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Research Note

Assessment of the community-based natural resource management approach and its impact on the Basarwa: the case of Xaixai and Gudigwa communities

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Rosinah Masilo-Rakgoasi has been involved in CBNRM from its early stages of inception and is still in the field. Her first degree is a BA in Sociology and Environmental Science, and she completed her master's degree in Development Studies in 2002 at the University of Botswana, with funding from the Collaborative Programme for San/Basarwa Research and Capacity Building. Masilo-Rakgoasi has mobilized and facilitated the formation of many Community-Based Organisations in natural resources management, and most of them involve Basarwa as part of the population. Since 1995 she has been employed as a sociologist by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, which is the major CBNRM implementing agency. Her tasks include community mobilisation, community development, applied research and monitoring and evaluation of CBOs in CBNRM. This research note is a summary of her MA dissertation. Apart from her field experience, the data she used for her thesis were collected through household interviews, key informants interviews, focus group discussions and assessment of the secondary data.

This study makes a critical assessment of the concepts of participation and empowerment in the CBNRM approach and its impact on the lives of the different groups of Basarwa in Botswana. The use of 'community' as a unit of analysis is assessed through case studies of the Ju/hoansi group of Xaixai, in the North-West and the Bugakhwe group of Gudigwa in the Okavango Delta area.

Research objectives

The broad aim of the study was to critically assess the CBNRM approach and its impact on the different groups of Basarwa. This was done through an analysis of :

- the implementation of the CBNRM approach
- the views and experiences of the different groups of the Basarwa,
- issues of participation and empowerment of the different groups of the Basarwa in CBNRM activities, and
- the appropriateness of CBNRM as a poverty alleviation approach.

Finally, the study makes recommendations for the implementation and the running of CBNRM projects.

Research questions

- What are Basarwa's levels of participation in decision-making and benefits?
- What are the problems associated with the implementation of CBNRM as a development approach?
- Is CBNRM playing any role in poverty alleviation?
- What are the views and experiences of different Basarwa groups on CBNRM?

Community-based Natural Resources Management

Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM), is a concept used to refer to an approach that combines rural development and natural resources conservation (Cassidy et.al. 1999). This approach was introduced around 1990 as a response to the top-down approaches that have proved unsuitable in the developing nations. The aim is to ensure that the local people have the power to decide on what to do with their natural resources .

The involvement of rural communities in the management and utilization of their natural resources has long been a policy issue in Botswana. The government papers, the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act of 1992, Wildlife Conservation Policy of 1986, Agricultural Resources Conservation Act of 1974, and the National Development Plans 7 and 8 all advocate for increased opportunities for local communities to benefit from veld products, wildlife and tourism. But these documents do not provide guidelines on how the local communities could actually benefit from the resources (Alexander et al.1999; CBNRM Draft Policy 2000; Painter 1997; CBNRM National Reports 1998, 1999, 2000).

The primary government agency responsible for wildlife conservation and utilization, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, had the main responsibility for the initiating of a community approach. Due to lack of the expertise required in DWNP, the USAID funded Natural Resources Management Project (NRMP) was set up in 1990 to work with DWNP to develop the CBNRM pilot projects nationally

Under the CBNRM approach the community is given a shared hunting quota for the hunting season and is leased a Community Hunting Area(s) (CHA) by the district Land-Board authorities. The community is supposed to decide on how to use the resources; land, animals, plants, physical features, and the uses selected should be ones that benefit the whole community. So far, hunting quotas have tended to be used either for subsistence, or for commercial purposes, for example renting CHAs to safari companies.

In order to assume management of the resources, the communities must fulfill some requirements: The community must organise itself into a committee, to apply to DWNP for a hunting quota. The community must then be established as a legal entity, with a registered constitution, that represents the interests of all members. This community organisation must then prepare a management and development plan for the area and its natural resources, which must be approved by government. The CBO can then, if it wishes, enter a lease agreement with the Land Board (or Department of Lands for Stateland).

The establishment of the Community Based Organisations in CBNRM is based on the idea that people whose livelihoods are dependent on and are sustained by a given resource(s) will be committed to conserve the resource(s) and use it in a sustainable way. The CBNRM approach seeks to change the conditions under which people have access to natural resources in three important ways:

- Giving greater authority to local people who depend directly on wildlife and natural resources to make decisions about how those resources will be used.
- Creating strong social and economic incentives for people to make decisions that will maintain and improve the quality of wildlife and natural resources.
- Creating conditions that ensure that the benefits from improvements in the state of wildlife and other natural resources are broadly distributed, to build a strong constituency for conservation and sustainable use (Painter 1997).

The analytical problem: of concept of community

The Community-Based Organisations in natural resources management are managed by structures of between ten and twelve elected members from the communities. However, in

the elections of the management structures, the insurance of equal representation of all ethnic groups is rarely taken into consideration. As a result, in most CBOs the management structures are mainly composed of members of the dominant ethnic groups. This preserves the biases that participation in CBNRM is meant to alleviate, because if the Basarwa are not represented in the CBO management structures, their specific issues of concern can easily be ignored. The baseline surveys and CBOs monitoring and evaluation reports provide evidence for this argument. For example, it is reported that in Nqaa Khobe Xeya Trust (NKXT), Kgalagadi District and in Cgaecgae Tlhabololo Trust (CTT) in North West, although the Basarwa comprise large segments of the populations, the decision-making powers and leadership are vested in the minority non-Basarwa groups, Babandero in CTT and Bakgalagadi in NKXT.

There is not much literature available on CBNRM and Basarwa specifically, as this approach for rural development has as one of its aims to achieve overall community participation. This, however, cannot be achieved if the community is a unit of analysis and is treated as if it is harmonious and homogeneous. Most development officers and planners avoid talking about the community differences like ethnicity, hoping that by doing that the community will become cohesive. This has proved not to be working in the multi-ethnic communities.

In this study, Basarwa respondents are classified according to gender and categorised in three age groups, the youth, adults and elderly. The main argument for these classifications and categories is that most of the literature talk of the 'Basarwa community' as if it is an homogeneous group that is classless and not gendered like other groups. This effort is one of the major ways of deconstructing 'Community' as a unit of analysis and intervention in development programmes.

Major findings

Basarwa Live in Absolute Poverty. Despite the revenues accrued by the CBOs in CBNRM, the poverty of the Basarwa is worsening. As their participation in decision making for their developments through CBNRM and in the running of the CBOs is very low, their concerns are not attended to with the seriousness they deserve.

The study has revealed that it is not only in CBNRM activities that Basarwa's involvement is low and not empowering; this has been the case with other development efforts and even in the way the village and settlement affairs are run. Due to a long history of exploitative relationships, most of the Basarwa families do not have adequate resources or anything at all to sustain themselves. Therefore, poverty among the Basarwa communities is most serious as it does not only affect them at a particular point in time, but it is entrenched and perpetuated over time. It is not easy at the present to tell whether they or their children in future have a realistic chance of getting out of it, because the conditions that gave rise to it are being reproduced and being worsened by almost every development approach put in place. The gap between them and the other Tswana groups is widening further.

Basarwa participation in CBNRM is minimal

In order for the CBNRM approach to impact positively on the lives of Basarwa, they must participate in the decision making concerning the running of the CBNRM projects so that they can be able to influence the nature of the projects to cater for their needs. Basarwa reported that the CBOs have an unequal distribution of benefits and as a marginalized group they always get less. In this thesis, the benefits have been identified as employment, revenues, income generating projects, life improvement projects, training and game meat.

Most analyses claim that Basarwa's low levels of participation in CBNRM are due to the fact that the Tswana traditional *kgotla* is used as a community platform for discussing CBNRM issues and this leaves out Basarwa who traditionally do not have the *kgotla* setup. This dissertation demonstrates that it is not the *kgotla* that inhibits Basarwa's participation in CBNRM issues, but notes the following factors responsible for this:

Inadequate mobilisation: The way mobilisation was initially done, how it is currently done and by whom, influence the people's level of participation. Mobilisation should be carried out in such a way that it takes into account community dynamics and is inclusive of all groups in a community. It should make it possible for everyone's voice to be heard, so that each person's problems and concerns could be attended to.

Attitudes of facilitators/ development workers towards Basarwa: Most development workers and the field staff working with Basarwa are not interested in Basarwa as people and do not accept them for who they are. Such extension officers fail to help Basarwa to pursue their goals. This is problematic, as most Basarwa live in multi-ethnic communities, where it is easy for facilitators with strong pre-conceived ideas about Basarwa to concentrate all their efforts on the non-Basarwa, in that way ignoring and excluding Basarwa. Therefore the extension workers appointed to work with Basarwa should be people who are interested in helping Basarwa. Also some Basarwa should be trained as rural development and conservation implementers.

My study notes that although the *kgotla* is claimed to be a democratic platform, where everyone is allowed the freedom of expression, this only becomes applicable if one is given the permission to talk. The *kgotla's* democracy can inhibit Basarwa's participation in discussions as it extends even to selecting who should talk and be listened to by the tribal leaders who normally chair the community gatherings. These are in most cases from the non-Basarwa ethnic groups. The study reveals that the Basarwa's situation is unique in the sense that their participation is not inhibited by the forum of discussion, but by those with whom they share the platform and those who chair the meetings.

Constitution of CBOs

The constitutions of the CBOs are mostly silent on the position of the marginalized groups in a community, such as Basarwa or women. Therefore they fail to take into account issues specific to the Basarwa's situation. The CBOs' constitutions give the CBOs' Boards of Trustees more power than the general membership of the CBOs. As a result the Boards of Trustees serve their interests instead of those of the general members. This excludes Basarwa influencing the development plans to address their problems because in most cases Basarwa have inadequate representation.

CBNRM has not empowered Basarwa groups. Its implementation and methods fail to give Basarwa capacity to control the resources and projects. Its methods do not take into account the community dynamics. This omission makes it impossible for the CBNRM facilitators and community members to address issues specific to Basarwa. Addressing such issues could empower Basarwa as it will give them power within themselves and make them confident in contributing to their own development.

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