



## Conservancies, Power Relations and Participation

The above discussion highlights the dynamic nature of institutional relationships within conservancies. Access to resources at household level is partly mediated by these, but also by relationships at the household and inter-household level. These kinds of relationships are shaped by both reciprocal obligations as well as relationships of power and inequality.

Li and Vaughan (2003) found that in five settlements studied in ≠Khoadi //Hôas Conservancy, reciprocal relationships were important in determining access to water under the new system of 'water point committees'. In some cases in relation to the monthly money/diesel household contribution rule set by the water point committees, an informal understanding among settlement members was prevalent at all five settlements. This essentially meant that poorer people were usually given a grace period to pay arrears, sometimes indefinitely. Those who could not afford to pay would contribute labour. However, the new arrangements associated with water point management in other cases had the effect of creating a drain on people's labour, time and monetary resources, contradicting an important decision-making norm (consensus), providing an opportunity for

people to manipulate water point committee rules and giving some water point committee members an avenue to abuse their power.<sup>2</sup>

The establishment and management of water points is shaped by local social relationships. These are often manifest in terms of 'patron-client' relations in which some people are wealthier and more powerful than others. Power is vested in the relations between people in a variety of ways. These may become manifest in terms of cooperation, but can also lead to conflict and stand off. The implications for resource access of such power relations are illustrated by the description in Box 1.

Both the examples of water and land illustrate that resource access at the local level is governed as much by social relations as by the existence of more formal institutional rules. In order to understand better how issues of governance are shaped in practice, however, it is important to recognise that there is a relationship between local social relations and institutions. Differences in status and power exist between individuals for a variety of reasons. These are the result of differences in wealth, political position and related to these are individuals relationship to different institutions. (Chapter 6 provides case study material relating to these issues in respect to the activities of CGGs.)

### Box 1: Social relations and resource access in ≠Khoadi //Hôas

Farm X lies on a main road near the Grootberg Breeding Station, where many conservancy activities take place. There are three households in the village. The first is a large extended family headed by an elderly man. The second household is a young farmer and his wife and child. The third is primarily composed of related elderly people and is headed by a recent widower. Several kin and non-kin relationships exist between households and also with households in other communities. These tend to function on a peer-level or may also resemble non-blood kinship ties. The complex and egalitarian nature of these relationships provide a wide variety of benefits for community members: older people without transportation are often taken to clinics by their neighbours, young children move easily from one household to the next, and food and companionship is shared readily between families. From an outsider's perspective, each household seems to be giving and taking on a fairly equal level, such that paths of reciprocity are obvious and almost direct. There is no evident hierarchical structure beyond the culturally defined age/sex rankings.

Farm Y lies on a rough track in the north-western corner of the conservancy. There are four households on the farm. Three are larger extended families headed by older people and including a large number of children and unemployed young adults. The fourth is headed by an adult man who is well known and seems to be respected in the conservancy area. He is wealthy and owns a large number of both cattle and goats but is an 'absentee' farmer who spends little time on the farm. During March 2001 interviews, the other households on the farm complained of a shortage of grazing area. Driving onto the farm in early May, we observed plentiful grazing and asked the residents about it before the meeting. They told us that the grazing area we had seen was reserved for the absentee farmer. When questioned, they elaborated that this man had claimed that area as his own. Since he was seen as a powerful and influential person in the community, they were unwilling to contest his claim for fear that he could have them evicted from the farm completely. (Source: Jensen *et al.* 2002: 27)

<sup>2</sup> Research carried out by the WILD Project in Kunene, in collaboration with Ben Li, a graduate student from the University of East Anglia (see Li and Vaughan 2003).



“Our institutions, many of them are new, many of these things are new, traditional authority has new laws and new rights, conservancies have new laws/rights, they all think they have ownership, they should sit down with their own jurisdictions and discuss these rights. Every man is trying to show their muscles, everyone suffers...” (MET official, Kunene, cited in Vaughan *et al.* 2003b)

Conservancies are operating in a context of overlapping authorities and claims on authority made by a number of institutions and individual actors. In order to establish its right to make decisions over land and NRM, a conservancy cannot rely on the wildlife legislation alone. It has to negotiate with existing and new institutions that are in competition with the conservancy. The situation in respect to the relationships between conservancies, households and traditional authorities, for example, is quite different in the study areas in Kunene compared to Caprivi. The shifting and contested nature of the authority of traditional leaders is more evident in the Kunene examples than in Caprivi. This creates a situation in which there appears to be a good deal of uncertainty as to what is or is not permissible and appropriate in terms of key resource management decisions (for example, in respect to the allocation of lands for settlement and grazing) and who has ultimate authority.

Water is also bound up with the question of land rights. In ≠Khoadi //Hôas, for example, Li and Vaughan (2003) found that “uncertainty over land settlement rights translated into confusion over water rights and responsibilities, in so far as people did not differentiate between land and water as separate resources”. Further they found that the confusion over land settlement rights “constituted a profound destabilising force often prescribing an atmosphere of dissent between people”. There is considerable potential for conflict to develop between the new water point committees being established and the conservancy, which is increasingly viewed by residents as having *responsibility* for dealing with problem animals, particularly elephants that damage water points. Conservancies such as ≠Khoadi //Hôas will need to negotiate appropriate relationships with the water point committees if their land-use and resource-management plans are not to be undermined by those who control the water resource. Further, close relationships will be necessary if conservancies are not to be held responsible for issues that they ultimately lack authority to deal with. In some respects the potential conflicts with the new water management institutions might also be minimised by the overlap of personnel between the various committees, including the local leagues/farmers’ associations of the GFU.

“On the other hand, my concern is the conservancies have to take into consideration the management of water points especially when it relates to elephants.” (Department of Rural Water Supply Official, cited in Vaughan *et al.* forthcoming)

Much local-level resource management essentially takes place at the farm and household level, and the institutions that have jurisdiction over various resources only become involved in the management of resources when it comes to the settlement of disputes or at the level of planning (for example with plans to zone). It is at this level that the institutions involved in resource management have implications for livelihoods. Access to areas of land for grazing at the household-level for some residents may be valuable for tourism or for wildlife by other institutional actors. Taking a governance perspective reveals that there are differences in power relating to who has authority to take decisions over land designations (between institutions and between individuals). With regard to livelihoods there is a need to retain a degree of flexibility and to negotiate grazing access, for example, at an inter-farm level, but any such local household-level decisions may be overridden by institutional decisions to plan for land designations for other purposes. In the context of land-use planning, for example, to ensure that there is a close ‘fit’ between the planning of institutions and the livelihoods of individual households and farms there need to be good channels of communication and fora for the input of community members. The next section of this chapter addresses the extent to which there is participation in conservancy decision-making processes and accountability in terms of the flow of information between conservancies and community members.

### Issues of participation

Conservancies are new institutions. Policy and legislation require that conservancy committees should be accountable, but a range of factors affects what happens in practice and there is considerable differentiation in outcomes between different conservancies. The extent to which conservancy institutions will gain credibility and acceptance is, as the discussion above highlights, related to how closely allied conservancies are to be accepted and existing structures of authority and decision-making at different levels within communal areas. To be effective they must also be recognised as legitimate by residents in the area. To be recognised and accepted as legitimate at the local or community level, conservancies need to be accountable to their members, there must be an adequate flow of information and people must feel they are included in decision-making – in other words there needs to be *participation*.

“More information must go to community members – it should not stop at the committee.” (Caprivi headman) (Source: Beavan Munal/Richard Diggle, IRDNC Caprivi, interviews with traditional leaders, cited in Jones and Luipert 2002)

All stakeholders in the Namibian CBNRM programme recognise that there is a significant gap between the broader community and the committee. The material presented above



relating to the structure of the conservancy institutions, provides a number of examples that illustrate the kind of links that exist between resource users and the conservancy committees. In the case of ≠Khoadi //Hôas Conservancy, and to a lesser extent Mayuni, there is a lack of a direct structural relationship between the conservancy committee and the broader membership and community. In ≠Khoadi //Hôas Conservancy the 'gap' may be greater than elsewhere; nevertheless ≠Khoadi //Hôas serves to illustrate a commonly accepted problem within the conservancy programme. Research in ≠Khoadi //Hôas suggests that there are a number of perspectives on the issue.

"When I was at the AGM at Grootberg (≠Khoadi //Hôas Conservancy) last year I told them: 'Currently you, the committee, decide on your own and only report back to the community.' I also told Torra the same thing. I asked, 'Where are the minutes of your meetings?' In Torra only three people in the committee are doing things so it is not even the committee but only these few people. That is not community based. [...] I am concerned that the investors and committees are running forwards together leaving all other stakeholders behind." (Interview with Government Official, cited in Schiffer 2002: 3)

In similar vein local community members also expressed certain concerns:

"It does not change anything whether you are registered or not. Community people have nothing to say." (Cited in Schiffer 2002: 3)

Recent research has highlighted the following possible reasons for a lack of broader engagement and participation (Schiffer 2002):

- The nature of procedures and structures
- Lack of information/education
- Logistics
- People stop being active after unpleasant experiences
- Exclusive power-networks/favouritism
- Little interest of community in conservancy matters

It is clearly difficult to make generalisations about the extent to which conservancies are accountable to their membership and the reasons for this vary. In addition to the above derived from the work of Schiffer, a key reason for a lack of attention being paid to issues of participation relates to the activities and focus of CBNRM support agencies. As discussed in Chapter 4, the focal activities of the CBNRM support organisations has been on the three CBNRM pillars. In so far as institutional development has been addressed, much of the efforts to build capacities have related to the functions

of conservancies in terms of revenue capture, resource management and institutional capacity building. To this extent a considerable amount of training has been provided in financial and staff management, in negotiating joint ventures (tourism and trophy hunting), and in establishing the event book system. Less emphasis has been given to issues of improved governance and participation. Among those support organisations, who operate from Windhoek, this is more pronounced than for those with locally recruited staff who live and work in the area (M. Jacobsohn pers. comm.). WILD survey data provides evidence to suggest that there remain a number of issues relating to issues of communication, and participation that need addressing further.

According to the socio-economic household survey carried out for WILD (Suich 2003), 32% of households<sup>3</sup> in ≠Khoadi //Hôas did not know there was a conservancy in their area. Of the 68% that knew about the conservancy, 27% knew about the conservancy's management plans, with 27% also being consulted about the development of these plans and 44% had been consulted in the development of the constitution (n=142).

In Torra, 85% of respondent households<sup>4</sup> knew of the existence of the conservancy. Of the 85% (71 households), 34% knew about the conservancy's management plans, though 47% were consulted about the development of the plans. In addition, 58% knew about the conservancy's constitution and 54% were consulted in the development of the constitution.

In Salambala, the number aware of the conservancy was 78%<sup>5</sup>. The number of households that knew about the conservancy constitution was 34% and 32% had been consulted in developing the constitution. In Mayuni Conservancy, 72% of households<sup>6</sup> were aware of the conservancy, 34% were aware of the conservancy constitution and 32% had been consulted in its development.

According to another survey<sup>7</sup> carried out by WILD in February 2003 on the status of cash payouts by Torra Conservancy (Vaughan *et al.* 2003), very few of the conservancy members had information about conservancy income. The survey showed that 97% of respondents did not know how Torra had generated its income over the past year and 85% did not know how the conservancy had spent the revenue generated. The same survey showed that 97% of respondents said that conservancy members should be part of the decision-making concerning use of conservancy income. When asked why, 36% said it was the right of

<sup>3</sup> Sample size was 210 households.

<sup>4</sup> Sample size of 84 households.

<sup>5</sup> Sample size of 206 households.



members, 22% said for the sake of transparency and 21% said it was necessary for active participation of members. A further 15% said members should take part because it is their money and 3% said members should be part of decision-making to avoid conflicts. The cash payout itself came about because of pressure put on the committee by members who became aware of the large sums of money (N\$1.2-1.5 million) sitting in the conservancy's bank account (Vaughan *et al.* 2003). Previously there had been no plans for a cash payout and previous surveys had indicated that members wanted income to be spent on income-generating projects (Jones 1999b).

A similar situation exists in both Torra and ≠Khoadi //Hôas regarding decision-making about own-use hunting and meat distribution (see Chapter 6). With regard to the development of CBT enterprises in Caprivi, Murphy and Halstead (2003) found that communities were satisfied with the initial consultations that took place; however, they articulated the need for ongoing consultation, communication and information after the enterprises were established. Some community members also expressed concern that they were not kept informed about the financial status of enterprises.

*"There was no transparency on financial matters. If I am the chairman, the only one who knows is my son."* (Caprivi community member, cited in Murphy and Halstead 2003)

Observations by WILD researchers of conservancy annual general meetings in Torra and ≠Khoadi //Hôas Conservancies suggest that committee members tend to dominate these meetings and conservancy members have little opportunity to voice their opinions. Conservancy financial matters are not dealt with in much detail, nor are detailed budgets prepared for approval by members. At the Torra AGM of August 2002, community members called for more transparency in the decision-making concerning the compensation provided for stock losses caused by predators.

*"The conservancy committee should be patient with community members and give enough time for discussions. Allow people to scrutinise every report before any other point on the agenda."* (Benny Roman, member of Torra Conservancy and IRDNC employee)

There is also evidence in some cases of good participation and links between the conservancy committees and the broader community. In Salambala, for example, a *khuta* representative sits on the conservancy management committee and provides feedback to the *khuta* and from the *khuta* to members of the conservancy. The executive

committee also meet the *khuta* regularly in order to provide feedback. In this case, the existence and complementarity between the traditional authority institutions and the conservancy creates a stronger link and acts to improve participation (albeit through representatives of the village level – headmen). Another example, again from Caprivi, relates to the processes of elections for representatives to the conservancy committee. In this case, WILD research on the use of cash payouts in Salambala revealed that the decisions concerning the use of money given to villages was made at village and collective level (see Mulonga and Murphy 2003). This illustrates quite clearly that group decision-making at a village level takes place with respect to important decisions. Since villages through their headmen are linked to the conservancy institutions any decisions taken at a village level can be communicated to conservancy committees. In this way there are opportunities for a relatively high degree of communication and representation between the different parts of the institutional structures.

A further example, again from Salambala Conservancy, illustrates that the issue of participation is considered important by residents themselves. During committee elections in 2003, the principle of village representation was initially ignored. A small group of people who attended the AGM voted in a new committee, which was felt later to be unrepresentative. With support from IRDNC, new elections were held that enabled the principle of village representation to be restored. One of the problems encountered in this process was that the conservancy constitution itself had not entrenched the idea of village representation that had been used when the conservancy was formed and which underpinned the accountability of the committee to members (Diggle pers. comm.). In many cases the constitutions are problematic because they are often simply based on 'blue prints' and not always developed according to local procedures and priorities. The situation is compounded by the fact that "most constitutions are a cut and paste of others, it's easier to do them that way and to get them passed by the MET, but the majority of the community do not understand them" (Anna Davis pers. comm.). The conservancy 'tool box' (MET 2000) also provides a model constitution, which forms the basis of most conservancy constitutions.

The implications of the problems regarding accountability and information flows are widely recognised by CBNRM stakeholders in Namibia and there are now considerable efforts to address this potential gap in terms of downward accountability and creating better channels of communication. It is not only the issue of accountability and communication, which suggests a 'downward' link between the conservancies and community, but the

<sup>6</sup> Sample size of 183 households.

<sup>7</sup> Sample size 67 people or around 15% of total conservancy membership.