

Research Note

Huiku community-based conservation project in Ghanzi district

Masego Nkelehang,

University of Botswana.

E-mail: gmasego@yahoo.com.

This research note sums up some of the main points from an MA dissertation, based on material and experiences gathered during a period when she worked as Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Programme Officer for Kuru Development Trust in Ghanzi (1998-2000). Since this is not fieldwork research, the main methodology of the thesis is the use and review of secondary data. Information has been gathered mainly from publications on CBNRM national conferences and workshops held over the past five years in Botswana, from IUCN and SNV publications and websites, from Government of Botswana policy papers and publications, and from general literature on CBNRM.

My study critically examines the sustainability of Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Botswana, with particular reference to the Huiku project in Ghanzi district as a case study. Key factors are the Huiku natural resources base, local infrastructure development and community involvement in the management of this CBNRM project.

The dissertation demonstrates how predetermined models in community development projects fail to accommodate community knowledge and skills, thus limiting their capacity and potential to be active participants in projects ideally meant to be community owned and controlled. The Huiku Project illustrates how control and management of natural resources has remained with the government, rather than powers devolving to local communities.

Background of Huiku

Huiku is a CBNRM project comprising two communities of Qabo and Grootlaagte in Ghanzi district. These two communities are situated in a wildlife management area and Controlled Hunting Area GH 1. In 1994, the process of mobilising the communities to join efforts to utilise wildlife and other natural resources began. This process was facilitated by Kuru Development Trust (a rural development NGO in Ghanzi) and DWNP. In 1999, their constitution was formulated and their trust was officially registered with the Government of Botswana. In 2000, Huiku as a legal body was allocated a wildlife quota for the first time, and in 2001 for the second time. The two communities decided to hire community members as their hunters, and thus hunted, killed and sold the meat in the two communities. In 2002, they advertised their project for a joint venture partnership with a safari company.

The CBNRM concept

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) was first introduced in southern Africa in the 1980s, as a community based conservation approach as well as a rural development strategy.. This was a shift from the previous fortress conservation narrative that excluded community participation to the adoption of a community based conservation narrative that emphasises community involvement. CBNRM is also meant to represent a shift from the top-down state controlled conservation of natural resources to the devolution of conservation goals and responsibilities to local communities. The rationale for this shift

has been that local communities are key stakeholders in natural resources management, especially wildlife. CBNRM also emerged to address rural poverty; the idea being that conservation goals should be linked to meeting human needs through economic revenues derived from utilisation of resources. CBNRM seeks to redress inequality created by the open access to resources approaches of the past. Although community-based conservation was first introduced in the 1960s, the Rio conference in 1992 on Environment and Development and the adoption of Agenda 21, (which advocates local solutions to development) energised the establishment of community based development schemes like CBNRM. Since the Rio conference, there has been much more policy commitment and donor support for community-based development initiatives like CBNRM.

Community based natural resource management was introduced in Botswana in early 1990, and is now implemented in most rural parts of the country. Natural resources under the CBNRM include all those inherent in any particular place including wildlife, birds, veldt products, etc. However, in practice the CBNRM concept has been developed largely from a wildlife utilisation perspective. Most CBNRM projects involve wildlife, and only until recently have other natural resources been developed and incorporated within the CBNRM umbrella. Therefore, CBNRM is based on the availability of natural resources in particular areas. Communities in or adjacent to Controlled Hunting Areas (CHA) utilise wildlife resources as their principal natural resource.

In order to engage in CBNRM and make use of natural resources in their areas commercially, communities are required to establish community trusts: legal bodies normally called Boards of Trustees, which are ideally representative and accountable bodies of the entire community. Communities are also required to have a constitution that defines the body's natural resource management functions and the body's accountability and responsibility towards the community members. Additionally, the community must prepare a land use management plan outlining how they intend to use the resources in their area, and for those using wildlife, the plan should conform to the regulations of the wildlife management area in which the CHA is located. The management plan has to be approved by the District Land Board. As a legal body, communities can obtain 15 - year renewable land- and resource use leases from the Land Boards and annual wildlife quotas from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks. Communities can also choose to engage in joint venture agreements with the private sector, mostly safari companies, to utilise their land and natural resources commercially.

Main conclusions

Sustainability is a slippery term to use, and many have criticised its ambiguity in general development discourses. However, although the definition of sustainability differs between disciplines, under CBNRM sustainability is defined in terms of ecosystem and sustainable biodiversity conservation, economic viability, skills and capacity as well as socio-political conditions. From this perspective, there are various factors that may contribute to the sustainability of CBNRM projects. However this dissertation confines itself to three key issues: community involvement to manage CBNRM projects; availability of natural resources; and infrastructure development that supports the marketing of CBNRM projects to gain revenue. These key issues are fundamental if CBNRM projects are to be sustainable, yet they are not given much attention in the broader literature on CBNRM issues. The dissertation hypothesizes that if these three key conditions are not met, it is unlikely that CBNRM projects in particular areas will achieve their stated goals. This dissertation explores the extent to which this is the case by focusing on the Huiku project.

The first strand of the argument is that CBNRM has been implemented as a blueprint across the country without considering geographical resource endowment differences.

Huiku is located in Ghanzi district, which is in a desert part of western Botswana. In this area the wildlife and natural resource base is declining, the wildlife remaining are of low economic value, and their annual quota is small, thus making sustainability of the CBNRM project in the area questionable. This is in contrast to the Northern part of Botswana (Chobe and Ngamiland) where wildlife populations are increasing, and endowed with high economic value. There one can find such animals as elephants, buffalo, lions, rhinos etc.

The second strand of the argument is that CBNRM has been implemented across the country without considering geographical infrastructure development differences. The two communities involved in the Huiku project are in a rural area. Qabo is 80 kilometres from Ghanzi Township, Grootlaagte is 70, and the two settlements are 70 kilometres away from each other. Most of the wildlife in the area can be located half way from each settlement. The main mechanisms of communication and transportation are by 4x4 vehicles since the roads are sandy. In Ghanzi district, the infrastructure mainly connecting to rural areas is underdeveloped thus making sustainability of CBNRM projects very difficult. CBNRM is directly linked to tourism as an additional opportunity through which communities can sell their natural resources. Poor infrastructure makes communication, marketing and networking of CBNRM projects and attraction of investors difficult because it requires enormous investments. District development planning does not adequately incorporate, accommodate and facilitate CBNRM development in the district at large. District councils were not taken on board when CBNRM was established and have been marginalized in the processes for a long time. CBNRM for a long time remained the responsibility of the central government through the Department of Wildlife and National Parks at district and local levels. In this kind of institutional arrangement, CBNRM cannot be successful if districts' development planning does not support and create a favourable environment in which CBNRM can be implemented. CBNRM does not occur in a vacuum, rather it depends on and is directly linked with other development activities in any given area.

The third strand of the argument is that, although CBNRM is ideally supposed to be community owned and controlled, in practice communities engaged in CBNRM do not have managerial powers over their natural resources. Most critical decisions on utilisation of resources are taken by the government. This also brings questions of the realism and practicality of devolution of powers to communities. Communities also sublease the use of their resources to safari companies, who have exclusive rights over the resources. These two strands of control and management of resources by the government on one hand and safari companies on the other, render communities to be passive recipients of financial revenues accrued from the safari companies. They, therefore, remain passive participants in the whole process rather than being active managers of their resources. This demonstrates that although the government claims that CBNRM in Botswana devolves powers and control of natural resources to communities, this is far from the reality.

My dissertation also suggests that communities are motivated to participate in CBNRM due to the economic incentives they gain from the CBNRM projects. The uniformity of CBNRM implementation across Botswana also demonstrates the amount of power and control the government has over the programme. CBNRM fails to accommodate the priorities and preferences as to how communities would like CBNRM to benefit them. In the current arrangement, CBNRM may only be sustainable with the support of the government as the driving force. Withdrawal of the government may imply that projects will collapse. Alternatively, if communities are given full control and power of their resource utilisation, then CBNRM implementation may take different forms, depending on the wishes of the communities. It is only in this way that CBNRM can be community based, community owned and sustainable under the control of the communities.

Note

Masego Nkelekang has completed her studies for an MPhil in Development Studies at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (UK), with funding from the Collaborative Programme for San/ Basarwa Research and Capacity Building. She has a BA in Sociology and Public Administration from the University of Botswana.