The Efficacy of Community-Based Monitoring in Namibia: The Event Book System

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A novel monitoring system developed in Namibia is the Event Book System (EBS). This community based monitoring system was created to inform management decisions in communal conservancies throughout Namibia. While the system has been in operation for almost a decade, to date, no examination of the EBS in terms of its ability to enhance the adaptive capacity of conservancies has been performed. Community-based monitoring is also often criticised based on concerns about communities lacking the capacity, sustained interest, and resources needed for effective monitoring. To this end, the main objective of my research is to understand the EBS in the context of how information is being created, accumulated, and transmitted in the communal conservancies of Namibia. Three conservancies along the Kwando River will be the focus of this research, the Kwandu, Mashi, and Mayuni conservancies.

Information about the EBS was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the communal conservancy management, as well as conservancy membership and key informants in the associated NGO's and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. These interviews will allow me to assess the way that information is collected, where this information is stored, whether or not this information is shared, and what decisions are made based on the information gathered. Preliminary findings indicate that there appears to be some elite capture of information from the EBS by the management committees within the communal conservancies, with little information getting down to the household level. I also observed that though the information is being stored within the conservancy offices, the full potential of this information was not being capitalized upon, perhaps because the communities lack the capacity and resources (for example, the spatial aspect of the data is largely ignored).

To assess some of the EBS's potential, I collected all of the EBS data from these three focal conservancies, and will analyze this information using GIS and remote sensing to determine whether or not the community-based datasets might be enhanced using more "scientific" methods. Ultimately, this will test whether or not so called scientific and community monitoring systems can be complementary, and, if so, how can scientists and communities work together to enhance community-based datasets to aid communities in terms of their adaptive capacity.

While these methods contribute towards an understanding of the EBS, previous interviews conducted in the 2007 field season revealed that information about the vegetation dynamics of the region was being omitted from the EBS. To this end, a comparison of the vegetation in these three focal conservancies and the Bwabwata National park on the Western side of the Kwando River will be conducted. Thirty transects on either side of the river were established in 2007 and 2008. Analysis of this data will not only allow me to examine how different land use strategies have affected the vegetation within and outside of the communal conservancies, but will also provide the communities with valuable vegetation baseline data which can be re-sampled in the future to see whether or not ecosystem management strategies need to be adjusted.

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