

A Comparative Perspective of Elite Capture of Community Conservation Programs in Namibia and Zimbabwe

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My research seeks to understand why community wildlife management programs fail to deliver communal goods and services to the poor. I am interested in how and why such well intentioned projects and interventions, targeting the marginalized and disenfranchised populations, end up benefiting local elites such as chiefs, local headmen and other traditional or religious leaders, committee members, and their immediate relatives.

In summer of 2009, I was awarded an African Power and Politics grant to travel to Namibia and Zimbabwe to undertake my preliminary dissertation work. My initial interests were broader governance issues. I initially intended to understand how the macro, meso, and micro level interface in CBNRM, the distribution of authority, and the effects of process of the melding of modern and traditional institutions on performance

of CBNRM programs in Namibia and Zimbabwe.

I worked in five communities in Namibia with the support of a local NGO. I conducted interviews and surveys on a bigger project, working closely with five conservancy communities in the Caprivi Region; Kwando, Mashi, Balyerwa, Wuparo, and Sobbe. I attended meetings to provide feedback to management on the governance issues based on the larger survey we had conducted in these areas. Inequity was a major issue and elite control was also widespread in most of these communities.

In Zimbabwe, I spent two weeks working with the CAMPFIRE Association. I reviewed project documents, workshop proceedings, and consultancy reports. I also traveled to Masoka, where I was able to conduct interviews, participate in meetings and community activities, and review minutes and proceedings at their local

office. Masoka community was one of the CAMPFIRE pioneers that accepted the idea in late 1980's and promoted its proliferation across the country, region, and internationally. I managed to interview former committee members and the traditional leaders. Finally, I conducted some informal discussions with community members, teachers, nurses, and village heads. The 1980-1990's acclamations of deliberative democracy, formalized rule, equity, and enthusiasm and hope in CAMPFIRE were no longer evident. The program had become so centralized with the traditional leadership exerting much influence and appropriating most benefits.

My research experience was worthwhile. It helped me to narrow my research interest from broader governance interests to understanding micro governance processes. In summer of 2011, I will conduct a comparative case study in selected communities in Namibia and Zimbabwe, to understand mechanisms through which elites capture community-based programs and non-elite strategies for alternative representation.

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