

## “No capital needed!”— De facto open access to common pool resources, poverty and conservation in the Kafue Flats, Zambia

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**Abstract.** This article makes the point that poverty and conservation issues are centrally linked with access rights to common pool resources. The case of the Kafue Flats illustrates how local groups are rendered poor and vulnerable because of the changed situation of common pool resources, which used to be managed by customary common property institutions. As the Zambian state took control of these resources under conservation agencies and dismantled the customary use rules, the common pool resources became “open access” because the state was too poor to manage them as it wanted. This coincided with a large increase in the number of users, as many Zambians from urban and peri-urban areas or former miners who recently lost their jobs found relatively easy to exploit common pool resources such as the fish and wildlife in Kafue Flats. These people argue that, as citizens of Zambia and as owners of government licences, they have a right to exploit the natural resources. As they are usually more powerful than local people, these outsiders succeed in undermining local access and end up impoverishing local residents. To escape poverty, the latter have started making a commercial use of common pool resources, which amounts to an erosion of local rules, especially those defining access rights between men and women and between individuals and the community. In this light, conservation has a chance to succeed only if traditional resource rights will be re-established in a co-management setting. Some participatory processes aiming at just that have recently been initiated



Picture 1.  
The fishing monitor (*utamba*) of one tributary sector, Chiefdom Nalubamba. (Courtesy T. Haller and S. Merten)

After a promising economic start due to its copper industries, Zambia is today one of the least developed and poorest coun-

tries in the world. Since independence in 1964 the government followed the double strategy of trying to develop the country industrially and to conserve nature in national parks. Under the first President, Kenneth Kaunda, conservation was particularly important, but Kaunda was also very much behind the copper industry, supposed to deliver the basis of the industrialisation of the country, with the aim of import substitution.<sup>1</sup> After the copper price dropped and oil prices rose up, this strategy became increasingly problematic and generated a massive debt for the country. The country’s economy further suffered because of the fight against the

apartheid regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia. Progressively fewer revenues from the state were available for different sectors, including conservation and the rural economy, which were heavily subsidised. Especially after Kaunda lost power, structural adjustment programmes lead to decentralisation and privatisation processes, which contributed to institutional changes in rural regions such as the Kafue Flats, in particular regarding common pool resources such as the fishing and hunting sector.

The Kafue Flats are a floodplain of 6500 km<sup>2</sup>, of which between 3000 and 5000 km<sup>2</sup> are seasonally inundated. This makes the area rich in natural resources and an attractive place in a semi-arid region. After the floods recede, you find there rich pastures, fishing grounds and abundant wildlife.<sup>2</sup> The first inhabitants to use the natural resources under common pool tenure,<sup>3</sup> were the indigenous Batwa.<sup>4</sup> The Batwa are a fishing and hunting people, settled on elevations at the shore of the Kafue river itself. Today they are a minority. The Batwa developed regulations for the fisheries in the Kafue river rooted in their religious belief that ancestral spirits control the local fisheries, and especially the breeding grounds of breams in the area. There, they forbade fishing during the rainy season. The Batwa controlled river sections where fishing was allowed only by member of the local communities and outsiders who had asked and received their permission. These common property institutions were already regulating access to the fisheries at the time when the Ila and Balundwe pastoralists came into the area.<sup>5</sup> They used the rich pastures of the floodplain in a transhumant way. Until recently, the Ila were known as the richest cattle owning people of Central Africa.<sup>6</sup> Their

economy is based on cattle but it also includes agriculture and fishing in the tributaries of the Kafue river, ponds and oxbows, as well as individual and collective hunting. These activities made them prosperous, and their wealth attracted powerful groups such as the Lozi from the northwest, who raided the Ila. Despite being defeated several times, the Ila and Balundwe became known as fierce fighters and defenders of their area.<sup>7</sup>



Map 1. the Kafue flats and their inhabitants.

In each territory with one or more villages, the local leaders managed common pool resources as common property and local institutions regulated access

*In Kafue Flats [...] after the floods recede, you find rich pastures, fishing grounds and abundant wildlife...*

and the sharing of gains. Similarly to the Batwa, with whom they were intermarrying, the Ila and Balundwe crafted strict rules governing access to pasture, fish and wildlife. These rules prescribed fishing gear, permitted weapons and the timing of their use as well as inclusion/exclusion mechanisms— all adapted to the seasonal cycle of the floodplain. For instance, fishing was

always prohibited in the breeding areas in the main river. In addition, collective fishing in ponds in the dry season

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was only possible after the performing of ritual activities by ritual masters called *utamba*. Fishing before these rituals and announcements was believed to evoke supernatural

sanctions by ancestral spirits, who would have attached the fishermen in the form of crocodiles and hippos. The *matamba* (plural of *utamba*) working under village headmen monitored the river and tributary sections and had a group of young men helping them with enforcing the laws. Based on our research we know of some incidents in the past where free riders would be fined with the payment of cattle and people using the wrong gear, such as baskets not allowed at a certain time in the season, had their gear confiscated and destroyed. Similarly, if not drastically, traditional collective hunting (called *chila*) of the endemic lechwe antelope was announced by a co-ordinator representing a local group controlling a specific part of the Kafue Flats. Hunting before and after the announcement of the collective hunting time was repressed by serious sanctions. We know of at least one story, in which a poacher was reportedly killed by the supervising group for having hunted before the collective hunting time was announced.<sup>8</sup>

### The Kafue Flats as region of seasonal immigration

Today several other groups have migrated into the area, some of them seasonally and others permanently. This already began in colonial times

when the authorities regarded the Kafue Flats, and especially the fisheries, as "underused". After "pacification" they invited the Lozi, the former enemies of the local people, to step in and use the fish in the area. This step undermined the power of the indigenous Batwa people, who were not numerous enough to take action against these immigrants.<sup>9</sup> The Lozi fishermen installed permanent settlements in the area and introduced new fishing techniques, including nets. In the late 1950s the area attracted many commercial fishermen and traders from all over Zambia, but especially Bemba people from the Copperbelt. As catches went down the state took measures to set up formal fishery institutions by issuing licences, closing times and mini-



Picture 2. Ila waiting at a pond for the fish monitor (*utamba*) to perform the collective fishing ritual. (Courtesy T. Haller and S. Merten)



mum gear for fishing nets.<sup>10</sup> After independence, most of these rules were kept and the state could provide the financial means to monitor the fisheries and to sanction misuse. But the local people had to accept the new migrants and their local rules and access rights were effectively dismantled. Hunting regulations underwent a similar process. Collective hunting techniques and traditional institutions, especially the collective hunt (*chila*) on the endemic lechwe antelopes, were restricted by the government in the end of 1950s and then completely abolished in the 1960s. Hunting licences had to be bought, but those were difficult to obtain for local people and this made them feel that their access rights had been taken away.<sup>11</sup>

Another central aspect of government policy was the setting up of national parks and game management areas by the Kaunda government, with the objective of protecting wildlife. Three national parks were established in the Kafue Flats: the Kafue National Park, which is the largest of the three, the Blue Lagoon Park and the Lochinvar Park, the latter being a former ranch of a white settler. The two smaller parks lay within Game Management Areas (GMA) 11, managed from the wildlife department that operates from Lochinvar Park.

After the decline in copper prices in 1975 Zambia moved into an economic crisis and people from urban and peri-urban areas began looking for alternative sources of income. Researchers working in the area at the time as well as local informants indicate that the fisheries became one of the most important informal sectors of the country.<sup>12</sup> The Kafue fisheries experienced waves of massive immigration. This led to a decline of catches, and consequently less immigration, but sea-

sonal immigration remained extremely high.<sup>13</sup> Today one can find seasonal fishing camps of 900 households or more in the Kafue Flats. It is mostly young men attracted by the fast money in the commercial fisheries as well as in fish trade. But also women are engaged in fish trade and

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go to the flats for this. The climate in these camps is rough and aggressive. Men can be found drunk already in the afternoon, garbage lies around and the sanitation is inadequate, generating health problems. Observers agree that "law and order" here is completely out of hand. Most of the fishermen from these camps fish with illegal methods, including nets with extremely small mesh size or even mosquito nets and shade-cloth normally used for agriculture (to protect the vegetables from the sun). Other methods include large nets set without boats or driving fish into small meshed nets by beating upon the water. In addition, the fishing closed times between December and February (breeding times) are not respected.

What makes the area so attractive? On the one hand, the poorer segments of the society have to find their means to earn a livelihood. Fish and wildlife still catch good prices compared to other sectors such as maize (which is no longer subsidised). Another contributing factor is the relative closeness of the Kafue Flats to the capital Lusaka (250 km), which makes the area more attractive for seasonal immigrants who do not have a long-term interest in the resource base. In addition, the protected areas and two dams constructed for

hydropower generation have had important effects to the area. Because of the roads that have been built for these initiatives – even if they are poorly maintained road – the area is easily accessible from urban centres and the accessibility is further made easier by the dams because the area is less severely inundated than it used to be, especially in the rainy season.<sup>14</sup> The exploitation of common pool resources such as fish and wildlife in the Kafue Flats thus became an important livelihood strategy for many people who lost their jobs or were badly paid. In interviews conducted by us an often mentioned argument by commercial fishermen and traders for being engaged in fishing business was that: “No capital (is) needed here!”. Because of that, and because of weak formal monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms, a relatively easy access, a good price that can be obtained for fish on the urban markets and the relatively little cost of gear and transportation, the fisheries became attractive to many. These occasional extractors from the common pool resources include former Copperbelt workers but also bank employees and business women from town. The Kafue Flats fisheries have become a *de facto* “open access” common pool resource. Locals do not have the right to uphold their customary rules. Seasonal immigrants argue that they are Zambians and have a right to access the Zambian resources managed by the state. However, due to lack of financial means, the fisheries are not effectively managed by the state, and not even monitored. Only two fishery officers are responsible for the monitoring of a river section of about 80 km, and often there is no money for transportation, cars and motorbikes do not operate and cannot be repaired, or fuel is lacking. Under such conditions it is clear that misuse of gear and fishing in closed times is rarely sanctioned by

the state. Fisheries officers cannot fulfil their role and local rules are no longer in place.



Picture 3. Ila women with baskets at a collective fishing event. (Courtesy T. Haller and S. Merten)

The situation of wildlife is very similar to the one of fisheries. Hunting is relatively easy for urban people, who can get a licence with less travel and financial constraints compared to rural people.<sup>15</sup> According to local informants it is easy for commercial hunters to bribe local scouts in order to be able to shoot more animals than the licence allows. The harsh

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restructuring conditions since the time of structural adjustments and the cuts in the state budget, meant that less money is available for wildlife conservation, and underpaid game scouts are weaker in resisting corruption. The government attempted to cope with a partial privatisation of the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA). It has also revamped a programme called Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas (ADMADE), already initiated during Kaunda's times, which uses participatory approaches and seeks to involve local communities in Community Resource Boards.



Picture 4. Basket fishing is often a collective event. (Courtesy T. Haller and S. Merten)

### Poverty and conservation problems due to loss of local access to resources

The current main perception of the local people is that wealthy individuals from the city take away all the fish and game. A negative attitude towards new migrants is a relatively new phenomenon because especially in Ila and Balundwe societies a headman can strengthen his power by incorporating new groups as followers. This, however, has now changed for the Ila and Balundwe but also for the Batwa, a minority who has seen its own influence plummeting. Their rules are nowhere

respected. Among the very few remaining means against this loss of control are witchcraft and magic. In some instances, members of the Batwa claimed to be the ones controlling the numerous and dangerous hippos. But new migrants also have their techniques for magical protection and for luck in fishing.<sup>16</sup> The Batwa— too few in number and stigmatised as being backward— are again disempowered. As a matter of fact, the Batwa possess all the classical features of an “indigenous people”, and their situation is worsened by the management of the Lochinvar Park. The parks boundaries cover a large part of the former territory of the Batwa from Nyimba, the largest Batwa settlement. The Batwa complain that the park scouts harass them when they go into the park, that they do not allow them to fish in the park or to hunt in the GMA, meaning that the Batwa are no longer able to use the natural resources that they regard as their own. In their eyes, hunger and poverty are linked to the installation of the national park.

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The Ila and Balundwe have also realised that they are losing common pool resources to the new migrants. Fish and wildlife have not been of commercial interest to them; they had been relying on it for subsistence. Their main interest was in cattle, and because of cattle they perceived themselves as rich, owning about 13 animals per male head in the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> But, since then, the Ila have faced severe impoverishment due to major changes in their livelihood encompassing changing conditions about fish, game, crops and cattle. The first blow came with the state control of the fishing and hunt-





Picture 5. Men are now taking up women's baskets for fishing. (Courtesy T. Haller and S. Merten)

ing sectors, which took away fishing and hunting rights. In the beginning this was a relatively minor problem as fishing in the tributaries was still possible for the Ila and Balundwe, who thus compensated the loss of game meat. Game meat used to be more important than beef, because traditionally the Ila and Balundwe only consumed beef at special occasions, such as funerals. The bulk of meat eaten in olden days was game meat.<sup>18</sup> Also to obtain cash, the Ila used to rarely sell cattle because cattle was seen as a bank of security, used for marriage, milk consumption and for political reasons<sup>19</sup> and ownership of cattle often involved more than just one person.<sup>20</sup>

During the times of Kaunda the agricultural sector was subsidised and the Ila made maize production their basic source of cash income.<sup>21</sup> Today maize is still an important cash crop but has lost its significance because of the cut of subsidies in the agricultural sector. Seed and fertilisers are no longer provided by the state. Inputs are getting expensive and trade is no longer based on fixed state controlled prices. People now depend on traders who buy right after harvest when the price is low. In addition, the area faced severe droughts in the last years leading se-

vere food crises. But what made many Ila and Balundwe unable to cope with these crises was a major cattle disease known as East Coast Fever or *denkete* (theileriosis). People lost about 80% of their cattle in the end of the 1980s and early 1990s and were only able to restock their herds slowly. Based on a survey conducted by the authors in five villages in Chief Nalubamba's area (Namwala District) households have only about 50% of the average number of cattle they had before. There are large differences between rich and poor households as the poorer households lost their livelihood basis.<sup>22</sup> At the very time when agriculture and cattle husbandry went into crisis, access to wildlife was already restricted and fish was getting scarcer due to high demand.

Due to the changes in the environmental and institutional setting it is now getting difficult for local people to even imagine alternatives. It is in this respect that local Batwa, Ila and Balundwe seek a better and safer access to the common pool resources they were controlling in former times. In the wildlife sector they see that people from outside get all the game, which makes some of the young men opt for the poaching strategy hoping to be able to sell some dried

antelope meat. The access to fish from the Flats has become very difficult. In times of scarcity fish goes to wealthy traders or to female fish traders getting fish for sex

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(a full range of relationships has been observed, from prostitution to having a regular boyfriend among the fishermen). Another problem for local people is that the local rules are not respected by the new migrants, who do not want

to be controlled by locals and threaten to use violence to free themselves from their rules. With the absence of the Department of Fisheries the only option for local people would be to organise and use physical force to get their rules respected, which could lead to ethnic conflicts.

The use of fisheries in the tributaries has also increased, and even there the institutional setting has changed. As fish is becoming increasingly valuable, even local people get interested in fish as a resource for cash. There is an in-

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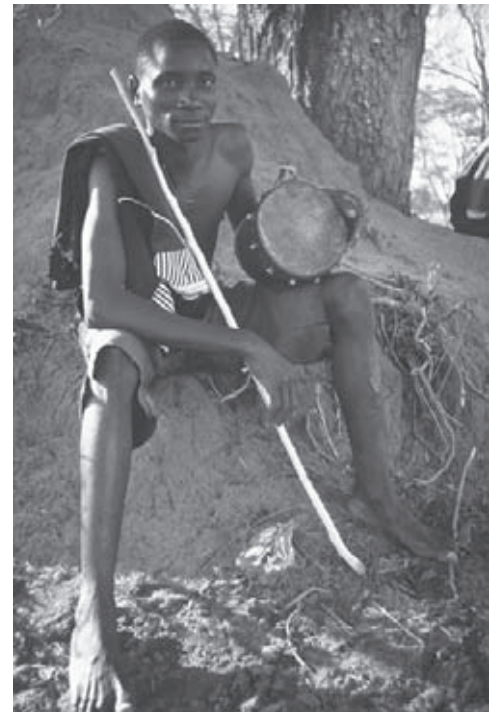
stitutional change happening regarding gear. Men - who used to fish with spears - are taking up fishing with baskets, the technique reserved for the women. The men then sell the fish and keep the money for their personal use and not for the household. Similarly, young men have taken up fishing with nets in ponds long before

the collective fishing is announced, leaving the rest of the community, men and women alike, with next to nothing. The local supervisors called *utamba* seem powerless to maintain control. The young men then invest their money, for example into grocery stores, while the women who used to fish for family subsistence end up losing one of the last sources of animal protein for their households. Poor households cannot compensate this loss with any other income generating activity.

During the rainy season, markets develop close to bridges of tributaries attracting more and more commercial fishermen and traders from town, who benefit from small fish travelling upstream to breed. Last but not least, traditional weirs controlled by men called *buyeelo* have increased and are set without accepting former regulations such as getting the permission from local headmen. These men therefore also violate the women's right to fish because women are not allowed to fish once a *buyeelo* is set.

Most of these changes contribute to inequalities within the local people as only

few can profit from them, while poverty increases for those who are no longer entitled to use the resources. Meanwhile the state is unable to provide adequate means for sustainable use and for conservation. As a



Picture 7. An Ila herdsman. (Courtesy T. Haller and S. Merten)

matter of fact, conservation itself is part of the problem because it excludes local people from their right to manage the resources and undermines their locally devised institutions. There are now attempts to get back to co-management systems in wildlife and in the fisheries. In wildlife management so



called Community Resource Boards are introduced locally. Results are mixed

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because information about potential incentives, such as profit from the park and from a camp site inside the park, is not well known, and local people hardly know where the money from the Lochinvar Park

paid to local Chiefs go. Money might go to help set up school or health facilities but these are collective gains and not individual ones.<sup>23</sup> Another problem is that the tourism revenues are too small to provide a financial incentive to each household to be willing to participate in conservation of wildlife, especially if

compared with the costs related to problems with herd mobility to the pastures in the Flats or to the loss of game and fish within the park boundaries and within the GMA.<sup>24</sup>

A possibly more successful approach has been initiated by the local Department of

Fisheries, which started a discussion of locally developed by-laws supplementary to the national fishery laws. This attempt is currently being supported by

the WorldFish Centre through an eighteen-month pilot project covering the Southern part of the Kafue Flats. It is a promising step because without recognising access and management rights by the state, no sustainable use and no conservation measure can be taken successfully. It involves a real participatory process, in which all stakeholders are able to discuss their views on how to structure access rights. Once the process is concluded, it will be legally recognised by the state in a co-management system. Especially promising, the process is based on local initiatives and demands and it incorporates mechanisms to include women's voice by partially gender separated local debates on such by-laws. Such methods make sure that women are not just present at meetings without speaking up. The initiative also implies clear and trustworthy regulations of when the state (and which department of the state) will need to step in to support decisions taken by all the stakeholders, and especially of women. Only by these means, poverty in the Kafue Flats can be reduced and the natural resources will have a chance of being used in a sustainable way.

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Picture 6. A fishtrader at a Lusaka market (Courtesy T. Haller and S. Merten)

## Notes

- 1 Gibson, 1999; Andersson, Bigsten and Persson, 2000.
- 2 See Handlos, 1977; Ellenbroek, 1987; Chabwela, 1992; Chooye and Drijver, 1995.
- 3 Becker and Ostrom, 1995.
- 4 Lehmann, 1977.
- 5 This is a result of our own research. We collected data about this during two research periods of six

- month each in Mbeza (Ila Chiefdom Nalubamba and surrounding chiefdoms) between 2002 and 2004. Methods used were participant observation, qualitative and quantitative interviews, focus groups discussions, biographies and oral history.
- 6 Our own research; Fielder 1973.
  - 7 See the diaries of Emile Holub and others; Cutshall 1980.
  - 8 Smith and Dale, 1920; Fielder, 1973; Colson, 1970; Cutshall, 1980; and our own research.
  - 9 Lehmann, 1977.
  - 10 Mortimer, 1965.
  - 11 Chabwela, 1992; Gibson, 1999; our own research.
  - 12 Scudder, personal communication, 2003
  - 13 See Mortimer, 1965; Muyanga and Chipungu, 1982; Subramaniam, 1992; our own research.
  - 14 Our own research; Chooye and Drijver, 1995.
  - 15 See also Chabwela, 1992.
  - 16 See La Munière, 1969; our own research.
  - 17 Fielder, 1973.
  - 18 Smith and Dale, 1920 and 1968; Cutshall, 1980; Fielder, 1973; our own research.
  - 19 Fielder, 1973, Rennie, 1982.
  - 20 Tuden 1968; Fielder 1973.
  - 21 see also Cutshall 1980.
  - 22 own research.
  - 23 See also Gibson, 1999.
  - 24 Our own research; see also Gibson, 1999.

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## Does resettlement contribute to conservation? The case of Ikundu-Kundu, Korup National Park, Cameroon

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**Résumé.** Deux hypothèses ont été à la base du recasement des populations du parc national de Korup (KNP) au Cameroun. Le déplacement devrait entraîner l'amélioration des conditions de vie des populations recasées et éliminer ou réduire la pression des activités paysannes sur la faune du Parc National. Cet article examine la validité de ces hypothèses dans le cas des populations déplacées du village d'Ikundu-Kundu (IKK), le seul village du KNP déplacé dans le cadre de ce programme. L'article contribue ainsi à l'étude des impacts pluridimensionnels du recasement sur les populations et sur la biodiversité. L'analyse s'appuie sur les recherches effectuées par les auteurs à IKK en 2003, ainsi que sur les enseignements tirés d'une riche littérature sur le Parc National de Korup. Elle montre que le recasement induit de profonds changements dans les activités de subsistance des paysans recasés. D'agriculteurs-chasseurs-cueilleurs, certains sont en train de se transformer en agriculteurs 'tout court'. Si, à court terme, cette situation peut avoir des avantages sur la biodiversité faunique du parc, elle est désastreuse pour l'ensemble du couvert forestier de la région et elle induit chez les recasés des stress et des perturbations socioculturelles importantes. Par ailleurs, il y a une combinaison de facteurs qui font que— malgré la délocalisation— la chasse se pratique encore dans le parc par les jeunes recasés, autour du village abandonné. En définitive, le bilan du recasement d'IKK est plutôt très mitigé après 3 années - d'autant que la durabilité des impacts socio-économiques positifs enregistrés est largement tributaire d'un encadrement et d'un suivi permanent des populations recasées.

The confrontation of dominant Western representations of Nature with African local realities is at the root of the present impasse in the management of protected areas (PAs) in tropical African humid regions. Myths and conjectures, particularly the myth of "wilderness" and "pristine forests",<sup>1</sup> have shaped conservation policies in Africa in ways

strangely unhindered by historical accuracy. The general weakness of biological monitoring<sup>2</sup> in conservation projects defined in reference to the "human threat" to biological diversity is a glaring manifestation of this paradox.

The myth of the African wilderness found a strong ally in the legal fiction of the "vacant lands without master",