

The Impact of Wildlife Management Policies on Communities and Conservation in Game Management Areas in Zambia: Message to Policy Makers

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Introduction

Zambia has set aside vast tracts of land in the form of GMAs for wildlife management. In 1999, the government implemented the 1998 Zambia Wildlife Act as it realized that without viable natural resources, future generations would face increased risks of hunger and poverty, which would compel them to further exploit their diminishing natural resources. The enacted Policy for National Parks and Wildlife in Zambia instituted the concept of Community-Based Natural Resources Management.

Today, it appears that GMA governance through community institutions such as Community Resources Boards and Village Action Groups is failing to achieve the purpose for which GMAs were established; namely to act as buffer zones to National Parks in order to protect wild animals and their habitats to support a viable wildlife-based tourism industry, which contributes significantly to the national economy and to the improvement of welfare in GMAs. This is a summary of a larger report of a study that evaluated the ecological, commercial and sociological impacts of the community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) policies in the GMAs.

Major findings

The study shows that, despite all the commitment by the government, the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA), the communities and their partners, the GMAs are in a spiral of degradation ecologically, economically, and sociologically. Ecologically, in more than half the GMAs the populations of animals have declined, mainly due to poaching. In some GMAs the animal status is unknown while many hunting blocks are no longer viable. A snap-survey further shows that the natural habitats available to support wildlife in GMAs are shrinking throughout the country due to increased settlements, cultivation, traditional land claims and uncoordinated planning by government departments. Bbilili GMA is the worst affected with almost no land left for wildlife.

The commercial performance of the GMAs is also largely unsatisfactory. Until now the commercial use of wildlife has focused on hunting, with international trophy hunting accounting for most of the income in active GMAs. Safari hunting is one of the least developed in southern Africa. Only 10 of the 36 GMAs have photographic tourism developments of which only two (Chiawa and Bangweulu) receive revenues from lodges. Employment figures in both consumptive and non-consumptive tourism are also very low. In Mfuwe area, which is the most active GMA-based tourist hub in the country, there was only 700 permanent and temporary staff as of 2005. In general, utilisation and trophy quality of major species, such as lion, leopard, sable, roan and buffalo, have been and continue to be on

the decline. Zambia ranks very low in the region as far as generating revenue from hunting is concerned. Hunting revenues disbursed by ZAWA to CRBs have been declining since 2004. For example, incomes declined by K170 million in 2005 and by K50 million in 2006.

The study also reveals that communities in the GMAs are characterised by high poverty levels. When compared to other rural communities, the welfare in GMAs is 30 percent lower than the national average for rural areas, with the exception only of the GMAs the Luangwa valley and Bangweulu. Monthly per capita expenditure of GMA residents is estimated at ZMK71,000 compared to the national average of ZMK112,000 and ZMK244,000 in rural and urban areas, respectively (LCMS, 2006). This is so partly because the GMA communities have continued to experience the depressing effects of wildlife management policies, which are restrictive to agricultural development and alternative uses of natural resources.

The most serious problems across all GMAs are poaching, human encroachment, fire, deforestation, subsistence agriculture and illegal fishing. Very little funding goes into resource protection in most places. Only three GMAs – Lupande, chiawa, and Sandwe – meet the minimum requirements for management effectiveness. The welfare status of most communities have not improved despite all the community development interventions in the wildlife sector. Only community members that are actively involved in affairs and management of active CRBs are able to benefit. These tend to be already relatively well off. Thus, the poor continue to be left out. GMAs also have poor infrastructure, such schools and health facilities.

Conclusions

The results show that Zambia's natural resource management policies have failed to uphold the objectives for which GMAs were established, which are to act as buffer zones to national parks while supporting a viable hunting industry capable of contributing to community welfare and national development. While the Zambian Government has accepted CBNRM approaches that provide rural communities with secure tenure of their natural resources, the commitment to develop appropriate supporting legislation and technical capacity has been lacking. Moreover, even where legislation is in place, rights of access to and use of natural resources have not been clearly defined. Communities have not received the necessary assistance to develop capacity to independently manage their activities. The result is that communities are unable to realize the optimal benefits from the wealth of resources on their lands.

These policies together with an economic development orientation that is skewed in favor of urban areas, have contributed to the degradation of GMAs in general and the depletion of wildlife in particular. Wildlife management is not necessarily the communities' preferred land use option. Experiences from other southern African countries demonstrate that CBNRM can contribute to poverty reduction in GMAs, provided it is effectively implemented through an integrated approach and facilitated by an enabling policy environment with adequate support for implementation. Lessons also demonstrate that blame must be placed, not with the unequivocal commitment and capacity of the government and its partners, but rather with the wildlife management policy itself.

It seems clear that rural communities have been disadvantaged by the existing wildlife management policies, which limit their participation in the management of natural resources, and by the general lack of economic development in these areas. The Zambian government needs to launch a national review of the GMA management policies and practices with the view to design and adopt a new policy framework within the broader context of protected areas and natural resources management. This policy framework should be drafted prior to modifying the Zambia Wildlife Act so it can influence its contents.

Policy recommendations

The proposed new wildlife management policy should be sufficiently flexible to respond to the specific needs of people in specific areas, and to address different socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions. An enabling policy environment would include: (1) economic incentives for communities; (2) emphasis on results; and (3) mobilization of stakeholders according to their comparative and competitive advantages. The revision should among many other issues consider the following:

Partnerships. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) that include various community organizations are now part of the government's policy in natural resources management. However, their success requires improvements to existing and sometimes outdated policies and legal frameworks. Legislation should establish an unequivocal incentive framework to stimulate communities to contribute to, and appreciate, the objectives of the partnerships. Furthermore, it should provide for a clearer definition of communities' rights to natural resources, and this improved security of tenure should be legally enshrined in the agreements and policies.

While private partners in PPPs may bring in capital, the government must boost its investment in infrastructure such as roads and basic services such as schools and health centers to make GMAs attractive to private sector investors. The policy framework for partnerships should be formulated through a consultative process involving a cross-section of stakeholders.

Business-oriented approach. While donors will continue to support some activities, such investments are rarely long-term and do not allow methodologies to mature and local capacity to be installed. Rather a business-oriented approach should be adopted in order to guarantee continued investments in community development activities. Accordingly, local people must be encouraged to engage in businesses. The government has expressed concerns about the low level of community participation in past efforts, but a recently enacted law, the Zambia Citizen's Empowerment Act, is expected to enhance local participation in business.

Legalized Community Structures. Community participation must be formalized through legal entities at community level. Community structures should be registered under the relevant legislation to grant them legal status enabling them to deal with other entities as equal partners and enter into legally binding agreements. Resource ownership should only be given upon a community showing proof of interest, capacity and the means to assume responsibility for the management of the resources. As such, communities must define their boundaries, membership, roles and responsibilities, produce action plans and define benefit-sharing

mechanisms. Upon fulfilling laid down conditions, they should be granted rights to natural resources in their areas. Devolved rights should also include adequate authority and responsibility for the management, benefit and disposal of resources within agreed frameworks as well as the right to exclude others who are not defined participants.

Diversification away from wildlife. A new wildlife management policy must address communities' access to other, non-wildlife, natural resources, which the majority of poor households depend upon. The policy should provide all recognized community structures with rights to all resources in their areas of jurisdiction. Apart from harmonization of legislation, the policy should also harmonize approaches and provide for improved coordination.

The government has prioritized the agricultural sector as a vehicle for reducing rural poverty and is providing incentives for agricultural development. This agricultural expansion however should be implemented in a manner that does not compromise the objectives of the GMAs.

Zoning and reclassification. The need to diversify economic activities in GMAs calls for new land use approaches. This may even justify the reclassification of some GMAs. At the very minimum, land use or management plans will have to be implemented to ensure that wildlife habitats are better safeguarded and non-habitat parts of the GMA are released for other economic activities, which are currently restricted, such as intensive market-oriented livestock and crop production or rearing of small game animals. Restricting essential economic activities for the sustenance of local people simply worsens the prevailing poverty conditions.

Management plans. The economic activities in GMAs should be outlined in integrated management plans to ensure that they are compatible with wildlife conservation in the long term. Management Plans may provide suitable planning instruments for selection of profitable enterprises with low adverse environmental impacts. Community structures should be granted enough authority to control access and use of all natural resources within their areas of jurisdiction within the agreed management or land use plan.

ZAWA: Implementer or Regulator? The sheer scale of managing a wildlife estate that includes 19 national parks and 36 GMAs covering more than 30 percent of the country's territory is daunting. As ZAWA only maintains the national parks with difficulty, it is not surprising that it can allocate very little of its budget and human resources to GMAs. In short, the task given to ZAWA is too ambitious for a single institution unless its function evolves from *hands-on* to regulatory. Additionally, ZAWA is not the best equipped to implement the community support function required in GMAs. ZAWA's staff comes from a culture of conservation and wildlife management rather than community development. As a consequence, ZAWA tends to allocate its resources to the most pressing conservation needs, which is the surveillance of its national parks.