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LADDER Working Paper No.32

February 2003

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LADDER is a research project funded by the Policy Research Programme of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) that seeks to identify alternative routes by which the rural poor can climb out of poverty. LADDER is working with nearly 40 villages and 1,200 households in Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi and Kenya to discover the blocking and enabling agencies in the institutional environment facing rural people that hinder or help their quest for better standards of living for themselves and their families.

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Is small really beautiful? Community-based natural resource management in Malawi and Botswana

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Piers Blaikie *

Summary

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) remains a long-established and still popular policy with International Funding Institutions (IFIs), NGOs and recipient governments, especially in Africa. The notion has had a long and varied history. Its promised benefits to people and environment is well supported by theory and attractive populist sentiments, and the label itself is a powerful discursive force, which combines the promise of poverty reduction, local empowerment and technical knowledge with sustainable natural resource management. Outcomes on the ground, however, are mixed and often poor. Why, then is it still so popular? The politics of IFIs and their clients require that CBNRM programmes have to be seen to remain successful, and indicators of “success” can easily be found in a complex, multi-faceted development process with a variety of disparate goals. At the same time, reflection by the academy upon poor performance has suggested that the supporting theory of CBNRM should be re-examined (better theory leading to better CBNRM policy), and the pre-conditions for success and suitable characteristics of communities should be more carefully defined. Further, there are enduring problems of manageability of diverse communities and conditions of natural resources, of final control of decisions about resource management (who decides, upon what criteria, and who decides upon these?). The ways in which they are resolved - the practice of CBNRM - usually frustrate its stated goals of participation and local management. However, two political contradictions between IFIs and recipient governments further impede effective implementation. The first is that CBNRM threatens control of valuable resources hitherto controlled by political elites, especially when land tenure reform is on the CBNRM agenda. Also, the flow of patrimony from local sources, via chiefs and other local leaders to the centre, is potentially interrupted, allowing new political entrepreneurs to enter at the local level. Secondly, CBNRM dis-empowers professionals (in forestry, fisheries, and agricultural extension). Their training enables them to instruct, to control and to meet local production targets, not to become social engineers and local problem solvers. Various strategies of acquiescence and foot dragging on one side and the provision of neo-patrimony in terms of training, counterparting, funds etc on the part of IFIs. Examples are drawn from two contrasting African countries (Botswana and Malawi).

Setting up the argument

The idea of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is, in various forms, an established policy goal of rural development, especially in Africa. It is also a simple and attractive one – that communities, defined by their tight spatial boundaries of jurisdiction and responsibilities, by their distinct and integrated social structure and common interests, can

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manage their natural resources in an efficient, equitable and sustainable way. The natural resources in question are usually, though not exclusively, common pool resources. In southern Africa, these are typically forest, open woodland or grasslands for livestock grazing, wood supply, medicines and famine foods; farm land for gleaning, grazing after harvest and crop residues; wildlife for game meat and safari incomes; fish in fresh water lakes; and aquifers, tanks and irrigation channels for domestic and livestock water supply and irrigation (Adams *et al.*, 2000:12). Case studies and in-country research are concentrated in two contrasting African nations. The first is Malawi, the rural people of which have endured decades of sustained dispossession by a neo-patrimonial despot and currently face serious food insecurities, extreme absolute poverty and currently (in early 2003) widespread famine. The government has pursued a programme of progressive legislation for forests removing restrictions on the access and use of woodland, and has specifically targeted women as key resource users (National Forest Policy 1997 and Forest Act 1997). It has only had a decentralization policy since 1998, approved a Strategic Plan for CBNRM as recently as November 2001, and has proceeded since with some CBNRM implementation especially in forestry and artisanal fisheries. However, policy reform has had to contend with decades of institutional destruction at the local level, and a rural population, which had grown weary and wary of any further interventions by government.

The second country is Botswana, a comparatively wealthy African country, resource rich in minerals and with low population-land resource ratios, whose government has taken devolution of powers to manage natural resources seriously since the mid-1980s, and specifically CBNRM since 1998 following assistance from USAID. These countries have had very different histories of government, but have both witnessed at times in the recent past the growing interference into, and resulting dissolution of local chiefly government, territorial incursions by the state and private capital to establish plantations, state forests, game and nature reserves and various para-statal adventures driven the bureaucratic elite (government servants who use their access to credit, planning permission, licences etc) to go into business themselves.

Although the term CBNRM was not generally in use until the 1980s, the notion that communities should, and could, satisfactorily manage their own resources according to their local custom, knowledge and technologies has a long history. However, the ideas of community and the local have constantly been shaped and reshaped by different outsiders through time (from colonial Governor-Generals, political advisors, European settlers, rural development consultants and academic writers). Thus, the idea of CBNRM has evolved through time and been specific to particular countries, but over the past fifteen years, there has been a convergence of various strands of meanings in the international development literature and practice by International Funding Institutions. Today for example, social and community forestry in India and Nepal and Natural Resource Management Committees in Malawi have some quite close similarities at a general level, which have resulted from a range of accepted policy design from IFIs. Still, at the level of the detail of administrative, legal and financial structures and of daily practice, it continues to mean widely different things to different people. In the colonial period in Africa, the practice of Indirect Rule was developed for which “native institutions” had been adapted and shaped for the purpose of rule by colonial rulers, dividing the rural from the urban and one ethnicity from another, and formed an institutional segregation. Africans were relegated to a sphere of customary law (or *indigena t* in francophone Africa) while Europeans obeyed civil law (Ribot, 1999:23). These institutions, based upon “traditional” (usually chiefly) leadership amounted to what Mamdani (1996) called decentralised despotism, and analogous to *apartheid*. They were essentially

local and varied according to a great variety of cultures, ecologies and material needs but usually underpinned by communal tenure and chiefly authority. They were in many ways neglected except for purposes of political and strategic control, labour mobilisation and latterly before Independence for soil and water conservation. Otherwise, they were treated with a degree of disdain or neglect by most colonial writers, who assumed that processes of “natural evolution” would lead to individual tenure, a market in land and the commercialisation of agriculture (Lugard, 1922). The presumptions behind Lugard’s thinking had become standard development wisdom by the period of the winning of independence by most African states, and remains powerful today (even in the minds of many government officials who implement CBNRM programmes, see Taylor 2001, with reference to Botswana). They were that individualisation of land tenure with registration of title would encourage long term investment in natural resource management, would inhibit (what was later styled as) the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968), and help to provide collateral for production loans, and create incentives to shift production from subsistence to the market – a late colonial narrative with a very contemporary ring.

Contemporary CBNRM can be seen as an attempt to re-unite the rural and urban, and the policy elites and civil society across the divide, which had been created by colonial rule. It also runs counter to various post-colonial projects in newly independent states of modernisation, centralisation and in some cases patrimonial robbery of the small peasantries using coercive state powers. It remains a touchstone for much of rural development and sustainable natural resource management and has been promoted by most major international funding institutions (IFIs) since the early 1990s. Yet, as this paper argues, it has largely failed to deliver the expected and theoretically predicted benefits to local communities. CBNRM has become and remains so popular to IFIs, but often so *unpopular* with target communities themselves. Faced with such disappointing results and many critiques, it still flourishes as a central policy goal in all countries in central and southern Africa. In this sense, CBNRM *succeeds!* This paper examines why.

All roads lead to CBNRM

CBNRM combines a number of powerful ideas, which contribute to its popularity or, more sceptically, “[its] warm emotional pull” (Taylor, 2002:125) in much of academic writing and funding agencies. The first is part of the phrase itself - “community”, the meaning of which may be understood in three ways (Agrawal and Gibson, 2001: 1-31) - community as a spatial unit, as a distinct social structure and as a set of shared norms. As this paper will discuss, empirical evidence shows that the three are seldom co-terminous, and that community boundaries of jurisdiction may make little sense in the rational management of an identified natural resource with boundaries that may bear no resemblance to community boundaries (for example, a watershed or the habitat of an endangered species of fauna). There is also an extensive and powerful critique of the idea of the “community”, which will be alluded to later (see Cleaver (1999, 2002) on the “myths of community”), and, while the critique contributes to an explanation of the failure of many CBNRM projects, it has failed to tarnish their attraction to IFIs.

Another powerful discursive tool in the label “CBNRM” is the elision of the notion of sustainable natural resource management (defined by rational and scientific criteria) with “community”, implying that this vehicle for management is well suited for the task, with its connotations of *gemeinschaft* (“intimate, private and exclusive living together” Bender, 1978 in Agrawal and Gibson, 2001:8), local ownership and indigenous expertise. It is supposed to

be able to deliver on scientifically specified NRM principles (which are by definition seldom, if ever, community-constructed and local). Herein lies the first contradiction in the label CBNRM, the first confrontation between formal science with its foundations in logical positivism and the independence between observer and observed on the one hand - and on the other, local knowledge, which is embedded in a particular environmental and social history and continuously negotiated on-site and face-to-face). However, the CBNRM policy narrative goes, this unequal relation of power to name the environment and its processes and trends, can be palliated or even negated by participatory and inclusionary techniques by which some form of hybrid knowledge can be negotiated and implemented. Here again, there are many instances where local knowledge has not been able to negotiate on an equal basis with official scientific knowledge, but has instead been shaped by what is offered by outsiders, who make strategic choices about which “local knowledge” is heard and conformable to their scientifically given environmental goals (Mosse, 2002).

CBNRM also derives its power from the promise of a diverse range of benefits predicted by social science theory and of a more sustainable management of natural resources. The latter focuses on environmental conservation and the current perceived failures identified through the coercive application of modern environmental knowledge, which is assumed to be scientific, reliable, authoritative and reproducible – the very antithesis of local knowledge). In this sense CBNRM often makes more of its promises over Natural Resource Management than Community, and thus the promise is not made for, and delivered to, the community at all, but rather to target-chasing, fund-raising members of the development industry worried about the environment. As Taylor, among many others notes: - “one of the expatriate NRMP team members in Botswana admitted informally that their real aim is conservation, and community development is included as a means to achieve this” (Taylor, 2001).

A major argument here will be that it is the *practice* of CBNRM, (its production, representation in policy documents and implementation) situated at the interface between the “community” and outside institutions, which creates profound contradictions between theoretically derived promise and actual delivery. There are two key related but distinct ideas which represent the bridging between the outsider and the local. These are decentralisation and participation. Both imply a movement of decision-making and real political power from the central to more local levels (for example, district, county, parish or community-based organization). Participation in decision making about the management of natural resources requires a wide range of quite radical reforms, including transparency in transactions, accountability downwards, the granting of a considerable degree of local discretion over environmental decision making (termed “environmental subsidiarity”), and a degree of competence, confidence and political savvy by local institutions (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999; Ribot, 2001, 2002).

Many of the theoretical benefits of CBNRM are “small-scale” dependent, and weave through most of this disparate collection of pro-CBNRM theories and sentiments.

1. There is a pro-poor and safety net argument because of the privileging of small-scale insiders (labour intensive, surpluses retained locally, maximisation of internal trade transactions) to the exclusion of outside capital (which would lead to mechanisation, loss of artisanal jobs, enclosure, privatisation, export of profits and re-investment elsewhere). This argument has become particularly serviceable in the current round of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers which most African countries are obliged to produce as a condition of debt relief, in which CBNRM are, in a sense, retro-fitted to poverty reduction

strategies. Here a case of the opportunistic grabbing a set of propositions about the benefits of CBNRM off the shelf and putting them to discursive work in the day-to-day life of IFIs and senior government in Lilongwe or Gaborone. Here, it is a matter of the practice of the daily life in policy making and funding, which shapes discursive strategies and therefore what off-the-shelf theories are chosen. CBNRM is well endowed with promise.

2. CBNRMs promote efficient resource use and allocation, locally appropriate technologies and the successful application of indigenous technical knowledge (ITK), because local ecological specificities can be addressed by local experience and experimentation, adaptive agricultural practice, wildlife and hunting practices and forest use, local farmer networks etc. There are formidable problems of negotiating these knowledges at the development interface (a classic treatment being Long and Long's aptly named *Battlefields of Knowledge* (1992)). These too will be illustrated later in the chapter.
3. New institutional economics and public choice theory indicate that locally managed resource systems with clearly recognisable territorial boundaries will tend to internalize externalities (the decision-makers pay for the costs of their actions); will tend to deploy all information where local decision makers have most information about that resource, enabling service provision to match needs; and will create local institutions as problem solving solutions to issues of trust and malfeasance in economic life, and assist in issues of representation and transparency, which requires in rural environments face-to-face discussion and witnessing (thus, the small scale, small number, low transaction costs argument holds) (Cleaver, 1999: 601; Ribot, 2002)
4. CBNRM will solve or palliate open access problems resulting from coercive and insufficiently policed state property regimes. Policing will be undertaken by local people, who are on the spot and can see and directly apprehend wrong doers (another functional advantage of the 'local'). The community will have a stake in the protection of the resource and secure tenurial rights, either *de jure* or informally, *de facto*.
5. CBNRM can be styled as a "local site of resistance", a bulwark against modernist and de-humanizing invasions, and which can withstand the depredations of the colonial and post-colonial state, and globalizing forces (Escobar, 1995:46-52)
6. CBNRM can initiate a benign cycle of effective participation, empowerment and the development of political confidence and expertise (drawing on Mamdani's (1996) work "from subject to citizen") financial independence, as the "fulcrum for democratic change" (Ribot, 2001).
7. CBNRM is described as an antidote to the acknowledged failure of state-run natural resources (Adams and Hulme, 2001), where "fences and fines" approaches to wildlife protection have too high economic costs for the state to meet), and disenchantment with fortress conservation, (Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997; Inamdar *et al.*, 1999; Songorwa *et al.*, 2000).

Of course, there are counter arguments against CBNRM too. The CB institution can be seen as no more than a "rascal's charter" as it protects archaic and regressive forms (e.g. chieftancy and patriarchy), and encourages cronyism. There are also some epistemological challenges from conservationists and arch-modernists with proven ecological imperatives who look on "post-modern influences" and associated community-based approaches as an assault on rational ecology-based conservation, (Attwell and Cotterill, 2000). These views however do not prevail in most international policy documents – the local is progressive and transformative, not laggard and traditional. Small is indeed beautiful. So the story goes...

Yet arrival is elusive...

For all the theoretical benefits promised, by and large, CBNRM policy has failed to deliver, in terms of its stated aims. Shackleton *et al.* (2002) concludes from 13 case studies in Africa that “most devolved natural resources management reflects rhetoric more than substance” and that “the ways in which local people realise the benefits of devolution differ widely, and negative trade-offs, mostly felt by the poor, are common”. Shackleton and Campbell (2001), in an evaluation of fourteen case studies in eight countries of Africa assessed the outlook for CBNRM as poor overall, although they identify a number of CBNRM projects which show some signs of success. They take the well-trodden path towards the conclusion that the less the state and its line ministries impose and limit local NRM, the more local people can reshape social-environmental relationships in ways which suit them. There are success “stories” too, although they are stories told by the initiating agencies themselves. The well-known CAMPFIRE project in Zimbabwe, boxed up in commentaries as a successful case study, has since been widely criticised since (see Sullivan, 2001). A visit to the Compass Tamis website for documentation of CBNRM initiatives in Malawi has, as its column title for documents “success story title”, (leaving little doubt over the quality of outcomes) (<http://tamis.dai.com/compass.nsf>). There are huge difficulties in establishing clear criteria of success and failure (requiring baseline studies and monitoring the before and after situation, establishing evidence of “better” conservation, better production, improved incomes and institutional development (see World Bank, 2000 in Ribot, 2001:45.) But a generalised conclusion may be fairly confidently made that CBNRM programmes have substantially failed to deliver the promises to both communities and the environment. Why?

..... and as many roads lead back again: “our theories are inadequate”

There are a number of epistemologically distinct approaches to explain the failure of CBNRM programmes and policies. The first is to take theories seriously, and to try and rectify or improve them, on the assumption that, if there were better theories, there would be better CBNRM outcomes. However, this presupposes that there is a rational and instrumental model of policy making and implementation. Here, better theory, which predicts more accurately the outcomes of CBNRM from initial characteristics of the community and the natural resource, appeals to rational policy makers, who then change or adapt the policy in directions suggested by the theory. While a complete abandonment this naïve version of the rational of policy making leads the whole project of government and the possibility of progress into some fairly desolate destinations, it needs to be comprehensively critiqued and modified (see Keeley and Scoones (1999), on understanding environmental policy process, and Apthorpe and Gasper (1996) on arguing development policy).

There are a number of examples which illustrate well how a particular theory with powerful discursive leverage in policy making discourses in Malawi and Botswana have been overturned but which still have legitimacy. Two examples will suffice. The first is the eclipse of Hardin’s Tragedy of the Commons as a general and inevitable condition following the establishment of a network of scholars (mostly economists on the USA) who theorized and championed common property management systems (see for example, the work of Bromley, Oakerson, Feeney, McKean, and Ostrom). In Botswana, Hardin’s theory was linked to a large volume of ecological studies of rangelands, which identified serious environmental degradation there due to what was assumed to be over grazing on an open access resource. Science in this case provided a most important “a-political” and authoritative evidence, and it came from outside consultants, uncontaminated by political and economic interests from

within Botswana. The Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) of 1975, followed by the implementation of a fencing component of the National Policy on Agricultural Development (NPAD) of 1991 both drew their legitimacy from a particular social theory (or “parable” as its author has it) and supported by an impressive weight of evidence of degradation of the range. In short, local people could not look after their local resources – therefore, in the name of scientific and sustainable management, they must be privatized through fencing and exclusion of local cattle hitherto grazed on communal lands. The local, it was implied was incompetent, therefore it would be invaded and used more responsibly by non-locals. The considerable lapse of time between these two policy enactments attests to the resilience of Hardin’s theory and the scientific evidence of the existence of serious environmental degradation in policy circles, even in the face of overwhelming empirical and theoretical attack, and asks searching questions about the (contingent) role of theory in policy making. The scientific basis for defining rangeland degradation has been marked by the collapse of the stocking density controversy in the face of new models of natural variability and pastoral adaptation, thus largely exonerating local herders from over stocking and bring the major perpetrators of degradation (although the debate of the significance of non-equilibrium theories in range ecology still continues (Abel and Blaikie, 1989; Behnke, Scoones and Kerven, 1993; Illius and O’Connor, 1999; Sullivan, 2002). Needless to say, local voices that had been denying overgrazing were raised but never heard. Nonetheless, the political momentum for privatisation continues, with the result that rangelands is one sector which has been almost entirely neglected in the CBNRM project in Botswana (Shackleton *et al.*, 2001:19).

The next avenue for exploring the inadequacy of theory supporting CBNRM is to identify where the initial conditions for a satisfactory establishment of a local institution fail to be met. In this sense, it is an inductive failure of theory exposed by empirical trial. This has led to an ever-growing number of ever-growing lists. There is Ostrom’s list of eight attributes (Ostrom, 1990), and Roe *et al.* (2000:114-20) have five tables of characteristics of communities plus internal and external factors of desirable attributes. Adams and Hulme (2001) have assembled a list of contra-indications, where CBNRM, in this case wildlife, simply is “not the answer”. This includes, among other sets of conditions, for which CPNRM could never fulfil any of the major objectives (for example, the existing wildlife is not sustainable, or a range of wildlife which cannot yield a sustainable revenue flow, and when there is deep resentment at earlier dispossession of land). For example, in L. Mbuoro National Park the inhabitants cleared all wildlife so the government would lose interest in the area (Hulme and Infield, 2001). In the case of the Okavango Delta in Botswana, resentment and passive resistance regarding earlier and continuing coercive resettlement of the Basarwa (Koi-San) have been revived by the appearance of CBNRM policies. The Chobi National Park was formed in 1960 followed by The Moremi Game reserve in 1964 and involved wholesale relocation of settlements. Special Game Licences (SGL) were established for each community which themselves imposed quite serious restrictions on the level of offtake of wildlife, but were rescinded at the time of the formation of CBNRM Trusts (where village “communities” were strongly encouraged to form Trusts as the only legitimate vehicle for the CBNRM), and the quota of wildlife available for hunting was further radically reduced. Official visits to encourage the Baswara to form these Trusts were seen as yet another attempt to dispossess them of hunting rights and hunting territory. The list of contra-indications for the successful formation of CBNRM is unfortunately very long.

Agrawal (2001) questions the wisdom of pursuing this seemingly endless task of specifying “facilitating conditions” for successful CBNRM (and implicitly accounting for failure when

they do not apply), and lists a synthesis of about thirty, most of which describe the three main attributes of an idealized “community” and the local outlined at the beginning of this paper. More specifically, these include for example, the small areal extent of the natural resource, well-defined boundaries, small group size, shared norms, homogeneity of identities and interests and so on). Then Agrawal (ibid.) identifies the sets of causal links which are specified in research about common property institutions, with particular attention paid to external factors such as population growth (see also Lipton (1984), where the author draws attention to the growth of population and attendant growth of transaction costs involved in CBNRM management on account of the size of the group), the nature of enforcement, support or coercion by the state, and these will be addressed in the Botswana and Malawi cases below. The conclusion the author draws is that careful research and statistical comparison may hold out the prospect of a “coherent, empirically relevant theory of the commons” (Agrawal, ibid. 1649). This effort may be helpful for the choice of likely communities for the successful establishment of CBNRMs (see the Malawi Country Report for the establishment of promising sites for CBNRM, Mwabumba *et al.*, 2000), but it leaves policy makers with the task of finding a needle in a haystack (an existing community with its natural resources which fulfil an impossibly large number of criteria), where the haystack itself has far from clear outlines.

Of course, there is an unknown, but probably very large, number of CBNRMs through out most of Africa, which operate beyond the searching eye of decentralised government, or zealous NGOs. For example, there are many village committees in Malawi which organize the maintenance of contour *bunds* originally set up by colonial authorities, repair footpaths which can turn into serious gullies, and stabilise marker ridges with vetiver grass, and all this with minimal government support or interference (Evans *et al.*, 1999). There are less exemplary examples. There are small fishing “CBNRMs” (in inverted commas since the participants would call their institution by a variety of local names) throughout Malawi as well as Uganda and western Zambia. Along the shores of Lake Kyoga, there are attenuated and rather ineffective fishing regulatory bodies headed by a *gabunga*, who attempts to control illegal fishing practice (the use of seine nets close to Nile Perch breeding areas, mosquito nets used for catching *mukene*, and fish poisoning). The latter was satisfactorily controlled by the *gabunga*, but nets are confiscated only when a levy to the *gabunga* is not paid. It is rumoured that the confiscated nets are sold on to neighboring villages. Such a description resonates with accounts of local government in many parts of the developed world as well (ramshackle, sometimes effective, sometimes not, liable to corruption from time to time, and liable to change). In more general terms, it is the variety and complexity of ways in which rural people manage their natural resources which tend to frustrate efforts to improve the predictive capacities of existing theories, to standardize the local as it were, so as to reproduce it in ways which conform to the theories about it.

CBNRM and the state – blowing on cold embers?

There are two sets of external forces, which pose serious, and in some cases, insurmountable challenges to the promotion of CBNRM in ways beneficial to local environments and people in the ways predicted by theory. The first concerns the political interface of the international and national at which CBNRM is produced and negotiated. The history of state formation at and after Independence in Malawi and Botswana, which set the political environment for the interface between IFIs promoting CBNRM and government officials. Malawi has been characterized as a neo-patrimonial state (for a full discussion, see Bratton and van der Walle,

1994), following years of despotic rule by Dr. Hastings Banda (1964-1993). As Dr. Banda said about himself: -

“Nothing is not my business in this country: everything is my business, everything. The state of education, the state of the economy, the state of our agriculture, the state of our transport, everything is my business.” (Cited in Alan, 1999).

He might have added that a significant part of Malawi, particularly the newly privatised land, retail and marketing services was indeed his business in a strictly personal sense (Cross and Kutengele, 2001). The notion suggested by a CBNRM policy that the local may be able to reclaim control of resources, and taxation may be devolved to regional and District level threatens the conduit of patrimony from the local, via the Chief, to District officials and other Big Men and upwards to the capital – not an attractive proposition for those at the top of the network. However, coercion on the part of IFIs, promises of training, equipment and opportunities of professional advancement also form part of the neo-patrimony in many states of developing nations. Official acceptance of (and more personally, acquiescence) to the policy, the waving through of some local NGO projects and some rhetorical gestures in the form of policy papers, may be enough to ensure the continuing flow of the neo-patrimony of aid without really compromising the flow from the capillaries which draw patrimony from the local to the national level. While there were several training and skills development workshops facilitated by the Department of Forests, foot dragging over approving regulations and management plans has meant that many communities have lost interest.

CBNRM also creates widespread feelings of professional dis-empowerment from foresters, agricultural research and extension officers, wildlife rangers and so on. The local for them is a site for instruction, implementation and control with specific scientific objectives in mind. Not any longer. Partnership, social engineering and taking local politics and local technical knowledge seriously are emphatically not what professionals are currently trained for. Furthermore, IFIs are constantly changing their policies even within the CBNRM sector, there are different donor practices with low levels of donor coordination, all of which undermine purpose, initiative and a sense of routine for in-country officials (personal interviews undertaken by the author in Lilongwe, 2002). In the words of one forester “participatory forestry has become a talking shop - we are never left with any clear idea of what we should do” (pers. comm., Lilongwe, 2001). Here, it is the professional not the local farmer who feels dis-empowered and with not much to do for which they are trained (see Mayers *et al.* (2001) for an excellent account of the forging of a forestry policy in Malawi, where these issues are discussed).

Botswana on the other hand, has taken much more serious political steps to decentralize powers of management to the local level (The Wildlife Conservation Policy (1986), National Conservation Policy (1990), Tourism Policy (1990), and finally CBNRM since 1990, (Rozemeier and van der Jagt, 2000). In any case, there exists a long history of decentralised planning where democratically elected District Councils play an important role. There are also Land Boards at the District level, which have the power to make a number of decisions about natural resource use, although the Boards are only partly elected by the local population and it is an arena of conflicting interests. Also, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks keeps quite close scrutiny of wildlife matters through its Technical Committee, which is largely detached from the District Council (which sends a few members to the meetings but receives very little of the income which may derive from commercial wildlife ventures). A much higher degree of accountability in government and a very much better resourced administration, have contributed to a more visible presence for CBNRM. In spite of this, the range of CBNRM issues and the extent of the powers of local CBNRM

Trusts are quite circumscribed and mainly deal with wildlife only. A number of CBNRM Trusts to manage wildlife have been successfully set up. However, the management skills and capital necessary to run a safari enterprise usually cannot be found in a local VDC, with the result that it is foreigners who successfully bid for them, pay a licence fee to the VDC and make little attempt to employ local people, develop local skills in guide work, building construction, catering, driving etc. This has meant that the “local community” have often become little more than rentiers with no opportunity for widening livelihood options and associated skills.

Other sectors such as rangelands are largely excluded from CBNRM briefs. The management decisions concerning what is left of communal grazing areas after privatisation devolves onto the local chiefs, the traditional meeting (the *kgotla*). The Village Development Committee (VDC) has more to do with community activities other than NRM anyway. Thus, in Botswana, official engagement with the local has had a long history, been much more intensive and is better financed and organized than in Malawi. However, the power of the *kgotla* to make management decisions over land has been undermined by the Land Boards, engagement is limited to wildlife which has largely been taken over by foreigners, and the Trusts have tended to take the form of wealthy enclaves the benefits from which do not flow to the local VDCs.

CBNRM as Trojan horse: theory and practice

Finally, the account of the overall failure of CBNRM to provide the benefits to local people but to remain a policy “success” moves to the policy process itself and the role theory plays in it. As we have seen, CBNRM has enjoyed a long and successful career at the centre of international projects and programmes, in spite of a stream of critique and evidence of failure (see Cooke and Kothari, 2002, for a sustained and detailed critique of the practice of participation). A sceptical view of CBNRM would treat it as a fashion, in a catwalk of fashions – community development, micro-credit, farming systems, livelihood approaches and so on have filed past (Edwards, 1999), but notes this model has had exceptional longevity. CBNRM and participatory models of environmental management are underpinned by a mass of theory as has been summarized earlier. However, the mass itself resembles a pile of assorted ideas, sold loose by the kilo as it were, the discursive appeal of which lies in its weight rather than coherence. This remark in no way judges the quality of the theory – most of it enjoys a high international reputation – but in the way it is used, (and abused) as a legitimizing representation in policy making. Mosse (2002) states:-

“development interventions are not driven by theory, but rather by practices. It is not policy ideas or project models but institutional realities of development funding and “co-operation” that determines what happens in development.” Thus, the intellectual quality of the theories may not matter very much, or at least not be the most important criterion for their deployment. Rather, they take the role of discursive capital in the production, marketing and sale of CBNRM, but also the relation between practice and theory runs the other way too, in that theory also shape policy (for example, the burgeoning of manuals on Participatory Rural Appraisal, and accounts to establish best practice in CBNRM programmes).

The practice of implementing policies for re-invigorating the local and conserving the environment through CBNRM usually starts with detailed design of policy and projects, terms of reference, organigrams of devolved government, a new legal framework, financing, training of both government officers as well local leaders, new political structures and even, as in the case of Malawi, amendments to the national constitution. In distinction, the subject

of the policy is the community which is socially and environmentally diverse, complex, which, even within one community, has a wide array of different social constructions of the same “resource” (for example a wood may be a sacred grove, a supply of fuel wood, a biodiverse collection of medicinal plants, high quality carving wood for tourist curios, or act as protection of a watershed). These may be contested, but meanings will always be multiple and be different from one community to the next. Also, the technical specifications of the resource itself have different political implications. For example, multi-species indigenous forest and single species eucalyptus wood fuel lots have a completely different set of management demands and therefore a different local politics. Faced with such complexity (as it appears to the eye of the outsider), manageability becomes a nightmare. To render the local manageable, standardisation and replicability become essential.

The first re-imagining the local so as to render it manageable requires its black-boxing and containerization. A black box simplifies by hiding troubling complexities within, and obscuring even smaller scales (the household, women, children, ethnic minorities), and a local politics of control and inequality. CBNRM projects in practice may become an opportunity for new political entrepreneurs, both internal and external, rather than an opportunity for target groups (the poor, women, minorities and disabled), as the egalitarian and pro-poor objectives of CNRM may demand. Gender issues, particularly of the asset position of women-headed households, are seldom addressed, (because they are so difficult to do so within the formula of CBNRM) and reliance on chiefs (who are almost invariably male) may reinforce these inequalities, and exclude (most) women from the negotiations which local scale management is supposed to facilitate.

The containerization of the local in CBNRM policy is another reductionism to render manageable what is a diverse and complex involving movement of people (and sometimes resources such as fresh water fish and wildlife) through space and time, which transgresses simple mapping of boundaries. Boundaries, which make sense for managing natural resources, and local territorial boundaries often do not coincide. To whom do the wildlife of the Kalahari or the fish of Lake Malawi, which both migrate across territorial community boundaries, belong, and whose responsibility are they? These are not insuperable problems but they require a deep understanding of the political economy of local resource use. A failure to understand existing management arrangements often results in inept attempts to territorialize common property jurisdictions. Fishing in Lake Chiuta in Malawi for example, was regulated through complex arrangements between local and migrant fishermen, which were ignored by the setting up of territorially, based Beach Village Committees (BVA). Local fishermen, who tended to land lower catches than the migrants, then used the new BVA to attempt to evict the migrants on the grounds that the latter were responsible for over-fishing. BVAs crosscut the jurisdiction of the local Chiefs, inducements were brought to bear by some of the contestants with outcomes which varied from chaotic to partly successful (see a review of Africa’s inland fisheries and CBNRM projects, (Geheb and Sarch, 2000)).

For all the rhetorical intentions of CBNRM policies, the contradictions of engagement between the local and centralized institutions still tend to reproduce the local in a bureaucratically manageable form. There are of course local strategies of resistance. Non-participation in CBNRM may become a rational strategy of resistance, or getting what one wants by other means (stealth, stealing, using through existing networks). The CBNRM project is also an opportunity where changes in authority, local bye laws and sites of decision making provide a disturbance, an opening for new political entrepreneurs, new rents and control of resources. There are winners and losers but the prospect of being the former may

induce a form of provisional acceptance of a CBNRM, subject to fears of dispossession by the state and on conditions which will favour the likely winners. Outright resistance is not uncommon and evokes coercive responses from the local state. For example, the Basarwa (or Bushmen) in Botswana objected to further incursions into their hunting rights, and were met with cajoling by local officials along the lines that “we are all Batswana now” and you should not try and preserve your identity as Basarwa “, and “if you do not agree to form a CBNRM Trust [as the vehicle for CBNRM] the government will set it up without you, and you will lose out” (Taylor, 2001:7). CBNRM requires delicate, politically astute and technically sound negotiation on the part of outsiders, in which transparency and downward accountability are essential. All the same, strong forces militate against the actual moment of relinquishing professional and pecuniary control. CBNRM projects have to possess a series of clearly defined objectives, quantifiable costs and benefits and time based activities, in order to market themselves to funders. Being *too* participatory wastes time (as Mosse, 2002 has noted) and deflects personnel from fulfilling targets. Prime attention must given to outputs, (kilometres of soil and water conservation measures completed, numbers of seedlings planted, number of local institutions formed), rather outcomes, which cannot be measured in such clear terms. It is outputs and targets which are essential fact fodder to feed clients in the development industry, and since CBNRM is such a complex idea, encompassing as it does both the social and the environmental, “success” can be found somewhere, even in the most dismal project.

Conclusion

The construction of the local and the small scale has taken many turns in southern Africa, even over short periods in the two countries discussed here. Under colonial or Protectorate rule, the Chief became the conduit of indirect rule, and the local was relegated to a stagnant backwater, which might, at some point, be slowly drawn back into mainstream economic life. However, environmental conservation was and remains today, an important warrant for invasions, instructions and dispossessions. Scientific evidence such as land degradation and the extermination of wildlife (Anderson and Grove, 1987) was brought to bear. Scientific expertise as the rational enforcement agency in the hands of the state was not long in forcing entry in the name of conservation. At this point, the author parts company with some of the more post-modern interpretations of conservation, which treat it as an elaborate disciplining event, a blind instrument of Western semiotic subjugation of “Africa”, a simulacrum of imported technical tyrannies and so on. Maybe, a more realist political ecology might ask the question why so much of colonial soil and water conservation works remain after colonial rule. Maybe, in some instances, they still work? There are real environmental management issues, albeit interpreted in different ways, in every community.

Furthermore, both the colonial and post-colonial state have long presided over the encroachment and undermining of common property and the control and management of local natural resources by local people. Plantations, estates, state forestry programs, private farms, game parks and national parks encroached on the territory of local people, and the state has also invaded it with conservation expertise. Instruct, fence out, dismantle and resettle, and turn the local inside out (with locals on the wrong side of the fence). External driving forces continue this process. Structural adjustment programs, global trade agreements (the South must liberalize its markets of course, but the North will continue to subsidize its farmers) and population growth with a lack of non-agricultural employment all combine to reduce people’s well being and confidence to manage their own lives, and to make material

conditions more onerous in which to do so. Here it is the global impacting in all sorts of specific ways upon the local (Watts, 2000).

Then at this point in the argument, CBNRM makes its stage entrance. It is an arena, which individual agents feel they can have an impact. It is adorned with an impressive armoury of theory and populist sentiment and promises rescue of the local and many benefits to nature and society. There is a confusing variability in CBNRM and related administrative and legal reforms, such as decentralization across even a single country. It is porous, can absorb all manner of different agendas, and is rich in variety, something in it for all, especially for the aid industry and its clients. However, the warrant for CBNRM still remains environmentally focused. If local people are managing their natural resources sustainably, why is there NRM in the title? Why not merely CB and the notion of community development which was in vogue (especially in south Asia) in the 1960s? An answer to this might point to the failure of “fence and fine” coercive conservation, now no longer enforceable by weak states such as Malawi. Also, sometimes the state and its science are found to be mistaken (as in the case of the overstocking controversy in Botswana and other southern African countries). It would be better to negotiate with the local, the counter argument goes, and allow the functional advantages of the small scale to operate as theory predicts, - and advantageously, to pass on the costs of policing forests, wildlife and range lands which the state was finding impossible to meet.

The success or failure of CBNRM may be judged by the outcomes, in terms of degree to which it has delivered on sustainable environmental management, enhanced incomes especially for the poor and institutional learning at all levels. These criteria suggest difficult and costly monitoring and evaluations. Where clear evidence on these criteria is missing (or adverse), other measures may be substituted. Otherwise a CBNRM programme or project is seen “not to work”. In any case, results are always mixed and open to all sorts of interpretation. There are cases where it is clear that local people, including the politically marginalized, *have* benefited, especially when the state really has let go professional and economic control. Also, there are so many others which have messy and not too encouraging outcomes in terms of CBNRM’s stated goals. However, it is in the implementation of CBNRM that the “community” and the social and environmental variability which comes with the local, have to be regularized, reduced, manualized, replicated and inserted into program targets – but lionized and idealized too, if CBNRM is to succeed discursively and the project is to survive at all.

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