

**CASS / PLAAS Inaugural Meeting On**  
**"Community Based Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa:**  
**A Regional Programme of Analysis and Communication"**  
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**Theme Presentation on**  
**"Governance and Community Capacity"**  
**By**  
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*"The development paradigm which we are articulating here has little to do with the transfer of resources  
... development is about facilitating resourcefulness..."*  
- Allan Kaplan

*"As in much of Africa, the resource tenure frameworks and the power dynamics are far too complex to  
permit even the most resourceful of individuals to drive a straight line through them."*  
- Thembela Kepe, Ben Cousins and Stephen Turner

### **I. Introduction**

The quotations given above distil the two major thrusts of this presentation. The first relates to substance, to what in my view it is that the Programme should be looking at in CBNRM - the abilities of local actors to collectively manage their natural resources with resourcefulness and adaptability. The second relates to methodology; the complexities involved in achieving this set of abilities, the complexities involved in understanding them, and how a focus might be found which may provide cohesiveness - if not a straight line - for our analysis.

CBNRM, in the idiom of contemporary scholarship, forms a large part of the "narrative" linking conservation and development concerns (cf. Roe, 1991, 1995; Adams and Hulme, forthcoming). Aside from its attractions to a donor community searching for such linkages, it has provided a catalyst for new configurations of multi-disciplinary scholarship, particularly between systemic approaches in conservation biology and the social sciences. At the same time it has fuelled a new contemporary "counter-narrative" which questions its assumptions and results. This "counter-narrative" has several strands. Among these are the arguments of ecologists who seek to "de-link" the conservation of large mammals and rural development (cf. Barrett and Arcase, 1995) and social scientists who see CBNRM as elite manipulation of rural aspirations, or as a simplistic and over-generalised approach to the complexities of local governance and rural development. Other social scientists see CBNRM as holding great promise but unfulfilled expectation, either out of political cynicism (Constantin, 1996) or inadequate implementation (Agrawal, 1997). There can be no doubt that debates on CBNRM will figure prominently in academic and developmental discourse over the next decade. Given its considerable record in CBNRM, Southern Africa is well placed to inform this discourse and the CASS/PLAAS programme is a timely initiative. The realisation of its potential will, however, depend on an efficient and

judicious use of its limited resources over its four identified areas of investigation; a parsimonious approach, which this discussion on governance and community capacities seeks to take.

## **II. Relevant Sub-Topics**

Having advocated parsimony, I am, however, first going to indicate a "shopping list" of issues relevant to the topic of governance in CBNRM. The list is not exhaustive, but the fact that I indicate 13 issues is a pointer to the multiplex nature of the topic. The list that follows is not necessarily in any order of priority; my prioritisation will emerge in section III of this paper.

### **1. Defining "Community" - Boundary Delineation**

"Community" is one of the most enduring concepts in social science. Equally, the definition of the concept has proved to be one of the most enduringly elusive tasks of the discipline. In particular, the different and frequently superimposed principles of communities of place, communities of use and communities of interest have created problems for common property theory. In my view, it would be futile for the Programme to seek a common, polyvalent definition of the term. A functional approach will be more productive, looking for the profiles of interaction required for people to "organise themselves for effective common pool natural resource management at levels below and beyond the effective reach of state bureaucratic management." (Barrow and Murphree, forthcoming.)

There is, however, one component of community which cannot be evaded - boundary delineation. Any regime, however partial, transient or dynamic, requires such delineation in terms of membership and jurisdiction. Without this, authority (however derived) and responsibility (however determined) are meaningless. Thus research on governance cannot ignore this issue.

### **2. Internal Legitimisation of Authority and Responsibility**

Legitimising local regimes and their leadership cannot be ignored. Frequently, in rural Southern Africa these rest on a mix of customary and consensual rationalisations in dynamic flux. The detail below this dichotomy is often elusive and tends to be missed in our analyses.

### **3. Intra-Locality Differentiation**

This should be understood, and leads on to the issue of "equity" in communal governance. "Equity" can be a construct of the researcher, and here care should be exercised to avoid the imposition in analysis of external value systems. Internally, it can be a matter of institutionally derived acceptability, which both imposes itself on organisation and is itself modified by organisation. Again, this is a dynamic synergy. In what ways does CBNRM impact on this relationship?

### **4. External Legitimisation of Local Natural Resource Management Regimes**

To what degree do CBNRM projects and programmes confer authority and responsibility on localised regimes? To a large extent the answer to this question lies in legislation, tenure status, bureaucratic culture, elite interest and project or programmatic implementation. But it is also determined by local assertiveness. To what extent is devolution pushed by local action and development along a spectrum from denial to de facto to de jure jurisdiction?

### **5. Cognate Legal and Policy Environment**

Related to the point above on external legitimisation is the issue of cognate policy and legislative change not directly aimed at natural resource management but nevertheless important for CBNRM. Most of the countries in the region are currently involved in policy and legislative reform in areas falling into this category, for instance local government, land reform, economic structural adjustment, affirmative action, mines and mineral legislation, and constitutional reform. All of these constitute a background legal and policy environment, which at points can emerge to have a direct impact on CBNRM.

## **6. Commercialisation and the Private Sector**

The commercialisation of natural resource use is a trend of growing importance to CBNRM. Indeed a large number of CBNRM programmes place much of their rationalisation on the exchange values of natural resources. Paralleling this trend is the increased involvement of the private sector in the arena of conservation and natural resource management, a trend that has been noted worldwide. Increasingly, relationships between communities and the private sector are direct and unmediated by government agencies. The evolution of such relationships has a bearing on local governance and cannot be omitted from the research agenda of this aspect of the Programme.

## **7. Fiscal Autonomy in Local Governance**

Even in robust devolutionist approaches to CBNRM, this issue is often given little attention. Without such autonomy local regimes retain a degree of dependence, either on government, aid agencies or NGOs. Research questions to be asked include:

- a) The degree of such dependence;
- b) Whether project or programme interventions encourage it or whether dependence is a function of an absence of revenue-generating capacity;
- c) Whether such dependence is a result of inflated administrative budgets and/or poor fiscal controls;
- d) What local training needs may be required; and
- e) Whether there is a local will to remove this type of dependency and what corrective changes are in evidence.

## **8. Professional and Civil Science**

Frequently, CBNRM is taken to mean devolution in terms of benefit, but compliance in terms of natural resource management according to the dictates of "science" based external professional management. To what degree do CBNRM projects allow experimentation and the development of local civil science to take place? To what extent do CBNRM projects coalesce professional and local science in a new partnership of learning through the learning that comes from adaptive management, rather than simply giving a perfunctory nod to "ITK"? Is management simply "trial-and-error" or is it genuinely adaptive through a system of negative feedback?

## **9. Social and Ecological Topography**

A fundamental and generalised dissonance between the social and ecological characteristics needed for

self-sufficient, localised natural resource management regimes has been noted in the literature (Murphree, 1996; Turner, 1996). Communal, non-bureaucratized regimes require personalised interaction between members. This has a spatial implication: relatively tight residential propinquity. Self-sufficiency requires an adequate resource base, usually implying a spatially large area. Ecological variability or cultural patterns of residence frequently determine whether these two requisites can be brought together. The region provides a gradient of such contrasts (e.g. contrast the Zambezi Valley with Damaraland) and is ideal for the comparative analysis of the variable.

## **10. Regime Hierarchies**

I know of no serious CBNRM approaches that advocate local autarky. It is recognised that local natural resource management regimes must operate within larger systems of co-operation and control. Communal regimes have their neighbours and in the land tenure mosaic of the sub-continent these may be neighbours of different types. Transhumant modes of use, mobile species of wildlife and ecological knock-on effects may require co-ordination at different levels of magnitude. Thus communal governance cannot be solely inward looking; it must have the capacity to deal with and participate in systems of governance at larger scales. The evolution of this competence is, again, a topic for the research agenda of the Programme.

## **11. Project and Programme Objectives**

Mention has been made in the introduction to the interest generated by CBNRM because of its potential to bring together conservation and development objectives. This is both its strength and weakness - weakness since internal objectives may be considerably different from external objectives, but external objectives may easily become dominant because of power differentials. In such cases local governance becomes difficult and its leadership is likely to lose its legitimacy.

Most CBNRM initiatives in the region have been initiated under the aegis, or with the support of, government conservation agencies. Even when they are justified under development objectives, I suggest that most of them tend to be operationalised with conservation objectives as paramount, "conservation" being defined in terms set by donor cultures and conservation professionals. The conservation perspectives of local farmers tend to be submerged. Research questions that arise include:

- a) What the initiating motivations of different parties were;
- b) In which direction has implementation pushed objective; and
- c) What the effect on local governance has been.

## **12. External Agency Intervention**

External agents, inexorably, influence local governance by the power that they wield, the way that they intrude and the personal or functional alliances that they forge. This set of issues is both critical and difficult to research, but cannot be evaded when addressing the issue of governance.

## **13. Cultures of Natural Resource Use**

Local cultures of natural resource use have long been seen as important in establishing continuation between past and present in natural resource management. All cultures have their sets of natural resource

use norms and the rationalisations behind them. The research danger here is to be content with an anthropological catalogue of these norms and practices without searching for the essence of their derivation. I suggest that a fruitful field of investigation here is the presence or absence of a sense of finiteness in resource endowments, a sense that articulates to institutions of collective control over use.

### **III. The Key Issue: Process and Evolution in Governance and Community Capacity**

Success in CBNRM is too often seen, often unthinkingly, as a linear progression towards a predetermined set of fixed goals. Analytically, this is convenient as it enables us to set criteria and measure progress along a spectrum of degrees of accomplishment, in governance and community capacity as well as the other themes chosen for the Programme.

In reality, we know that "progress" in CBNRM projects and programmes is not linear. What, in the light of our own criteria, is judged as static or recalcitrant may shift to what we consider "success," while "success cases" may seem to falter and fail. Nor is "progress" in CBNRM predictable. Our predetermination of goals can never be more than partial and indeterminate. Furthermore, each of the variables I have mentioned in Section II is dynamic and can evolve in ways difficult to predict; in combination they present a vast set of permutations impossible to predict with certainty.

A way out of this analytic impasse is to radically revise our mindsets, to see process as an end as well as a means, and to accept that the core objective of CBNRM is communal capacity for dynamic and adaptive governance in the arena of natural resource use. This revision of mind-set parallels that of Kaplan's paradigm for development in the quote that prefaces this presentation: "... development is about facilitating resourcefulness." Elsewhere, in the monograph quoted, Kaplan states: "The whole point of development is to enable people to participate in the governance of their own lives. If this is not seen then the entire development endeavour becomes a farce." If one substitutes "CBNRM" for the word "development" in this quote my perspective is clear.

The operationalisation of this perspective in a research strategy for the CASS/PLAAS Programme is outlined in the following, concluding section.

### **IV. Governance and Community Capacity: A Research Strategy for the Programme**

Explicit in the CASS/PLAAS Programme is a comparative methodology. A comparative methodology will, however, be inadequate if it yields only a catalogue of similarities and differences within the region across the range of variables mentioned in this paper. It is the interaction between these variables in specific, localised contexts producing a set of profiles of process which will provide the kind of comparison which advances our analysis.

It is for this reason that I suggest that the Programme's methodology on comparative governance in CBNRM should be rooted in a set of (old fashioned?) historical case studies. In taking this approach the Programme would be capitalising on its comparative advantage - the presence of a variety of experiments in CBNRM in the region with considerable time-depth. Each of the case studies selected should have a sufficient track record to reveal process over time and be sufficiently replete to reveal interaction between the variables selected for special attention. This selection should be carefully done to ensure that

the case studies are comparable, allowing an analysis that can distinguish between the generic and the specific in final synthesis.

In terms of practical programming, how might this work out? Assuming that the main contentions of this paper are accepted, and recognising that the workshop may wish to modify them, I suggest the following national strategy:

1. The core topic for research under this theme should be the impact of CBNRM programmes on processes enhancing communal capacities for dynamic and adaptive governance in natural resource use and management.
2. The title for this aspect of the Programme might be something like "Profiles of Process in Governance in CBNRM."
3. At least three scholars should be selected to conduct the research from three countries in the region, each committed to examine two case studies in his/her country.
4. The study should be programmed to last over 30 months of the Programme, with the following notional schedule:

a) Months 1-6

Recruitment of three member research team, initial meeting of the team to agree on focus variables, case histories, methodologies.

b) Months 7-18

Field research, preparation of initial case study analyses, ending with a second team meeting to critique case studies, agree on synthetic analysis and report/publication outline.

c) Months 19-24

Text preparation and editing

d) Months 25-30

Final editing, followed by publication in Month 30.

It is recognised that this strategy and timetable deviates from the suggestion that "the Programme should focus on one CBNRM issue or theme at a time," since the assumption is that other themes will be pursued concurrently. It is also recognised that this proposal will require a budget for team meetings. However, I feel that it is only through team interaction over time that a cumulative analytic aggregation and regional synthesis can be achieved.

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