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## **BETTER PROSPECTS FOR ZIMBABWE'S COMMUNAL AREAS**

*by Julius Zava*

Until recently, the Tonga people of Binga District in Zimbabwe's Zambezi Valley suffered high levels of illiteracy, malnourishment and illness. Their poor living conditions exposed them to cholera and other water-borne diseases.

When Kariba Dam was built in 1957, the Tonga had been moved away from the mighty Zambezi river onto arid land virtually unfit for crop farming. In a valley that is mainly wilderness and home to Africa's largest mammals, the elephant and black rhinoceros, the few crops were always destroyed by wild animals.

But recent years have seen a turnaround for the Tonga. "The situation has completely changed since the introduction of the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources [CAMPFIRE]. There has been an improvement in provision of health, education and social services," says Tapera Maveneke, CAMPFIRE Association director.

CAMPFIRE is an innovative program that promotes utilization of natural resources, including wildlife, as a sustainable option for conserving the environment while also eliminating poverty.

Begun in two districts in 1988, the program has now spread to over half of Zimbabwe's 55 administrative districts, bringing greater prosperity to some of the poorest rural areas.

According to assistant CAMPFIRE Association director Stephen Kasere, "CAMPFIRE areas are becoming some of the most developed in Zimbabwe. There is on-going infrastructural development. Electricity, clean water, roads, clinics, warehouses to store seed and grain, and shops are all over."

CAMPFIRE was initiated by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWM) in 1982 after it realized it was losing the battle against poachers. Before CAMPFIRE, exploitation of natural resources was the prerogative of government. Local people were denied access to these resources. However, villagers resorted to poisoning fish and trapping animals to beat the anti-poaching regulations.

By contrast, white commercial farmers had been given jurisdiction over wild animals on their farms by a racially discriminatory 1975 Wildlife Act. Government amended the act in 1982, extending the privileges granted in the 1975 Act to communal areas. These areas -- mostly near huge national parks in the Zambezi, Sabi-Limpopo, Mazoe Runde and Pungwe Valleys -- were created by colonial regimes and account for 46% of the total land area in Zimbabwe. The valleys are too arid for conventional agriculture but have large animal populations. Arable land is overused and land degradation was threatening the poor soils before the advent of CAMPFIRE.

Before the new provisions in the 1982 Act were implemented, the DNPWM asked the Centre for Applied

Social Sciences (CASS) at the University of Zimbabwe to carry out research on how the CAMPFIRE proposal could be implemented effectively.

CASS received funding for its research project from IDRC and the Ford Foundation. Project leader Dr Marshall Murphree says that one of the first tasks was to go into the villages in target areas to gather information on how people wanted the project implemented.

"We felt people should be the proprietors of the research and we set up linkages and networks for them to direct us in the research. Our findings now make the foundation of CAMPFIRE policy," says Murphree.

"We discovered that CAMPFIRE should have a policy of devolving natural resource management to communities. Development cannot be divorced from the environment. We found out that, eventually, political and socio-economic power would have to be decentralized to empower local communities so that they have decision making powers," says Prof Murphree.

Under the influence of CASS's research, district councils have adopted a policy of decentralizing authority over wildlife to communities. Previously, the councils were reluctant to do so. It has also become economic policy that profits earned by CAMPFIRE communities, known as producer communities, should be ploughed back into the same communities in the form of cash to individual households or for infrastructural development -- rather than be heavily taxed by councils.

"The program has become an instant success. This has led to a change in attitude towards animals. Now the villagers value wildlife more than crops and livestock. Poaching has drastically been reduced as people become more responsible," says Murphree.

Other parties involved in CAMPFIRE, apart from DNPWM, CASS, and CAMPFIRE Association, include the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Ministry of Local Government, Urban and Rural Development, and *Action* magazine. Zimtrust, a non-governmental organization, is responsible for grassroots institution building. Apart from policy innovation, Murphree says CASS acts as a socio-economic monitoring and evaluation unit for CAMPFIRE. The Centre also serves as a training ground for applied environmental and socio-economic studies. Increasingly, CASS is becoming a regional centre of excellence in the social science aspects of community-based natural resources management, a trend that could produce significant policy impact in the region.

Current research by CASS, says Murphree, aims at influencing government to change the existing tenure system, which makes all rural land state land. CASS wants to see local communities granted title deeds so that land also belongs to villagers, with membership clearly defined.

"People need secure tenure over their land and this is being considered by government policy makers. Meanwhile, CASS is researching how effective common property management can best be achieved," says Murphree.

## **SPACE FOR DIVERSITY**

CASS has been instrumental in legitimizing CAMPFIRE nationally and internationally, following a philosophy that conservation can be best achieved by utilization of lands in communal areas and parks, says Murphree. National parks in Zimbabwe had become ecological islands that could not support genetic and species diversity. CAMPFIRE has added another 18% to the 13% of land in Zimbabwe preserved for wildlife. Access to more than double the land where wildlife is conserved has opened up traditional migratory routes for animals within the country, contributing to the preservation of biodiversity and the natural environment. Animal populations, including herds of elephants, are increasing so rapidly they have to be periodically culled. Robert Monroe, director of Zimtrust, says that most CAMPFIRE profits are derived from ecotourism, safari hunting, sales of animal hides, meat and other trophies. In many CAMPFIRE districts, hotels, safari camps and other ecotourism centres are going up at a rapid pace.

Through safari hunting alone, the program generated Z\$1 million in 1989. In 1993, Z\$40 million in foreign exchange was earned, increasing average household income in CAMPFIRE districts four- fold.

The boom in tourism and in the numbers of wildlife makes CAMPFIRE one of the most successful methods of conserving wildlife and natural resources in general. While the program has primarily concentrated on wildlife management, it will diversify into woodland, livestock and grazing land management.

Other sub-Saharan countries are now importing the model to serve their own natural resources, especially to bolster diminishing wildlife populations. "And for the first time in more than a century, rural people are making decisions on their lives -- politically and economically," says CAMPFIRE's Stephen Kasere.

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