

Institutions and Institutional Change in CBNRM: Understanding Interactions among Local, Meso and Macro Political Structures

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My research focuses on the interactions among three governance tiers in community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). After two decades of implementation, CBNRM in southern Africa has variable outcomes ranging from 'weak' to 'elite capture' of community benefits. My objectives for my summer research were: (1) to understand the factors influencing variability between the many communities involved, (2) explore how the distribution of authority across multiple institutions at the micro (local people), meso (e.g. district councils) and macro levels (e.g. central government, NGOs) affects CBNRM, and (3) explore how the melding of modern democratic institutions and the traditional arrangements of chiefs and headmen affects performance of CBNRM programs.

My research work builds on field research started 2007 with a University of Florida research team in Namibia. Over summer of 2009, I worked in Namibia and Zimbabwe. I spent the first half of summer in Namibia collecting and analyzing data, which we fed back to the community members and wildlife committee members in five conservancies in the Caprivi region, Balyerwa, Kwandu, Mashi, Sobbe, and Wuparo. The experience helped me to focus my work in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, I worked with the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) Association. I reviewed project documents, workshop proceedings, consultancy reports, and conducted informal discussions with employees. Afterward, I visited Masoka community (northeastern Zimbabwe) and conducted interviews, participated in meetings, community activities, and reviewed records of meetings and documents at the local office for the past 12 years.

My preliminary findings in Zimbabwe show that the macro-political and economic crisis was a



major shock on CBNRM activities at community and district level. But more importantly, local level shocks exert great impacts on the CAMPFIRE activities. In Masoka community, there has been a gradual decline in people's adherence to CAMPFIRE principles. This corresponds with the decline in external support (finance and education) and death of Headman Kanyurira (local leadership). Over the years, community members have developed a sense of mistrust over new leadership due to a lack of financial transparency and centralized decision-making. Macro and meso political factors also exert a moderating effect on the local level, and the lack of monitoring and education increasing the potential for 'local elite capture.'

Following the outcome of

my research, I intend to undertake a comparative study across three countries, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe on the role of traditional authorities in conservation activities.

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