CBNRM: reflecting on the past to create potential for the future.

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) aims to conserve natural resources by allowing the communities depending on them to manage them. It was devised after National Parks and Reserves failed to achieve a satisfactory balance between development and conservation. In contrast to these strategies, CBNRM endeavours to allow communities and other groups access to and a say in the management of local resources, hoping to provide an incentive to conserve the wildlife in the area through the generation of revenue from them. CBNRM initiatives have proved a strong alternative to enforced parks, due to the community-centric viewpoint which retains produce and profits locally, as well as promoting efficient resource use. Theoretically it incorporates indigenous technical knowledge and encourages local participation, working as an antidote to previous state run attempts at conservation. However, in practice the implementation of these schemes has not been as smooth as originally hoped. Identifying weak areas highlights where improvements could increase the success of CBNRM. Although it is impossible to attend to one factor without affecting another, as they are all so inter-linked, I believe there are three main areas of weakness: a) the colonial legacy of the ignorance of local traditions and customs leading to a misconception of local communities; b) the unanticipated complexity of inter- and intra-community relationships and c) the poor governmental organisation and support of schemes. By attending to these points, and creating a resilient community that has a more powerful role for local communities, I believe the potential success of CBNRM can be increased, and will discuss these points respectively.

Ignorant stereotypes and misconceptions of local customs are a legacy of colonial explorers who misunderstood farming techniques and traditions when first arriving in new countries in the 19th century. Their experiences have been passed down as "received wisdom" (Anderson and Grove 1987) to create an image of developing countries as barren wildernesses, the local people incapable of conserving the resources appropriately and as a result needing the West to intervene. After colonial occupation, international concern about endangered species and soil erosion led to the creation of National Parks, and this has left many indigenous communities homeless

in order to protect the wildlife. The result is an atmosphere of hostility and distrust between local communities and the state.

This ignorance and misrepresentation of local traditions can result in local population's opinions being neglected, for example through misunderstanding different forms of protest: In Nicaragua, the reaction to the removal of the local population's access to natural resources was passive resistance, remaining silent and unresponsive. However, authorities took this as assent of the plans, and thus the views of the local community remained unheard (Nygren 2000, p. 821). In the same vein, having been evicted from Amboseli National Park in Kenya, Maasai hunters killed rhinos to express their discontent (Lindsey *in* Anderson and Grove, 1987). This was interpreted simply as mindless violence, strengthening misguided stereotypes of destructive native hunters, who lost even more of their resource and land rights as a result.

Ignorance of the context of community life can cause programs to be designed inappropriately, increasing chances of failure. The ADMADE project in Uganda aimed to reduce the occurrence of poaching from a National Park. It was assumed this illegal hunting was driven by a need for money and that by increasing financial incentives against poaching the incidence of the killing of game would decrease (Gibson and Marks 1995, p. 942). These incentives were provided in the form of a share of entrance fees, meat from the park, investment for schools, clinics, roads and other public services as well as providing a greater incentive for the locally recruited scouts to enforce the no poaching rules through bonuses. However, although the hunting of big game decreased, small game poaching increased, and it became apparent that the hunters had motives other than money. Indeed, hunting continued because it was a respected cultural tradition used as a rite of passage as men demonstrated their strength and capability. As a result, financial incentives were not sufficient to prevent the illegal hunting (ibid, p. 951). Despite the good intentions of CBNRM to provide compensation for these actions and give higher returns to locals, the projected feelings of the community were over-looked as a result of a lack of consultation of local communities in the decision-making process. This is not a unique occurrence - many programs do not account for local traditions and mindsets, resulting in schemes that promise incentives that are simply inappropriate to the

particular circumstances, and therefore do not act to change behaviour in the intended way.

The second area of weakness in CBNRM is tightly linked to these misconceptions - CBNRM often assumes community homogeneity, both within and between local populations. The general interpretation of a "community " is as a small, integrated unit sharing locally evolved norms and rules, but this does not allow for the differences within the community or the local politics governing the people and it inevitably leads to under-representation of the individuals within them (Agrawal and Gibson 1999, p. 630). Hierarchies within them mean that elected representatives from within the community may not voice opinions shared by all but only push for agendas benefiting themselves (Nygren 2000, p. 820). CBNRM project incentives are often in the form of facilities, which are not equally accessible by all members of the community – for example some will live further away from the new schools and clinics. Profit sharing is often left in the hands of chiefs who may use it for their own needs before sharing with the community, or unequally distribute it to friends and family, leading to intra-community conflict (Gibson and Marks 2005, p. 956). Difficulties defining boundaries between different conservancies under CBNRM projects in Namibia, and the impossibility of confining wildlife to one area can destabilise relationships between communities (Jones 1999, p. 299). Designing CBNRM only for whole communities and not addressing the issue of individuality within them means that the benefits will never be appreciated by all members of the community, and the ultimate aim of CBNRM – to increase conservation efforts by local populations – will not be realised.

The final section of the discussion of weaknesses within CBNRM regards the weak organisation and support offered by the state. State based projects have generally been both poorly designed and implemented; local communities have little incentive to take part in government driven schemes after the historic exploitation of indigenous people described above. Although many NGOs are attempting to rectify this by providing a voice for local communities in order to facilitate the creation of community based projects, and providing educating about the benefits available to communities that do participate, efforts are often undermined as the actual rights of the land are usually maintained by the state or authorities (Alexander and MacGregor 2000, p. 618). This

means that although CBNRM projects give responsibility of the land to local communities, the land is not their own, thus there is no motivation for people to work at conserving the wildlife in the area (Agrawal and Gibson 1999, p. 631).

This retention of rights allows the government to receive credit for success whilst avoiding blame and costs of failure. In order to achieve this, the government retains the authority to exert influence over two of the three processes required for the management of resources – the negotiation of rules and the resolution of disputes regarding these – while communities have jurisdiction over only one, the implementation of these rules. This means the government maintains the right to exercise its authority in rule making, which are often influenced by national as well as local political agendas (Agrawal and Gibson 1999, p. 637). This lack of participation in the decision making process creates a feeling of helplessness amongst local people, who have no opportunity to influence the policies that are created or how they are carried out, and thus no real motive to participate. The method also works against the government, who incur costs from having to send a representative to decide the outcome of disputes which would be more effectively settled by the community involved in the disagreement, who have an understanding of the context (ibid, p. 638).

In Amboseli National Park in Kenya, Maasai tribes agreed to vacate their land to allow conservation in return for compensation in the form of a water supply, schools, cattle dips, a share of tourist revenue and profits from building projects and a new campsite location. However, five years later their promised water supply had dried up, their share of the profits was irregular and they received little tourist revenue (Lindsey *in* Anderson and Grove). In Uganda, the compensation promised by the government to people removed from Mgahinga National Park turned out to be an inadequate amount with which to buy new land, and the ban the utilization of resources within the park created a dire situation for those who had been relocated (Adams and Infield 2003). Projects need commitment and support from local authorities as well as national and international organisations. Unfortunately in many cases such the two described above this support is extremely lacking, leading to a depressing cycle in which more projects fail, promises of benefits go unfulfilled, negativity is increased and the distrust of authorities by local communities grows. Therefore the continued

support needed for these projects is essential not only to ensure the success of the current project but also any future initiatives (Adams and Infield 2003, p. 179).

Finally, the financial insecurity surrounding CBNRM is also an issue. As government does not wholly fund CBNRM projects, communities also need charitable donations to start and maintain them. However, the size of these donations can vary with changing political climate, which can also affect other forms of revenue generators such as tourism and safaris. In the 1990s when many CBNRM projects were starting out, the attention given to environmental issues worldwide was high and as a result the donation for these causes increased (Nygren 2000, p. 808). However, as interest changes and moves away from these plights onto other causes, these donations will potentially decrease, creating serious implications for CBNRM projects that will have difficulty generating the revenue necessary for successful businesses. The profit margin would decrease and as a result the incentive for taking part in the projects will decline relative to this.

The problems described above are a result of ignorance of traditions and weak organisation, but they can be rectified. The following section will discuss how planning long-term and creating resilience within these projects, allowing flexibility between areas in response to specific circumstances, would increase the probability of success with CBNRM.

In order to produce a resilient community it is necessary to generate a strong economy for local communities with an emphasis on conservation efforts. Attempting to shoehorn environmentally methods in at a later date has a much lower success rate than building it in from the start (Lindsey *in* Anderson and Grove 1987). This balance between allowing development whilst protecting wildlife is difficult to resolve, but it is possible to create a balance whereby natural resources are utilised but the survival of natural resources is not compromised by this use (Brockington and Homewood 1996). This can be achieved and is more likely to succeed when incorporating responsibility of the land into the set up. The people of Rio San Juan emphasise they want the opportunity to use the forest without destroying it - "If they give us a chance to live on something, we aren't going to cut down the trees" (Nygren 2000, p. 814). If

people have their own property rights to the land they are managing, they have more incentive to look after it and ensure its continued success in the future.

Financially speaking it is necessary to educate people about the market economy. All projects start out dependent on donations, but these investments have been showed to provide a positive return: conservancies do constitute a considerable contribution to the country's GDP. Although the continuation of these donations can be uncertain, there is no reason to expect the collapse of the communities with the withdrawal of this money. In most cases, even in the event of stopping all donations immediately, only in very vulnerable conservancies, thus reliant only on one source of income that would be left in difficulties should that fail, would there be any fatal implications (Barnes et al 2002, p. 677). The majority of the donations go towards initial costs such as providing capital for investment, and as a result the revenue generated from the natural resources such as tourism, safari and agriculture are enough to sustain the area into the future. For example, the conservancies created under the USAID project in Namibia have generated US $600,000 in revenues in six years (USAID 2003).

Encouraging local communities to undertake a variety of methods of income to maintain this flexibility is important. Investment in high value added areas such as tourism are beneficial, although it is imperative that any changes in method are introduced gradually to create smooth transition – a sudden leap into a modern economy without the whole community on board in terms of knowledge of the market and in agreement with the business ideas could lead to failure (Lindsey *in* Anderson and Grove 1987). It is also important to research the situation within local communities to ensure that the suggestions being made are appropriate to the political and environmental climate of the area. It is imperative to avoid, for example, the situation in Kenya, where an attempt to introduce group ranches into Amboseli led to fractions between groups due to the unsuitability of this style to their traditional knowledge (ibid).

Resilience is crucial for securing the continued success CBNRM but a more fundamental issue has to be addressed in the participation of the projects. The main difference between those CBNRM projects suffering from the problems described above and more successful attempts such as that in Namibia is that the priority of the

latter is on the inclusion of local communities in designing and implementing the initiatives (Jones 1999, p. 300). This community-centric point of view, accepting that local people have extensive local knowledge which can be tapped and incorporated into accepted methods of farming. Indigenous populations have practised environmental preservation techniques since before ether arrivals of Westerners (McCracken *in* Anderson and Grove 1987) and combining this knowledge with more modern scientific discoveries has the potential to create optimal methods for sustainability (Nygren 2000, p. 825). However, local people are generally excluded from any decisions made regarding land and natural resources; their agricultural and farming methods are disregarded as inefficient and the incentives provided to participate are either not an appropriate form of compensation, or not enough to outweigh the disadvantages of taking part.

In most cases of CBNRM effective disfranchisement results from the opinions and needs of local communities being overlooked. Although many projects such as those in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania include the people in looking after and managing resources, the ownership of the land remains that of the state. The legacy from colonial times that that people reliant on it for their livelihoods could not be trusted to not exploit it (Anderson and Grove 1987) is disregarded today, but the lack of actual property rights still remains a barrier for local communities, and removes the responsibility and commitment that might ensue if they were granted ownership of the land.

The USAID project in the Kunene region of Namibia demonstrates a successful project overcoming these hurdles. USAID originally set out to help locals work out a method of generating revenue by charging commission to safari tour operators who brought tourists through their villages. The local communities went on to realise the potential income from tourism and safari, and developed other ideas such as creating guest houses. The reliance on tourism also presented an incentive to protect the local wildlife the tourists came to see. This was the aim of the original national park initiatives which had simply removed indigenous people from the land, making them resentful of the park and unlikely to co-operate (Jones 1999, p. 296).

As a result of the success of this singular project, in 1990 the Namibian government developed a policy where local communities could apply for "conservancy" status. If they fulfilled certain conditions, such as having a defined boundary, membership, committee and constitution and the status was granted, they would be provided with conditional ownership and license to buy or sell certain game. The IRDNC provided help preparing communities to fulfil the conditions (Jones 1999, p. 299).

The impetus for the government's decision to invest in this lies in an advantageous cost-benefit relationship: the land is managed in a sustainable fashion, but there is a reduction in management costs as the conservancy assume control of the resources. For the community, the profits from maintaining the sustainable lifestyle outweigh the disadvantage of working to conserve the wildlife. This has led to successful relationships forming between the conservancy and government, and has incorporated all the points made above regarding building conservation and flexibility into the program from the off, by working with the local community and giving them actual ownership rights over resources. As a result it has avoided the problem areas associated with other similar projects.

The success of the project in Namibia demonstrates the potential of CBNRM, and illustrates the necessity for giving local communities the responsibility to make the difference in land management. By allowing self-definition of community, for example through the application process used in Namibia, organisers can be educated into the specific needs of each area, and a project with appropriate aims and incentives - available to all the demographics, not just the most obvious -can be set up. The responsibility of this falls also onto the local community to address themselves the needs of the multiple actors within, and the increased responsibility means local disputes can be resolved locally to help these problems being exacerbated.

There is no longer an excuse for misconception surrounding indigenous people, and by awarding more power to local communities a system of checks and balances can be effected that will ensure the government maintains its promises and assisst in restoring positive relationships between local communities and the state. CBNRM projects that do not allow communities this power, through exclusion from decision-

making processes or withholding land rights, are doomed to failure as the project participation is too low to make the potential outcomes that have been so positively theorised come to life. By planning for resilience from the off, financial uncertainty is reduced. Evidence from case studies shows that when these issues are addressed, CBNRM real potential for creating a successful relationship between conservation and development.

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