

Can Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Projects Alleviate Poverty Among Basarwa Communities?

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Abstract: Since its inception in the early 1990s in Botswana and elsewhere in Southern Africa, the Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) concept has been implemented in areas where poor and often marginalized communities reside. There are many reasons for this including that CBNRM in these countries is biased towards wildlife management and often these communities reside in pristine and wildlife rich areas. Some of the wildlife was believed to either be in danger of going extinct or the numbers were going down drastically supposedly due to hunting and or poaching. It was hoped then that the implementation of these projects would bring about biodiversity conservation as well as the much needed development and employment for these communities. This paper we present the situation in two *Basarwa* (San) communities of Gudigwa and Mababe who are currently involved in CBNRM projects in Ngamiland district. The paper looks at what CBNRM projects have been able to offer in terms of employment and village/community development. The study found that for both the villages studied, the CBNRM project is the main source of employment and empowerment for the community. The study concludes that although CBNRM has potential to be a viable poverty alleviation and development tool for *Basarwa* and other remote dweller communities, however, low education levels of residents, which translate into lack of capacity to tap this potential, as well as lack of appropriate support from better resourced development agents (Government and NGOs), present a challenge for the programme to fulfill this potential.

Keywords: Basarwa, Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Traditional skills, Livelihoods, CBNRM

1 Introduction

1.1 Rational and Context of the Study

While there is no universally agreed definition of poverty there seems to be a convergence towards 'an inability to meet basic needs' (BIDPA, 1996) or to define the poor as 'the economically worse of' (Mazonde, 1997) as favored definitions. This has not stopped the emergence of many other definitions. Jefferis (1997; p34) argues that poverty should be conceptualized in terms of choice; that 'poverty can be seen as a situation of lack of choice, arising from low income or low capability'. The World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than US\$ 1 per day, and *moderate poverty* as less than \$2 a day. These define poverty primarily in economic terms. Other definitions have been advanced which link poverty and socio-political exclusion (Wison, K., Kanji & Braathen, 2001). In this context (Kerapeletswe & Moremi, 2001; p222) submit that among other things, poverty among rural people in Botswana 'is influenced by poor access to and control of resources'.

Based on the researchers field experience working with and observing poverty among rural people, this paper adopts a human rights approach to poverty advanced by a Bahai human rights organization. Poverty is seen as a condition in which human beings are stripped of their dignity and self-esteem. The poor are deprived of the opportunity and the capacity to participate in society (<http://www.bahai.org.za/cm/system/files/human-rights-and-poverty-informal-consultations.pdf>). The authors have observed rock bottom low self esteem, high dependency syndrome (especially on Government welfare programs), preponderance of alcohol abuse and other forms of self destruction behaviours, apathy and total surrender regarding self capabilities among the San communities in remote rural areas of Ngamiland. Similar observations have been made by other researchers working with San communities in Botswana and other countries in the Southern Africa region (Saugestad, 2001; Nthomang, 1999 & 2002). The authors thus concur with Kerapeletswe &

Moremi (2001)'s observation that total surrender regarding self capabilities is likely to result in persistent or chronic inter-generational poverty.

Poverty in Botswana is a condition that borders on the bizarre. As Botswana Society (1997) put it, it is a situation where extremes poverty and plenty exist side by side. Thus, poverty in Botswana has been growing along side aggregate increases in income (Mazonde, 1997). Obviously the driving factors are those of distribution, equity and access (Fidzani, 1997; Jefferis, 1997; Mazonde, 1997; Kerapeletswe & Moremi, 2001). The economy of Botswana experienced phenomenal growth in the 1980s, averaging about 13% per annum. It stabilized to about 7% in the 1990s and the recent budget speech reported a current growth rate of about 6.2% (MFDP, 2008). Current per capita income is estimated to be \$9,200. As is expected with this type of growth aggregate poverty levels have gone down over the years. 59% of all persons in the country were estimated to live in income poverty in the period 1985/86. The figure declined to 47% during 1993/94 financial year (Kerapeletswe & Moremi, 2001; p221). These are still high levels of poverty considering the good performance of the economy over the same periods. The situation deteriorates when one looks at the dynamics of absolute poverty (see Table1). The national proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day increased from 19.4% in 1992/93 to 23.4% in 2002/03. The situation is worse in rural areas where the same proportions were 26.4% and 36.1% for 1992/93 and 2002/03 respectively. On the other hand urban areas which already had a low proportion of their populations living on less than a dollar a day experienced a decline from 8.1% to 5.1% over the same period.

Apart from the rural-urban divide regarding the severity of poverty in Botswana, there is also the issue of ethnicity. As Kerapeletswe & Moremi, (2001; p222) put it 'social barriers and discriminatory social attitudes towards some ethnic groups such as *Basarwa* restrict their social and economic participation'. In the introduction of his Book on *Minorities in the millennium, Botswana Perspective*, Mazonde (2002; p4) is much more blatant about the position of *Basarwa* and argues that '*Basarwa* are the most despised of all ethnic minorities' and submits that 'their cry for land and other resources, including representation in the house of Chiefs, is more acute than is the case in any one of the other minority groups'. Remote area dwellers in general and *Basarwa* in particular, make the list in both Jefferis (1997) and Mazonde (1997)'s lists of groups most vulnerable to poverty.

As a general observation in Botswana, the areas where *Basarwa* have settled are very remote and furthest from the main administrative centers. The *Basarwa* settlements are usually also the least developed in terms of infrastructure provided by Government (roads, clinics, schools etc). Further more *Basarwa* face de facto restrictions on their places of residence as they are more often likely to be relocated than other *Batswana* groups. Those who remain on their traditional land still face the risk of resettlement and many

Table 1 Proportions of persons living below one \$ a day: Source: (CSO, 2004; p25)

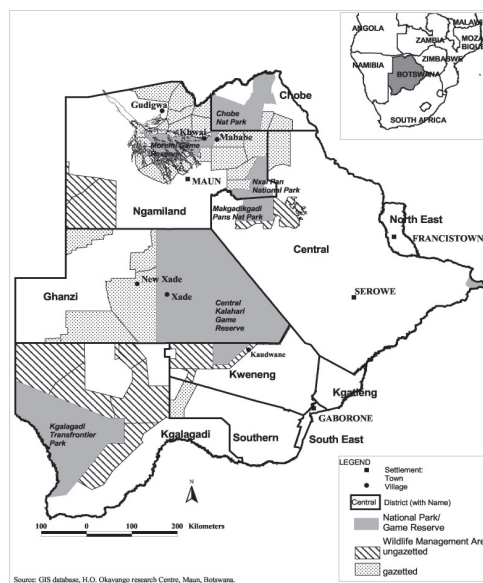
Region	Total number of households based on HIES	Total number of persons estimated	Number of households with persons below one dollar a day	Number of persons below the dollar a day	Proportions of persons below the dollar a day %
2002/03 HIES					
Cities/Towns	109,556	369,812	3,449	18,699	5.1
Urban Villages	121,321	545,253	15,398	105,118	19.3
Rural areas	163,395	717,857	41,850	258,915	36.1
National	394,272	1,632,922	60,696	382,733	23.4
1993/94 HIES					
Cities/Towns	87,419	316,139	4,511	25,814	8.1
Urban Villages	67,218	330,443	8,610	56,389	17.1
Rural Areas	136,973	704,319	29,310	186,095	26.4
National	291,610	1,350,899	42,432	268,298	19.9

are denied land rights because of the prospect of resettlement (Hitchcock & Biesele 2000). In general, the socio-economic status of people who have been resettled decline following resettlement, partly due to the cost of relocation, which is never adequately covered by compensation, but also due to the amount of time it takes for new modes of production and sources of livelihoods to gain momentum. Therefore due to a combination of the above factors; rurality, remoteness and social exclusion, many *Basarwa* live under conditions of extreme poverty and face difficulties in terms of access to social services, employment and income generating opportunities (Hitchcock & Biesele 2000).

For this reason *Basarwa* communities have attracted scholarly attention as well as programme prescriptions which are aimed at lifting them from the condition of poverty or 'improving their lives' (Saugestad, 2005). Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) is one such programme, which apart from environmental conservation aimed at politically and economically empowering communities. The programme was deemed suitable for *Basarwa* communities especially those displaced from their land when national parks were established (see Bolaane, 2004 & Magole, L., 2007) and are now residing in pristine wildlife rich areas at the fringes of the parks. In this paper we present the result of two case studies of *Basarwa* communities in the Ngamiland District of Botswana. The *Basarwa* communities of Gudigwa and Mababe received assistance to implement development projects under the Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) programme. We ask if the programme and the specific projects implemented in the study sites offer poverty alleviation and community development opportunities for the *Basarwa* involved.

2 Research Sites: Gudigwa and Mababe CBNRM Case Studies

Gudigwa village is located on the remote North Eastern part of the Okavango Delta Area in Ngamiland District of Botswana (see Map 1). The village was established in 1987 through the Remote Area Development Program (RADP) as a congregation and service center for several *Basarwa* groups who were otherwise nomadic groups. According to the 2001 Housing and Population Census, Gudigwa has a population of 732 people (CSO, 2002). The settlement of Mababe sits uncomfortably in State Land below the Okavango Delta to the South East of Moremi Game Reserve and South West of Chobe National Park (see Map 1). People of Mababe were assembled at this place in the late 1980s when their nomadic camps were annexed into the Chobe and the Nxai Pan National Parks (see Map 1). The village currently has about 157 residents.



Map 1 Botswana location map showing settlement of Gudigwa and Mababe villages

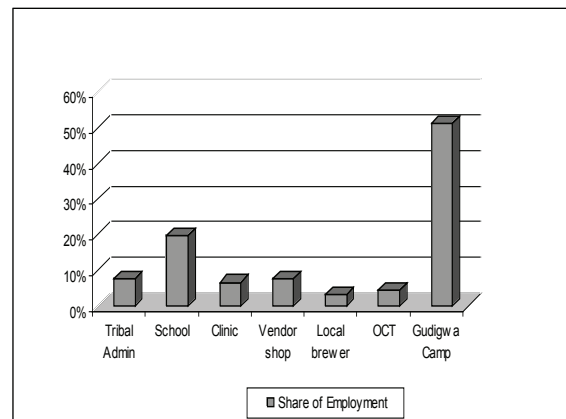


Figure 1 Proportion of Employment by Employment Sector in Gudigwa

According to Botswana's National Settlement Strategy, only settlements with a population of more than 500 people are recognized villages and may receive basic social infrastructure. Provision is however made for some remote settlements such as Mababe to provide basic social amenities under the Remote Area Development Programme. The CBNRM projects of Gudigwa Village and Mababe settlement were studied in 2005 and 2006 to find out whether they (the projects) have brought (or have a potential to bring) any improvement in the poverty and development situation of these communities. In Both communities we collected and analyzed data on employment, livelihoods, village infrastructure, and social services. We do this fully aware that socio-economic benefits were not the primary reason for CBNRM, that conservation was. However we believe that for the communities we have encountered during our research work the situation is the other way round; the environment and wildlife in their area is fairly intact, it is poverty which is the main issue. Here we believe it is morally correct for CBNRM to be justified by its socio-economic benefits first and then conservation.

3 Research Methods

Data on socio-economic and cultural aspects of the community was collected through structured questionnaire that was administered to heads of households or their representatives. Respondents had to be at least 18 years old. Sampling involved special stratification of the three wards in Gudigwa and random sampling of the households. In Mababe because of the high level of absenteeism from the village at the time, opportunistic sampling where we interviewed who ever we could find was used. Altogether interviews were held in 31 of the 72 census registered households in Gudigwa and 10 out of the 35 households in Mababe. Data was also gathered from extensive review of statistical bulletins, research reports and other published materials.

4 Research Finding

4.1 Socio Economic Benefits

4.1.1 Employment

At the time of the study, there were 92 formal and informal sector employees in Gudigwa. The Government through the primary school, clinic and Tribal Administration provided 34% of the jobs, whilst the Community Based Organisations (CBOs) involved in CBNRM projects (BCCT¹ operating Gudigwa Ecotourism Camp & (OCT²)) provided 55% of the jobs. The private informal sector (kiosks, local brewers) provided 11% of the jobs. A sizable majority (74%) of this workforce originated from Gudigwa.

1 Bukhakhwe Conservation and Cultural Trust, single village trust for Gudigwa village.

2 Okavango Community Trust is a community based organization operating a mix of CBNRM activities on behalf of the of five villages of Gudigwa, Beetsha, Ereetsa, Gunutsoga and Seronga.

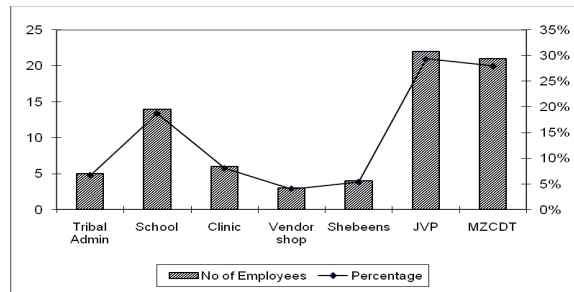


Figure 2 Proportion of Employment by Employment Sector in Mababe

Furthermore, most staff employed in the CBOs (over 90%) originated from Gudigwa village. The Government institutions have the lowest staff members originating from Gudigwa with the Tribal Administration at 14%, the primary school at 44% and the Clinic at 67%. The workers originating from Gudigwa within Vendor shops are surprisingly low at 43%.

Employment in Mababe is provided by Government (through the Tribal Administration Office, the Primary School and the Clinic), the CBNRM project through the Joint Venture partner (JVP) and the Village Trust, Mababe Zokotsama Community development Trust(MZCDT), as well as some informal sector operations in the form of shebeens and a vendor shop (Figure 2). Out of the 73 jobs in Mababe at the time of the study, over half (61%) were provided by the CBNRM project. Government was the next significant employer offering 34% of the jobs.

4.1.2 Income generated by CBNRM

At the time of the study Gudigwa village had not yet accumulated any income from the project. This is because they had not yet expanded their investment activity beyond the Gudigwa Ecotourism Camp. As stated in Magole & Magole, (2007) the camp was still new and had not yet broken even. On the other hand the Mababe community chose to lease out their land and sell their wildlife quota from the start. This community (Mababe) has earned an increasing amount of income since 2000 and are currently earning well over a million pula from the variety of investments. Investment has expanded to other things such as a camp site, game meat sales and vehicle hire.

4.1.3 Utilization of available skills

Traditionally *Basarwa* are hunter-gatherers and are known for their exceptional hunting skills and knowledge of both flora and fauna. They were (and still are) renowned medicine people. According to Bolaane (2004) the *Shamans* (medicine men) were believed to be supernatural beings and would enter into a trance that linked them to the spiritual world. This is usually evoked by singing and performing special dances. Once connected to the supernatural corridor of communication with the spirit world they would heal, drive out evil spirits, foretell the future, control the weather and even ensure good hunting.

Basarwa were (and many still are) good artists. This is depicted in the paintings they have left behind especially those at the Tsodilo Hills. Contemporary art shows by organizations such as Kuru, which promote

Table 2 Income Generated by the CBNRM project in Mababe Settlement

Income	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Land rental	60000	69000	79350	91205	104940	120981	139128
Quota	531271	610962	702606	807996	929196	1068575	1419331
Other					149159	130739	122709
TOTAL	591271	679962	781956	899201	1,183295	1,320295	1,681168

San culture, and the National Museum have also displayed great artistic skill by the present day *Basarwa*. In both Gudigwa and Mababe all those who were interviewed claimed to have good knowledge of plants and to be a skilful veld products gatherer. Similarly over 90% of the male respondents claimed great hunting and animal tracking skills. In Both cases these skills were no longer being utilized. Singing and dancing are also popular skills and luckily they have a market at both the Gudigwa and Mababe camps. They are offered as a tourist entertainment package. Craft making and blacksmith skills are quiet significant in Gudigwa and some people do bring crafts to sell at the Camp. However these are now rare skills in Mababe.

4.2 Comparison with Other livelihoods

The livelihoods profile of Gudigwa as depicted by Table 3 below testifies to the level of poverty in the community. This is shown by the proportion (78%) of respondents who are supported by Government aid schemes, and the high ranking of very low paying activities of gathering and piece jobs. A strange scenario however emerges where the majority (83%) state CBNRM activities as their source of livelihood and yet collectively the village ranks it low as a source of livelihood. The authors of the table (Kgathi, et.al, 2004) observed a widespread disgruntlement with two aspects of CBNRM. First of all CBNRM was blamed for the loss of special game licensing for *Basarawa*. Secondly Gudigwa villagers felt that the other CBNRM (managed by OCT) venture, which they shared with four other villages, benefited those other villages more than themselves, that they were marginalized in that partnership. However they did appreciate the employment, funeral benefits, transport, and income earned from traditional and cultural activities as well as sale of crafts. The significance of CBNRM as a social support scheme for the community cannot be taken lightly.

In Mababe there are only two other significant sources of livelihood apart from what the CBNRM project offers. These are arable farming and temporary employment in the Safari companies. The community has an agreement with their JVP to help them with draught power. Under this agreement the JVP should when requested plough for each of the 35 households who wishes to.

4.3 Availability of Infrastructure and Social Services

Social amenities in Gudigwa include a full stream (standards 1-7) primary school; a health post (nurse + family welfare educator); *Kgotla* (traditional meeting place and seat of the *Kgosi*) and local police offices, staffed with a Headman (*Kgosi*), three police officers and a court clerk. There is also an access road connecting to the area service centre of Seronga village. Also available in the village are four privately owned kiosks selling essential items like detergents and some basic food staff. There are also three local brewers. In this village Government is the main provider of social amenities. Gudigwa is a council constituency and so has a local councilor.

Table 3 Relative importance of other sources livelihoods in Gudigwa

Livelihood activity	% of respondents	Ranking
Arable agriculture	33	9.3
Livestock farming	33	7.4
Formal employment	35	7.4
Basket making	39	3.7
Remittances	17	3.7
Government assistance	78	9.3
Drought relief projects	22	7.4
Beer brewing	28	3.7
CBNRM	83	1.7
Other (Gathering, Safari piece jobs)	50	14.8

Source: (Kgathi et.al, 2004)

Although it is a much smaller settlement Mababe also has a full stream primary school, a health post complete with a nurse and a community welfare educator. The village has a *Kgotla* and local police office staffed with a Headman (*Kgosi*) and two police officers. Mababe also has a local councilor. Unlike in Gudigwa the trust in Mababe has also managed to provide some amenities; a community entertainment center, an ablution block (toilets and bathrooms) for community use and a shop. As a community service the trust has also built one-roomed houses each for the community senior citizens.

5 Discussion: Can Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Projects be a Development and Poverty Alleviation Tool for *Basarwa* Communities?

5.1 Poverty Alleviation and Community Development Potential

Apart from the fact that there is no doubt about the employment and income generating capabilities and capacities of these projects, for the involved communities CBNRM projects are almost a life line. They not only provide the main source of employment and livelihood but they are also empowering in that they offer community members a platform of expression in terms of culture and arts as well as a rare shot at running their own affairs. In Gudigwa we found that the project had provided the community with a source of energy and purpose to revive long lost traditions. While commercialization of culture has the potential to degrade it, if well managed it also has a potential to preserve it and ignite a sense of pride in those who possess it. At the moment the project in Gudigwa is having problems (which are not the subject of this paper) and is not operating. The basket weavers (women) are mourning the loss of market and income, the loss of incentive to keep on improving their skill, as well as the company and support they used to give each other when they used to sit together weaving their baskets while at the same time discussing family and community issues.

Considering that it is a small community, the Mababe project is earning an impressive amount of money. There are complaints from other members of the community and Government officials and indeed the Government about the handling of this income, however some of it has translated into tangible benefits for the communities and many members have had opportunities they would otherwise not have had. This is not an attempt to trivialize problems that trusts and communities are having or have had in running these ventures, however the authors wish to point out that when in the face of absolute poverty what these projects offer makes all the difference. It is in the context of disempowerment and poverty that the authors look at this. The Mababe case also seems to show that these projects are easier to manage in smaller communities than in big ones. A population bigger than that of Gudigwa village (732) may be difficult to organize for running such a project and sharing the benefits. This appears to be the problems facing the Okavango Community Trust (OCT) that is shared by five villages.

In both communities people appeared to appreciate an opportunity to do something together and bond as a community. While the problems of CBNRM have been widely stated (See for example Kgathi & Ngwenya, 2005; Piers, 2006; Magole & Magole, 2007), the adventure of seeking solutions seems to bind the community together. Community members are not as severe as the outsiders (especially researchers and Government) in their evaluation and criticism of the CBNRM projects. It may be because some of them are perpetrators of some ills of CBNRM, but then again it may be because of the value they attach to the projects. The two cases show that benefits touch nearly everyone, indeed others more than others. In our other submission for this publication we argue that individuals and groups of individuals within CBNRM projects position themselves to benefit more than others. Many in the community have expressed their displeasure with this tendency however they see this and other problems as challenges that they have to face and not flee from. The truth is that this attitude and the stamina to fight are a result of lack of alternatives; communities do not have a choice. Take the community of Mababe for example: Situated adjacent to state land with many dos and don'ts, with a small population of largely poor and uneducated individuals, with

limited accessibility to services and markets; it will take time if ever for any investor to go and set up in that village.

5.2 Challenges and Conclusions

The main challenge for CBNRM projects for *Basarwa* and other remote communities is that we (the critics) are dealing with people with low levels of education who have a long history of poverty and marginalization with impatience. As Saugestad (2001) argues the tendency for Government policy is to view the San as people 'lacking' and incapable of doing anything. Unfortunately this is also the view of many so-called experts on the San. As a result assistance proposed for *Basarwa* is always one that perpetuates dependence rather than empowerment. It is the view of the authors that CBNRM has the potential to change this situation. The condition for this is for those who are involved (in helping *Basarwa*) to change attitude and start to believe in their (*Basarwa*'s) capabilities and show it by encouraging them to utilize their traditional skills and knowledge more. Otherwise there is a great need for capacity building, support and allowance for time to gain experience in order for *Basarwa* to meaningfully participate in ventures such as tourism and other foreign or new forms of investment. We observed for example that trustees do not have the backing of reliable and guaranteed support from Government and NGOs, education or experience to do what they need to do. Lack of infrastructure is also another challenge. Government should work at improving infrastructure such as roads and telephones to make doing business in these communities easy.

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