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Panel: Transcending barriers: The role of networks
in natural resource management

Network who?

The impact of “networks” on the participation of communities in community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) in Botswana¹

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Synopsis

This short paper aims to question the impact of “networks” on the participation of communities in CBNRM in Botswana from a specific programme implementation point of view. The CBNRM Support Programme was launched in 1999 by IUCN/Botswana and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation with 3 defined CBNRM networking roles with the ultimate aim to create an environment conducive for sustainable support to CBNRM activities at local level. Midway the programme implementation period a critical analysis shows a lack of active involvement of the communities and little tangible benefit in what a network stands for: information sharing, learning, co-ordination and participation in decision-making.

Introduction

Community-based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) in Botswana has gradually taken shape since the mid eighties but became firmly established as a rural development strategy during the implementation of the Natural Resources Management Project (NRMP) that ended in 1999. During this USAID funded programme CBNRM projects at community level started and showed potential. Necessary legislation, policies and guidelines at various Ministries were adapted to allow for decentralisation of natural resources management to community levels. A number of NGOs took up the role of project facilitator or “honest broker” and the growing number of joint ventures between Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and safari companies showed the interest of the private sector in CBNRM.

The end of the nineties saw a steadily increasing number of organisations (“the stakeholders”) interested in CBNRM: CBOs, NGOs, Government Departments, private sector companies, donors and research institutes, and the call for communication between them, co-ordination and sharing and learning from each others experiences became apparent.

¹ This paper can be downloaded from the *CBNRM Net* web site at: <<http://www.cbnrm.net/index.html>>.

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Launch of a networking programme

IUCN/Botswana and SNV/Netherlands Development Organisation in Botswana launched the CBNRM Support Programme in 1999 (- 2003). The main aim of the programme is to create an enabling environment for sustainable support to CBNRM activities undertaken in rural communities in Botswana by achieving 3 objectives:

1. To assist in the further development of a CBO Network (BOCOBONET) as a national advocacy organisation representing the interests of its member CBOs;
2. To document lessons learnt in CBNRM and to disseminate the information to all CBNRM stakeholders through publications and a web site; and
3. To improve dialogue and co-ordination between the CBNRM stakeholders.

The Botswana Community-based Organisations Network (BOCOBONET) was established in 1998 and its membership has grown over the years to approximately 40 CBOs who are engaged in various CBNRM activities. The network has few staff and little funding, and finds it hard to survive. However, BOCOBNET has managed to gain recognition amongst the other stakeholders as membership organisation of CBOs in all relevant platforms.

The CBNRM Support Programme to-date (co)-published 14 papers (workshop proceedings, lessons learnt, CBNRM Status Reports – see annex) on various topics and distributes the papers to currently 400 addresses in Botswana and surrounding countries. This information as well as background information on CBNRM in Botswana and regular news updates can also be found on the web site of the programme. The number of site visitors per month averages nearly 200.

To improve the dialogue and co-ordination between all CBNRM stakeholders a National CBNRM Forum was established following the first National CBNRM Conference in July 1999 in Gaborone. The National CBNRM Forum and the district version in Ngamiland (the Okavango area) consist of representatives of the various stakeholders and they have met several times since 1999. In addition the Forum is increasingly recognised by all stakeholders as “truly representative” and “all inclusive” and is currently playing an important role in the further development of CBNRM as concept and as development approach.

Networking roles

The networking role of BOCOBNET is not a direct output of the CBNRM Support Programme and its operation, effectiveness and impact is beyond the programme’s control. The CBNRM Support Programme however developed 3 network dimensions, each with a specific role and output.

Web site <http://www.cbnrm.bw>

The web site was set-up targeting Botswana-based NGOs, private sector organisations and Government Departments who increasingly get access to the internet. The site provides a database of relevant CBNRM background information, documents, links to other websites and a news page on current CBNRM issues with the aim to provide references, to inform and to generate debate.

The CBNRM Occasional Paper series

The series is aimed at “CBNRM practitioners” in Botswana (CBO board members, relevant NGO and Government extension staff) and local authorities (Land Board, District

Council and District Administration) in the “CBNRM districts” (mainly in the northern and western part of Botswana). The readership is “non-academic” and topics and styles used are selected accordingly. Every paper is translated in Setswana and “academic language” is “translated” as much as possible during the editing process. The topics selected deal with pertinent issues (e.g. “legal rights to resources”, “improving women’s participation”³ and “joint venture options”) and the themes are described using as many case studies as possible.

The publication series is primarily regarded as a tool of documenting lessons learnt for the growing network of CBNRM practitioners. This network is growing steadily. The number of NGOs involved in CBNRM is 11 to-date. The number of Government departments with CBNRM-related activities is 7. The number of CBOs involved in CBNRM grew from 19 in 1997 to 61 in early 2002; the number of villages covered increased from 30 to 130; the number of joint venture agreements rose from 3 to 14; and the income generated through these JVAs increased from 1.4 million to approximately 8.0 million Pula.⁴

The CBNRM Support Programme mailing list counts 393 addressees (December 2001) who are sent the publications (an average of 4 per annum) free of charge.

<i>Composition CBNRM Support Programme mailing list</i>			
<i>Botswana</i>	255 (65%)	<i>Per stakeholder group:</i>	
<i>Namibia</i>	20	<i>Government</i>	155 (40%)
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	49	<i>NGOs</i>	78 (20%)
<i>Zambia</i>	14	<i>CBOs</i>	43 (11%)
<i>Mozambique</i>	16	<i>Others</i>	117 (29%)
<i>South Africa</i>	12		
<i>Others</i>	27		
<i>Total:</i>	393		

An increasing number of practitioners is reached through the publications with experiences gained in CBNRM project implementation. Better-informed practitioners are expected to perform more effectively. Practitioners as a network of people and organisations with a common goal are expected to consolidate CBNRM as a viable and sustainable development approach.

The National CBNRM Forum

The National CBNRM Forum was established as platform for broad stakeholder dialogue, facilitation, co-ordination and co-operation on CBNRM in Botswana. The Forum provides a neutral ground (outside Government) with equal representation of CBOs, NGOs, Government Departments and private sector. The main role of the Forum is to facilitate sharing of experiences and co-ordinated responses to issues facing CBNRM in Botswana. Examples are the response to a ministerial directive threatening the financial autonomy of CBOs in early 2001; the contribution to the CBNRM Policy in 2001 and the review of the Joint Venture Guidelines (currently ongoing).

³ The word “gender” and the accompanying “Gender and Development” framework were avoided in this paper.

⁴ At the time of writing (February 2002) 7 Botswana Pula equal 1 US\$.

Mid-term review

Towards the end of 2001 a mid-term review of the CBNRM Support Programme took place (PEER Consultants, December 2001) as well as an internal evaluation. A customer survey form to be returned when receipt of future publications was appreciated accompanied the papers mailed in September and November 2001. In addition a web site visitor analysis was done in December 2001. The data were revealing.

The web site is for academics

From the reactions and questions on the programme site (<http://www.cbnrm.bw>) it becomes clear that the overwhelming majority of site visitors have an academic interest in CBNRM, the majority of which comes from outside Botswana. The site might be an interesting source of information and might publicise the Botswana CBNRM approach (relevant to attract donor support) but as such does not contribute to an enabling environment for sustainable support to CBNRM activities in the country. It does not contribute to stakeholders being more informed, nor does it generate a debate on the principles of CBNRM in Botswana.

Papers require reading

The interviews conducted by PEER Consultants as part of the 2001 mid-term review seem to paint a similar picture as above. Responses from CBOs (in Ngamiland) would suggest that the papers are not widely read by this category of stakeholders. Respondents feel that the papers are “too long and too complicated”. However the majority of respondents also feel that further papers should be published. This is contradicted by the very low response to the customer survey that took place during the same period (see box below).

NGO and Government staff does generally appreciate the Publication Series and “browse through the documents” or “occasionally use them as reference document”. The percentage of returned forms during the recent customer survey (36% and 33% respectively) however does not entirely support this appreciation.

The “other” stakeholders (private sector companies, consultants, research institutes and donors) value the publications and the response of this category on the customer survey was just over 50%.

	<i>Mailing list</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<i>Returned forms</i>	<i>% of total returned forms</i>
<i>CBOs</i>	43	11%	6 (14%)	5%
<i>NGOs</i>	78	20%	28 (36%)	19%
<i>Gov.</i>	155	40%	51 (33%)	35%
<i>Others</i>	117	29%	59 (50%)	41%
<i>Total</i>	393	100%	144	100%

Without being conclusive, the data show a continuum from community organisations less likely to read the “lessons learnt” on the one end to the academics eager to learn about the Botswana experience on the other end. A positive impact of the booklets may be more informed extension officers in Government or NGOs, which may lead to more sustainable

support to CBNRM activities at community level. The community organisations and their leadership however do not actively seem to absorb the available information with a danger of perpetuated dependency on information from outsiders.

An additional layer of consultation

The National CBNRM Forum was established as platform for broad stakeholder dialogue and co-ordination on CBNRM in Botswana. Its networking role is recognised by Government and other stakeholders. Its active involvement in policy formulation in providing technical advice to for example the Department of Wildlife and National Parks and its role in information sharing for example by organising the second national CBNRM Conference in November 2001 in Gaborone bears evidence to that. These developments are considered positive. The potential dangers of the network however are skewed representation and poor communication.

The individual communities who are involved in CBNRM are represented by BOCOBONET. Not all communities are members of this CBO Network. There is an imminent danger that the representation is not that all-inclusive. This is obviously a drawback of any type of representation but in a multi-cultural and multi-sectoral rural setting with poorly developed communication channels this danger might become real. The National CBNRM Forum would in that case purport to speak on behalf of all Community-based Organisations and by doing so creating an additional layer of consultation making communities less rather than more vocal.

Conclusions

Networking can be useful in “creating a enabling environment” for successful CBNRM implementation, to build capacity of the participants by learning from each other, to enrich the debate with various viewpoints on the principles of CBNRM. The impact of networking in Botswana on the participation of communities in CBNRM is however limited. The community organisations who are supposed to be part of the described CBNRM networks hardly participate let alone benefit in terms of sharing information, enhanced co-ordination of services and co-operation with other organisations.

The CBNRM Support Programme web site obviously not, but also written documents appear not to be very accessible for community organisations. To make things worse, the National CBNRM Forum has created an extra layer of consultation that is expected to represent the interests of the communities. However, with the communication between Forum and individual communities being virtually non-existent one can doubt the level of participation of communities in CBNRM-related information sharing and decision-making. Attributing factors include poor telecommunication in the rural areas of Botswana; limited levels of education in communities; an underdeveloped “culture” of recording and disseminating information and poor leadership skills.

Midway programme implementation it proves to be very difficult for the CBNRM Support Programme in Botswana to establish networks that benefit rural poor communities.

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Annex

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