

MZ07

Community representation in CBNRM: the case of Moribane

Key Points:

- 1** CBNRM projects in Mozambique are attempting to create bodies to 'represent' communities
- 2** Local history has affected the ways in which communities react to these attempts
- 3** In Moribane, local leaders appointed a committee of young men, who were subordinate to the elders
- 4** In general, local people think committees carry out external agendas rather than represent local interests

This Briefing is one of a series produced jointly by the Forum for Social Studies (Ethiopia), Centro de Experimentação Florestal (Mozambique) and the University of Sussex (UK). Each is designed to summarise research findings and encourage feedback. The Briefing is part of the 'Marena' research project, funded by the UK's Department for International Development.

Community representation in CBNRM

One of the issues that programmes must confront is how communities should be represented in management structures. In Mozambique, various laws have recently been passed which refer to 'communities' and transfer powers ranging from 'participation in conflict resolution' to the 'management of natural resources' and the capacity to demarcate and title land. But the regulations that define more precisely what is a 'community', and how it is to exercise these new powers, are still in the process of being formalised and approved. In the meantime, CBNRM projects are going ahead, each employing its own definition of 'community' and its own approach to 'representation'. This *Briefing* examines the experience of one CBNRM project in establishing such a definition and approach.

The Case of Moribane

In 1996, a CBNRM project was initiated in the former Moribane forest reserve, in Sussundenga district, Manica province. The first thing the project did was to approach the Chief of the area, M'punga, as there had been no government representative in the area since the early days of the civil war. After a long period of negotiation, Chief M'punga allowed a camp to be established in the area and work to begin on project implementation. The Chief was in charge of gathering together people of the area for meetings with agency representatives, thereby taking control of 'community representation' from the outset.

In order to gain trust and acceptance, the project asked the people present at the meetings to identify their needs so the project could try to assist in meeting these needs. One of the needs identified in this process was a grinding mill.

The formation of a community committee

in Moribane was motivated originally by the project in order to create a body that could be responsible for the grinding mill they wished to donate to the M'punga chieftaincy. The project intended to hand over the mill and make the people of M'punga entirely responsible for its installation and use.

Resistance to collective bodies

The project decided that the people of M'punga should form some kind of collective entity to take on responsibility for the mill, but the people present at the meetings were initially resistant. They rejected the suggestion that they form a co-operative because of the negative experiences they associated with the co-operatives formed immediately after independence in Mozambique. Their own suggestion was that the mill be handed over to a private individual on a loan basis, who would pay for it with the earnings from the milling operation. This went against the project's idea of community management. Eventually the people agreed to form a 'community committee' to manage the mill, and to represent the community as a whole in its dealings with the project.

Appointment of the committee



The Chief and his four *sagutas*¹ each were to select two committee members from their areas, making a total of ten. The only stipulation was that the committee members be should literate. There were several complications, however. One *saguta* refused to appoint any committee members since he feared that this was a covert means of drafting young men for military service. The settlers in another area of the chiefdom demanded their own representative because of a dispute with Chief M'punga over the legitimacy of their settlement. Later, the people of this area moved away to escape from elephant invasion of their fields (see *Briefing MZ03*). The representative whom they had selected remained on the committee, but represented the people of the area to which he had moved, which happened to be the area lacking representatives in any case.

Effectiveness of the committee

The committee members appointed in this way were without exception extremely young, many being teenagers. They were also all male. The Chief explained that these were the only people available who were literate. However, it seems clear that an additional factor is that the committee members are subordinate to and take instructions from the Chief, *sagutas* and other local elders. In general meetings, the committee members do not play an active role, mostly remaining quiet. The committee has no terms of reference, and in practice refers every important decision to the Chief, or to the project's technical staff.

On the one hand, this committee chosen by the M'punga leadership 'represents' the

community well because its operation is entirely in keeping with local social rules requiring young people to defer to elders, and all residents to defer to the leadership. On the other hand, it is not a particularly effective entity on its own, and therefore is not likely to play an active role. Furthermore, it is clearly skewed in its composition, and it would be difficult to accept anything arising from the committee as 'representative' of the diversity of views of the entire population living within the M'punga chiefdom.

Local Perceptions

Most people in the M'punga chiefdom claim to know little about the CBNRM project and the community committee. They appear to feel little control over or responsibility for the activities of either. For example, when the grinding mill operators requested to be paid a salary, the people present at meetings told them to go to the project staff for salaries. This may be linked with local belief that if someone gives you money, whatever results from the use of that money belongs to the original donor.

Those who do know something about the committee believe it is mainly responsible for patrolling the community and punishing people who contravene government rules on clearing land with fire and cultivating near rivers.

Concluding comments

Laws on natural resources in Mozambique in the 1990s all make reference to 'communities', but the legislation is vague as to how such communities should be defined and represented. Many CBNRM projects have opted for the formation of

'community committees' to respond to the issue of representation.

The political history of Mozambique has a strong influence on community reactions to attempts to set up new authority structures. This must be taken into consideration in contemporary projects, or projects risk repeating the mistakes of history.

Reliance on traditional leadership to select committees is a positive move towards recognition of locally legitimate structures of authority. But it can result in ineffective and subservient committees, as well as in committees that do not represent the diversity of community interests.

In any case, research with ordinary people in Moribane suggests that these committees are still seen as being there to serve the purposes of outsiders. As a result, they cannot be seen as 'representative' of the interests of local people in a most basic sense.

¹Aides to the chief, responsible for designated areas in the chiefdom.

MARENA Briefings (Mozambique)

- MZ01 Conflict, 'post-conflict', and traditional authorities
- MZ02 Traditional leaders and CBNRM
- MZ03 Elephants: problem or opportunity?
- MZ04 Charcoal, hunting and fires
- MZ05 Spirits and natural resources
- MZ06 Individuals and innovations
- MZ07 Community representation in CBNRM: the case of Moribane
- MZ08 Community representation in CBNRM: the case of Tsetserra
- MZ09 Implementing CBNRM in M'punga
- MZ10 Conflicting perspectives on the natural resource base

The views expressed in this Briefing are those of the Briefing team, and do not necessarily represent DFID policy.

The Briefing team:

Contributors to the Briefings include:

- Richard Black and Elizabeth Harrison, School of African and Asian Studies, University of Sussex
- Yeraswork Admassie, Alula Pankhurst and Tarakegn Yibabie, Forum for Social Studies, Addis Ababa
- Elizabeth Watson, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge
- Jessica Schafer, University of Oxford
- Patrick Matakala and Antonio Serra, Centro de Experimentação Florestal, Maputo, Mozambique
- Antonio Ribeiro, Department of Politics and Communication Studies, University of Liverpool

We welcome comments and feedback, which should be sent to:

Richard Black (r.black@sussex.ac.uk) or
Elizabeth Harrison (e.a.harrison@sussex.ac.uk)