



RESEARCH BRIEF

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Managing Zimbabwe's Wildlife

A Comparison of Community and Private Conservation Approaches

BY HERBERT NTULI AND EDWIN MUCHAPONDWA, EFD SOUTH AFRICA, DRB 15-28, DECEMBER 2015

Zimbabwe's community-based conservation model, which brings together peasant farmers in a tourism-focused approach to wildlife management, has not reduced the community's poaching pressure on wildlife stocks in the protected area of Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) as much as intended. Comparing this model with a conservation model involving private commercial farmers who also operate on the edge of the reserves and derive income from ecotourism shows that initiatives thrive when farmers invest in their conservancy (for instance, by providing their own labour and capital) and can write their own management rules.

Peasant farmers living on the edge of protected areas in Zimbabwe in the 1980s found themselves at odds with the state's efforts to conserve wildlife. Traditionally, these communities had hunted wildlife for the pot. But this, and human-wildlife conflict between farmers and animals roaming outside of the formal protected area, has resulted in wildlife numbers dropping. Conflict with elephants, who roam into community farming areas, particularly as crops ripen, is widespread

In order to promote conservation measures, and reduce wildlife poaching, Zimbabwe initiated the CAMPFIRE programme (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources). The idea was to show communities that they could benefit from wildlife conservation, and to encourage them to treat wildlife as a valuable asset.

These crop and livestock farmers are generally in areas where the climate is too harsh for good crop production. CAMPFIRE presented farmers with a viable alternative livelihood: rearing livestock alongside conserving wildlife, with an eye on earning an income from tourism.

Since its inception, conservation authorities have supervised communities closely, and these communities are responsible for preventing poaching in their areas.

Key Points

- This study compares the two conservation approaches practiced on the border of Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) to see how they can learn from one another.
- One is a collaboration of private game farmers who have pooled their wildlife by taking down fences between properties; another is a community-based initiative of peasant farmers. Both earn income from selling hunting licences, with varying levels of success.
- However, poaching is still high in the peasant-farming model, causing wildlife numbers to dwindle. This model could draw lessons from the management approach of the private game farmers.

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One of these CAMPFIRE initiatives falls on the periphery of the Gonarezhou National Park (GNP) in south-eastern Zimbabwe.

Also on the border of this protected area is the Save Valley Conservancy, where a number of private farmers have pulled down the fences between their properties to allow game to roam freely between the park and their own farms. Managing game as a 'common pool' resource in this way allows wildlife to roam more widely, and lets the farmers benefit from economies of scale. The private landowners provide their own labour and capital, and also have autonomy in writing the conservancy's rules.

Both of these initiatives earn income by selling hunting licences to foreign tourists.

The CAMPFIRE initiatives worked for a while, but with land reform measures increasing in recent years, so did the illegal killing of animals, and wildlife numbers began to drop.

But the conservancy model adopted by the commercial farmers has proven much more effective in earning revenue for the landowners, and has also resulted in successful wildlife stewardship. In addition, vegetation seems to have recovered as livestock has been replaced by free-roaming game.

What works?

This study was concerned with finding out which policies would make the CAMPFIRE initiatives more successful. One suggestion is to cut taxes or fees on CAMPFIRE communities, by reducing both the share of their tourism income that they are required to pay to the Rural District Council and the premium charged by the safari operator, who is a private entrepreneur and not necessarily a member of the community. Other ideas include increasing the penalties imposed on people for killing animals illegally, and creating stronger management and institutional structures within the community.

The researchers used a theoretical model and computer-based model simulations to see which solutions addressed some of the problems faced by the CAMPFIRE project, and then showed how stock numbers changed depending on which anti-poaching methods are used.

The take-home message for researchers is that, when these sorts of initiatives are being developed, policymakers should carefully consider the design of the scheme and the trade-offs that will emerge when development initiatives link with conservation efforts.

This theoretical exercise allowed the researchers to make three important observations.

Firstly, it would be cost-effective for park authorities to reduce their anti-poaching efforts in the CAMPFIRE communities. Rather, authorities should support efforts that allow the communities to control their own anti-poaching efforts, which is much cheaper. Authorities can do this by supporting changes to the institutions (and associated policies) that govern how the communities manage their conservancies at a grass roots level. The Rural District Councils, for instance, could transfer wildlife management and benefits directly to the community leadership.

Secondly, the conservancy and the communal land need to carry more wildlife stock, if their anti-poaching efforts are to benefit private landowners and the peasant farming communities. At the moment, the community is poaching more than current circumstances can sustain and wildlife numbers are dropping.

Thirdly, the CAMPFIRE communities could strengthen their institutional structures by learning from the private conservancy's approach to drawing up management rules and managing resources and finances. At the moment, even though both are trying to achieve the same thing, the CAMPFIRE communities aren't benefiting as much financially, and their conservation efforts aren't addressing poaching. Policy decisions need to support communities in becoming more autonomous.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This brief is based on 'A Bioeconomic Analysis of Community Wildlife Conservation in Zimbabwe' by Herbert Ntuli and Edwin Muchapondwa, 2015. EFD Discussion Paper 15-28. The DRB series of research briefs is associated with the EFD Discussion Paper series.

FURTHER READING

Balint, Peter and J. Mashinya, 2006. 'The Decline of a Model Community-based Conservation Project: Governance, Capacity, and Devolution in Mahenye, Zimbabwe'. *Geoforum* 37: 805-815.

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The CAMPFIRE Program in Zimbabwe: <https://firstforwildlife.wordpress.com/2015/08/18/the-campfire-program-in-zimbabwe/>

Hunting is Conservation - The CAMPFIRE Program in Zimbabwe: <http://huntforever.org/2015/09/21/hunting-is-conservation-the-campfire-program-in-zimbabwe/>

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