

**THROUGH OUR EYES**  
**ACORD'S EXPERIENCES IN CBNRM**

Okavango Community Trust



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Three years ago, ACORD, an Africa-led International Organisation working in eighteen African countries, started an uncertain journey on the paths of Ngamiland West, one of Botswana's poorest regions.

Mission - to reduce poverty among the marginalized and vulnerable people; strategy - participatory research, learning, information sharing and addressing HIV I AIDS and gender-related issues; weapons - sheer determination, hope and a firm belief that the power to change the destiny of the locals in Ngamiland West lay in the hands of the people themselves.

ACORD's experiences in Ngamiland West have been, simply put, an eye opener for any NGO involved in community work, especially where this work embraces environmental issues, natural resource management, human resource development, poverty and disease alleviation: in one word, people.

People are different, but in some ways are the same. The same goes for experiences. Many have experienced the Okavango; these experiences may be similar but will in many ways be different. This document aims to share ACORD's experiences on the precious lessons learned through working with people in the communities and, of course, various organisations. It hopes to recommend pertinent issues in initiating and implementing a Community based natural resource management project.

In this publication, ACORD retraces its footsteps on the weather-beaten path of success and failure, certainty and uncertainty, hope, despair and reality. It tells of what it takes to facilitate a community owned project and how to persevere.

It is about ACORD's experiences in working with the Okavango Community Trust; a community-based organisation set up under the auspices of the governing community based natural resource management policies in Botswana.

Some of the issues highlighted come from the *Output to Purpose Review* (October 2000 and March 2002) of the Ngamiland Poverty Pilot Initiative Project (NPIP). These involved among

others reviewing ACORD's relationship with the Okavango Community Trust.

### **OKAVANGO COMMUNITIES - A PROFILE**

The different ethnic groups that live in the Okavango delta have established traditional livelihoods. These include nomadic food gatherers, hunters, fishers and livestock herders.

In 1995, widespread cattle lung disease led to the wiping out of all cattle in the area, plunging the people into dire straits, they lost their traditional economy basis. The government had to put down all the cattle in the area. They offered people money or cattle in compensation. If they chose the cattle option they would have to wait a while to get them. Most of them opted for money and spent it on perishables and non-productive assets. This in itself was problematic since it just plunged people into a cash-based economy that they were not used to. As a result, they became poorer and poorer.

Though poor, the people in this area had one resource with great economic potential at their fingertips. The abundant wildlife freely roaming the vast arid lands, if properly harnessed and managed, promised a better life for the 2500 locals of Seronga, Gunotsoga, Beetsha, Eretsha and Gudigwa villages.

In response to the villagers' plight, the Government then set up a community-based natural resource management system to benefit the people. Two concession-hunting areas, NG22 & NG23 were reserved. These areas could be used for hunting and photography, and any benefits earned from them would go to the five villages. But before this project could be handed over to the villages, the village members had to organise themselves, and thus the beginnings of the Okavango community trust (OCT), which is the centre of the discussion in this paper.

Before examining the OCT and its work in Okavango, it is important to understand CBNRM, at least in a broad sense.

## **COMMUNITY BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Countries in the Southern African region have been using community-based natural resource management in their rural development programmes for over 10 years now. It is a management system that empowers communities to harness and manage their natural resources in a sustainable manner, and gives beneficiaries equitable access to the benefits. It also allows people to secure tenure, and form community-based organisations, which enhance their bargaining and lobbying powers. CBNRM is meant to enhance rural economic development and conserve natural resources.

CBNRM envisions generating jobs, revenues, cash dividends, shares, equity, and additional spin-off enterprise activities. In addition, it assumes that communities will ultimately realise that having more control and decision-making powers over their natural resources is a benefit in itself. These benefits will spread widely through the community and help to raise the standard of living.

In Botswana, community-based organisations organise and implement CBNRM. A community-based organisation (CBO) might be a trust, a cooperative, or an association made up of one or more villages. The common practice with regard to CBNRM has been to establish trusts.

The CBO should then be registered with the Registrar of Societies for it to be a recognised legal entity. Once this is done and it is acknowledged by the appropriate land board they then can go ahead and make and implement decisions on how to best benefit from the resources in their control. Most villages tend to go for the option of entering into joint ventures agreement with private companies for the use of the resource rights.

Community members decide how to manage natural resources and how to distribute benefits, while central and local governments play important facilitating implementation of roles. When communities accept the benefits of resource utilisation, they undertake responsibilities that require their investment of effort and money in monitoring, regulating resource use, protecting resources and educating others on the need of sustainable resource use. This is also expected to

enhance their business skills that include among others marketing and bargaining abilities.

CBNRM projects in Botswana have several characteristics outlined below:

**A community may obtain a Head lease from the Land Authority**

If the community wants more secure access to land and natural resources and considers joint ventures with the private sector, it may decide to obtain a lease for the area from the Land Authority. For this to happen, a number of conditions have to be met. These include legal registration, having by laws and developing a Land-use and Management Plan that explains how the community intends to use the natural resources.

**Communities receive benefits directly from CBNRM**

Revenues and other benefits derived from the CBNRM process go directly to the participating communities. The community makes decisions on how to distribute them, as well as investment decisions.

This assumes that when communities realise the economic value of their surrounding natural resources, they will be inclined to manage them in a more sustainable way. Currently, Botswana has about 50 community-based organisations involved in CBNRM. These projects range from thatching grass, collecting and marketing herbal tea, handicrafts, campsite management, trophy-hunting, and photographic safaris.

The range of natural resources being actively managed will expand as new opportunities are identified, revenues reinvested, business management capacities strengthened and enterprise management recognised as necessary to achieve improved use and accounting for revenue generating activities and to resolve potential conflicts.

**CBNRM - Guiding Policies**

Several policy documents shape CBNRM development. Some date as far back as the early 1970s, but the important ones include:

### **The Tribal Grazing Land Policy, 1975**

The tribal grazing land policy divides the country into three land-use categories; communal, commercial and reserve land. The primary objective of this policy was to improve environmental conservation through stopping overgrazing and degrading rangeland and promoting greater equity of incomes in rural Botswana.

### **Wildlife Conservation Policy, 1986**

Much of the country's land was designated as 'reserve area'. It is these that eventually became Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Other land uses are permitted only if they are compatible with wildlife. Residents of WMAs would be able to manage existing natural resources for their own, and Botswana would benefit too. WMAs derive their legal backbone from this Policy. It encourages the development of a commercial wildlife industry based on sustained utilisation, in order to create economic opportunities, jobs and incomes for the rural population.

### **The Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act, 1992**

The wildlife conservation and national parks act empowers the Director of Wildlife and National Parks to issue permits to use wild life for commercial development. It also allows revenue derived from license fees to be paid to the relevant district councils.

### **Tourism Policy, 1990**

The Tourism Policy of 1990 provides local communities with direct and indirect benefits from tourism so that they will receive and recognise the value of wildlife and its conservation through participation in wildlife based industries, including tourism. The major objectives of the policy are to generate employment mainly in rural areas, to raise incomes in rural areas, and, generally, to promote rural development.

### **National Conservation Strategy, 1990**

The National Conservation Strategy Policy proposed the execution of wildlife cropping projects, primarily for the benefit of local communities.

### **Community-Based Strategy for Rural Development, 1997**

The community-based strategy for rural development, 1997, recognises the need to increase community involvement in initiating, development and implementation of rural development projects. Such would be achieved through decentralisation of decision-making processes.

### **Community Based Natural Resources Management Policy - Draft 1998, 1999**

Once passed by an Act of Parliament the CBNRM policy will become the main document governing the development and implementation of the CBNRM programme in Botswana. What does it contain .....?????

In addition to the policies cited, there are two sets of key government official documents / circulars guiding CBNRM activities. These include the joint *savingram* (official circular) by Ministry of trade, industry, wildlife, and tourism (MCI) and Ministry of local governments, lands and housing; and the joint venture guidelines, which looked at opportunities and options for investment in CBNRM. The documents stipulate conditions to be met by community organisations before being involved in CBNRM. This includes, establishment of a Representative, Accountable, and Legal Entity (RALE).

### **THE OKAVANGO COMMUNITY TRUST**

The Okavango Community Trust was set up to represent the interests of the five villages (collectively known as the OCT communities) of Seronga, Gunotsoga, Eretsha, Beetsha and Gudigwa; on issues pertaining to the concession areas NG 22 and 23. It was registered as a Trust in 1996 after a series of meetings among the technical advisory committee members for establishing a CBNRM project in Kwando and Okavango wildlife management areas (WMAs).

The Trust holds, manages and utilises the leased areas on behalf, and for the benefit of the community. It does this in a sustainable manner, by developing them for the tourist industry. It also ensures that areas leased are developed in away that provides vocational training to the people and equip them with the highest possible skills in all aspects of the tourist industry. OCT also assists in developing,



manufacturing and marketing local products from the community. These include, but are not limited to, handicrafts, game products, timber and agricultural resources. Other objectives include:

- To utilise the assets of the Trust to assist in the general uplifting and development of the community.
- To educate the Community on the importance of wildlife resource conservation.
- To assist the Department of Wildlife and National Parks in supervising the leased areas and ensure that the game in these areas are protected and properly managed.

Although the OCT was set up to do noble tasks, the manner in which it was set up was unconventional, especially for a community-based organisation. It was, as it were, driven to the communities rather than with them. As happens in most such incidences the locals did not readily accept the trust as theirs, neither were they fully aware of its functions, nor did they participate in its activities.

In 1993, the Natural Resources Management Project under the Department of Wildlife and National Parks established two trusts the Chobe Enclave Community Trust and then the Sankuyo Tshwaragano Management Trust. The process used omitted important principles of participation. However, this same process, as precedence, was then used for the establishment of the OCT thereby contributing to some of the operational problems the organisation faced later.

The natural resources management project had 'consultation' meetings with Okavango communities on the CBNRM programme concept and on how to get organised in order to implement manage such a project these areas in the latter part of 1994. The concepts were explained to the villagers in subsequent meetings and seminars. Stakeholders included the Tawana Land Board, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Okavango community consultants, Members of Parliament for the region and an attorney representing the Okavango Community Trust. The attorney drew up the OCT constitution, without input from the community.

In February 1995, quota management committees (now Village Trust Committees) were elected. In April, Tawana land board formally recognised OCT as beneficiaries of NG 22 and

23. After this, the OCT appointed Mechilleti Bates Safaris to enter into a joint venture, contrary to requirements that:

- The allocation and development of controlled hunting areas situated in Wildlife Management Areas should conform to the community areas management plans.
- Joint venture guidelines should be followed.
- All controlled hunting areas should be tendered for so as to enable the community choose a safari operator more likely to engage in sustainable tourism operations.
- Any provisional land allocation should be suspended till the communities have satisfied the necessary requirements.

After much debate and advisors giving the guidance, the trust was granted permission to tender the areas. The communities were given the mandate to manage their controlled hunting areas and sublease them to the safari company in the absence of management plans. This created a weak foundation whose effects were to be felt later.

In addition, some of the policies that govern CBNRM have loopholes, or are mismatched. For instance, while the Tourism policy recommends that communities be given concession areas to manage, the land authorities require the communities to have management plans for these areas before they can be handed over to them. At the same time, there are no effective provisions to assist the communities develop these management plans, which require huge finances and technical support.

### **Okavango Community Trust operational structures**

In order to effectively implement the project, OCT established a number of structures to represent the communities, and manage and administer the trust in general. These structures are the Village Trust Committees (VTCs), Board of Trustees, a Management team and employees.

Under the Deed of Trust for the OCT, village trust committees are elected at an annual general meeting every two years. Each village is required to elect ten people. The chairperson and secretary of each VTC are automatically appointed to sit on the OCT board of trustees. One person nominated from the safari company is also appointed to sit on the board. The board of trustees is made up of eleven members.

The role of the elected committees is to make decisions on behalf of the general OCT members as well as to provide a link between OCT, the joint venture partner and other stakeholders on issues regarding NG22 and 23.

The Board hires a management Team, comprising of a general manager, office manager, and a treasurer. Their responsibilities are, among others to advise the board on technical aspects of project management and to oversee the implementation of the decisions of the board. The current general manager was' 1, recruited from outside the OCT villages due to shortage of skilled people locally. This necessitated appointing a local person to understudy him and be able to take over his responsibilities when he leaves. Radio operators, shop attendants, drivers, labours and a number of other casual workers employed by OCT fall under the management team.

#### **ACORD AND THE OCT**

ACORD's work with the Okavango Community Trust is best understood in the context of the Ngamiland West Participatory Development Initiative, a project resulting from an Overseas Development Agency research to assess the nature and extent of poverty in Botswana.

In late 1999, ACORD initiated a pilot programme aimed at reducing poverty in Ngamiland. The programme focused on income generation, natural resources management and strengthening community institutions. In late 2001, HIV / AIDS and research and networking components were added to the programme.

In partnership with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Tawana Land Board and Conservation International, ACORD worked to strengthen OCT and its related structures. This special alliance created the necessary environment for common understanding of the purpose, goals and intentions of the programme, thus minimising conflict and confusion. It also enhanced efficient resource allocation through skills and finance sharing, and logistical and technical arrangements.

ACORD realised that for the OCT project to succeed, it must be people-centred, taking into account the needs of the

OCT communities. As a result, ACORD's interventions were, to a large extent, dependent on the *community's pace*.

Before designing community interventions in the OCT communities, ACORD found it imperative to understand the communities they were serving; their needs, aspirations, problems and available opportunities. This was done through Participatory Rural Appraisals.

### **Capacity building**

ACORD was involved in the following major areas:

- Improving leadership and organisational developmental skills in the community-based organisations.
- Reviewing the OCT constitution and dealing with issues of equitable distribution. Apparently, the OCT constitution gave so much power to the management, and less to the community. As a result, people did not benefit from the concession management opportunity.
- Working with the village trust committees in the five villages to build, enhance and support their ability to invest resources earned in viable village projects.

Through workshops and mentoring ACORD supported OCT members to become skilled in several areas and making them more accountable and committed to community development in OCT villages. The areas covered were:

- How to run village committees.
- Relationships between different committee members.
- Developing a vision and mission statement, objectives and how these would be achieved.
- Defining roles of individual members of a group, with reference to OCT.
- Improving accountability and community participation to ensure that OCT carries out its mandate optimally?
- Stakeholder analysis relationship between OCT and others, e.g. government, communities, NGOs, the safari operator with whom they got into a joint venture etc.
- Group dynamics: leadership styles, active participation by members, dealing with difficult group members, and how groups can work more effectively.

OCT communities operate through committees. Since these committees represent large numbers of people they need to be reasonably accountable and truly represent the larger membership. As such, ACORD developed a training package on roles and responsibilities and worked through it with the committees. Because of this, the committees learned to appreciate the importance and functions of such bodies. Some level of accountability has also been experienced. Furthermore, it is believed that this intervention would allow committees to monitor OCT's operations and vice versa. The purpose of this training was also to promote dialogue between the various institutions. This is necessary to ensure accountability and transparency in service delivery.

More work was done to highlight and guide the communities through the model of joint venture partnership and they were expected to run, and each party's role. It became clear that people thought that the joint venture partnership should run all the development projects and manage OCT finances. They began to realise that they could play a more active and effective roles by deciding how the Trust should be run.

### **Participatory Rural Appraisals**

ACORD and OCT applied for funds from National Conservation Strategy Agency (NCSA) under the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) to conduct participatory rural appraisals (PRA) in three villages (Beetsha, Seronga, and Eretsha). These had already been done for the other two. ACORD, CI, and DWNP did the planning and implementation of the PRAs jointly. The participatory rural appraisals were meant to determine priority issues in the, communities. This process also helped the implementing agencies to develop more insight into OCT communities.

ACORD worked with Conservation International and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) to reinforce work in raising awareness on their rights and responsibilities. In the process of empowerment and capacity building, emphasis was put on assisting OCT to improve on its management systems, consultation processes, accountability, sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of the general Trust's membership.

The participatory rural appraisals revealed that all the five communities identified common problems. The following problems were identified:

- The OCT constitution was not understood.
- There was no Management plan and Business plan for NG 22 and 23
- Unemployment
- Shortage of clinic staff
- Bad roads
- Lack of banking facilities
- HIV/AIDS
- Limited stock in the project shop
- Poor committee relations
- Litter
- Poor extension service
- Non participation of women and youth in development issues

### **Tackling the Issues**

ACORD, Conservation International and DWNP started working with these communities to address some the problems mentioned above. While some tasks like increasing clinic staff and building roads were beyond ACORD's mandate, the agency advised the communities on the channels of communication with the relevant authorities e.g. speaking to and through their Member of Parliament.

Since the OCT constitution was not understood in all the villages, and this had a bearing on effective CBNRM development, ACORD, Conservation International and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks organised a workshop to address the problem. This was targeted at OCT board and the village trust committees because they played a central role in assisting members to understand their constitution and other processes in the trust operations.

This five-day workshop was held in November 2001. Comparisons were made with constitutions from other community-based organizations like Sankoyo Tshwaragano Management Trust (STMT). This broadened participants' understanding to such an extent that they identified a number of contentious issues in

the constitution and suggested appropriate changes. For instance, they noticed that the constitution gave too much power to the management, at the expense of the community. The participants also suggested ways of discussing the constitution further in all the five villages. These meetings are now being planned for.

### **Reporting/feedback mechanisms**

The OCT constitution provides for Annual General Meetings and Board Meetings, which facilitate information flow within the trust. At the AGM, the Board reports to the general membership on the activities of the Trust, present financial reports, budgets and management issues. The general members discuss these reports and make decisions on how the Trust should be run. Such meetings ensure transparency as they give people an opportunity to scrutinize OCT activities (including financial management). Because OCT is made up of five villages, the constitution stipulates that a meeting be held in each village.

However, members of OCT were not skilled at writing and presenting reports. ACORD started off by writing the reports on their behalf. Though the general members appreciated these reports, this was not the best path but it was necessary to gain confidence. With time this was steered to a place where the people could do their own writing.

### **Community Management Plan**

By law, the Government of Botswana requires communities to develop management plans for their concession areas to guide the communities on natural resource use. Many community-based organisations in Botswana have responded to the need for developing management plans, and some already have them.

When OCT was being formed, a number of steps were skipped including that there was no community management plan. As a result, the community members felt less responsible for the natural resources in their areas.

During the PRA's the communities also highlighted this need. OCT requested ACORD to help develop a funding proposal to enable them engage technical expertise in this area. Finance was secured from the Global Environment Facility/Small grants Programme. In order to show commitment to the process, OCT was required to pay part of the costs involved.

OCT entered into a joint venture agreement with Micheletti Bates Safaris to develop the hunting and photographic potential of NG 22 and 23. And in this period, Micheletti Bates Safaris has engaged Okavango Wilderness Safaris (OWS) to develop photographic activities since the former is a hunting organisation with limited expertise in photographic ventures. This was all done despite the fact that there was no management plan to guide such activities.

To date, NG 22 and 23 do not have their own specific management plans, though the planning process is underway; they are governed by the Van der Heiden Report (1991) and the management plan for controlled hunting areas allocated to communities in the Ngamiland WMAs (1995). It has now become imperative for OCT to produce a comprehensive management plan to guide management of these two areas. It will also have the additional benefits of ensuring community participation and equipping the villagers with knowledge on how to run the concession areas and share the gains equitably.

Okavango Community Trust can use the management plan as a tool to responsibly manage their resources in NO 22 and 23, and as a basis for a medium-term tourism and development plan. This plan will conform to the overall management plan for the Okavango Delta currently being produced by the National Conservation Strategy Agency. The Management Plan will include, but not be limited to:

- a. Assessing the present tourist facilities and infrastructure relative to the carrying capacity of each area.
- b. Investigating possible changes to land use practices for both areas.
- c. Proposing potential activities and infrastructure for each area and proposing carrying capacities based on objective criteria.

The management plan will also provide objective information on land use zoning and the carrying capacity of both controlled hunting areas for tourism activities, thereby providing the basis for guiding developments in future. It is strongly believed that the management plan will be a useful bargaining tool for the community when negotiating business deals with the private sector. Currently the community has no



basis for such bargaining, except tender proposals presented by the private sector during bidding. The tendered proposal is seen as a one-sided document as it represents aspirations of the private sector and not necessarily those of the community.

The management plan is expected to

- Raise awareness in OCT communities on the importance of planning the management of natural resources in their areas.
- Put in place a plan that is owned by the communities.
- Ensure commitment among community members to managing their areas according to the management plan.
- Ensure OCT's contribution to managing and conserving the Okavango Delta and maintain its ecological integrity in line with the RAMSAR requirement.

Apart from sourcing funds, ACORD is facilitating the development process and helping OCT report to donors. It also chairs reference group meetings.

#### **ACORD - IS IT MAKING AN IMPACT?**

The Output to Purpose review report (October 2000) of the Ngamiland Poverty Pilot Initiative Project (NPPIP) shows that ACORD managed the following:

- Facilitate the process of developing local institutions, thus increasing their confidence. ACORD has trained board members, VTCs and other OCT leaders in various leadership skills. They now have a sense of pride and are optimistic about future development and their ability to control their own activities and projects in the villages.
- People in community structures (committees) have, to a reasonable extent, gained leadership and organisational development skills. They have been empowered to take the reins in their own hands.
- Community members appreciate the sustainable use of resources to improve their quality of life. For example, some villagers are now employed and have access to primary health as a direct result of benefits coming to the community.

ACORD worked with OCT communities to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. This process of empowerment and capacity building, emphasised on assisting OCT to improve its management systems, consultation processes, accountability, sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of the general Trust's membership. ACORD is confident that its interventions made the impact.

OCT can now demand technical assistance from service providers including ACORD and the Government. For example, the communities identified and initiated their own training needs. After the community realised they needed to develop a management plan for their concession areas they approached ACORD to help them develop a funding proposal.

The OCT constitution allows VTCs to be established in the five villages. Although VTCs were appointed, their roles and importance were not known, neither to the communities, nor to the committees themselves. As a result, VTCs remained ineffective. But after building their capacity, VTCs became active and started challenging Board and OCT management decisions and activities.

The communities realised that they had power, and thus began to question the decisions of the OCT Board as their representatives. They discovered that other channels of communication existed for them to air their grievances. For instance, when OCT renewed its agreement with the Joint Venture Partner, the general membership realised that the Board, in deciding on the way forward, did not adequately involve them so they lobbied for more involvement. The VTCs sent a delegation to meet the District Commissioner for Ngamiland to express their dissatisfaction on how the board was running Okavango Community Trust. The main problem revolved around the Board's decision to renew the current Joint Venture agreement with a safari operator, and the Board's inability to consult the general membership. The decision to renew the agreement with the then Joint Venture Partner completely disregarded the communities' wish to go for open tender.

The District Commissioner, with a team of government officials visited OCT area and held *kgotla* meetings in each of the five OCT villages, at which the OCT board was strongly criticised for failing to involve the general members in

running the Trust. The members felt the Board was insensitive to the community's needs and that it served only the interests of the joint venture partner.

By debating the tender issue, the community also identified a number of problems that led to the situation. Among them was the fact that OCT constitution did not adequately express, or represent the interests of the community, and that a management plan for the community's concession areas NG22/23 was non-existent. This was a potential source of conflict.

The confidence to approach the District Commissioner, and the fact that the people could openly voice their problems without any fear indicated that they now felt they owned OCT, contrary to the past when they felt it belonged to the Board.

Following the complaint by the community to the DC, the matter was raised with the Minister of Commerce and Industry who wrote a directive instructing OCT to opt for an open tender. Because the Board of Trustees now knew their rights, they used the constitution to argue against the Minister's decision. Their argument was that as the board of trustees, they had the legal right, as stipulated in the constitution, to make decisions on behalf of the community. Based on this, the Minister withdrew her instruction.

Although the tendering did not take place as the community had wished, the debate created opportunities for the community to discuss their trust and identify its weaknesses. For the first time, the communities advocated for a new board of trustees to be elected because the current one did not adequately represent their interests. They also discussed the appropriateness of OCT constitution. Since most of the OCT members did not understand it, they discussed the need to make it more representative.

Another example is the participation in developing the management plan was impressive. The consultants developing the plan indicated that community participation was high. Large numbers attended the meetings called to discuss the plans and have expressed their views on how they wish to manage the resource. For instance, the people have already expressed their wish to invite separate tenders for their two concession areas. Initially these were advertised as one package. This

meant that only one safari company could enter into a lease agreement with OCT. Communities believe that inviting separate tenders will attract more bidders and lead to increased competition and result in increased revenues from the land. The OCT communities do not only see the management plan as a tool to guide the development of natural resources activities, but also as a means of enhancing their bargaining edge in negotiating deals with the private sector and other organisations. Advocating for these improvements is an indication that the community now had a sense of direction on how to develop NG22 and 23 as their business ventures.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **Use of Participatory Methodologies**

People were not involved in setting up OCT, leading to a number of problems that could have altogether been avoided. ACORD strongly believes in a people-centred approach towards development, where people play the leading role, and development agents only facilitate the community process. For this reason, using participatory methodologies is central to our work as this ensures that project recipients develop a sense of ownership of the process. This also ensures commitment, as beneficiaries are involved at every level of project development including project identification, design and implementation.

The PRAs that were done later in OCT villages assisted the communities to identify their needs, opportunities and constraints in the development of a CBRNM project that would contribute to improving the livelihood of people. Strategies to address the identified constraints were also developed through the process.

### **Collaboration with stakeholders**

Collaborating with stakeholders through continuous dialogue and consultation is crucial for common understanding in project development. It is important for building confidence, which is often lacking in processes that involve multiple actors.

Collaboration is also important for sharing resources and skills transfer from the experts to the locals, or fellow

stakeholders. Different actors have different expectations, interests and mandates and, as such, it is important to understand these variations in order to minimise conflict and misunderstanding.

### **CBNRM is dynamic**

CBNRM is a dynamic and lengthy process that needs patience and dedication. It involves multiple actors and its success highly depends on the active participation of all stakeholders.

Since most of the concepts used in CBNRM are new to the communities, they may often seem to operate at a snail's pace. On the other hand, service providers, operating alone or working jointly, work in predetermined time frames, or on deadlines determined their authorities or donors. This context must be appreciated and well addressed by all parties if the project is to succeed. ACORD has learned that a fine balance has to be struck for the project to run smoothly, and the interests of the parties involved served.

### **Community needs and priorities**

ACORD has learned that community needs and priorities are not necessary synonymous. CBNRM assumes that community members' interests and aspirations are the same. The differences are usually defined along such factors as ethnicity, cultural, social, economic and religious affiliation. The OCT has four main ethnic groups; the Bayei, Bakgalagadi, Basarwa and Bambukushu. These groups are not always willing to work together.

Because of these differences in project development, strategies for addressing constraints do not always conform to one another. In most cases the need to attain immediate tangible benefits exceeds long-term benefits resulting from sustainable conservation of natural resources.

### **Voluntary work versus personal incentives**

All the staff on the Board of Trustees and the VTCs is voluntary and does so on part time basis. Rural people rely on farming for their livelihood, and so, have busy and tiring schedules. More often than not, they have less time for community work. When they do make time for it, they naturally expect some form of incentive. The lines between voluntary work, personal profit and community interests must be clearly

drawn from the onset. For instance, OCT board members are well known for having awarded themselves hefty sitting allowances. One needs to understand the history, the frustration, the time put in and the expectations raised around this CBNRM project to understand the allowances issue. The voluntary, personal and community lines were not clearly drawn from the onset. Further more the community members who had no previous experience with a project such as theirs were not in a position to appreciate that such a decision would hurt their reputation and their budget.

### **CBNRM projects and joint venture arrangements**

Part of the rationale behind encouraging communities to develop joint venture business partnerships with the private sector is that they would become 'business partners' initially and, ultimately, the community would take over the activities once the necessary business skills have been developed. For many CBO like OCT this has not happened. The implementation framework does not provide guidelines on how this is expected to happen. Further no unit has been given the responsibility for facilitating this skills development aspect.

People living in controlled hunting areas have little or no expertise on partnerships, contracts, management, marketing, tourism, and business in general. It was assumed, in the OCT case, which Mitchelletti Bates Safari Company would teach its employees how to run tourist- related business, with a view of empowering them to take over in future. The missing link was that no one was given the responsibility for monitoring that this happens and setting the time frames within which it was to happen.

Until recently, people have not had the opportunity to make management decisions on using the resources found in their areas. Management is an important element of CBNRM since it implies both opportunities and responsibilities and focuses on development and sustainable utilisation for the benefit of the community and for future generations.

### **Lack of strategies for equitable benefit distribution**

Although OCT generated some money from its ventures, it had no prior strategies on how to transfer the benefits equitably to its communities. Their efforts in this direction were as a result of the pressure community expectations. The consequent

plans then tended to be piece meal for an institution that could have done so much better.

Most of the money earned was used for administration and running costs in establishing the institution as a business. They have an office, a fleet of vehicles, staff and other office related operational activities with their corresponding costs that they needed to cater for.

Efforts to distribute the funds were made by way of allocating each village a fixed sum of money that village committees could be applied for, to finance village development projects. This did not happen as intended because people lacked the skills and capacity to plan and implement 'large' scale projects. ACORD sees the need to work with and support the institution to enable them to effectively undertake the task.

#### **Multiple village versus single village approach**

Initiating and implementing a CBNRM project where resources are allocated to more than one village is challenging. In this scenario there are often groups of people with different ethnic backgrounds, diverse interests, different ways of interpreting and approaching issues. This in itself has got inherent conflicts, which may delay the process. For example, people of one village may believe that they are not getting equal employment opportunities like people from another village, or that they are not equally represented in the leadership structures. This issue has, and still is attracting much attention in Okavango Community Trust.

#### **High staff turnover**

Staff turn over is an important issue for a growing CBO such as the OCT. As an institutions capacity is being built so is the capacity and skills of the individuals involved. If these individuals decide to leave the organisation they take what they have learnt with them. The few successes that have been gained in this area have been lost by way of people leaving the CBO and/or the villages for more permanent and formal jobs and various other reasons. OCT, like many other CBOs and NGOs does not compete well on the staff remuneration front, so people will readily leave when they are offered better packages.

Particularly crippling has been the departure of the understudy general manager(s). The current manager is not from any of the villages. he was employed by OCT but paid by the business partner (MBS) as a gesture of business skill support. This arrangement was meant to only last one year while the trust got organised and trained or employed one of their own to run the business. Four years later the first manager is still in post and OCT has employed a new understudy manager because the first one left.

Another dimension to the turn over issue is that of office tenure. Board members and the VTCs are elected to a two-year office term. Because there is no mechanism for passing on skills this means that every two years capacity building efforts will begin from scratch.

## **CONCLUSION**

Botswana's CBNRM involves a multi-stakeholder approach. That is, different players, namely government departments, CBOs, NGOs, donors, and the private sector have roles to play. Communication and collaboration between them are essential components for the success of CBNRM.

It is equally important for stakeholders to strive to understand the needs and interests of one another, as well as their operating parameters. Time frames, operating schedules, and expectations of different stakeholders, if not properly addressed, could impact negatively on project development and implementation.

ACORD recommends involving communities in projects right from the start. This generates interest and ensures maximum participation, transparency accountability and, above all, breeds success; this could have been the story of OCT if the right procedures were followed. Still all is not lost. The determination shown by the active OCT representatives and now the communities, by the various NGOs and supporting government departments as well as the good will shown by the business partner (MBS), indicates that there is still something worth staying and persevering for. Everybody involved has a stake in ensuring that the project works and that is why it is en route to achieving it's goal.