

Situational Analysis of Communities Bordering Sabie Game Park in Mozambique

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I spent the summer of 2013 working on a pilot project for governance in community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) conducted by the Southern African Wildlife College. The primary goals of CBNRM in these projects are to improve conservation and reduce poverty. To assist with monitoring and evaluation of this project, I conducted a situational analysis to gather baseline data on four communities bordering Sabie Game Park (SGP) in Mozambique, a private reserve that operates hunting safaris. SGP borders Kruger National Park in South Africa and is part of the Greater Limpopo Trans-Frontier Conservation Area. This area is of great importance for conservation of ecosystems and charismatic species such as lion, elephant, leopard, buffalo, and rhino.

My research included household livelihood surveys, informal interviews, and situational analysis workshops. The workshops consisted of participatory methods for developing a historical timeline, helps/hindrances in the development of the village, needs assessment, resource use, and community mapping. The results were

compiled into a typed report in Tsonga (the local language) with digitized maps and returned to the communities for use in future planning.

Mozambique achieved independence from Portugal in 1974 and soon after, the country experienced a long and violent civil war. As a result of the fighting, many people fled the region. Those that stayed were forced to seek shelter in the mountains and caves along the border between Mozambique and South Africa. The civil war ended in 1992 and many people began returning to their former homes. When SGP was created in 2000, some of these people were forced to relocate yet again from where they had settled inside the new park borders. The completion of a large electric fence around the game park has eliminated communal access to ancestral graves and water sources that are of particular importance in the dry season. In exchange for the land, communities were promised new water sources, schools, and clinics. To date, some, but not all of these promises have been fulfilled. As a result, many community members expressed animosity toward the park which has created mostly costs and few benefits for them.

Human-wildlife conflict is mitigated by the fence, although it still occurs. The most common issue is loss of crops from wild pigs, elephants, and hippos. Livestock losses from leopard, lion, or crocodile occur annually and human life is reportedly threatened by buffalo, elephant, or predators on occasion. These conflicts combined with the loss of access to the park itself have led many community members to be unsupportive of conservation. It is likely that receiving financial benefits from SGP would compensate the costs and improve attitudes toward conservation. This shared interest in wildlife can lead to fewer illegal activities in a region where rhino poaching is prevalent.

People in this region are primarily livestock owners and subsistence farmers that are heavily reliant on the environment for their own survival. Natural resource extraction includes firewood, timber, rocks, thatching grass, fish, game meat, wild-fruits, medicinal plants, and edible insects. Additionally, adequate land and water are needed for crop and livestock production. Because employment is low, cash is primarily obtained from selling livestock or charcoal. The heavy reliance on natural resources can lead to environmental degradation and increased vulnerability of locals. Income from wildlife can increase household economic standing and potentially reduce the threat of environmental degradation.

The results from this initial assessment can be used to guide the development of the pilot project in this region and to monitor its effectiveness. Before and after comparison studies can be conducted to see if conservation attitudes improve and poverty is reduced in these communities as anticipated.

Leandra Clough is a second-year student in the Masters of Sustainable Development Practice Program. Support for this project provided by MDP/Center for African Studies and Southern African Wildlife College.