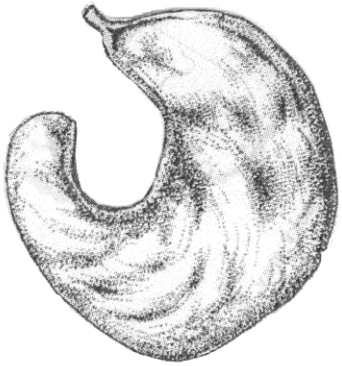

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Panaceans, utilitarians, and skeptics: A review of three decades of Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Namibia

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Abstract

Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) is a form of resource governance the objective of which is to achieve sustainable development and empower communities. CBNRM was demonstrably successful in the first twenty years of operation in Namibia but, over time, the literature on the topic has come to reflect the diminishing benefits derived from the program. As such, in this article I have divided the literature into three loose temporal groupings, which I have labelled panaceans, utilitarians and skeptics. The work of the panaceans appeared largely in the first decade of CBNRM in Namibia and view the program as having been successful in achieving the three goals of economic development, environmental conservation, and community empowerment. The utilitarians were less convinced by CBNRM, pointing out that while certain goals were achieved, others were not. The work of the skeptics has appeared more recently and suggests that those most marginalized in the rural communities which CBNRM is intended to help, do not benefit at all. The arguments of the three groupings have evolved over time and demonstrate the increasing challenges facing the programme as well as pointing to useful avenues for improvement.

Introduction

Since its inception in the mid-1990s Namibia's version of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) has been touted as one of the most successful in southern Africa and a global leader in this form of resource governance.[1] The basis for this is the fact that the percentage of land devoted to conservation in Namibia is among the highest in the region[2], while the country has seen marked increases in once-dwindling

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[1] Dilys Roe, Fred Nelson and Chris Sandbrook, *Community Management of Natural Resources in Africa: Impacts, Experiences and Future Directions*, London, International Institute for Environment and Development, 2009.

[2] Jessica Brown and Neil Bird, *Sustainable Natural Resource Management in Namibia*, London, Development Progress, 2011, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/124914/2010-12_namibia_environment_widlife_conservation.pdf

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wildlife populations[3], demonstrable economic benefits derived from the program[4], as well as a widely reported sense of community empowerment.[5] Many of these successes, however, were recorded in the first two decades of program and over the past five to ten years, the successes seem to have become fewer and more modest. This shift has largely been reflected in the academic literature. Thus, I argue that research on CBNRM falls into three quasi-chronological categories: panaceans, utilitarians, and skeptics.

The panaceans' research is rooted predominantly in the decade following the drafting of the 1996 Nature Conservation Amendment Act, which provided the legislative framework for CBNRM in Namibia. Across southern Africa at the time there was great enthusiasm for CBNRM, which, it was widely believed, could achieve the three broad goals of 1) economic development, 2) environmental conservation, and 3) community empowerment.[6] The panaceans largely viewed the initial success Namibians were experiencing with the program in a positive light, generally reporting that CBNRM provided a means by which to achieve the goals of sustainable development.[7] After an initial decade of marked success and optimism, the enthusiasm for CBNRM began wane somewhat, as it became clear that while some goals were being achieved these successes were perhaps less far-reaching than originally envisioned. The work of the utilitarians appeared between roughly 2006 and 2015 and their research generally suggests that CBNRM produces benefits and largely contributes toward sustainable development goals.[8] However, they tend to agree that a number of issues with the policy, its implementation and, specifically, the failure to devolve government of the program effectively, had undermined efforts to achieve genuine community empowerment.[9] While they tout the environmental benefits derived from the program, the utilitarians see the progress it brought in economic development as modest, and raise serious questions about its efficacy as an instrument of community empowerment.[10] In more recent years, much of the literature on CBNRM in Namibia has adopted a much more critical outlook on the program and scholars have begun to question whether

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[3] Michael Schnegg and Richard Dimba Kiaka, "Subsidized Elephants: Community-Based Resource Governance and Environmental (in)Justice in Namibia", *Geoforum*, 93, 2018: 105-115.

[4] Brian Jones and L. Chris Weaver, "CBNRM in Namibia: Growth, Trends, Lessons and Constraints", in: Brian Child, Helen Suich and Spenceley Anna, (eds.), *Evolution and Innovation in Wildlife Conservation*, London, Routledge, 2012: 241-260.

[5] Jarkko Saarinen, *Sustainable Tourism in Southern Africa: Local Communities and Natural Resources in Transition*, Bristol, Channel View, 2009.

[6] David Hulme and Marshall Murphree, "Communities, Wildlife and the 'New Conservation' in Africa", *Journal of International Development*, 11 (2), 1999: 277-285.

[7] Brian T. B. Jones, "Policy Lessons from the Evolution of a Community-Based Approach to Wildlife Management, Kunene Region, Namibia", *Journal of International Development*, 11 (2), 1999: 295-304.

[8] Karol Boudreaux, "A New Call of the Wild: Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Namibia Essay", *Georgetown International Environmental Law Review*, 20, 2008: 297-336.

[9] Marshall W. Murphree, "The Strategic Pillars of Communal Natural Resource Management: Benefit, Empowerment and Conservation," *Biodiversity and Conservation*, 18, 2009: 2551-2562.

[10] Arthur Frederick Hoole, "Place-Power-Prognosis: Community-Based Conservation, Partnerships, and Ecotourism Enterprises in Namibia", *International Journal of the Commons*, 4 (1), 2009: 78-99.

it produces any benefits for community members at all.[11] The skeptics suggest that, at best, communities fail to benefit at all, and at worst, CBNRM amounts to poor rural Africans subsidizing tourism for the Global North.[12]

On closer examination of the three groupings of literature it becomes clear that the change in outlook on CBNRM is largely related to wildlife numbers which grew significantly for several years, but have since plateaued and in some cases have even begun to fall again. Economic benefits provided to communities through the conservancy program were once upwards of N$500 per year for members, but in many cases have declined to N$50 or ceased altogether. Furthermore, fewer jobs have been created through the program or through related tourism enterprises, so that economic benefits in general have become limited. Similarly, the sense of ownership over their development that communities once felt through the democratic processes of the conservancies has been undermined by ever more frequent accusations of local-level corruption and general disillusionment with the promise of participation. Scholars point to a variety of reasons why the program has become less and less successful over time including the policies themselves, the way they have been implemented, the power imbalances between local and global actors, as well as elite capture. This article provides a synthesis of the literature on CBNRM specifically in light of the recent article by Cruise and Sasada which suggests that the reported positive impacts of CBRNM are either overstated or, in some cases, entirely unsubstantiated.[13] However, a number of academic studies, as this article will explore, as well as the Namibia Ministry of Environment and Tourism resolutely refute these claims.[14]

This article will survey the literature on CBNRM in Namibia. It will further unpack what this form of resource governance is, what its objectives are and how it is supposed to achieve these goals. The article will analyze the three political groupings of literature in order to demonstrate how the outlook on CBNRM has evolved – or perhaps more accurately devolved – over time. It will also discuss the various conclusions as to why the program has experienced diminished levels of success.

CBNRM in southern Africa

Southern Africa has a history of natural resource governance that has often been marked by unsustainable extraction while simultaneously failing to engender broad-based development. Examples of this are starkest with large-scale extractive industries of resources

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[11] Michael Bollig, "Towards an Arid Eden? Boundary Making, Governance and Benefit Sharing and the Political Ecology of the 'New Commons' of Kunene Region, Northern Namibia", *International Journal of the Commons*, 10 (2), 2016: 771-799.

[12] Schnegg and Kiaka, "Elephants".

[13] Adam Cruise and Sasada Izzy, "Investigation into the Efficacy of Namibia's Wildlife Conservation Model as It Relates to African Elephants (Loxodonta Africana)", *Journal of African Elephants.* 2021, https://africanelephantjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Investigation-in-Namibias-conservation-model-Full-Report-LR.pdf

[14] Werner Menges, "Damning Conservation Report Raises Hackles", *The Namibian*, December 12, 2021.

such as oil, gold, diamonds, and other minerals. However, the same remains true for other types of resources that are extracted on a smaller scale but by a much broader segment of the population. This includes commonly used resources such as freshwater resources, forests and forest products, but also wildlife and their natural habitat and even the atmosphere and quality of the air. Common pool resources such as these have been subject to the tragedy of the commons globally, but in southern Africa this tragedy has often played out more acutely, posing particularly complex challenges. As populations have grown across the region, the limited freshwater resources have come under increasing strain and forests have been decimated in most countries.[15] Beyond this, the pressure on Africa's charismatic megafauna has increased and, at one point, wildlife populations were in steep decline throughout the region.[16] This strain on resources is result of growing human populations demanding ever-increasing resources to sustain livelihoods, combined with environmental pressures as a changing climate shifts precipitation patterns and continues to heat up this already hot continent.

In many cases, what has played out is a version of the tragedy of the commons in which populations that have been mired in a state of protracted underdevelopment have been forced to extract various local natural resources unsustainably. This often benefits individuals in the short term, while in the long term threatening the collective well-being of the broader community.[17] One of the starkest examples of this is seen in the wildlife populations of southern Africa. Huge numbers fall victim to poachers who rely on the sale of their parts on the black market for income, while in other cases farmers will simply kill problem animals which have been forced into closer contact with human populations and their livestock.[18] This is again as result of expanding human populations and settlements, combined with the effects of climate change leading to less available water for both humans and wildlife. This in turn leads to less prey and less grazing material in the wild.[19] As a result, human-wildlife conflict has increased which sees predators killing more livestock, while animals such as elephants, rhinos and giraffes cause damage to infrastructure as they tear up pipes in search of water or destroy gardens and buildings in their endless hunt for food. With over sixty percent of the African population engaging in some form of subsistence agriculture for a means of survival the clash between farmer and wildlife has been a substantial issue and one of the factors leading to dwindling wildlife

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[15] Péter Tarr, *Environmental Impact Assessment in Southern Africa: A SAIEA publication,* Windhoek, SAIEA, 2003.

[16] David Hulme and Marshall Murphree, *African Wildlife and Livelihoods : The Promise and Performance of Community Conservation*, Woolnough, Irthlingborough, 2001.

[17] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. The Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions*, Cambrigde, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[18] Rodgers Lubilo and Paul Hebinck, "'Local Hunting' and Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Namibia: Contestations and Livelihoods", *Geoforum*, 101, 2019: 62-75.

[19] Kevin Coldrey and Jane Turpie, *Climate Change Risk Assessment for Namibia's Communal Conservancies. Final Report 2020*, Cape Town, Anchor Environmental, 2020.

populations.[20] Thus, climate change is one of the most pressing issues relating to CBNRM, yet one which, to date, has hardly been researched.[21]

To deal with the issues of unsustainable resource extraction combined with protracted underdevelopment, CBNRM has developed across much of southern Africa as a key resource governance technique. CBNRM consists of a broad set of policies and practices and can take a variety of distinct forms. Such differences aside, it generally involves a devolution of control of certain natural resources from national governments, into the care and control of local communities. The idea is that those who reside close to resources will manage them more sustainably as they will recognise the necessity for conservation for their own future and will be held accountable by family, friends and neighbours, rather than by distant governments.[22] In Africa relations between national governments and their people have often been fraught and governments are often viewed as purveyors of insecurity rather than security, and plunderers of resources, rather than providers of services.[23] CBNRM is presented as a way to stop poaching through the implementation of pro-poor projects that rely on community engagement and empowerment.

CBNRM has a long history and evolved over time before growing in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s when the dominant thinking in development and global environmental governance came to focus on community empowerment, partnership and ownership.[24] This was a time of a marked shift in which neoliberalism can be said to have won out across much of the world as the dominant ideology, as the West eclipsed the East with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the US began its reign of unipolarity. All of this proved important as these manifold complex forces worked together within the international political economy and served as a way to extend the power and ideology of the West while doing so quietly and at a distance. Latham elaborates this, arguing that there has been a shift from a global New Deal to a neoliberal emphasis on the power of markets to shape development in supposedly benevolent ways.[25] As will be demonstrated by various voices in this review however, the process has not be so clear-cut. For CBNRM, western involvement entailed the provision of donor funding through a proliferating network of NGOs across southern Africa, which used predominantly western funding to invest in

[20] Makhtar Diop, "Foresight Africa 2016: Banking on Agriculture for Africa's Future", Brookings (blog), 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/01/22/foresight-africa-2016-banking-on-agriculture-for-africas-future/

[21] Andrew Heffernan, "Accounting for Climate Change in CBNRM: Reflections on Wildlife Conservation in Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2022, forthcoming.

[22] Russell Taylor, "Community Based Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe: The Experience of CAMPFIRE", *Biodiversity and Conservation*, 18 (10), 2009: 2563-2583.

[23] Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, "Chapter 2: Neopratrimonial Rule in Africa", in: eadem, *Democratic Experiments in Africa Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[24] Martin Sjöstedt, "Aid Effectiveness and the Paris Declaration: A Mistmatch between Ownership and Results-Based Managment?", *Public Administration and Development*, 33 (2), 2013: 143-155.

[25] Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011.

projects that were intended to promote sustainable development. In many cases, this involved devolving the rights to certain natural resources – such as wildlife – to local populations who could then benefit economically through a variety of industries based on ecotourism.[26] Generally, local communities entered joint-venture agreements with tourism companies that built lodges, campsites, infrastructure for safaris, as well as the vast economy that goes along with tourism including restaurants, guided hikes and tours, heritage sites, local craft and ware shops, museums, beaches and more. This was all based on the assumption that wealthy tourists would travel to experience the pristine African savannah and its rare and majestic wildlife.[27] One of the key factors here is that the savannah must remain pristine, and the wildlife must remain healthy and abundant. Thus, the more successfully any country or community protected its wildlife and their habitat, the more economic development they could enjoy – resulting in a win-win scenario. This win-win scenario as a way to prevent collective resource issues from degenerating into tragedies of commons is precisely what Elinor Ostrom based her seminal work on.[28] Managing resources in order to profit from them long term is generally seen as sustainable and is intended to be both broad-based and equitable as jobs can be created and incomes can be reinvested in communities through infrastructure projects, education, as well as cash benefits that can be distributed to community members.

In theory at least, there is a third important aspect to this form of sustainable development beyond environmental conservation and economic development, and that is community empowerment. These goals form what I argue are the three pillars of CBNRM.[29] CBNRM is supposed to devolve power to communities so they can develop local democratic governance mechanisms. This institutional development, in theory, gives communities and their members a voice in their own development, thus achieving the 'ownership' and 'participation' on which CBNRM is based.[30] Many scholars have pointed to this third aspect of CBNRM as the most important, as ownership and participation should engender long-term sustainable development that evolves beyond resource management. Despite its importance, community empowerment has been neglected in the existing literature. This is probably due in part to it being the most abstract and difficult to quantify of the three key components of CBNRM, while also the hardest to develop.

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[26] Sheona Shackleton, Bruce Campbell, Eva Wollenberg and David Edmunds, *Devolution and Community-Based Natural Resource Management: Creating Space for Local People to Participate and Benefit?*, London, Overseas Development Institute, 2002.

[27] C. Fabricius and S. Collins, "Community-Based Natural Resource Management: Governing the Commons", *Water Policy*, 9 (S2), 2007: 83-97.

[28] Ostrom, *Governing* .

[29] Andrew Heffernan, "Development, Conservation, Empowerment: The Trilemma of Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Namibia", *Environmental Management*, 69, 2022: 480-491.

[30] Louise Fortmann, Emery Roe and Michel van Eeten, "At the Threshold between Governance and Management: Community-based Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa", *Public Administration and Development*, 21 (2), 2001: 171-185.

There is a large and extensive body of literature on the history of CBNRM, the theory behind it, and how it has worked in practice across the region over the past decades. There has been a great deal of success, as wildlife populations have rebounded and evidence of economic growth coupled with decreased poverty rates has been presented.[31] Certain communities have clearly benefitted from the program, to which economic development, wildlife numbers, and local level respondents bear witness. In other communities however, success has been much more qualified and, over time, much of the enthusiasm for the programs experienced in the 1990s has been lost. As a result, academics, policymakers, environmentalists, and the general population have developed a much more nuanced view of CBNRM. One of the major weaknesses in the literature is the failure to account adequately for the impact of climate change on CBNRM. This is a result of CBNRM being framed predominantly as an issue of domestic conservation that is separate from the broader issues of global climate change. However, my research shows that climate change is the binding constraint to CBNRM program success and as such, ought to be central to any analysis relating to it, so that policies evolve which take these shifting realities into account.

CBNRM involves a number of different actors worldwide who operate at once at local and global levels while also often blurring the boundaries between the public and private spheres. These actors channel funds to support CBNRM activities. However, these funds are not allocated impartially and are increasingly funnelled to specific communities for specific activities and agendas. An example of this can be seen in two distinct forms of wildlife management and conservation. The literature often sees two broad approaches to managing wildlife – labelling one consumptive use and the other non-consumptive use.[32] Consumptive use activities often involve various types of trophy hunting in which foreigners can travel to a country and pay large sums of money to go on a hunting foray with the objective of shooting a specific animal. Strict quotas regulate such activities to ensure they are sustainable, and the profits are re-invested in local community activities. In this sense, they are sustainable, yet considered *consumptive* as the animal is killed in the process. This contrasts with non-consumptive use forms of management which are what most people imagine an African safari to be: staying in a lodge and being driven around in a 4x4 vehicle to track and observe wildlife, take pictures and enjoy their beauty. This is considered non-consumptive as the same animals can be viewed repeatedly, they are not harmed or killed in the process and hence remain in the resource pool.[33]

This classification system, however, developed primarily from a western cultural frame and is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, while hunting Africa's charismatic megafauna may well seem abhorrent to many around the world, it has been a part of the local culture over thousands of years. For the most part, it was carried out sustainably and, in this sense, it mirrors the accepted way that deer, moose, or bear are hunted in the West

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[31] Brown and Bird, *Resource Management* .

[32] Pascal Tremblay, "Wildlife Tourism Consumption: Consumptive or Non-consumptive?", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 3 (1), 2001: 81-86.

[33] Ibid.

for example. While some endangered species are also hunted in Africa, there are ways to allow limited hunting that keeps the activity sustainable – especially when the profits are re-invested, as is often the case, in conservation activities and local communities. Secondly, considering trophy hunting consumptive, while more traditional forms of ecotourism as non-consumptive, is not only framed entirely from a western cultural view, it also serves the interests of westerners themselves. It allows them to feel good about their contribution to protecting these wildlife populations, which they see as a sort of global human good. It also allows them to continue their consumption, i.e. their photographic tourism of the wonders of the African savannah, without thinking about the more difficult questions of negative impacts on wildlife or locals. One of the popular mantras that has evolved within development discourse is 'African solutions to African problems', but this framing of non-consumptive use resource management seems to perpetuate ongoing power imbalances that see western actors heavily involved in 'solutions'.

Ecotourists who travel to southern Africa may live by the mantra to "take nothing but pictures and leave nothing but footprints", but in large numbers they also consume considerable resources, leave behind waste and, most importantly, produce a great deal of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Ecotourism has been on the rise globally and is supposed to be less harmful, and potentially even ecologically beneficial to local environments. This is often the case with CBNRM projects which have led to increases in wildlife populations and the development of many local sustainable industries and conservation activities. This, however, fails to acknowledge the less localized and often less visible environmental impacts as growing numbers of tourists continue to contribute to increasingly dangerous levels of global GHG emissions.[34] It is for this reason that the impact of climate change must be understood as well as the impact of CBNRM on climate change, in order to ensure the program remains sustainable and can evolve to respond to changing environments.

Much of the literature on CBNRM has approached it as an apolitical domestic policy tool for conservation. This approach, however, requires one to disregard a vast body of information. My research has demonstrated that CBNRM cannot be fully understood without considering global power relations. CBNRM, like many development initiatives, is highly political and highly complex. In various countries, it is implemented through legislation by national governments. However, in practice it is a broad set of policies and practices that are made possible by a plethora of disparate actors operating both locally and globally while simultaneously within the public and private sectors. Firstly, the legislation for these policies is often drafted with the help of NGOs, international institutions and consultants, and these actors are funded by foreign governments. In general, once implemented, the CBNRM projects that result from these policies rely on the direct support of a network of NGOs on the ground which are both local and international, and which have increasingly complex funding streams which makes it difficult to determine who is funding what. Furthermore, there is evidence that many are becoming increasingly

[34] Robert Fletcher, "Ecotourism after Nature: Anthropocene Tourism as a New Capitalist 'Fix'", *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 27 (4), 2019: 522-535.

politicized. As funding streams have narrowed, this has often led to increasingly targeted approaches to development in which, rather than seeking to fund a project broadly, funders – and hence the NGOs through which their funds are channelled – pick certain projects, groups, communities, and individuals based on the activities they are engaged in. This creates a complex web of actors as various forms of power emerge based on the social interactions of those within these networks.

Panaceans

Much of the panaceans' work consists of analysis of CBNRM programs across the rest of southern Africa as the initiative was still in its infancy in Namibia at the time most of them were writing. As a result, much of this literature looks to neighbouring countries for examples of benefits CBNRM can produce, while others provide a more forward-looking approach outlining the benefits that this form of resource governance *ought* to realize based on the thinking behind it. One of the examples pointed to most by the panaceans is the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) in Zimbabwe. Along "with its innovative wildlife department, effective national natural resources movement and strong university, Zimbabwe's well documented CAMPFIRE programme made the early running in the evolution of CBNRM" and, as a result, much of work of the panaceans is based on this example.[35] Studies by Child, Frost and Bond, and Taylor discuss the development of CBNRM in Zimbabwe while presenting real, measurable benefits, as well as the future potentials for the program.[36] CAMPFIRE became one of the main examples from which other programs developed in neighbouring countries. This led to studies on various natural resources besides wildlife, in Tanzania[37], Kenya[38], and southern Africa more broadly. This in turn brought about a wave of enthusiasm for this form of resource governance as a potentially effective way forward.[39]

Building on this growing scholarly evidence of the potential for communities in need, studies on CBNRM in Namibia began to appear. Following the drafting of the 1996 Nature

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[35] Brian Child and Grenville Barnes, "The Conceptual Evolution and Practice of Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa: Past, Present and Future", *Environmental Conservation*, 37 (3), 2010: 283-295 (287)

[36] Brian Child, *Parks in Transition: Biodiversity, Rural Development and the Bottom Line*, London ; Sterling, VA, Earthscan Publications, 2004; Peter G. H. Frost and Ivan Bond, "The CAMPFIRE Programme in Zimbabwe: Payments for Wildlife Services", *Ecological Economics*, 65 (4), 2008: 776-787; Taylor, "Resource Management".

[37] Salla Rantala, Renee Bullock, Mwilla A. Mbegu and Laura A. German, "Community-Based Forest Management: What Scope for Conservation and Livelihood Co-Benefits? Experience from the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania", *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, 31 (8), 2012: 777-797; Elizabeth J. Z. Robinson, Heidi J. Albers, Charles Meshack and Razack B. Lokina, "Implementing REDD through Community-based Forest Management: Lessons from Tanzania", *Natural Resources Forum*, 37 (3), 2013: 141-152.

[38] John S. Akama, Christopher L. Lant and G. Wesley Burnett, "A Political-Ecology Approach to Wildlife Conservation in Kenya", *Environmental Values*, 5 (4), 1996: 335-347.

[39] Fabricius and Collins, "Resource Management"; Shackleton and Campbell, *Devolution*.

Conservation Amendment Act, scholars credited Namibia with being home to one of the most successful examples of CBNRM in the world.[40] Snively discusses the legal realties in the country, exploring how "at independence it adopted what is considered by many to be one of the most progressive constitutions in the world" as well as being "the first country in Africa to provide for environmental protection in its constitution."[41] The panaceans point to Namibia's progressive constitution and the way it was able to develop effectively a legislative framework thanks in part to lessons learned from neighbouring countries and CBNRM programs. They suggested that, with independence in 1990, the new constitution would remove many of the historical constraints Namibia had faced in shifting from agriculture toward more favourable land use patterns for wildlife.[42] The panaceans argue that "wildlife utilization strategies potentially yield significantly higher economic returns than these traditional land uses."[43] Many build on these arguments, claiming that not only can wildlife conservation be more economically productive while conserving local environments, but that the community-based aspect empowers local residents while also more effectively protecting wildlife against poaching and other threats.[44] In Namibia, prior to independence, relations between the state and the people were historically fraught and governments – whether colonial or Apartheid – were often purveyors of insecurity rather than security, and plunderers of resources, rather than providers of services.[45]

The panaceans point in particular to recovering wildlife populations that had been declining rapidly prior to this shift in governance.[46] Jones et al. demonstrate that

> Wildlife is increasing in many Namibian conservancies, particularly those in the north-west and the north-east (NACSO, 2010). Springbok, for example, in the north-west have increased from a few thousand in the early 1980s (a period of severe drought and heavy poaching) to around 160,000. Similar increases have taken place with Hartmann's mountain zebra and oryx. Elephant and black rhino

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[40] Brian Jones, "The Evolution of a Community-Based Approach to Wildlife Management at Kunene, Namibia", in: David Hulme and Marshall W. Murphree, (eds.), *African Wildlife and Livelihoods: The Promise and Performance of Community Conservation*, Oxford, Currey, 2001: 160-176.

[41] Stephen W. Snively, "Environmental Laws of Namibia: Constitutions, Conservation, and Cheetahs", *Probate & Property*, 26 (3), 2012: 44-62 (45).

[42] Brian Jones, *Synthesis of the Current Status of CBNRM Policy and Legislation in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe*, Harare, WWF Southern African Regional Programme Office, 2004.

[43] Julie Richardson, "Wildlife Utilization and Biodiversity Conservation in Namibia: Conflicting or Complementary Objectives?", *Biodiversity & Conservation*, 7 (4), 1998: 549-559 (558).

[44] Jon Barnes and Brian Jones, "Game Ranching in Namibia", in: Helen Suich, Brian Child and Anna Spenceley,(eds.), *Evolution and Innovation in Wildlife Conservation*, London, Routledge, 2012: 131-144; Fortmann et al., "Threshold"; Jones, "Evolution".

[45] Brian Jones and Marshall Murphree, "The Evolution of Policy on Community Conservation in Namibia and Zimbabwe", in: David Hulme and Marshall W. Murphree, (eds.), *African Wildlife and Livelihoods: The Promise and Performance of Community Conservation*, Oxford, Currey, 2001: 38-58.

[46] Arun Agrawal and Clark C. Gibson, "Enchantment and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation", *World Development*, 27 (4), 1999: 629-649.

> have more than doubled in number, and black rhino are being re-introduced by government into some conservancies in Kunene Region. The increase in wildlife stocks represents a significant increase in natural capital which is an asset that communities can use to diversify livelihoods and provide meat and jobs. Increasing wildlife numbers also provide a solid foundation for the further development of tourism in conservancies.[47]

Scholars from this group argue that the development of ecotourism destinations has sparked economic development,[48] as well as bringing together communities to develop local governance apparatuses and sharing agreements for continued and widespread success.[49] During the temporal period of the panaceans there were a significant number of demonstrably successful cases, with wildlife populations recovering and evidence of economic growth coupled with decreasing poverty rates.[50] Ashley argues that "one of the most important ways in which tourism supports other activities is that it strengthens households' productive capacity by increasing skills and providing cash for investment (i.e. by boosting their asset base)."[51] In the work of the panaceans the primary intention was to demonstrate how the 1990s had marked a definitive break from the evils of structural adjustment, the large scale plundering of natural resources by corrupt national governments, and continued undermining of empowerment of Africans and their communities.[52] They claimed this break was accomplished alongside evolutions in global environmental governance that saw states outsourcing responsibilities for conservation and development by delegating authority to communities. It is in this sense that the works of the panaceans serve to at depoliticize CBNRM, as it is largely presented as an unquestioned good. While they do not suggest it is a perfect form of resource governance free of challenges, they do suggest a win-win situation in which this approach benefits all and should be maximized wherever possible to achieve greater success.

Utilitarians

A view of CBNRM, which was more tempered in its enthusiasm, began to emerge with the utilitarians, who were active from roughly 2007 to 2015. This was part of a broader conversation that questioned more critically the degree to which sustainable development,

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[47] Brian T. B. Jones, Anna Davis, Lara Diez and Richard W. Diggle, "Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) and Reducing Poverty in Namibia", in: Dilys Roe, Joanna Elliot, Chris Sandbrook and Matt Walpole, (eds.), *Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Alleviation: Exploring the Evidence for a Link*, New York, Wiley & Sons, 2012: 191-205 (198).

[48] Agnes Kiss, "Is Community-Based Ecotourism a Good Use of Biodiversity Conservation Funds?", *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 19 (5), 2004: 232-237.

[49] Shackleton et al., *Devolution*.

[50] Brown and Bird, *Resource Management*.

[51] Caroline Ashley, *The Impacts of Tourism on Rural Livelihoods: Namibia's Experience*, London, Overseas Development Institute, 2000: 18.

[52] Melissa Leach, Robin Mearns and Ian Scoones, "Environmental Entitlements: Dynamics and Institutions in Community-Based Natural Resource Management", *World Development*, 27 (2), 1999: 225-247.

outlined in the Millennium Development Goals, had been, or was being attained. Boudreaux argues that

> a related benefit of CBNRM programs is that they reduce the costs of protecting natural environments. The incentives CBNRM programs create on the local level reduce the need for large-scale government protection of wildlife, increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of environmental protection within a country.[53]

It was beginning to become clear, however, that this was not always the case. The utilitarians began moderating expectations for CBNRM. Rather than presenting it in the somewhat depoliticized framework that much of the panaceans provided, the utilitarians developed more critical approaches which took a step back and unpacked the impact of CBNRM.[54]

According to the utilitarians CBNRM has three main pillars: ecological conservation, economic development, and community empowerment. Their works, however, suggest that success in turning "the frequent lose-lose position into the highly acclaimed, but seldom attained win-win situation" is quite difficult in practice.[55] This lose-lose scenario refers to the way resources had been unsustainably extracted in much of southern Africa for decades while simultaneously failing to provide prosperity to local populations. The win-win situation would realize the oft-espoused harmonization of economic growth alongside environmental protection. Hoole and Neuman empirically demonstrate many of the benefits CBNRM can, and has provided, while further analyzing local political struggles that exist within the community.[56] They argue community-level tensions result due to the emergence of local elites who capture certain benefits and use them to enhance their own positions vis-a-vis their neighbours. This contrasts with the depoliticized accounts presented by the panaceans and reveals the tensions that exist both at local level and between the local level and other actors. These politics and tensions within communities had been largely overlooked previously. These findings lead Hoole to conclude "that there can also be more sinister consequences for communities in these arrangements."[57] In his research in the Torra conservancy, which builds on prior fieldwork conducted by Boudreaux, Hoole found that 82 per cent of community members reported that they were no more well off than prior to the implementation of CBNRM. The issue of local level elite capture was further exacerbated as benefits derived from the program during this period

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[53] Boudreaux, "Call": 310.

[54] Tim Bartley, Krister Andersson, Pamela Jagger and Frank Van Laerhoven, "The Contribution of Institutional Theories to Explaining Decentralization of Natural Resource Governance", *Society & Natural Resources*, 21 (2), 2008: 160-174.

[55] Werner Zips and Manuela Zips-Mairitsch, "Lost in Transition? The Politics of Conservation, Indigenous Land Rights and Community-Based Resource Management in Southern Africa", *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 39, (55), 2007: 37-71 (66).

[56] Hoole, "Place-Power-Prognosis"; Roderick Neumann, "Primitive Ideas: Protected Area Buffer Zones and the Politics of Land in Africa", *Development and Change*, 28 (3), 1997: 559-582

[57] Hoole, "Place-Power-Prognosis": 79.

had already begun to diminish in many cases and this often made it unclear precisely who or what was to blame for decline in the benefits received by conservancy members.

Boudreaux and Murphree take the local level politics mentioned above into account and develop alternative assessments of CBNRM to those of the panaceans, each uncovering aspects of the resource governance model that has failed to play out as hoped or suggested. These include undermining the community empowerment aspect through incomplete devolution and the fact that the benefits of CBNRM often fail to remain within the community as a result.[58] Despite these issues, the utilitarians remained broadly optimistic about the future of CBNRM. Zips and Zips-Mairitsch suggest that when policies that are designed to shift lose-lose to win-win scenarios are implemented there will probably be a catch.[59] For CBNRM, it is more like trying to shift the lose-lose-lose reality of wildlife management that existed prior to 1990 to a win-win-win one – in this scenario adding the important pillar of community empowerment and local institutional development. The majority of utilitarians argue that in many cases at least a win-win-lose scenario is possible that sees overall net benefits and hence greater utility achieved.

Generally, the utilitarians have examined various CBNRM projects since its inception and attempted to assess relative strengths and weaknesses. Boudreaux argues

> CBNRM efforts recognize that in cases where local people enjoy property rights over these resources, are directly involved in decision making regarding the resources, and directly benefit from natural resources, they can be effective stewards of the resources.[60]

She concludes that

> despite all the good that has occurred in Namibia through the CBNRM program, there are barriers limiting the program's growth. The major barriers include:
>
> An unclear and insecure land tenure environment;
> A need to develop more rights to manage wildlife and other resources for local groups;
> A need to improve the institutional environment for doing business in Namibia; and
> A continuing need to build local capacity to govern in an accountable and transparent fashion and to manage local enterprises.[61]

Such conclusions are echoed by others authors who list one or two technical fixes for improving the implementation of the existing programs, which they consider beneficial and worthwhile.[62] Boudreaux's main conclusion is that "the Namibian state should extend the conservancies' legal rights in order to create a more vibrant institutional environment", suggesting that incomplete devolution is a major limiting factor to program success.[63] For

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[58] Boudreaux, "Call".

[59] Zips and Zips-Mairitsch, "Transition"

[60] Boudreaux, "Call": 304.

[61] Ibid.: 335.

[62] Jones et al, "Reducing Poverty".

[63] Boudreaux, "Call": 297.

Boudreaux and others, a major issue that continues to hinder CBNRM is the fact that the government devolves the rights to manage wildlife populations, however, not necessarily the rights to the land on which that wildlife resides. Furthermore, while conservancies have been granted rights to 'manage' the wildlife the government maintains control over the issuing of permits for trophy hunting and can limit hunting of any sort in certain regions as they see fit.[64] As the body granting gazettement to conservancies, the MET can also revoke permissions at any time, or step in to force changes or override decisions.[65]

Collomb et al., Child and Barnes, and Hoole argue that poor performance is a result of local political struggles stemming from power imbalances between the network of NGOs and other international partners operating in the conservancies.[66] Hoole's conclusions are based on a growing body of scholarly work that suggests community-based forms of conservation alone are not panaceas for sustainable development and natural resource conservation in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead, he and other scholars suggest "commons institutions for conservation operate in a multilevel world and necessarily link with different scales and levels of organization."[67] The utilitarians generally agree that "despite generating income from high value wildlife resources and tourism, CBNRM has fallen short of delivering household benefits to local communities."[68] These shortcomings were further unpacked by the skeptics.

Skeptics

The third group, the skeptics, whose work on CBNRM in Namibia appeared between 2014-2020, builds on the arguments espoused by the utilitarians but takes a step back to re-evaluate the supposed 'evolutions' in governance. At the centre of the skeptics' analyses are questions that reveal a much more complicated picture of power and politics than the suggested devolution of control from state to communities.[69] The skeptics point out that previous studies far too often attempted to discern the relative strengths and weaknesses

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[64] Michael Bollig and Diego Menestrey Schwieger, "Fragmentation, Cooperation and Power: Institutional Dynamics in Natural Resource Governance in North-Western Namibia", *Human Ecology*, 42 (2), 2014: 167-181.

[65] Julie A. Silva and Alfons Mosimane, "'How Could I Live Here and Not Be a Member?': Economic Versus Social Drivers of Participation in Namibian Conservation Programs", *Human Ecology*, 42 (2), 2014: 183-197.

[66] Jean-Gael E. Collomb, Patricia Mupeta, Grenville Barnes and Brian Child, "Integrating Governance and Socioeconomic Indicators to Assess the Performance of Community-Based Natural Resources Management in Caprivi (Namibia)", *Environmental Conservation*, 37 (3), 2010: 303-309; Child and Barnes, "Evolution"; Hoole, "Place-Power-Prognosis".

[67] Hoole, "Place-Power-Prognosis": 79.

[68] Collomb et al., "Governance": 303.

[69] Jen Dyer, Lindsay C. Stringer, Andrew John Dougill, Julia Leventon, Muleba Nshimbi, Francis Chama, Ackson Kafwifwi, et al. "Assessing Participatory Practices in Community-Based Natural Resource Management: Experiences in Community Engagement from Southern Africa", *Journal of Environmental Management*, 137, 2014: 137-145.

of CBNRM as a form of resource governance without properly analyzing what its purported goals were, which of these were achieved, and more importantly, how they were achieved and through whose impetus. Specifically, with regard to *who* benefits and how power is reorganized as a result.[70]

While the utilitarians and some of the panaceans suggest that economic benefits were often more modest than what was originally envisioned, many point to local institutional development and community empowerment as a key victory achieved for local populations.[71] The skeptics' research suggests, however, that these goals of 'good governance' have rarely been achieved through CBNRM.[72] Rather, as Schnegg and Kiaka illustrate in a study of freshwater conservation through CBNRM,

> ultimately, in many communities the poor not only subsidize the water consumption of those who are economically better off, but also pay for water for elephant conservation and thus also for tourism.[73]

These authors demonstrate how residents initially agreed to CBNRM projects that would limit elephant populations, which were seen locally as dangerous and destructive. However, as elephants are more effectively commoditized on international markets than other more locally desirable wildlife, their valorization has been pivotal to bottom lines, and hence the voices of the community are often drowned out by what Ndeinoma et al.[74] refer to as the public-private-governance network. This network, they argue "is composed of public actors, private firms, interest organizations (e.g. user group associations, small-scale farmers, trade associations, etc.)"[75] This network maintains an extensive degree of control over the projects and gives an indication that CBNRM is a much more complex picture than often presented.

The skeptics' research suggests partial devolution often occurs, but that from both a formal and informal standpoint, various other actors often maintain control. For Schnegg and Kiaka, exogeneous actors to communities maintain the greatest degree of control.[76] These include NGOs, private interests, and those who support their operations from the international community. For several others however, the state remains the paramount player in the field.[77] These authors demonstrate the many ways this continued control has

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[70] Schnegg and Kiaka, "Elephants".

[71] Agrawal and Gibson, Enchantment".

[72] Kathleen A. Galvin, Danielle Backman, Matthew W. Luizza and Tyler A. Beeton, "African Community-Based Conservancies: Innovative Governance for Whom?", in: Jamie Levin, (ed.), *Nomad-State Relationships in International Relations*, Cham, Springer, 2020: 147-172.

[73] Schnegg and Kiaka, "Elephants": 113.

[74] Albertina Ndeinoma, K. Freerk Wiersum and Bas Arts, "The Governance of Indigenous Natural Products in Namibia: A Policy Network Analysis", *Environmental Management*, 62 (1), 2018: 29-44.

[75] Ibid.: 31.

[76] Schnegg and Kiaka, "Elephants".

[77] Lelani M. Mannetti, Thomas Göttert, Ulrich Zeller and Karen J. Esler, "Identifying and Categorizing Stakeholders for Protected Area Expansion around a National Park in Namibia" *Ecology and Society*, 24 (2), 2019: 5-32 (5).

undermined the ability of conservancies to make effective decisions that would allow the projects to be successful.[78] As control is not fully devolved to the community, the conservancies' ability to enforce their regulations to protect wildlife is undermined, the supervision of resource-sharing continues to be conducted at the national level and, as a result, democratic decision making often breaks down. Bollig suggests this is due to "partially contradictory discourses on decentralization, political participation, economic empowerment, and neo-liberally inspired commoditization of natural resources."[79] Several skeptics point to this as being more than a minor issue as the objective of CBNRM is that communities should assume the responsibilities of quasi-sovereign actors, but rarely are they provided with the tools sovereignty usually entails.[80] These are the types of discourses alluded to in the previous citation from Bollig, as CBNRM is often inherently contradictory in nature by intending to devolve control to communities, but doing so by also extending power and authority to various global actors. Such contradictions have emerged within this new paradigm as argued by Peck and Tickell who suggest that

> in the asymmetrical scale politics of neoliberalism, local institutions and actors were being given responsibility without power, while international institutions and actors were gaining power without responsibility.[81]

Rather than being a zero-sum equation that sees communities empowered, the skeptics demonstrate that power has instead been downloaded by the state in a way that enables a number of actors to exercise their will to achieve certain ends. This occurs through the network of NGOs that have become active throughout the country, but whose goals and desires are not always transparent, and their practices not democratic.

The skeptics maintain that environmental conservation as well as economic development are often achieved as a result of CBNRM. However, they begin to discover "revenues largely remain with the national and international safari operators and investors."[82] One of the skeptics' major criticisms

> is that far from being a force for decentralisation, in effect it allows for a greater degree of centralisation of power and authority. [CBNRM] can be regarded as a means by which global actors can realise control over resources and people from the global level and concentrate power in the hands of a narrow network of international NGOs, international financial institutions, global consultants on tourism/community conservation and bilateral donors.[83]

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[78] Michael Schnegg, Michael Bollig and Theresa Linke, "Moral Equality and Success of Common-Pool Water Governance in Namibia", *Ambio*, 45, (5), 2016: 581-590.

[79] Bollig, "Eden": 771.

[80] Lelani M. Mannetti, Thomas Göttert, Ulrich Zeller and Karen J. Esler, "Expanding the Protected Area Network in Namibia: An Institutional Analysis", *Ecosystem Service*s, 28 (Part B), 2017: 207-218.

[81] Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space", *Antipode*, 34 (3), 2002: 380-404 (393).

[82] Schnegg and Kiaka, "Elephants": 113.

[83] Rosaleen Duffy, "The Potential and Pitfalls of Global Environmental Governance: The Politics of Transfrontier Conservation Areas in Southern Africa", *Political Geography*, 25 (1), 2006: 89-112 (101).

The skeptics suggest that at best, community empowerment fails to materialize at all, and at worst communities become embroiled in tensions and internal battles as local elites vie for power and resources vis-a-vis one another.[84]

Often residents remain more or less unaware of the decisions being made on their behalf, or when they do attempt to have their voices heard they are ignored.[85] While authors from both the panaceans[86] and utilitarians[87] point to what they consider skillfully crafted legislation that has been developed by state governments, several skeptics report that this important national legislation, as well as local level rules, were drafted in close consultation with the international community including NGOs, USAID, and the World Bank.[88] This, combined with the fact – identified by the skeptics – that it is certain goals of the global environmental movement – largely understood as the West – that are realized, and that the economic benefits that accrue seldom remain in the communities, lead some skeptics to wonder to what degree CBNRM is 'community-based' at all? In fact, Hoole suggests "the community role is mainly relegated to providing local labour and land tenure for the tourism enterprise development."[89] While not all projects are tourism based, this excerpt alludes to the way in which the public-private-governance networks may provide opportunities for outside actors to gain footholds at the community level. This entails a power imbalance that can create the types of situations skeptics argue lead to the failure of CBNRM to improve the lives of local residents.

Gaps and disputes

This article has unpacked the debates on CBNRM that have evolved over time in order to highlight what various scholars have asserted are the causes for and consequences of the program's diminished success in recent years. Dividing the literature into three groups and analyzing them as I have done here demonstrates the way the scholarly outlook on CBNRM has shifted over time and also points to a number of reasons why this is the case.

Since its inception in the 1990s, CBNRM has contributed to the achievement of a number of sustainable development goals for Namibia. The panaceans pointed to successes in neighbouring countries across southern Africa as well as recovering wildlife populations, increased economic benefits, and perceived community empowerment. Over time however, benefits derived from this form of resource governance have diminished and the

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[84] Dyer et al., "Assessing".

[85] Michael Schnegg, "Lost in Translation: State Policies and Micro-Politics of Water Governance in Namibia", *Human Ecology*, 44 (2), 2016: 245-255.

[86] Chetan Kumar, "Revisiting 'Community' in Community-Based Natural Resource Management", *Community Development Journal*, 40 (3), 2005: 275-285; James Mccarthy, "Devolution in the Woods: Community Forestry as Hybrid Neoliberalism", *Environment and Planning*, A 37 (6), 2005: 995-1014.

[87] Dan Brockington and Katherine Scholfield, "Expenditure by Conservation Nongovernmental Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Conservation Letters*, 3 (2), 2010: 106-113; Collomb et al., "Governance".

[88] Mannetti et al., "Expanding".

[89] Hoole, "Place-Power-Prognosis": 94.

academic output on the topic has reflected these waning levels of success. The utilitarians began to discuss the issues at the community level where local elites are said to have developed and subsequently kept resources for themselves. Skeptics expand on these concerns and further posit that power imbalances between local and global actors result in benefits being enjoyed predominantly outside the local communities and, at times, at the expense of rural African people.

Whether panacean, utilitarian, or skeptic, all suggest that there is real potential for CBNRM as a technique of resource governance in southern Africa. However, it is clear that the programs have fallen short of their intended goals in a number of ways. The findings from these three groups are important as they outline the challenges facing the CBNRM program. However, the detrimental effects climate change is having on the programs is an issue which has been almost completely overlooked by all three groups. This suggests future research on CBNRM ought to analyze climate change as a key variable, and further policies must be crafted which take these changing realities into account.

Scholars in all three groups generally agree that CBNRM works best where devolution occurs in more than just name and where small communities are placed at the heart of resource governance. They are also broadly in agreement that community empowerment is key for success, but diverge on the degree to which this important goal has been attained.[90] Several studies point to the way the state quietly retains control and, despite outsourcing some power to communities, central governments have the final say on the direction of developments in the conservancies.[91] Many argue that communities often remain unheard and unable to exercise agency effectively. However, it is unclear to what degree this is an accurate portrayal of the politics involved.

Beyond this, scholars have pointed to the amount of partnerships, resources, and training necessary to launch these projects and to continue engaging in efforts to attain success. Ndeinoma, Wiersum, and Arts refer to this as the public-private governance network, while most other studies relating to CBNRM discuss the influence the network of NGOs and other international actors maintain on the projects from implementation onward.[92] Interestingly, it is only mentioned in some of the most recent work by Schnegg and Schnegg and Kiaka that NGOs and other international partners had a role in the drafting of the initial legislation that provided the legal framework for CBNRM in Namibia.[93] Very little research has been conducted into ongoing NGO 'participation' and 'partnership' in CBNRM and without this any understanding or analysis of CBNRM is incomplete. While some scholars point to these power dynamics and intricate relationships, there has not yet been any analysis that provides adequate understanding of the politics involved both at the local and global level. As NGOs play such a significant and complex role in CBNRM projects it is essential to understand where they procure their funding and what degree of control the funders have

[90] Boudreaux, "Call"; Mannetti et al., "Expanding"; Schnegg and Kiaka, "Elephants".

[91] Boudreaux, "Call"; Dyer et all, "Assessing".

[92] Ndeinoma et al., "Governance".

[93] Schnegg, "Translation"; Schnegg and Kiaka, "Elephants".

of NGO activities. These webs of connectivity that link the local to the global have important – if not always obvious – effects on the way conservation can play out on the ground. Existing studies mention some of the roles NGOs and other international actors play, but they do not delve further into the social relationships, power asymmetries, and political motives of these actors. Furthermore, they do not dig deeper to reveal where these various NGOs and outside actors procure their funding or to uncover any further layers of political influence that might exist.

Thus far, the literature has paid very little attention to the politics of CBNRM and the way it influences and restructures power relations in global environmental governance. This is partly a result of the nature of existing approaches with many of the early studies on CBNRM tending to approach it as an apolitical policy shift. However, as the skeptics have shown, but was also implied by the panaceans and utilitarians, there is always a strong international presence in these projects. Analysis of CBNRM must extend beyond merely examining the policy as an apolitical/technical fix. Its enabling mechanisms must be traced so that it is possible to comprehend and conceptualize its reach in relation to broader questions of global environmental governance. Only by doing this can we begin to uncover the ways in which CBNRM has evolved and say which actors are driving the change and decision-making.

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