

CBNRM in Botswana

Revisiting the assumptions after 10 years of implementation

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Introduction

This paper has been prepared as a background paper on CBNRM in Botswana for the World Parks Congress in Durban in 2003. It provides a brief description of the development of the CBNRM approach in Botswana and its status today. It also addresses the concerns of a growing chorus of local critics who are doubtful about the impact of CBNRM. Questions are raised on why treating the nation's wildlife resources differently from the nation's mineral resources, on skewed benefit distribution at community level and on the seemingly invisible relation between community benefits and conservation of natural resources. Answers to these questions would contribute to the discussion on community involvement in protected area management.

Given the relatively short time of implementation (the first community in Botswana that assumed natural resources management responsibility was the Chobe Enclave in 1993) it is argued that it is not easy to measure the impact of the approach on both rural development *and* the conservation of the country's natural resources. However, it is possible to reassess the assumptions, which underlay this innovative natural resources management approach. With most of the building blocks in place for a potentially successful implementation, the Botswana CBNRM practitioners have reached a critical moment. In the light of the present criticism were their assumptions based on realistic assessments or on myths?

Community-based Natural Resources Management – the case of Botswana

In terms of natural resources Botswana is very fortunate. It boasts rich flora and fauna, while the population density is low (1.68 million in 2001 spread out over 582.000 km²). More importantly, its economy and service structure are predominantly driven by a profitable diamond trade:

- 18% of the country is protected area;
- 24% of the country is zoned as Wildlife Management Area (WMA), subdivided into Controlled Hunting Areas (CHAs);
- Low population densities allowed for allocation of CHAs to the sparsely distributed communities, especially in the west (Kalahari) and the north (Okavango and Chobe);

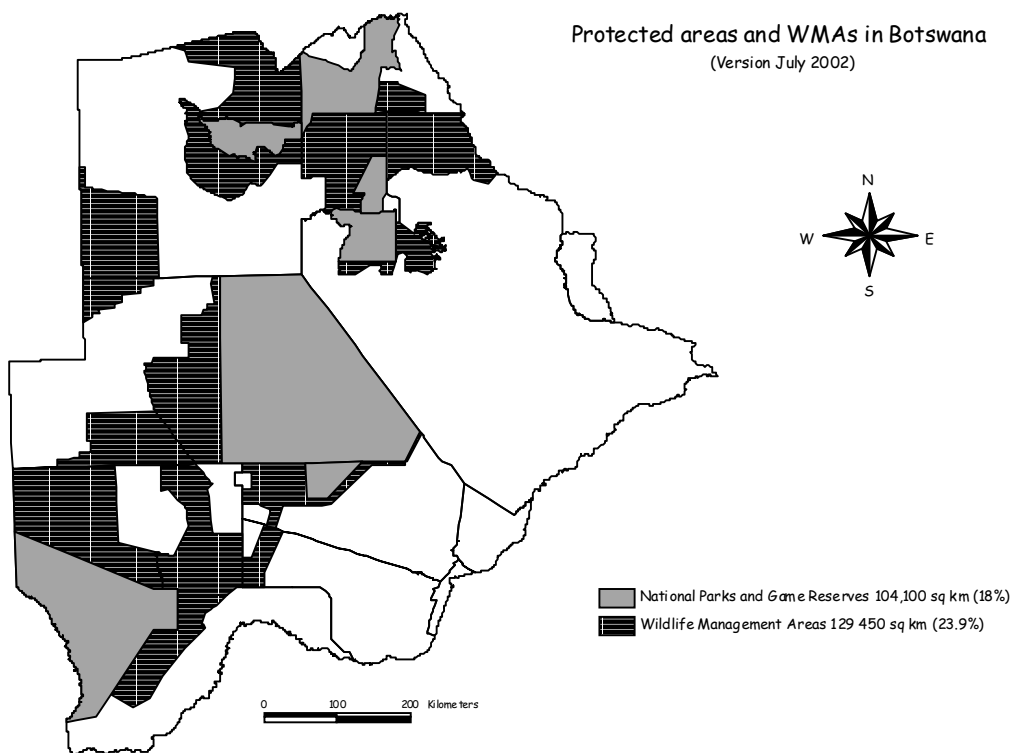
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Valuable contributions to this paper were made by Jan Broekhuis, who works in Botswana since 1991 and is presently the Assistant Director National Parks and Game Reserves at the Department of Wildlife and National Parks in Gaborone; by Masego Madzwamuse, presently the country representative of IUCN in Botswana and in that capacity managing a range of natural resources-related programmes; and by Ruud Jansen, independent consultant, who has worked in the field of natural resources management in Botswana since 1983.

- The relative national wealth decreased the competition over valuable natural resources and allowed for decentralisation of community user rights (and benefits).

These factors influenced the initial development of CBNRM in the beginning of the nineties.

CBNRM started in Botswana with the USAID-funded Natural Resources Management Project (NRMP) 1989-1999. In most districts, land use and settlement plans were in place and WMA and CHA boundaries designated. Subsistence hunting and gathering made an important contribution to livelihood security of a sizeable proportion of the rural population in the remote areas of the country. The project found an environment conducive for CBNRM in Botswana. With 25 million US\$ and an army of consultants working with Government agencies such as the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), it took 10 years for CBNRM to evolve into the approach as we know it today.



Map of protected areas and Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in Botswana².

Most of the work towards developing CBNRM in Botswana included policy development (e.g. the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act in 1992, Joint Venture Guidelines 1996/1999, resource user leases, CBNRM implementation

² Jan Broekhuis drew the map.

guidelines and the draft CBNRM Policy). The NRMP was further instrumental in the development of Management Plans for community-managed WMAs. It piloted community-based natural resource related enterprise development and was closely involved in the establishment and monitoring of the first CBNRM project in Botswana in the Chobe Enclave³.

The impact of the NRMP, not only in terms of funding, innovation and technical assistance but especially in playing a catalytic role, has been enormous. In 1989 a WWF mission visited Botswana to advise upon a sustainable wildlife utilisation model in its WMAs. It found huge wildlife areas in 7 districts covering 129.000 km² where very little management took place: largely uncontrolled citizen hunting, and State-controlled commercial hunting, with no community management involvement whatsoever.

<p>The CBNRM model in Botswana</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demarcated Controlled Hunting Areas are “units of production” for a community(ies) in or adjacent to the area; • Community(ies) are required to establish a legally registered community organisation (in most cases a trust); • CBO Constitution and bye-laws have to show proof of fair representation and accountability; • CHA Management Plan needs to be drafted to show intended use and conservation of natural resources; • 15-year Natural Resource User Lease can be obtained from Government; • Lease allows commercial use of resources, sub-leasing and other joint venture arrangements; while • Lease requires annual audit of community financial management.
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Today (National CBNRM Forum 2001 figures) the management of WMAs has changed dramatically. 46 Community-based Organisations (CBOs) have registered constitutions and are, in different ways, using natural resources in a controlled manner. These 46 CBOs cover 100 villages while so far 14 CBOs have signed Joint Venture Agreements (mostly in commercial hunting) with the private sector that generate 9.0 million Pula⁴ and direct employment for approximately 500 people.

Citizen hunting is substantially decreased (24% of the 7168 animals on the annual quota). 33% of the species are hunted in private concessions (resource fees accrue to the State) while 43% are hunted in community concessions (100% of the

revenue in terms of concession and quota fees accrues to the community)⁵. The actual and perceived value of wildlife has increased tremendously over the years.

Communities have gained legal access (through the lease) to natural resources and generally consider that an important step in their empowerment process (Taylor, 2000). The CBOs have become important players in Botswana’s development process.

The achievements to-date are not only due to the NRMP project. Policy development over the last decade showed Government commitment to buy into the concept. Other international organisations offering financial and technical assistance, as well as local NGOs facilitating projects at local level, were instrumental in further developing and implementing CBNRM in Botswana as one of the most decentralised natural resources management models in southern Africa. The catalytic role of the multi-million NRMP

³ For more information on the design and impact of the Chobe Enclave CBNRM project see Alexander et al (1999) and Jones (2003).

⁴ At the time of writing 1 US\$ equals 5.5 Botswana Pula.

⁵ These figures are based on an analysis of the (draft) 2003 hunting quota (excluding wild cats, hares, vervet monkeys and porcupines). For example the distribution of elephant quota over citizen hunting areas, commercial concessions and community areas is 18 (8%), 90 (43%) and 102 (49%).

project was the key to kick-start this process but the question that remains today is whether there is enough fuel to keep the engine running.

CBNRM – combining conservation with rural development objectives

The CBNRM concept was adopted by DWNP as a natural resource conservation objective. The Department realised that conservation policies could not be effectively implemented in the huge expanse of western Botswana without commitment of resident communities to actively contribute to this goal. It was assumed that by allocating natural resource user rights to the community living with the resources an incentive (the right to commercialise) was offered to encourage the conservation of the very natural resources the user community was depending upon.

One could argue that DWNP was so generous with decentralising management responsibility because its prime conservation efforts were directed towards the management of National Parks and Game Reserves that constitute 18% of the country. The WMAs where the CBNRM activities take place are all located adjacent to protected areas and have a clear “buffer zone” function. Allowing communities to manage the “buffer zone” relieves the Department from costly involvement and relieves the protected areas from communities’ pressure, making the management of these areas “much easier”. The introduction of CBNRM in the WMAs explains to a degree the present absence of participation of local communities in the management of National Parks and Game Reserves and, with exception of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve the lack of demand for such involvement.

The introduction of CBNRM had a second objective (GoB, 2001) to enhance opportunities for communities to earn benefits from natural resources in order to initiate rural development. In implementation this objective quickly took prominence over the first objective. The most popular and hitherto most successful practice is sub-leasing user rights to the private sector (in 14 community areas part of the hunting quota and concession rights are sold to commercial safari companies). The revenues and employment generated so far are proportionately significant to local incomes in the participating rural economies (case study in Ukhwi by Arntzen, 2003). Most CBNRM projects are situated in western and northern Botswana in very remote areas often without surface water, limited groundwater potential, hardly any arable agricultural potential and limited infrastructure. CBNRM results in an “output” that no other production system has ever achieved in Botswana’s outback.

The (draft) CBNRM policy, other policy documents and implementation guidelines aim higher than simply selling quotas. It is assumed that CBNRM opportunities will encourage growth of community enterprises and that returns from sub-leases are reinvested in productive development. In this way poverty and dependence on hand-outs can be reduced in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Community-based management – community who?

The communities participating in CBNRM in Botswana are in most cases clearly defined in geographical sense. One or more communities are situated in or adjacent to a CHA over which they may acquire user rights. Conflicts over natural resources between

communities are not a major issue due to low population densities but intra-community interest conflicts are!

The decision-making model applied in CBNRM in Botswana is a participatory democracy at village level. The rules of the democracy are described in the CBO constitution approved by all community members. Most constitutions prescribe that important decisions are made by the general membership, all constitutions institute executive boards to implement community decisions and to be responsible for daily management. Also financial management is the responsibility of the board for which it is accountable to the general membership. The use of benefits of CBNRM is generally decided upon by the membership. Income is usually set aside for administration and reinvestment in projects. In very few cases is cash distributed at household level.

The board has the difficult task to ensure *representative* decision-making, which in theory goes further than merely being elected by the general membership every other year. Communities in Botswana are not homogeneous entities. They consist of men and women, rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick, and people of different ethnical origin. Different groupings have different interests in natural resources utilisation. These interests are not fixed either, they might vary as per issue and over time. The stakes are high as natural resources are vital inputs in securing a livelihood in rural Botswana. In this context it would be “romantic” to think that community decisions can be made on a consensus basis. There will always be compromises. This is acceptable if all community members have an equal opportunity to participate in decision-making *and* if leadership has a sense of responsibility to protect the interests of the weak.

Both moral principles have been infused in the (draft) CBNRM Policy (Gov, 2001) but application has virtually been left to community leadership.

Waning support for the further development of CBNRM

During and immediately after the NRMP there was considerable support for CBNRM:

- Financial support for the establishment of CBOs, design of management plans, infrastructure projects;
- Financial and technical assistance for the development and implementation of training programmes; and
- Financial support for NGOs to facilitate (in a brokering position) the gradual growth of the CBOs and their natural resources management capacity.

However, Botswana has become a medium-income country and this has prompted international donors and support organisations to phase out their interventions. This impacted negatively on the CBOs but also has had rather disastrous consequences for the fledgling NGO sector in the country. NGOs in Botswana do not have a local financial resource base and fully depend on international support. The Government has not stepped in to fill the gap that is left behind by donors and virtually all environmental NGOs are currently facing severe financial problems. As a result the NGOs cannot afford anymore to play the role of broker in the further development and consolidation of CBNRM.

Case studies

Ngwaa Khobee XeyaTrust (NKXT) in Ukhwi

NKXT represents the communities of Ukhwi, Ncaang and Ngwatle (835 people) in the management of CHA KD1 (12.180 km²). The population consists of Bushmen (80%) and the more dominant Bakgalagadi (20%). The development of the constitution and management plan took 5 years aiming to arrive at a decision-making structure based on family groupings to ensure fair representation of the clans (tribes) between the 3 villages and in the overall board. The facilitation of this process involved local and foreign NGOs and was expensive.

In 2001 the trust was in the second year of a joint venture with a safari company. The trust sold 30% of the quota (desert species without lion) dividing the remainder for subsistence hunting over the family groups. Income from quota and concession fees was 185.000 Pula. In addition the company employed 25 people during the hunting season.

Roughly 75% of the income was used to hire trust staff (financial management and natural resource monitors/guides), for running a trust vehicle and convening meetings. The remainder was invested in a community campsite.

Problems arose in 2002 when the support organisations left the area, a new board was elected lacking exposure to trust plans and bye-laws and the quota decreased lowering the income to a point that trust administration could no longer be afforded.

Okavango Community Trust (OCT) north of the Okavango Delta

OCT (covering 5 villages around Seronga, 6431 people) was conceived by the resident safari company in the area. The constitution (1995) was drawn up by the company lawyers hereby giving far-reaching decision-making power to a (small) board. A small village elite has dominated the board ever since. The company has been able to renew contracts without going for tender.

The OCT area is rich in wildlife. OCT sells the entire quota including 12 elephants to the company. Income of OCT in 2001 was an estimated 1.4 million Pula. In 6 consecutive years virtually no benefits accrued to the 5 participating villages with exception of an aborted effort to establish 5 community shops and financial contribution to funerals.

Nearly all funds went to the “administration” of the project: offices, vehicles, training of board members and meeting costs (transport and allowances).

Source: National CBNRM Forum (2002) and project reports

Governments tend to think in projects and preferably implement them in a blanket coverage fashion. There is a tendency amongst extension officers to assume that, by using a few necessary instruments (constitution in place, management plan accepted, lease acquired and joint venture agreement) and a few training sessions of CBO staff, they have developed a community organisation that is able to give sustained direction to the community members “as managers of their natural environment”. Government does not seem eager to make resources available for long-term capacity building efforts.

CBNRM in Botswana – what were the assumptions?

Ten years of design, refinement and implementation of the CBNRM approach justifies some reflection. The objectives of CBNRM in Botswana are relatively clear but the approach was developed on the basis of assumptions that were not always spelled out. (With hindsight) the most important assumptions were:

- A foreign donor introduced CBNRM in Botswana as an appropriate conservation and rural development approach. It was assumed that over time CBNRM is politically accepted and institutionally embedded to guarantee continued support;
- CBNRM is all about devolving management authority to the community level. It was assumed that community members are eager to accept this authority since “user rights” mean “direct benefits”;
- It was also assumed that the accrued benefits make community members aware of the (commercial) value of the natural resources which in turn is a strong incentive for their conservation;

- CBNRM concerns the management of *communal* resources that are expected to benefit the entire *community*. As cash distribution is not really considered an option (small amounts have less impact) there was a drive towards reinvestment of income from quota and concessions into productive *community* enterprises. It was assumed that the remote areas have investment potential but especially that *community* structures are appropriate entities to manage businesses;
- Decision-making in CBNRM is structured through a participatory democracy at village level. The general membership, guided by an elected executive board of the CBO, takes important decisions in line with the adopted constitution. It was assumed that this model guarantees decision-making representative of all the natural resources management interests in the community; and
- CBNRM requires a process of gradually building the capacity of the community to exercise the awarded management responsibility. It was assumed that this process is finite and that the stage of maturity would be reached “in a few years”.

10 years CBNRM implementation – the assumptions revisited

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper it is presently very difficult to measure the extent to which CBNRM is achieving its objectives (natural resources conservation and rural development). The main constraining factors are a limited implementation period in most participating communities, the lack of baseline data and the absence of adequate monitoring systems (Jansen and Molokomme, 2002). However, on the basis of experience to-date (case studies and project reports) it is argued that the assumptions on which the CBNRM approach in Botswana is built are rather unrealistic thus making it unlikely to achieve an enduring positive impact. With regard to the 6 main assumptions identified above the following observations are made:

- *CBNRM in Botswana is neither fully politically accepted nor institutionally embedded.* The Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism is reluctant to send the draft CBNRM Policy to Parliament for fear of political opposition. The instrumental department (DWNP) does not seem to be able “to push” the policy through. Because DWNP was the focus of capacity building efforts for donors such as NRMP, there is no call from other Ministries or local authorities such as District Councils and Land Boards for CBNRM supportive measures. In fact, the potentially powerful local authorities are largely oblivious of CBNRM, as this governance layer was totally bypassed when management authority was devolved from State to community. The non-Government stakeholders are hardly organised and their voice is getting weaker with decreasing donor support.
- *In most communities there might be the will but there is presently no capacity to exercise management authority.* The management authority came from above and was not a total devolution of power. “Traditional rights” were not restored. Instead the “user rights” came along in the form of a complicated recipe book: organise yourself, design your bye-laws, ensure representative decision-making, account for your decisions, make plans, write them down and stick to them. It is argued that most communities did not realise what deal they signed into when accepting “management responsibility”.
- *The assumed link between a community benefiting from natural resources and as such having an incentive to conserve them is very optimistic in the circumstances.*

All CBNRM projects (with Government steering) opted for commercialisation of the natural resources. The benefits in these cases accrue to the community (e.g. sale of quota), while the costs of conserving (e.g. do not hunt) are borne by the individual. In all cases this has been at the advantage of the “village elite” and at the cost of those who are most dependent on natural resource use for survival (the poor, traditional hunters, women, elderly). There are virtually no CBNRM projects in Botswana where cash dividends were paid out. It is very unlikely that in these projects the benefits of the average community member will exceed the costs of the same individual. It is therefore equally unlikely that this will prompt conservation of the natural resources especially by those who have reduced access to them for subsistence purposes (Taylor, 2000).

- *Community structures do not seem to be the right entities to manage a profitable business.* During the CBNRM design it was realised that direct revenues from natural resource use would not be enough to generate rural development. Productive reinvestment of these revenues and employment creation would more likely set this process in motion. That this would happen through community-managed enterprises has proved so far unrealistic (Jones, 2002). First of all, the remote areas in question have very little development potential. Secondly, business skills are largely lacking at community level and thirdly, community entities with collective decision-making do not have the characteristics to run a commercial venture. This is not to say that no enterprise development can take place at community level but to expect that community revenue would automatically result in productive reinvestment has proved to be somewhat naive.
- *Communities are complex social structures and equitable representation does not come easy.* For representative decision-making you need skilled leadership and an empowered membership. In the absence of the latter in most remote CBNRM communities it proves to be very difficult to avoid the development of small village elites (mainly literate men from dominant village factions) monopolising the decision-making process, e.g. as is the case of OCT in the above box (also Alexander, 1999 and Jones, 2002). To avoid the rise of a local CBNRM elite requires intensive and long-term facilitation (the case of NKXT in the same box).
- *Building the capacity of communities to become managers of their natural resources for the benefit of all is a long-term process.* Ten years of CBNRM implementation has shown that this capacity building process takes much longer than expected. This has to do with the complexity of the approach (multiple sectors and multiple actors), the complexity of making management decisions over natural resources you do not have full control over and the complexity of the community social fabric. Assuming that a community will be “ready” to assume its management responsibilities at short notice is an unrealistic expectation and holds the risk of early failure.

Conclusions

Given the country’s specific conditions the CBNRM approach in Botswana has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the conservation of natural resources as well as to trigger sustainable rural development in the remote areas. The data on current

community participation and benefits to-date support this (National CBNRM Forum, 2002). While most building blocks are in place further refinement and adaptation remain necessary but that is to be expected from an approach as comprehensive and all encompassing as CBNRM. To that effect an extensive review of CBNRM will take place in mid-2003, which will contribute to the coming of age of CBNRM in Botswana.

The national review takes place in a time of growing criticism on CBNRM. Most of the criticism can be explained by the unrealistic expectations stakeholders have of the approach. This paper argues that, with hindsight, the assumptions upon which the approach was built were too optimistic and underplayed the complexity of the socio-economic context within which CBNRM was applied. Stakeholders might have also been somewhat naïve by embracing CBNRM as the panacea for all their problems.

The time is ripe to address the criticism openly and learn from past experiences, to adapt the approach and improve it. Without pre-empting the outcome of the review one can already identify (in brief) the areas where there is scope for improvement:

- *Community capacity building*: methodologies need to be long-term and more appropriate to suit specific local conditions;
- *Institutional development*: the basis for CBNRM needs to be enforced by involving more sectors (beyond wildlife), local government structures and traditional authorities (and knowledge);
- *Project facilitation*: the roles of facilitating organisations playing the “honest broker” in complicated change processes at community level need to be secured on a long-term basis;
- *Product development*: utilisation of natural resources has to move beyond selling wildlife quota. There is potential for increased involvement in veld products marketing and tourism (including co-management arrangements in and around protected areas). Forms of utilisation need to focus on employment creation and small-scale business development to maximise spread of benefits. In this perspective the community trust will have to change from “locus of management” into “opportunity provider”.
- *Benefit distribution*: benefits from CBNRM are primarily meant to compensate natural resources management costs. As most (opportunity) costs are born at a household level, so do benefits need to be felt at that level (e.g. through direct employment, social security scheme, food security, etc.).

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