



Environment for Development

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RESEARCH BRIEF

Local Communities and Wildlife Conservation in Zimbabwe

Are CAMPFIRE communities ready to take over wildlife management from the Rural District Councils?

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Zimbabwe's community-based conservation model, which brings together peasant farmers in a tourism-focused approach to wildlife management, has enjoyed limited success since its inception during the mid-1980s, due to a number of reasons. There has been increased human-wildlife conflict, and it is hard to enforce rules against poaching. Community involvement in wildlife conservation is one of the major factors influencing the success of integrated conservation and development projects. These projects can fail if there is lack of ownership of the project.

Policymakers and development practitioners usually do not consult local people when designing and implementing programmes. Top-down intervention does not take into consideration the needs and wants of local people, who are often viewed as beneficiaries in the development fraternity. The current conservation model in Zimbabwe is characterised by an uneven playing field where the power dynamics are in favour of state institutions and the private sector jointly working together to maximize their benefits, but at the expense of local communities.

Led by Dr. H. Ntuli, a recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Cape Town in 13 CAMPFIRE communities (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) around the Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe gave local communities an opportunity to choose between the current CAMPFIRE design and alternative arrangements which differ according to the rights that each design offers. The study echoes the voice of local communities and their desire to be recognised as important stakeholders in wildlife conservation who are capable of managing the resource without interference from the state.

Key Points

- Wildlife conservation projects can fail if policy makers do not take the local community's opinions into account. This has been the case in the CAMPFIRE program (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) in Zimbabwe.
- The goals of integrated conservation and development programs include reducing poaching of wildlife and directing revenue from wildlife tourism to local communities.
- This study showed that local people are willing and able to manage wildlife resources. They also express interest in partnerships with private companies.

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Comparing the design of the current CAMPFIRE with a hypothetical conservation model where local communities are given full control over wildlife shows that local people would support such an initiative. Communities care more about having the right to get economic benefits from resources, developing their own management rules, and monitoring their own resources, compared to a situation where government institutions are in charge. Moving the control of wildlife management from the Rural District Councils into the hands of local people in Zimbabwe will not only improve the flow of benefits from the state to communities, but will also reduce the costs of monitoring and enforcing rules against poaching, since they live and interact with wildlife on a daily basis. This may also generate the incentives to manage wildlife in a sustainable manner.

If local communities are not given this opportunity, then the second-best option would be to work with the private sector under public-private partnerships. Communities feel that the distribution of benefits in a conservation model that involves direct interaction with the private sector is much better than the model which involves the government. This is because the benefits have been dissipated by the system and because communities may not have control over the activities of the state. Future policy reforms in the wildlife sector should therefore consider the needs and wants of local people since this has bearing on ownership and success of conservation and development initiatives. Training related to wildlife management and awareness campaigns in protected areas facilitates ownership and success of community wildlife projects because trained beneficiaries have better knowledge of wildlife conservation.



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Conclusion: Communities Benefiting from Wildlife Conservation

The results of the study have several policy prescriptions. First, the study revealed that local communities prefer to work independently of the government, thereby providing support for further transfer of power from the Rural District Councils to the community. Second, the study revealed willingness by local communities to engage in monitoring and enforcement. This important result calls for community-based crime prevention approaches through the establishment and strengthening of local institutions. State interference in CAMPFIRE communities must be kept at a minimum whereby the government only provides an advisory role rather than as the main player. There is need for an improvement of community engagement and co-management models. The state should create an enabling environment for public-private partnerships between the community and private sector to emerge so that local communities start benefiting from wildlife conservation.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This brief is based on "Can Local Communities Afford Full Control over Wildlife Conservation? The Case of CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe." February 2019. EfD Discussion Paper Series 19-03, by Herbert Ntuli, Boscov Odhiambo Okuma and Edwin Muchapondwa. (Peter Berck Memorial Award for Best EfD Discussion Paper, 2019).

FURTHER READING

Sanctioned Quotas vs Information Provisioning for Community Wildlife Conservation in Zimbabwe: A Framed Field Experiment Approach. June, 2019. EfD Discussion Paper 19-15. Herbert Ntuli, Ann-Sophie Crépin, Edwin Muchapondwa, and Caroline Schill.

A Bioeconomic Analysis of Community Wildlife Conservation in Zimbabwe. 2017. *Journal for Nature Conservation* 37: 106-121.

Wildlife: An Income Stream for Rural Zimbabweans. November 2015. EfD Research Brief 15-21. Herbert Ntuli.

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