

Poverty Alleviation and Community Based Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa

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Abstract

Community based natural resource management (CBNRM) can refer to a range of different interventions, and can imply different meanings in different countries. In most southern African countries, CBNRM programmes are typically designed to devolve rights over wildlife and/or forestry (and sometimes other resources) on communal lands to local institutions. The basis of the devolution of management responsibility over these resources is that, if the benefits that can be derived from the use of the resources can outweigh their management costs, communities will have the incentive to sustainably manage the resources.

Naturally, programmes evolve differently in each country according to different social, political and economic influences. However, they do have common central objectives, which typically relate primarily to the conservation of biodiversity and secondarily to contributing to rural economic development, poverty alleviation and/or the improvement of rural livelihoods.

In order to achieve the first objective, the programmes emphasise the role of local people in the decision making and implementation of natural resource management activities, and seek to establish the mechanisms for ownership and responsibility of relevant resources, creating the necessary enabling legal and policy instruments to ensure that benefits accrue responsibly and equitably.

In order to achieve the second objective, the programmes in southern Africa tend to focus on wildlife resources (as opposed to forestry, fishery or other natural resources), as they are perceived to be the resources with the highest potential values, that can be most easily and quickly realised – primarily through the photographic and trophy hunting tourism enterprises and activities.

Poverty has traditionally been defined as the inability to meet basic needs, to or achieve a socially acceptable standard of living. It is typically measured using indicators such as gross income or expenditure on consumption (considered to be proxies of the material wellbeing of the household or individual). However, these indicators are often criticised for not taking into account distributional or equity issues, and their use also assumes that there are markets for all goods and services that poor people need. The recognition that these measures of poverty have weaknesses led in recent years to the growing recognition that they should be supplemented by information relating to both monetary and non-monetary attributes (for example marginalisation, powerlessness, a lack of voice in decision making and vulnerability), and that they should also more accurately reflecting the dynamic and complex nature of poverty.

Thus poverty is increasingly being recognised (and measured) as multi-dimensional, distinguishing the numerous aspects of people's lives affected by poverty. While there is no consensus on the specific definition of multi-dimensional poverty, there is broad agreement that key aspects to be considered should include economic opportunities (the range and diversity of opportunities available to build assets and

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increase incomes), empowerment (particularly participation in decision making) and vulnerability, in addition to the more traditional income/consumption measures.

There are various ways in which CBNRM programmes can impact on poverty and vulnerability at the household level – in both positive and negative ways.

In terms of the positive impacts that the programme can generate, these relate mostly to the creation of employment (derived predominantly from tourism enterprises and local natural resource management institutions e.g. game guards) and associated income. Direct utilisation of the resource can be another positive impact – for example in some countries, ‘own hunts’ of game are allowed, legalising some access to game meat; also meat from trophy hunted animals is typically distributed to villages near where the animal has been killed. Infrastructure investments can be another benefit – for example where community income has been spent on buying a milling machine, on building and/or staffing local schools, clinics, etc.

Training provided to staff and members of community based organisations can also be of significant benefit, as can the impact of improved local institutions, improved working relationships with governments and the maintenance of cultural and traditional values.

However, the programmes can also have negative impacts, such as reduced access to land (where it has been exclusively zoned for wildlife and/or tourism use), reduced access to wildlife resources – while always illegal, the presence of community game guards and local rangers increases the chance of being caught hunting. The programme can also increase conflict over newly valuable resources.

Possibly the largest negative impact relates to increased human wildlife conflict – where predators kill livestock and people, and other animals (particularly elephants) can damage or destroy crops, and pose a threat to property and human life.

Though programmes and projects have been running in a number of countries across the region for more than a decade, their ability to achieve their dual goals is not certain. In terms of the contribution of CBNRM programmes to poverty alleviation, much of the early literature describes the success of the programmes, often using oblique indicators of success, such as total revenue generated by tourism enterprises (including those for which the community receives only a share). More recently, the focus has been on ‘lessons learned’ from implementation. Authors note the difficulties in establishing clear criteria of the success or failure of CBNRM programmes, as this would require baseline ecological, socio-economic and institutional studies, as well as ongoing monitoring, which is non-existent for most projects and programmes.

This paper focuses on providing empirical evidence of which of the multiple dimensions of poverty are affected by CBNRM programme activities and whether they are positively or negatively affected and on whether the benefits or costs associated with the programmes (e.g. income, employment, human wildlife conflict, etc.) have any impact on individuals’ perceptions of their own household situation. In order to answer these questions, CBNRM activities in Mozambique and Namibia were examined. Due to the lack of baseline information with respect to each of the sites in these countries, two sites per country were chosen – one in a CBNRM area (i.e. affected by a CBNRM project) and a ‘control’ site, outside a CBNRM area, but as similar to the first in all other ways as is possible to enable a ‘with’ and ‘without’ project comparison. Both qualitative and quantitative data at the household and community level were collected through a household survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

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