

IS COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN BOTSWANA VIABLE?

ROMY CHEVALLIER & ROSS HARVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If Botswana is to continue its success story as an African anomaly, it will have to manage its transition to a less diamond-dependent economy skilfully. Until alternative and new sources of economic growth can be found, eco-tourism will be the keystone sector. If well governed, tourism can sustainably provide livelihood opportunities while contributing to wildlife and biodiversity preservation. An important component of its success is the extent to which local communities benefit from it and are central to management decisions. Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) is a formal policy in Botswana designed to achieve this end. This policy insights paper examines the history of CBNRM and the efficacy of its current iteration. Although there are a number of challenges to overcome with the Botswana CBNRM model, the paper ultimately argues that communities are better off with CBNRM than without it. It does, however, have to be more effectively governed, and a greater diversification of economic activities has to be encouraged. If it is to be successful, CBNRM must also be politically supported through the investment in appropriate CBNRM legislation and policy.

INTRODUCTION

Since attaining independence in 1965, Botswana has experienced promising political and economic progress. Unlike many of its resource-wealthy counterparts on the continent, it has used its extensive diamond wealth to build a functional

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modern economy. However, Botswana still depends on diamonds for 82% of its exports, and for one-third of government revenue. Macroeconomic modelling suggests that diamond revenues will start to decline from 2016 onwards.¹ Economic growth is slowing already, the diamond processing industry is struggling to maintain competitiveness, and the country is facing its worst drought since 1981.² It is therefore imperative that Botswana explores and promotes alternative sources of inclusive growth, which will anchor the economy through this transition and support a more equitable division of resource rents.³

Tourism will play an increasingly important role in Botswana's economy as diamond revenues decline. The sector is estimated to have contributed 8.5% of the country's gross domestic product in 2014, with a projected increase to 8.6% in 2015.⁴ Botswana is naturally endowed with unique and attractive scenery, globally important biodiversity and extensive wildlife areas. It also has the necessary infrastructure and facilities to cater for high-end, international tourists.

The Botswana government has long recognised that sustainable and viable tourism and conservation efforts will only succeed if local communities have a stake in the preservation of wildlife and supporting ecosystems. It first introduced CBNRM as an informal programme in 1989 and adopted a CBNRM policy in 1997. The policy was aimed at recognising the rights of local people to manage and benefit from natural resources and wildlife preservation. The overall objective of Botswana's CBNRM policy has been to contribute to poverty reduction through employment creation, income generation and the provision of social services, while promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use.

The CBNRM model in Botswana has seen two significant changes in recent years: the promulgation of an updated CBNRM policy in 2007 that altered the way in which revenues were divided between local community trusts and the central government; and the 2014 hunting moratorium that closed off a revenue stream that accounted for a substantial share of income for a number of community trusts.⁵ This paper examines two relatively successful cases, one in the Okavango Delta – the Okavango Community Trust (OCT) – and one in Kasane – the Chobe Enclave Conservation Trust (CECT). These cases highlight the complexity of Botswana's current approach to CBNRM and raise questions regarding the ongoing viability of this model.

CBNRM OVERVIEW

The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) came to power in 1965 and built a broad coalition of support through articulating a vision that forged a national Botswana identity around a common language and shared resource wealth. The state was to play a central role in promoting this shared resource wealth. This is particularly evident in the mining sector where mineral rights (including deposits on tribal land) are vested in the state. Revenues generated by the mining sector accrue to the national Treasury and decision-making with regards to the allocation of these revenues is centralised. However, other natural resources such as wildlife cannot be managed as easily by the central government.

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The dispersed nature of wildlife and other common pool resources and the attendant challenges related to controlling access ‘makes it next to impossible to manage those resources in a sustainable manner unless local residents co-operate with management efforts’.⁶ The management of wildlife resources were thus decentralised to prevent their destruction, reflecting an awareness ‘that incentives matter and that local communities (who often incur costs as a result of conservation) should receive some form of its benefits’.⁷

This appeared to be a contradictory approach to natural resource management by the government. There was considerable debate within the BDP on whether the devolution of resource governance for wildlife and other sectors might undermine the centralised model for mineral resource governance. Despite these concerns, the BDP forged ahead with CBNRM, as it recognised that future tourism revenue would dwindle if wildlife numbers declined and their natural habitats were destroyed. Although the distinction appears warranted in light of the physical differences between wildlife and mineral endowments, it has been a politically difficult message to deliver. Communities that have no access to wildlife or commercially viable resources argue that devolution generates the unfair and geographically accidental distribution of revenues. About 80% of all Botswana’s CBNRM income is concentrated in the north. Ngamiland, Chobe District and Khama Rhino Sanctuary are the main recipients of CBNRM revenue.⁸

CBNRM explicitly involves local residents of wildlife management areas (WMAs) in conservation through the commercial development of wildlife resources. In practice, the institutional arrangements for CBNRM in Botswana are as follows: First, a community-based organisation (CBO) must legally be established, normally in the form of a community trust. The community trust is mandated to manage revenue in the best interests of the community, which may consist of a number of different villages. Second, registered CBOs are entitled to lease land from the Land Board, attaining associated user rights from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP). Such rights may entail photographic safari rights, hunting quotas (before the 2014 hunting moratorium) and other rights to pursue commercial harvesting activities. Third, these rights are utilised to manage resources directly, or sold or auctioned to third parties (or members). Typically, CBOs in WMAs enter into joint venture partnerships (JVPs) with private tourism operators through sub-contracting rights and leases. These JVPs not only pay the CBOs for leasing the land but also generate local employment opportunities.

The 1997 CBNRM policy ensured that revenues generated by wildlife and other common pool resources were shared between private operators and local communities in localities where successful tourism operations could be established (both consumptive tourism in the form of hunting concessions and non-consumptive tourism). However, communities that were not located in such areas pushed for a more centralised model that would distribute revenues more equitably throughout Botswana’s population. The Botswana government attempted to address these concerns through the amended CBNRM policy of 2007. According to the 2007 policy, 35% of natural resource revenue accrues directly to CBOs, while the other 65% flows into the National Environment Fund (NEF). Any CBO can apply to the NEF for disbursements, whether it is explicitly linked to WMAs or not. This allows those with no direct access to wildlife resources to access revenue.

There have been other, more wide-ranging criticisms of the CBNRM model. In particular, the ability of CBOs to manage revenues to effectively support sustainable livelihoods has been questioned. These revenue inflows exacerbate community conflicts in some instances. Moreover, many CBOs lack the internal capacity required to negotiate equitable deals when forming JVPs with private sector operators. In response to these challenges, in 2009 the government created a state-owned entity called the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO). Besides its marketing and destination promotion functions, the BTO is tasked with inviting potential JVP partners for CBOs to tender for contracts. These are then evaluated according to the BTO's bid adjudication criteria. The BTO's role is ostensibly to prevent CBOs from choosing unsuitable partners and to ensure that fairer deals are struck in contract negotiations. However, CBOs and private companies are frustrated with the additional level of centralised bureaucracy through which they now have to operate⁹ and critics have argued that the move back towards centralisation contradicts the logic of CBNRM, 'weakens incentives for conservation and disempowers the CBOs'.¹⁰

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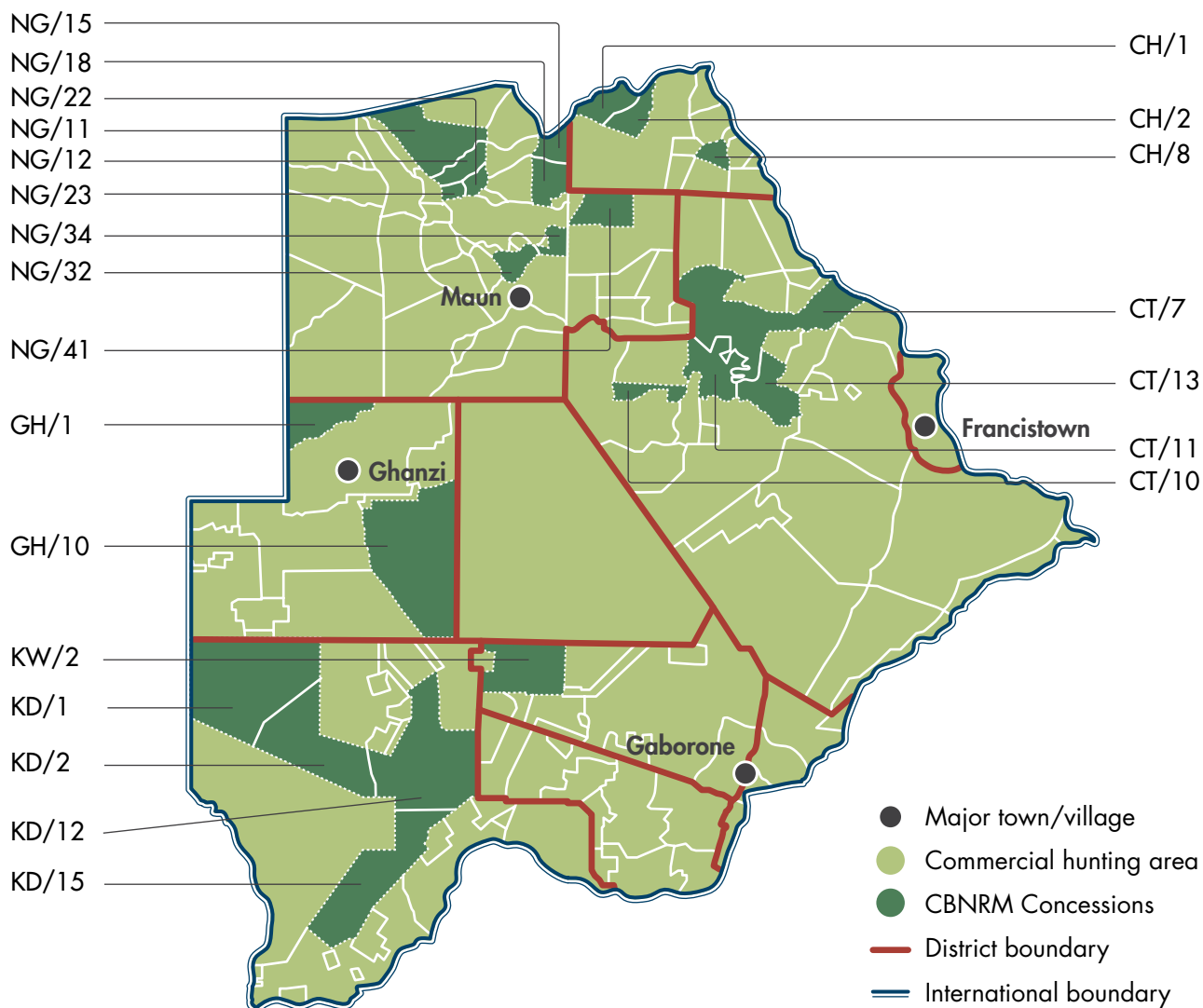
To complicate matters, almost all CBOs have voiced serious concerns about the way in which hunting revenues dissipated as a result of the moratorium, which many claim was implemented without prior consultation. The government invariably responds that these revenues can, in time, be replaced by more sustainable non-consumptive tourism revenues. Photographic camps do pay significant concession fees, and in certain cases these funds are likely to compensate for lost hunting revenues. However, in geographic locations that are not conducive to photographic safaris or cultural tourism, communities feel the revenue loss more acutely. Moreover, many local residents believe that poaching and the illegal trade in bush meat have flourished in the wake of the hunting moratorium – this being meat that would ordinarily have been distributed to communities by hunting safaris.¹¹

The two case studies examined below provide further insight into the current challenges facing conservation and tourism in Botswana. They reveal the complexity of CBNRM, even within relatively homogenous and well-managed community trusts, and show how Botswana's approach to CBNRM might be transformed to improve outcomes.

The Chobe Enclave (CH1 and CH2 in Figure 1) is situated immediately to the west of the Ngoma gate of Chobe National Park, encompassing the five villages of Kavimba, Kachikau, Mabele, Parakarungu and Satau (with a combined population of roughly 8 000 people). The small town of Kasane is about 50km from the northern tip of the enclave and is the hub of the tourism industry in northern Botswana.

Historically, a large portion of the northern section of Chobe National Park formed the tribal lands of the Basubiya, whose territory spread over northern Botswana into neighbouring Caprivi in Namibia and across into Zambia. The demarcation of a WMA (Chobe National Park) in 1967 severely restricted villagers' access to resources and limited the land available for agricultural activities.¹² Chobe National Park is more than 10 000 km² in size, while the enclave is only 1 690km². Households in the enclave have traditionally had a mixed economy based on crop and livestock production, occasionally supplemented by wage employment. Wealth has been unevenly distributed, with 10% of households controlling 60% of total homestead assets.¹³ A major feature of this area is its vast elephant population.

FIGURE 1 MAP OF CBNRM CONCESSIONS ACROSS BOTSWANA



Source: Swatuk LA, 'From "project" to "context": Community based natural resource management in Botswana', *Global Environmental Politics*, 5, 3, p. 103

Human-wildlife conflict was common in the past, and continues to be a challenge for the communities.

The Chobe Enclave became the site of a pilot CBNRM project in 1989, and in March 1993 a CBO was formed to represent these villages. The CECT was formally constituted in 1994. The former village project committees became village trust committees, electing representatives to the CECT board. The board of 15 trustees is elected every three years. The CECT was 'the first trust to enter into a joint venture agreement with a private safari company and as such the first community organisation to earn large amounts of money from natural resource utilisation'.¹⁴

Unusually for CBNRM projects in Botswana, the CECT was able to mobilise significant donor support, which allowed it to invest its own capital towards constructing the lodge

The CECT has been managing the annual wildlife quotas received from the DWNP since 1994. It also has a 50-year head lease from the Land Board to conduct wildlife and tourism activities. Until the 2014 hunting moratorium, the CECT derived revenues from managing CH1 as a hunting concession and CH2 as a photographic concession (see Figure 1), in addition to a JVP with a private operator – Africa Albida Tourism, which manages the Ngoma Safari Lodge. Unusually for CBNRM projects in Botswana, the CECT was able to mobilise significant donor support, which allowed it to invest its own capital towards constructing the lodge. USAID and the African Wildlife Foundation contributed \$1.77 million (about 50% of the total capital value of the lodge) for this purpose.¹⁵ The lodge is sub-leased to Albida for 20 years, after which the CECT board envisages that the trust itself will assume full operation and ownership of Ngoma Lodge.¹⁶ At present, the lodge employs 36 people from the five villages. In an attempt to facilitate skills transfer and build expertise within the community there is an on-going job-shadowing initiative underway that will allow locals to eventually take over the financial and operational lodge management responsibilities from Albida.

In 1997, the CECT earned \$46,400. By 2011, this figure was \$578,685 – more than 10 times the original annual income.¹⁷ The hunting moratorium, however, has resulted in a decline in this figure, back to the 2007 levels of \$250,000.¹⁸ It appears that the average revenue loss impact of the hunting moratorium on all of the CBOs in Botswana is not substantial, simply because relatively few had access to hunting concessions.¹⁹ However, it has proved a significant financial setback for the CECT. Nonetheless, the trust appears to be making real attempts to move in a more sustainable direction by diversifying income through alternative livelihood measures and activities (beyond wildlife products), and marketing existing products in new and innovative ways.

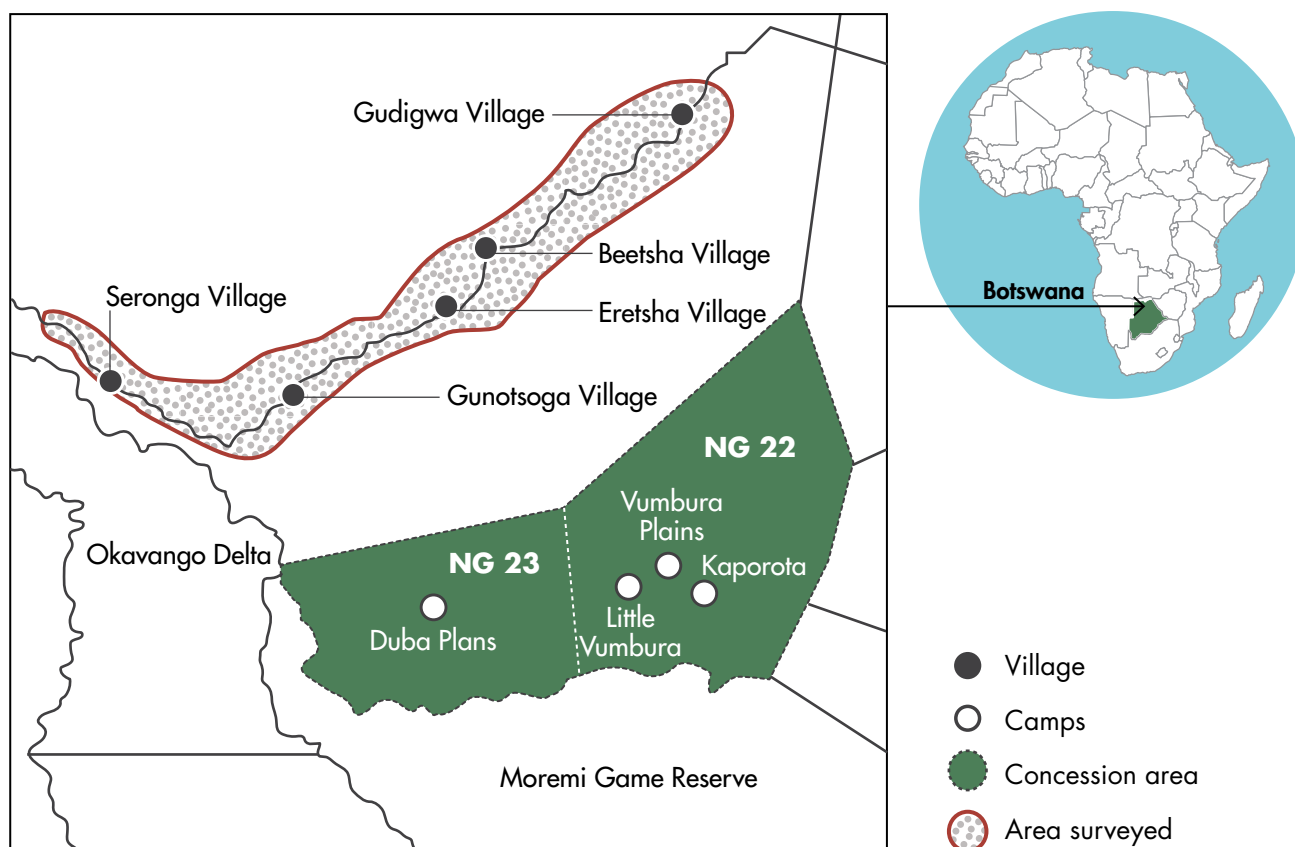
For instance, each year, when the income generated through the various CBNRM mechanisms is ready for distribution, ‘each village holds a forum to propose projects for funding’.²⁰ In 2008, five tractors and ploughing equipment were purchased to improve the productivity yield from agricultural activities. In 2009, the CECT decided to provide capital for three mechanised corn milling projects and a cement brick-moulding project. This general trajectory reflects an understanding of the need to diversify revenue streams and shows genuine participatory decision-making.

Although CBNRM has been criticised for not devolving sufficient decision-making responsibilities to local institutions – previously wildlife quotas were set unilaterally by the DWNP, for instance – the CECT has benefited from CBNRM in a way that has relieved poverty to an extent by providing both local economic opportunities and livelihood diversification. The latter has unfortunately also become a source of strife due to competing land-use conflicts. As agriculture has grown, so too has the threat of human–wildlife conflict – elephants raid crops and lions eat livestock, while buffalo spread foot-and-mouth disease to the 7 000-strong cattle stock. Farmers are thus calling for compensation for the loss of income. This extends beyond the roll-out of protective measures, such as electric fencing and warning systems, to include financial compensation. In 1999, the Botswana government established the Conservation Trust Fund for precisely this reason – to fund human–wildlife conflict mitigation and alternative income-generating investments, and to provide communities with compensatory income for conflict with wildlife.

This complex scenario also suggests the need for new and innovative thinking around integrated land-use planning. For example, some experts have argued that ‘greater consideration should be given to models of wildlife-livestock integration’.²¹ Although there are substantial downside risks to and legitimate concerns over the co-existence of livestock and wildlife,²² a more integrated approach would minimise the current trade-offs between potential livestock farming and wildlife tourism revenue, and would also allow for the occupation of former hunting concessions that are currently uninhabited. Areas such as CH3 are reportedly not suitable for photographic wildlife safaris. Left unused, poachers can easily infiltrate these areas to access the Chobe and Moremi game reserves.

On the edge of the eastern panhandle, where the Okavango River begins to fan into the delta, five villages formed the OCT in 1996. Although the villages are to the north of the actual concession areas, the OCT was established to manage the lease for the concessions of Ngamiland (NG) zones 22 and 23 (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 CONCESSION AREAS OF THE OKAVANGO COMMUNITY TRUST



Source: Snyman S, ‘High-end ecotourism and rural communities in Southern Africa: A socio-economic analysis’, PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2013, https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/item/5624/thesis_com_2013_snysus002_susan_snyman_susan.pdf?sequence=1, accessed 2 March 2016

The OCT board (elected on a rotating basis every three years) negotiates the contract terms with its private sector partners, of whom there are now two – Okavango Wilderness Safaris (OWS) and Great Plains Conservation. OWS operates Little Vumbura and Vumbura Plains in zone NG 22. It recently sold the rights to operate the Duba Plains Camp and its assets in zone NG 23 to Great Plains. By 2004, OWS had subleased both concessions, paying lease fees directly to the OCT.

At a household level, most people in these five villages are involved in subsistence farming. The collection of non-timber veld products, in addition to fishing and community-based tourism activities (normally through freelancing to smaller private operators), is also relatively widespread.

In the case of the OCT, Dr Sue Snyman records that the current lease payment to the trust amounts to \$375,000 a year, having been set at that amount since the 15-year lease agreement started in 2006. The staff component of local villagers in OWS camps is 74%. Total staff costs alone (not included in the lease fees) amount to roughly \$1 million a year. For the three-year period from 2006 to 2009, combined lease fees and staff costs totalled roughly \$4.16 million. Moreover, 'staff spending their salaries in their home villages creates a multiplier effect'²³ through increased education expenditure and savings.

Some experts have argued that non-hunting revenue is insufficient to compensate for hunting revenue loss, especially in more unprepossessing places. However, the data from the OCT's partnership with OWS suggests that, in photographically suitable areas, the revenue generated from non-consumptive tourism is a sufficient replacement. In other areas, cultural and adventure tourism may be worth pursuing more aggressively.

What remains an issue then is the effective, equitable distribution of this income, even within relatively functional cases such as the OCT. In Snyman's household-level interviews in all five OCT villages, for instance, 'many non-staff respondents commented that they would like to know whether the JV [joint venture] lease income is being spent'.²⁴ OCT staff members also complain that insufficient skills are being transferred to the employed community members, and that their salaries are too low²⁵ (around \$250 a month). Some of these negative assessments allegedly stem from current board members who have a political interest in painting private tour operators in a bad light.²⁶ At a more fundamental level, the constant turnover of board members means that long-term projects are difficult to implement due to the lack of continuity in decision-making at CBO level. In political terms, projects with long lead times are irreconcilable with local-level lobbying for three-year board positions.

Snyman went so far as to say that some 'respondents in this study were not aware of any benefits received from the OCT',²⁷ and that some had been told by the OCT that no revenue distribution was occurring because OWS had not paid the OCT. Although this is patently untrue, it demonstrates how important clear communication is to the JVPs if they are to encourage local community members to conserve wildlife. This is especially true for those communities that bear the opportunity costs of living with or near dangerous wildlife.

OCT staff members also complain that insufficient skills are being transferred to the employed community members, and that their salaries are too low

Transparency and communication challenges also exist from the side of private operators, who are often concerned that the money distributed to the community trusts is not being spent wisely or on the development projects initially envisaged. On the other side of the coin, some operators have been accused of giving preferential treatment to those community members who support them when it comes to lease renewal. There is evidently an urgent need to improve local understanding of and support for CBNRM structures and activities at the village level.

CONCLUSION

CBNRM in Botswana, and elsewhere, is a complicated endeavour. The Botswana government recognises the need for meaningful institutional devolution to the local level if wildlife is to be conserved, yet it also seeks to respond to the call for a more equitable distribution of revenues generated by wildlife resources. As a result, CBNRM in its current iteration is a hybrid model that blends centralised revenue distribution with some level of local autonomy in the hands of CBOs.

The OCT and CECT case studies highlight the complexities of CBNRM, even in relatively well-managed contexts. Significant revenues accrue to relatively poor communities that would arguably otherwise eke out an existence from government grants and basic subsistence activities alone. There are, however, significant difficulties. Some of these are structural, and require a shift in policy thinking. For instance, the constitutions governing CTs could be revised to separate the fund management role from employment and project implementation, so as to incentivise community members, who would benefit most from a project to develop the business management skills required for its success.²⁸ Provision could also be made for financial audits to be conducted by independent third parties, the results of which should be publically available for scrutiny. Resultant information about the exact costs and benefits associated with CBNRM projects would help to diminish rumour-mongering and suspicion, provided it is communicated in a way that is understandable to people with relatively low levels of financial literacy.

Other difficulties could be overcome through improved communication. Dialogue forums between JVPs, CBOs and the relevant government departments should therefore become more regular. This would improve transparency, minimise information asymmetry and ensure better overall communication between all stakeholders.

CBOs tend to function sub-optimally, largely as a result of the inadequate human capital available in remote areas. To alleviate these constraints, both JVPs and CBOs should promote education through scholarships, skills training and improved infrastructure. However, as is common across the world, this may produce the unintended consequence of outward migration, especially in rural areas.

To minimise human–wildlife conflict, as well as the tensions that have risen in the wake of the hunting moratorium, more tourism opportunities need to be generated for communities living in the buffer zones of WMAs. There are major opportunities in this respect, as significant potential exists to promote cultural tourism, recreational fishing, volunteer-tourism, and adventure tourism – activities

that do not compromise the government's high-value/low-impact tourism model and that simultaneously seek to protect ecologically sensitive areas. It is also important to promote opportunities that are not located in WMAs but rather within village/agricultural contexts.

CBNRM is only likely to be efficient and effective under particular, context-specific conditions. Creating and sustaining these conditions is complex. This is a constantly evolving policy space and it is clear that, although imperfect, communities are better off with CBNRM than without it. It does, however, have to be more effectively governed, and a greater diversification of economic activities has to be encouraged. If it is to be successful, CBNRM must also be politically supported through investment in appropriate CBNRM legislation and natural resource management policy.

ENDNOTES

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