

MZ08

Community representation in CBNRM: the case of Tsetserra

Key Points:

- 1** CBNRM projects in Mozambique are attempting to create bodies to 'represent' communities
- 2** In Tsetserra, there are many internal debates over who should 'represent' communities, and how
- 3** Local ideas of representation differ from those of the external implementing agencies
- 4** Using committees to perform salaried work initially sets up a precedent for external dependence

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.

After the end of the war in Mozambique, the Chimanimani mountain range, on the border with Zimbabwe in Manica province, became the focus of one of three proposed 'Transfrontier Conservation Areas' (TFCAs)¹ in Mozambique. As with other areas where CBNRM schemes have been attempted, a first priority for project personnel was to find a body that could represent local communities.

This *Briefing* looks at the northern part of the proposed Chimanimani TFCA, at the area known as Tsetserra. This relatively accessible area was where the first camp for the TFCA was built in 1997. Even so, this camp is still very much under construction three years later. Within Tsetserra, the TFCA authorities have attempted to establish community committees to represent local people.

Why community committees?

TFCA staff listed several motives for the formation of community committees, beyond the general aim of liaising with outside agencies. First, they were supposed to carry out income generation projects, such as beekeeping and mushroom marketing. Secondly, they were to enforce forestry and wildlife regulations, especially needed because the TFCA project opened up roads to areas previously inaccessible to outsiders, thereby creating the potential for unsustainable resource exploitation. A third motive, not made explicit but very important in practice, was to get local people to help with the construction of camps for the TFCA projects.

Creation of the committee

A Mozambican NGO was brought to Tsetserra to assist with the creation of 'community committees'. The chiefs and headmen were consulted first, and were asked to choose several people from each area to form the committee. The NGO presented the formation of the committee as a first step in the process of giving land title to communities, something envisioned in the new Land Act but not yet operationally possible.

The people themselves put forward ten men and ten women for the committee, but were told to cut it down to ten. They decided to dump all of the women and keep the ten men, but the NGO advised them to keep at least one woman.

Another committee, or 'interest group', was formed to run the beekeeping project. This was comprised of sixteen women and one man, and the man became president of the group. Together, the two committees/groups undertook the building of a meeting house adjacent to the TFCA camp. The men did the heavy work and the women carried grass for the roof and clay for the walls.

Local perceptions of the committee

First of all, there are many people in Tsetserra who avowed to knowing nothing of the community committees, or even of the TFCA project. Dissemination of information is generally done through meetings called by the traditional leadership, and then by word of mouth. These information networks are normally quite comprehensive. Therefore, the fact that people claim ignorance suggests that they are not particularly interested in the project,



or they have not absorbed the messages and are reluctant to pronounce an opinion yet.

Of those who do speak about the project, the overwhelming majority believes that the main purpose is to stop people setting fires for agriculture or hunting. Some see this as a good thing, complaining that uncontrolled fires are dangerous to crops, houses, sacred areas, and grasses used for building, and that hunting is causing species extinction. Others feel that the real problem in the area is caused by hunters with guns, whom they refer to as coming from 'the government', that is, from urban areas. These hunters do not obey local rules nor contribute to the local economy, and they are blamed for cattle theft as well.

A TFCA representative also complained that one of the large farmers in Tsetserra refused to cooperate with the committee and the project, saying *'because I built my own farm with my own labour, so I don't need a community group to come along and interfere in my work now'*.

Community representation

General opinion was in favour of the participation of traditional leadership in 'community committees', although some warned that a wider membership was needed to ensure checks and balances. It was suggested that the local elders, *matombo*, who act as advisors to the Chiefs, would be the appropriate ones to invigilate. Few people had a sense of democratic voting procedures or majority rules, apart from those who spent time in Zimbabwe before or during the war. Nonetheless, people expressed clear ideas on the need for representation of the diversity of community interests, at least in terms of gender, age, and origin. Men and women

were overwhelmingly in favour of including members of both sex in any committee, *'because one sex will not accept to be judged by the other'*. But this did not translate into the concept of evenly split committees.

There was debate over whether youngsters should be included; on the one hand, they might be too young to know the 'good of the people', but on the other, they would be useful to carry out tasks such as travelling to the city if necessary. No one thought that newcomers to the area should be excluded, but they would have to be current and regular residents.

Some thought that only rich people should be on the committee, so that they would have no incentive to steal profits from any project. Others thought that rich people, by definition, were thieves and dishonest people, and that people of 'average' wealth should be in charge. One person said the committee should have the power to overrule the opinions expressed by the people, because *'the sick person cannot decide what medication he needs, it is the doctor'*. A final conflict over the committee was between people who had lived in the area under Renamo rule during the war, and those who had spent time in government-controlled villages. The president of the committee alleged the former were unwilling to listen to the latter, as they felt more entitled to a say in community affairs, having stayed put during the difficult war years. Political divisions were at the root of power conflicts in the area more generally.

Who pays?

One result of the perception that the committee is there to enforce resource regulations is the demand for salaries on the part of committee members. At the time

of writing, this wish had been accommodated because the committee members were paid for building the TFCA camp. But once this was completed, the TFCA did not intend to pay local forestry or wildlife guards. The hope was that people would perceive it to be in their own interests to protect the natural resources, because they would receive incomes from the sale of renewable resources that outweigh the benefits of illegal or unsustainable use.

Concluding comments

The development of community committees in Tsetserra has not proceeded without difficulties and misunderstanding. In general, there is a good degree of awareness of the need for representativeness on these committees; however, local ideas of representation differ from those of the external implementing agencies. There is a much weaker understanding of what it is the committees are supposed to do. This is reflected in the slow pace at which they have been set up, and continuing levels of distrust of the committee's actions.

¹The others are in Gaza and Maputo provinces, along the border with the Gonarezhou and Kruger National Parks.

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