

Dynamics of local governance in natural resource conservation in the Okavango Delta, Botswana

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Abstract

There has been a shift in natural resource management worldwide. This paper describes how modern institutions and policies influence management and shape access to and utilization of resources by rural communities in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. It is rooted in the framework of adaptive co-governance within social-ecological systems, and employs a critical literature review to analyse access to and use of natural resources in rural Botswana. Prior to the establishment of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) in Botswana in 1989, resource governance was dominated by strong traditional institutions that were responsible for natural resource management and decision-making. Contemporary natural resource governance is characterized by a bureaucratic system that invariably undermines the role of traditional institutions in natural resource governance. Findings indicate that policies and regulatory instruments deny rural communities adequate access to and utilization of resources available within their immediate environment. In spite of an orientation towards an anthropocentric approach to natural resource management (as in the case of CBNRM), the current governance system continues to undermine the inclusion of local resource users as legitimate stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Keywords: Community-based natural resource management; resource management; traditional institutions; rural communities; Okavango Delta.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the role of institutions in environmental governance has been widely debated. Ostrom (2005) presents her general understanding of institutions as commonly understood precepts of engagement. Elsewhere, Ostrom and Cox (2010: 455) further elaborate on the concept by viewing “institutions as commonly understood codes of behaviour that potentially reduce uncertainty, mediate self-interest, and facilitate collective action”. According to this definition, institutions can be understood as mechanisms for enhancing environmental conservation. They play an important role in natural resource conservation because they produce or reproduce the incentives that promote either environmentally destructive or constructive behaviour. Thus, the absence of effective governance generates incentives for the misappropriation of resources, which in turn creates environmental problems.

Ostrom (1990) recommends a governance system that would collectively manage common pool natural resources. This system is comprised of formal and informal

institutions, and is codified in different rules, values and norms. Local communities have often designed effective and sufficient mechanisms to regulate the use of natural resources available within their immediate vicinities. Institutional arrangements of local people characterized by recognized past successes and potentials, knowledge, and self-interest of groups of users and communities are essential for effective management of common resources (Feeny *et al.*, 1990). They have cultural orientations that are comprised of mechanisms for conserving or ensuring sustainable utilization of such resources through systems of values and taboos (Kolawole, 2001, 2013). Ostrom (1990) therefore opines that traditional institutions can (or even should) play an integral role in natural resource management. She argues that values such as prudence, perseverance and taboos (e.g. over-consumption of resources) restrain people’s behaviour, making them inherently self-limiting; they generate incentives for behavioural self-control. These elements of social systems help to ensure sustainable utilization of natural resources. Moreover, inter-group dynamics create a reputation effect, whereby one group would not want to be seen by another group to be breaking the rules already in place. It is in this context that the solutions to environmental degradation must be contextualized within local communities.

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National governments in developing countries have not been successful in preserving and protecting common pool resources that were nationalized by them (Ostrom, 1990), as they continue to experience problems of free-riding and illegal exploitation of resources by both local and external populations, leading to species decline (Berkes, 2007). Elsewhere, Hendrik (1998) succinctly buttresses the claim that governments have failed to manage natural resources effectively because the rules in place are often in conflict with the needs and perceived rights of local residents. When local communities are ignored in the process of making the rules that govern their resources, effective management cannot be achieved because the rules are inherently incentive-incompatible with their needs. This leads to overconsumption of natural resources.

Attempting to address the problem in the 1980s, developing countries, including Botswana, adopted the concept of ‘conservation with development’, promoting the idea that conservation and development are mutually interdependent. Consequently, this led to the adoption of community-based conservation (CBC). Hackle (1999: 727) contends that CBC adheres to three basic principles, which state that “CBC allows people living near protected areas (PAs) to participate in land use policy and management decisions; gives people proprietorship or ownership over wildlife resources; and gives local people economic benefit from wildlife conservation”. In 1988, the government of Zimbabwe rolled out the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), a CBC programme that was highly successful, but that has occasionally encountered many challenges, such as trying to create a fortified command over wildlife resources throughout communal areas, without regard for pre-colonial land distribution in the new era of independence (Murphree, 1994). The absence of definitive community entitlement was critical in relation to wildlife conservation, as it has hindered the expansion of institutions participating in land and resource administration. Though the intentions of CAMPFIRE were visionary, it fostered a stance that alienated community entitlement as a result of specified rights (Murombedzi, 2007). In 1989, community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) was established in Botswana (Thakadu *et al.*, 2005). Community-based natural resource management recognizes that local communities must have direct control over the utilization and benefits of natural resources in order to value them in a sustainable manner. Ultimately, CBNRM policy is based on the thinking that if local communities participate effectively in governance processes, they will conserve natural resources on their own terms if the people derive benefits from them. Thus, the introduction of CBNRM in Botswana has ostensibly substituted traditional institutions for Western approaches to natural resource management.

Jeanrenaud (2002) contends that the conservation discourse has shifted from ‘people are a threat’ to ‘people can’t be ignored/people are a threat’ to ‘people-centred

approaches’, which emphasize the ‘participation of people’ in conservation, and question the appropriateness of conventional approaches by asking ‘conservation for whom?’ Instead of serving its intended purpose of ‘conservation and rural development’, CBNRM has become an agent of discord between local communities and the government and within local communities themselves. Dressler *et al.* (2010: 7) points out that “CBNRM fostered intense frictional relationships between local communities, conservationists and donors, thereby creating and institutionalizing major political disjuncture in the intent and ideal of CBNRM”. Even though CBNRM claims to decentralize authority over natural resources, the ultimate decision remains with the central government, as proven by Botswana’s Department of Wildlife and National Parks’ (Government of Botswana, 2007) decision to re-centralize the CBNRM programme (Poteete, 2009; Rihoy and Maguranyanga, 2010; Hoon, 2014). We posit that the pursuit of CBNRM by the Government of Botswana has led to a less adaptive co-management system, and caution that decreased autonomy of local communities may affect the preservation of natural resources, upon which long term sustainability of resources depends.

This paper addresses the questions of how rural communities in the Okavango Delta govern their environment and how CBNRM, a purportedly bottom-up approach, continues to be state-centric in its implementation. Specifically, the paper examines the role of local communities in environmental governance. The important roles of traditional institutions and the approaches used by rural communities in governing their environment are outlined. Also, the contemporary mode of access to and utilization of natural resources in the Okavango Delta, Botswana are highlighted. The paper begins by presenting a theoretical foundation upon which the analysis of pertinent issues on access to and use of natural resources is built.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

The theoretical underpinnings of this paper are rooted in adaptive co-governance within a social-ecological system (SES), which emphasizes the integrated nature of humans in the larger ecosystem. In this context, human and environmental interactions and processes cannot be separated in natural resource management (Cilliers, 1998; Gunderson and Light, 2006). From the SES viewpoint, adaptive co-governance focuses on the importance of decentralized and quasi-autonomous networks that are critical for elevating institutional and individual adaptive capacities, and are indicative of the transition that is demonstrated (Olsson *et al.*, 2006). Hall (2007) suggests that these networks are self-managing and engage with other networks via formal and traditional mechanisms.

Such mechanisms are critical to establishing, within networks, methods on how adaptive co-governance processes

are determined, engaged and expressed. Therefore, natural resource management is a result of official (regulatory and/or bureaucratic) formal methods that are implemented. But for resource use, and as put forward by Ostrom (1992), networks that are not formal are categorized as established social/cultural standards beyond the scope of legal frameworks. Such standards are inherent in nature through traditional social interactions. Clearly, community people have regulatory mechanisms that could not have evolved haphazardly, but through a careful process of observation, experimentation and validation (Kolawole, 2001, 2013). Thus, Berkes (2007) opines that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) has developed over many generations, and gets revisited on a regular basis. As such, TEK cannot be regarded as knowledge of the past, but can also be adjudged as knowledge of the present.

Adaptive capacity refers to the ability of a system to adapt to change and respond to disturbances, and allows for a feedback system that gives local community structures an opportunity to reflect upon, discuss, modify and improve management decisions (Armitage, 2008). Adaptive co-governance presents a scenario for the emergence of novel partnerships among entities, such as communities, governing authorities, the private sector, and the civil sector, in which both authority and responsibility over governing natural resources are shared. Good governance is comprised of legitimacy and transparency, polycentric institutions, empowerment and social justice, eliminating power imbalances, and ensuring fairness, integration, and adaptability (Kooiman, 2003). These are necessary to achieve good co-governance.

The co-governance of natural resources is embedded within the concept of CBNRM in Botswana (Mosepele *et al.*, 2014). Although there are dominant managerial tendencies from the state, the main emphasis of CBNRM has been the devolution of power to local communities (Poteete, 2009; Rihoy and Maguranyanga, 2010; Mbaiwa and Thakadu, 2011). Fletcher (2010) argues that the dominant approach to environmental issues has always followed a top-down linear mode of assessment and a *posteriori* follow-up of responses by those who are the target of policies (local communities, in this case), which are resident within natural resource areas. Rather than consult them from the outset, local communities in Botswana have generally been informed by the government after major decisions that affect them (the local communities) have been made. Despite claims by the CBNRM policy to incorporate indigenous knowledge in the management of resources, nothing has been achieved to date, because the formulation of policies in natural resource management has not recognized and integrated informal networks into management and decision-making (Cassidy *et al.*, 2011). For instance, the monitoring system that forms the basis for quota setting as pointed out by Bendsen and Motsholapheko (2003) does not take into consideration context-specific observations made by local communities. Perhaps due to some

noticeable, local level managerial shortcomings and without the political will to deal with them, the central government has gained more influence in CBNRM (Hoon, 2014). This poses a challenge for the successful coordination of CBNRM. Transparency, trust, participation and accountability are also affected, leading to local community disempowerment. The incentives to participate are in part affected by power imbalances and stakeholders' (local communities, in this case) perceptions as to whether or not their efforts will yield any meaningful and mutually beneficial results (Ansell and Gash, 2007).

Within the context of co-governance, communication should not be seen as a one-way process, but rather as a two-way process between different stakeholders involved (for instance, government, civil society and local communities). Therefore, consultation, which is an iterative process of the co-governance framework, should be actively sought. Consequently, decisions made between stakeholders are derived through a consensus-based approach, often requiring significant dialogue and deliberation among various parties involved (Ansell and Gash, 2007). The engagements among these groups present a 'trialogue model of governance' whereby negotiation, technological innovation, wisdom and observation emerge from interactions between: (1) science and society; (2) government and society; and (3) government and science (Turton *et al.*, 2007).

As a result of the complexities of institutional environments, adaptive co-governance frameworks strive to provide scenarios that encourage and stimulate economic growth, equitable social distribution and sustainability (Hall, 2007). As an offshoot of adaptive co-management, De Young and Kaplan (1988) and Kaplan (1990) provide an alternative of 'adaptive muddling', in which ordinary people (i.e., common shareholders) are allowed to engage in small experiments and create solutions to diverse environmental problems. In doing so, very diverse problems are resolved within a minimal time period (see also, Weick, 1984) due to the concurrent emergence of multiple solutions arising from such 'small' endeavours. Although many issues remain unresolved, the potential for adaptive co-governance frameworks is alluring for the transformation of institutional frameworks in collaborative management scenarios. As enshrined in any human associations, community-based organizations (CBOs) are replete with certain problems inherent to their operations such as corruption, self-centred leadership, hidden politics and conflict situations, which have hindered their progress (Mbaiwa, 2011). Issues of power, control, trust and legitimacy between various actors and among decentralized institutions can create potential bottlenecks for decision-making, negotiation and implementation (Armitage, 2008). But even so, a well-implemented and stiff regulatory mechanism could provide an essential conduit pipe for overcoming anti-social behaviours in the long-run.

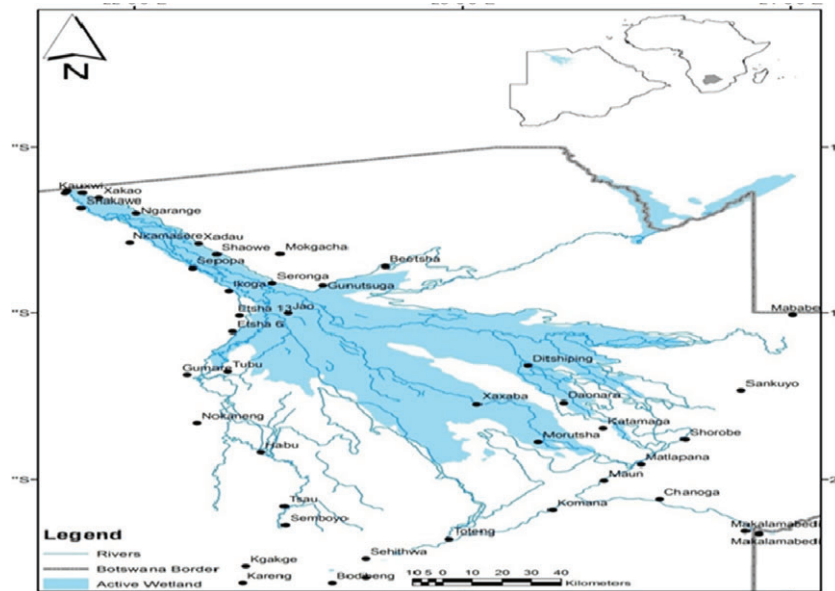


Figure 1. Map showing Okavango Delta (Okavango Research Institute GIS lab).

3. Review methodology

The paper employs a critical literature review to highlight issues relevant to resource management in Botswana. A number of publications and government documents that provided an in-depth assessment and review of the performance of the CBNRM programme in Botswana were critically reviewed. By using an inductive process, we were able to identify papers using the keywords ‘CBNRM’, ‘environmental governance’, ‘conservation’, ‘protected areas’, ‘natural resource management’ and ‘Okavango Delta’. Furthermore, the papers selected were those that contained a significant analysis of CBNRM and similar community-based social ecological systems approaches. From the research papers, common themes were identified as they related to the successful and unsuccessful implementation of the CBNRM initiative in Botswana. The analysis of this paper focuses on two main themes, which are: (1) empowerment of local communities in terms of power relations and status, particularly among local people, or the devolution of power from the central government to local people and institutions; and (2) active participation in decision-making and control of natural resources.

3.1. Overview of the study area

This study was carried out in the Okavango Delta, located in the Ngamiland District of Botswana in the north-western part of the country (see Figure 1). The Okavango Delta derives its water from the upland plains of Angola through the Kubango River, which is joined by the Kuito River, and then criss-crosses the desert land of Namibia, entering Mohembo in Botswana, finally culminating to form the Okavango River. The river then empties itself into the low

plains of north-western Botswana as alluvial distributaries, thus forming an inland delta. The delta is a pristine natural environment, and was declared a Ramsar site in April 1997. It was recently inscribed as a Natural World Heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in June 2014. The delta is vital in terms of the conservation of flora and fauna, as well as to the rural communities that reside close to it. The delta contributes to the livelihoods of the riparian, local people in the area. Approximately 90% of the population either directly or indirectly relies on natural resources within the delta for their livelihoods (Mbaiwa, 2011). The population of people living in and around the Okavango Delta is approximately 137,593 (CSO, 2011), and is comprised of different ethnic groups such as the BaSarwa, HamBukushu, BaTawana, BaYei and BaHerero. The area covers different land tenure systems, namely, communal, state and freehold. The main activities that are important for livelihood options in communal areas include *Molapo* or flood recession farming, pastoral farming and wildlife management, with both consumptive and non-consumptive utilization. There are PAs, which are controlled by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP). Thus, access and resource utilization is guided by the Wildlife Conservation and National Park Act. There are also direct livelihood benefits derived from inside the PAs. A number of community trusts have partnerships with private tour operators, who pay rent to lease the concessions from those communities, which in turn obtain them from the Land Board.¹ Also, direct employment from those

¹Land boards are elected bodies that are responsible for administration and equitable allocation of land resources for various developmental activities.

private tour operators is often provided (albeit in the form of relatively more menial jobs) to community members.

4. Discussions

4.1. Resource use and access in Okavango Delta: past and present

Institutions are commonly understood precepts of engagement (Ostrom, 2005). In addition to providing mechanisms for governance, institutions generate incentives by virtue of those mechanisms. Various indigenous beliefs and practices have contributed to indigenous natural resource management systems in Botswana (Cassidy *et al.*, 2011). Various ethnic groups such as the BaSarwa (hunter-gatherers), BaYei (fishermen) and HamBukushu (agro-pastoralists) were, in those days, able to create local institutions for the management of common pool resources (Thakadu, 1997). Historically, rules and regulations existed among communities regarding access to and utilization of natural resources. Although natural resources in the Okavango Delta are held under a common pool access regime, communities were able to sustainably use the resources by setting rules and regulations (Thakadu, 1997; Mbaiwa, 2005).

Rules for harvesting, hunting and time identification had a bearing on the growth and sustainability of valuable species. Cassidy *et al.* (2011) writes that early policies related to natural resource management were governed by rules, regulations and practices that were connected to the livelihoods of the people. The rules and regulations were then inherited by the local people under the guidance of a legitimate local authority. Traditional leaders played critical roles in ensuring adherence to traditional norms governing resource utilization. A critical element in traditional law enforcement mechanisms was the existence of community-based appointed individuals, who monitored adherence to rules. For instance, the BaSarwa people lived in small bands, in which each band had a leader who was responsible for the utilization and management of natural resources, including wildlife (Thakadu, 1997; Mbaiwa, 2005). Elsewhere, Albertson (2002) points out that the BaSarwa employed highly complex and flexible land use strategies that had sustained them for generations, even during drought spells, without harming the ecosystems on which they depended. Their nomadic lifestyle allowed for resource renewal and regeneration as they moved from one place to another. On the other hand, the BaYei headmen were responsible for the allocation of resource use rights. Today, most of these communities live in the outskirts of national parks and game reserves, where they are denied access to and utilization of natural resources (Magole and Magole, 2005).

Communities have rules for regulating and sanctioning the use of natural resources. For instance, hunting was done during specific times of the year. Thakadu (1997)

observed that big wild animals like gemsbok were hunted only in winter. The meat would then be shared equally among households. This was a way of controlling the use of natural resources, leading to the sustainable use of such resources (Mbaiwa, 2002). Breaking the rules carried the punishment of being excluded from the community's hunting groups and the removal of one's status (Thakadu, 1997). In order to hunt or gather natural resources in another band's territory, permission needed to be sought first. This was a way of avoiding conflicts, and seen as a way of respecting other groups' rights (Campbell, 1995). Thatching grass was harvested in the month of June, after new seeds had ripened and their dispersal had taken place (Kgathi *et al.*, 2011). Elsewhere, Bolaane (2000) notes that rules governing natural resource management had been introduced by the Khwai community, even before the implementation of CBNRM.

Influenced by democratization and modernization, traditional practices regarding resource management gradually disappeared (Kgathi and Ngwenya, 2011). Most of the traditional and cultural practices of access regulation and natural resource management that were in place in the past no longer exist. In post-colonial Botswana, natural resources in rural areas are now managed by adhering to government policies, despite the fact that in the past local communities managed natural resources effectively, having created institutional arrangements to ensure the basic protection of water, forests, wildlife and the enforcement of access and user rights (Wardell, 2003; Cassidy *et al.*, 2011; Hoon, 2014). These policies and power of control are, however, determined and concentrated in the hands of the central government (Cassidy *et al.*, 2011; Kgomotso, 2011; Hoon, 2014), while rural dwellers who had depended on the resources for many years are now systematically marginalized. These policies and regulatory instruments seem to engender role conflicts within and among government agencies in that they create arbitrary distinctions between resources, as in the case of where wildlife is governed separately from other natural resources. While on one hand wildlife management in Botswana is regulated and guided by the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act of 1992 and the Wildlife Conservation policy of 1986, on the other hand utilization is guided by the Tourism Act and CBNRM policy. In addition, different government departments such as the DWNP, Water Utilities Corporation (WUC), and Department of Forestry and Range Resources (DFRR) are responsible for regulating access to and utilization of natural resources in the Okavango Delta. These natural resource management policies have, therefore, altered community access to and utilization of natural resources in the area, thus undermining the ability of communities to establish full control over the use of their resources (Kgomotso, 2011). Pienaar *et al.* (2013) observes that communities that are engaged in CBNRM still feel that they have lost access to wildlife resources.

As the government now sets resource harvesting quotas, communities can harvest resources such as veldt products, thatching grass and fish, provided they have permits that are issued by the DFRR and DWNP, respectively (Mbaiwa and Thakadu, 2011). Certain amounts need to be paid by individuals if they are to use resources for commercial purposes. A quota system is used for the allocation of wild game for each community, which is assigned a controlled hunting area (CHA); the DWNP defines and establishes the hunting quotas. With the recent trophy hunting ban now in place, it means that communities will no longer be allowed to hunt wild animals. In other words, no user rights will be given to communities in terms of hunting wild animals. The national parks and reserve regulations do not allow individuals entry to a national park or game reserve without a permit, and a fee is usually charged to the individual. Therefore, communities are denied access to areas that belonged to them before they were displaced by the designation of these national parks and game reserves. For instance, the BaSarwa people of Khwai still feel that they should be given access to Moremi Game Reserve, where they had been settled before being relocated to present Khwai (Bolaane, 2004). In another vein, the Mababe community people feel that they should also be given access to the Mababe triangle (NG40), which is within Chobe National Park, as they perceive the place as theirs.

Murphree (1994: 405–407) defines property rights as “sanctioned use rights, including the right to determine the mode and extent of management use, rights of access and inclusion, the rights to benefit fully from use and management”. This scenario no longer applies in the Okavango Delta. In most cases, the state decides when and how wildlife can be used (see Hoon, 2014). For instance and as previously mentioned, the recent decision by the Government of Botswana (GoB) to ban trophy hunting is a typical case in point. This was a directive given by the GoB, and without consultation with affected communities in the Okavango Delta (LaRocco, 2014). In his 2013 State of the Nation address, the President of Botswana stated that the decision to ban hunting was based on 2012 wildlife census figures produced by Elephants without Borders (EWB),² which showed wildlife numbers to be diminishing (GoB, 2013). The director and founder of EWB claimed that the survey was the most accurate survey ever undertaken in the region (Gifford, 2013). However, scholars questioned the survey techniques used. Elephants without Borders (EWB) had compared the 2010 results to the 2006 results, making local experts question the comparative validity of the study (see Chase, 2011; Gifford, 2013). Although there were controversial debates surrounding the survey techniques employed by EWB, the director of the organization

was bestowed with the ‘Presidential Order of Meritorious Service Award’ for exceptional service to the country and conservation efforts by the president three years later. As pointed out by Lawrence (2014), a local newspaper Mmegi reported that the president had shares in Linyanti investment, a subsidiary of Wilderness Safari – a company that solely promotes photographic tourism. In 2015, the company was bestowed with the Presidential Order of Meritorious Service award in recognition of the role it played in the development of ecotourism in the country. Ultimately, the interest in photographic tourism in some quarters may have influenced the government’s decision to ban trophy hunting. The central government continues to make decisions about natural resource management without due consultations with communities (Rihoy and Maguranyanga, 2010). Decisions regarding community relocation have been made in the past without the consent of the community’s people. The BaSarwa people of Khwai were relocated from Moremi Game Reserve without their consent (Bolaane, 2004). Grazing land, in some circumstances, has been taken from communities through the erection of cordon fences. Without consulting with rural communities, decisions made by the government are tantamount to the disenfranchisement of rural communities. Depending on whose interests are represented, CBNRM could be seen as eroding trust and legitimacy in the eyes of the constituents they seek to serve.

As long as the ban on hunting is in effect, the livelihoods of local communities are likely to be affected, thereby creating extreme poverty (Saayman, 2015). Saayman (2015) argues that trophy hunting generates millions of Botswana Pula,³ especially in Okavango Delta, where the unemployment rate is high. Without a doubt, the trophy hunting ban is bound to have a tremendous effect on sources of household income and food security. In a way, the shift towards photographic safaris has divided wildlife conservationists. On one hand, some have argued that hunting quotas issued to communities that live near wildlife management areas helped empower and develop local communities (Onishi, 2015; Saayman, 2015). On the other hand, some wildlife conservationists argue that the long-term effects of hunting animal populations might hasten their extinction (Cornell, 2015). Under the current leadership of Dr. Seretse Khama Ian Khama, it is clear that the government of Botswana has resorted to ‘eco-tourism’ as a conservation tool. Therefore, more land has been allocated from common utilization to ecotourism (Kgomotso, 2011). Communities have been encouraged to ‘lease’ their land to private tourism organizations in order to amplify the benefits of its utilization (Kgomotso, 2011). This is meant to maximize profits for the private sector. Renting to private operators presents the manifestation of neoliberal conservation within the CBNRM framework.

²EWB is a non-governmental organization that has been conducting in-country and cross-border research on elephant conservation and management. See <http://www.elephantswithoutborders.org/>.

³Botswana Pula is the national currency.

4.2. Resource utilization in the context of decentralization in Okavango Delta

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is supposedly meant to generate a shift from a top-down approach (state/central control) to a bottom-up approach (community-based control) in wildlife and natural resource management. The shift involves the decentralization of natural resource governance. The CBNRM activities in Botswana are guided by the CBNRM policy of 2007. Through this approach, communities in rural areas that are adjacent to PAs and wildlife management areas (WMAs) are responsible for managing wildlife and other natural resources surrounding them. At the core of the CBNRM programme are CBOs, commonly known as community trusts (CTs). These are legal entities meant to ensure rural people's access to and management of wildlife (Kgathi *et al.*, 2002). Beyond that, they are supposed to represent and safeguard the interest of the communities in resource use and management. Some of the CBOs found in the delta include the Okavango Kopano Mokoro Community Trust (OKMCT), Khwai Development Trust (KDT), Mababe Zokotshana Development Trust, Okavango Community Trust (OCT) and Sankuyo Tshwaraganyo Management Trust (STMT). Community trusts (CTs) are primarily involved in CBNRM activities for two major reasons: resource conservation and derivation of material benefits for the community.

Thus, CBNRM is based on the assumption that local communities will be keen to conserve natural resources in the area from which they derive economic benefits, be it through tourism or other related avenues (Mbaiwa and Kolawole, 2013). Therefore, development of CBNRM in Botswana was triggered primarily by the need to improve conservation of natural resources. In this regard, CBNRM relies heavily on material incentives in order to achieve the desired goal of conservation. The question as to whether or not conservation will continue when such incentives are no longer in place therefore arises. Will communities place a higher economic value on natural resources when they are denied access or do not receive economic benefits from such resources? The answer to this question remains yet to be seen.

That said, CBNRM in the Okavango Delta is mostly tourism-oriented, and a CBO is in joint partnership with the private sector (mostly with hunting and the photographic safari company), with the hope of generating income for rural communities. Rihoy (1995) posits that CBNRM promotes resource use rights for local communities. Though communities are given partial resource use rights, the communities do not have direct control of the resources, nor do they make decisions, especially with regard to wildlife. Murphree (1994) therefore concludes that one of the constraints of CBNRM is the weakness of property rights over natural resources. For instance, CTs gained access to wildlife resources through a leasing system and annual hunting quotas. However, the ultimate

decision over wildlife remains with the government through the DWNP. In this way, CTs are not really provided with increased access over natural resources. This implies that community use rights are only provided by the policies rather than the legislation. There is a need for community usufruct to be protected in legislation, so as to enable local communities to make appropriate decisions regarding the use of resources on behalf of the central government.

Interestingly, the GoB, through the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO), now formulates the tendering process of CBOs. In its initial formation, the BTO was responsible for marketing Botswana tourism internationally. However, some aspects of decision-making powers have now been transferred from the DWNP to the BTO (Hoon, 2014). It decides the partnership of CBOs with safari companies without the involvement of CBOs (see Hoon, 2014). The CBNRM policy (2007) stipulates that “the decision to award [the] tender to a particular joint partner will, however, rest with TAC”. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is made up of different governmental departments, which offer technical advice to CBOs on how best to operate their CBOs. In the past, communities were responsible for awarding tenders for their trusts; they had the liberty to choose their own joint venture partner (JVP) (Mbaiwa and Thakadu, 2011). However, there was evidence of disagreement and controversies surrounding the selection of JVP trusts by board members of the trust. To a considerable degree, this system encouraged extortion and bribery, hence, the government decision to change the policy by choosing the JVP on behalf of the trust. Contrary to the policy, the TAC is not involved in the tendering process, while the BTO, which is not part of the TAC, is the entity that plays this role. Initially the idea was for the BTO to help CBOs make more efficient use of the revenue they derive from leasing their concessions, and to choose their partners with a more objective choice mechanism. As Keeley and Scoones (2003) observe, policy is an outcome of political interactions, and often reflects certain political interests. Therefore, such interests end up influencing policy outcomes. Given this scenario, CTs are not given a chance to facilitate the tendering process with the tourism operators. This surely points to one thing: it is about a lack of trust that the government has in the competence of CBOs to make decisions on their own. Moreover, it is important to point out that the sustainable development framework calls for the involvement of rural community's participation in the decision-making process and resource utilization in their local environment (WCED, 1987). Indeed, the exclusion and alienation of rural communities in decision-making with regard to resource use and management undermines the sustainable development principle that advocates for inclusion of communities in the decision-making process. Besides, the policy articulates that 65% of the funds generated by the CTs should be deposited into the National Environmental Fund (NEF)

(Hoon, 2014). By implication then, the CTs only have access to 35% of the funds generated by them. This decision could threaten the progress and sustainability of CBNRM. Although CBNRM is adjudged an ideal framework through which rural communities are empowered, this paper argues that community empowerment in the management of natural resources has not been fully realized. Empowering local actors to use and manage natural resources is more than decentralizing authority from the central government to the community. Empowerment should lead to the transformation of rural communities involved in CBNRM (Hoon, 2014).

Community trusts (CTs) have encountered challenges in their operations. For instance, Mbaiwa (2005) points out that challenges such as corruption and lack of capacity existed in Khwai village. Misuse of funds and poor management of the CBOs is one of the major challenges that CTs face. The reason for this is not far-fetched; CBNRM was foisted on communities, thus becoming a 'foreign import' project (Rihoy and Maguranyanga, 2010), which has not taken into account the local contexts and systems in place. From the perspectives of the community people, the implication of this is that the CBNRM framework is a 'foreign' idea, to which they find it difficult to relate. Although community people seem to have been given prominence in its operations, the CBNRM idea was not internally conceived, causing it to negatively impact traditional approaches that used to exist in rural localities. In addition, externally imposed programmes do not work because they are incentive-incompatible with local political distributions of power (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013).

It has been observed that CTs lack a mechanism of distributing benefits in an equal and sustainable manner (Mbaiwa, 2013). This poses a risk of internal disequilibrium and community conflict, which tend to weaken the operation of trusts in carrying out their activities in a fair, positive and sustainable manner. As community members do not enjoy the same level of benefits, there is a tendency for disenchantment, dissatisfaction and an unwillingness of some members to participate in CBNRM activities. While some CT board members, for instance, enjoy board meeting sitting allowances and travel allowances, others enjoy community level benefits. How revenue is distributed is meant to be a function of how a community votes, but often it comes down to being a function of influential board members' personal preferences. This could as well explain why the government envisages a greater role for the BTO in helping to distribute funds more equitably.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the role of rural communities in environmental governance and natural resource management in the Okavango Delta. Various traditional institutions performed various roles and practices in ensuring access to

and utilization of natural resources in the area. These practices involved regulating access to and utilization of resources by granting permission to use them, as well as by observing hunting and harvesting seasons. Most of the resources in the Okavango Delta are held under the open access and communal management regime. In this regard, the paper argued that the open access regime did not lead to the overuse of common pool resources. Traditional institutions promoted sustainable utilization of natural resources in the delta. In this arrangement, rural communities retained control over natural resources in their area. Although traditional institutions were effective in managing resources sustainably, traditional practices waned gradually due to colonization, modernization and the like. Presumably, national governments therefore decided to take over the management of natural resources in order to circumvent the tragedy of the commons. This paved the way for the introduction of the concept of co-management of natural resources, leading to the introduction of CBNRM as an ideal framework for managing these resources. Its establishment was based on the assumption that if rural communities derived benefits from their resources, they will be in a better position to conserve them. Consequently, communities were given user rights to wildlife and other natural resources. However, such user rights are only advocated for in policies rather than in legislation and practice, which places the central government at a vantage position to control the use of natural resources. Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is still heavily reliant on institutionalized top-down decision-making, which is incompatible with the philosophy of CBNRM itself. Marginalized communities that are dependent on natural resources need to be empowered through meaningful representations in the decision-making process. Ultimately, achieving environmental conservation and human well-being can only be realized when the people themselves are actively and directly involved in managing natural resources within their immediate environment.

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