of the grinding mill.

Two quotes from speeches made in Chikwarakwara capture the essence of the spirit of CAMPFIRE. District Council Chairman:

"This money comes to you from your wildlife. You did not have to work for it, just have wildlife. It is your money. The decision is yours. You must develop your own community. You cannot wait for government. It is your decision. You have the money. You can develop your own community according to how you decide.

And again, the District Administrator:

"We have not realized our richness. We have not seen where our advantages like. It is our wild animals who are our resources and who must be protected. If you as parents do not protect your wildlife, it will not be here to benefit your children..."

The promise of CAMPFIRE is that wildlife will be supported by communal land people if these people receive the revenue from wildlife to compensate them from the dangers, damages and inconveniences of having wildlife around them. Both Chikwarakwara and Mahenye demonstrated that with close communication with safari operations, and with direct receipt of benefits, the people readily respond to the opportunity for community control of wildlife. Program support and implementation is no problem at the level of the producing community when the people see results. Education on the benefits of wildlife is unnecessary when communities experience these benefits directly. Cash is a great extension agent. But Mahenye demonstrated that a successful program operating for eight years still can be endangered by changes in personnel at higher government levels, and that the best of informal arrangements cannot protect local communities if they are not assisted in developing formal institutional structures of decision making and

through which to communicate their wants to the district council. In Chikwarakwara, the district council delegated much more control over revenue to communities, and worked directly with the community elders in reaching decisions. In Chikwarakwara, responsible committees were elected as part of the public meetings for distributing the money. But it remains to be seen how this will work out in practice.

Through CAMPFIRE, the central government in Zimbabwe has indicated a willingness to decentralize control over wildlife. In Chikwarakwara and Mahenye, local people have shown the ability to understand and response to this opportunity by promoting wildlife conservation. It remains to be seen if the district councils will encourage decentralization, or if district councils will only replace the central government as a remote government control of community resources. It is difficult to see how local communities can be expected to exercise control over the use of wildlife by its members if the communities are not allowed a significant role in the distribution of the benefits from wildlife. It would seem that it is not enough just to channel benefits from wildlife to producer communities, but these communities must also be empowered by making decisions about the use and distribution of the revenues they have created through wildlife conservation. The experience of Chipinge and Beitbridge Districts suggest that it may be easier to initiate programs at the ward level than to create district wide programs and then decentralize these to ward level.

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