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Addressing Tenure and Rights in Pro-poor Conservation: The CAMPFIRE experience in Masoka

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Preface

IUED, the Graduate Institute for Development Studies and IUCN, the World Conservation Union, have with funding from RUIG-GIAN, the Geneva International Academic Network, initiated an innovative partnership on knowledge generation for pro-poor and equitable conservation.

Poverty, rights and inequity are fundamental challenges, which the conservation community has addressed with varying success. Ranging from Integrated Conservation and Development Projects to policy work, which seeks the incorporation of environmental sustainability in poverty reduction strategies, the entry points are multiple.

Poverty, rights and inequity are integral to the very foundation and focus of Development studies. IUED has a long tradition in providing critical analysis of both development thinking and practice. Linking such knowledge to the concrete context of conservation triggers both conceptual and methodological questions.

Seen separately, both conservation and development continue to quest both natural and social sciences, yet are bound to fail unless strong inter-linkages are built. Taken together, however, they pose immense challenges in terms of targeting research, harnessing inter-disciplinarity and identifying effective approaches.

What are the effective entry points to simultaneously address poverty, equity and rights in conservation? What are the important questions to be asked at the level of situation analysis? Where do we lack knowledge, which could significantly strengthen equitable and poverty-focused conservation? What is the role and impact of inclusive processes, participation and rights in conservation for poverty reduction?

By linking these two knowledge institutions, the initiative seeks to build a bridge between critical academic analysis in the development field with policy and practice in the conservation field. It seeks to make the link between conceptual and theoretical developments and the practical realities faced by governments and the wider conservation community in terms of reconciling development needs and sustainable management of natural resources. One of the outputs of the collaborative initiative is a collection of empirical and theoretical perspectives on how to link equity, poverty and conservation. This case study documents the experiences of one of the most the most long-standing and comprehensive initiatives in the area. It benefits from insights and perspectives from Charles Jonga, Director of the CAMPFIRE association.

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Addressing Tenure and Rights in Pro-poor Conservation: The Masoka Community Experience

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1. Introduction

This article seeks to illustrate how conservation can be linked to support sustainable livelihoods in rural areas, where there are few or no alternative sources of income. However, sustainable natural resources management and decision-making is difficult when communities have no ownership or secure rights over land and its natural resources. The policy framework for communal areas in Zimbabwe provides the right to manage and exploit natural resources, without adequately addressing the issue of ownership. This compromises the ability of local residents, who bear the cost of resource management, to plan and execute livelihood activities. Through practical experience and the use of field observation and data from secondary sources, an attempt is made to demonstrate how one community takes responsibility for locally sustainable social, economic and environmental decision-making, thereby benefiting directly and equitably from natural resources management.

2. A description of Masoka CAMPFIRE Community: where, when, type of project/ policy intervention

CAMPFIRE, an acronym for the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources, was formed in Zimbabwe for long-term development, management and sustainable utilisation of natural resources in communal areas. The majority of the African population (76%) in Zimbabwe is located in communal areas due to the divisive legislation introduced by colonial powers. Much of the communal land is a marginal environment (Natural Regions IV and V) representing 42% of the total land area of Zimbabwe (390, 760 km²). Poor rainfall, the absence of rural infrastructure, most notably roads and, in some cases, the presence of tsetse fly, put together creates a difficult economic environment in the margins of the country. One such area is Masoka Ward, in Guruve, where local communities, using the CAMPFIRE concept, have voluntarily set aside about 400km² of land and adopted both consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife production systems, based on free ranging

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game since 1988. Masoka Ward is situated in the Zambezi Valley, approximately 20 km south of the Dande Safari Area and 5 km east of the Chewore Safari Area (Hurungwe district) on the Angwa River. Masoka has about 350 households, and 60 of these are female-headed households. The area has one Headman and a Chief.

Communal areas in Zimbabwe are classified as Communal Land and State Land, which is owned by the state and administered by Rural District Councils (RDCs). This essentially confers on Guruve, and other RDCs, land management responsibilities equivalent to any private landowner. The RDC also earns revenue from commercial activities and limited taxation and thus is the lowest level of government in Guruve district. Despite policy constraints, CAMPFIRE has enabled the Masoka community, not only to benefit from the management of wildlife on their land, but also tourism. CAMPFIRE Association, a representative body formed in 1991, established several such initiatives under the USAID funded CAMPFIRE Natural Resources Management Project (1999-2003). Two projects, Masoka and Mkanga Bridge Camps, cater for basic overnight accommodation. The projects, which are complimentary to safari hunting, are designed to generate conservation benefits and to enhance community interest in managing and maintaining the natural environment and to create employment and generate income for locals through the sale of various goods and services. This way, CAMPFIRE has improved the standards of living in Masoka Ward through the stimulation of the local economy, sharing of revenues and contribution to community needs, and the provision of other infrastructure.

‘Pro-poor conservation’ in Masoka Ward is best understood within the context of the government’s policy of ‘conservation by utilization’, which focuses largely on wildlife. This policy was first applied on privately owned commercial farms through the promulgation of the Parks and Wildlife Act in 1975, and then on communal areas through an amendment of the same Act in 1982. The Masoka community, together with wards that also have wildlife in Nyaminyami district, was the first to take full control over wildlife resources in order to benefit from incentives created by the policy through the granting of Appropriate Authority to Guruve RDC.

However, in Zimbabwe, wildlife belongs to the state, and therefore the legislation only confers user-rights over wildlife to both the owners of private land (commercial farmers) and occupiers of State land (communities under RDCs). In the absence of such rights, an individual cannot use wildlife for any purpose, and poaching of wildlife or 'illegal off-take' is an offence in terms of the law. The notion that wildlife belongs to the state is further perpetuated by the fact that government regulates the use of wildlife in communal areas through quota setting, itself a form of rationing. For 2004, Masoka had a quota of 9 elephant, 60 Buffalo, 3 Lion, 5 Leopard, and several species of large and small plains game. According to the 2001 Aerial Census Report, Guruve district has about 3000 elephants.

3. Significance of Rights

Community rights over wildlife utilisation are an important aspect in reducing conflict between people and wildlife, as much as being a conservation strategy. These rights have created opportunities for sustainable economic development in Masoka Ward, through the management of wildlife and other natural resources for the direct benefit of the ward's residents. The level of success is determined by two factors (1) the extent of decentralisation of control over wildlife and other natural resources to the community, and (2) the willingness and capacity of the community to adopt natural resources management as a development strategy.

Rights of Masoka community and other communities under CAMPFIRE to benefit economically from conservation are enshrined in the philosophy of the programme, its operational principles and Constitution. However, the social costs of living with wildlife are high, and there is also an opportunity the cost of the land set aside for wildlife that could otherwise be used for subsistence cropping, among other land uses. Livestock is also lost through injury and predation, mostly by lion and leopard. The presence of buffalo, which carry the foot and mouth disease, also militates against a viable domestic animal husbandry economy in Masoka. There is also persistent crop damage by elephant and buffalo every year. Elephants are responsible for up to 75% of all wildlife crop damage in Masoka Ward, with between 30 and 45 cases reported every season. Crop damage is high during the wet season when the most commonly grown subsistence crops, maize and sorghum, are mature. The community is located close to the Angwa River, and this naturally creates competition for

water between the community and wildlife. Two cases of human injury and death from buffalo and elephant respectively, were recorded in 2004. The use of traditional methods of problem animal control in cropping areas, such as making noise and throwing of stones, create habituation and often provoke the crop-raiding animals into challenging people guarding their crops. In addition to crop damage, the harsh climatic conditions and fragile soils have seen all households in Masoka Ward, like the rest of the Zambezi Valley, relying on grain from food aid programmes every year.

A solar powered electric fence was constructed out of donor funding and local community contribution to protect crops and homes in 1996, but as with most similar fences, it had a lifespan of five years and is now disused. A new electric fence is the community's top-priority project at present. The community currently employs 9 Game Scouts paid from its wildlife account, to complement the RDC's Problem Animal Control Unit. There is no insurance or any other form of compensation to affected communities for loss of property, crops, and even death, except for standard funeral assistance provided by the community, RDC and local Safari Operators. In the early days, the RDC paid compensation, but with no proper assessment system of the claims, the practice was stopped. As a safeguard, the community sets aside funds to cater for such eventualities as part of their annual CAMPFIRE revenues.

By joining CAMPFIRE Association, Guruve RDC, subscribed to the "principle of the devolution of the custodianship of wildlife resources to producer communities". Acceptance of this principle was also a condition for the conferment of appropriate authority status on the RDC by government. The council is obliged to ensure that producer communities are the principal beneficiaries of the benefits of their wildlife and other natural resources and the activities of the Association. Between 2002 and 2003, Masoka earned about US\$95 000 as dividends from safari hunting operations. For the first quarter of 2004, the community earned US\$60 170, which constituted 59% of the gross revenue paid to council for safari operations. This level of community dividend is higher than the 55% minimum payment prescribed in the CAMPFIRE Revenue Guidelines 2002 developed and made part of the CAMPFIRE Association Constitution in 2003 as a measure of increasing income to the communities involved in CAMPFIRE and to serve as a mechanism of greater accountability and transparency. In 1989 the household dividend for Masoka was merely US\$10, but this represented an increase of 56% on household income from cotton, the most common land use

option in the area. However, from 1996 onwards, the Masoka community dispensed with the method of exclusively distributing CAMPFIRE income as individual cash dividends, opting for essential infrastructure development and establishment of income generating projects through collective decision-making.

In areas where communities have decision-making power and receive tangible benefits, greater interest and investment in conservation is evident. Over the years, the Masoka community has applied CAMPFIRE revenues towards a number of community projects, including the purchase of 2 tractors. The tractors are a vital form of draught power and commercial tillage service. Cattle numbers are low in Masoka Ward on account of intermittent tsetse fly mortalities and government policy against overstocking in the Zambezi Valley in general where soils are fragile. The tractors are also a means of transport to the nearest business centre, Mushumbi, which is 50 km away and is not serviced by any form of public transport. The community, which previously traveled 30km to the nearest health centre, has also constructed a clinic, leading to an improvement in health services delivery. One primary a school and a secondary school have also been built, with the former exclusively funded by the community. Prior to this, the nearest primary and secondary schools were an impossible 30km and 44km away, respectively. The community, to ease accessibility to the nearest main road also funded a 30km seasonal road, the only gateway to Masoka by car today. The community also operates a well-managed grinding mill that has books of accounts. The community has established a wildlife office, sponsors various sporting activities, and is currently co-funding the erection of a new 20km² electric fence from CAMPFIRE revenues. CAMPFIRE has also benefited the community, not only through meat from cropping, but also in the form of radio communication between the ward and the district offices more than 150km away, and the purchase of drought relief food in times of scarcity.

There is full acceptance of the right of communities to utilise income as they see fit. The CAMPFIRE movement and its support structures have led to increased awareness of entitlements and rights and demand for these at local level. The Wildlife Committee has learned basic organizational and record keeping skills. They maintain their own bank account, hold regular minuted meetings, and elect new leadership every two years. Women representation is evident, but up to now has been limited to committee member positions. However the women, in addition to the provision of paid and voluntary labour, also actively participate in decision-making. They have succeeded, for example, in demanding within the

community that the new fence should have more exits to facilitate access to resources outside the fence, unlike the previous one. 2 registered Community Trusts, composed of both men and women, have been established for Masoka and Mkanga Bridge Camps. Masoka has also benefited from the training of a Professional Hunter from the local community by their Safari Operator. As a result, the wildlife area has been maintained, and wildlife populations are increasing through sustainable off-take.

4. Rights Issues under CAMPFIRE

Tenure and rights issues in Masoka Ward are a microcosm of the whole community based natural resources management programme on which CAMPFIRE is premised. In Masoka, like other communal areas, the only resources local communities own and control are livestock and crops, and not the land from which they derive livelihoods, let alone the wildlife. This leads to a perception of wildlife as less an economic asset, and more of a real threat to their lives and investment in crops and livestock. Before colonialism and national economic and social transformation, wildlife was considered as both a source of food and cultural asset, directly controlled at community level through traditional and customary structures of the Chisunga Chieftaincy. More communities are now engaged in subsistence crop farming, but under very difficult conditions. Like most parts of the Zambezi Valley, Masoka Ward continues to record an influx of new settlers from outside the district interested in cotton production, thereby exacerbating wildlife habitat loss from encroachment and uncontrolled fires. There is no formal control over these settlements, as the council's authority over land allocation is often subverted at sub-district level. The 1984 Prime Minister's Directive, which has shaped development structures in Zimbabwe, as well as CAMPFIRE, does not include the representation of Chiefs or Traditional Leaders, except as appointed "special interest councillors" in the RDC. The legally undefined relationship between the traditional leadership, which communities revere as legitimate land authorities, and the local government administrative structures over land allocation appears to be a major problem. On the other hand, the absence of land ownership rights in communal areas is a disincentive to investment in natural resources management, as everyone can utilise the land. Rights over communal land are also limited to transfer through inheritance, and not sale. As a result, land has no commercial value for the people of Masoka.

While under CAMPFIRE, the Masoka community can decide how to prioritise the use of wildlife revenues; they are not empowered to determine the commercial value of wildlife, in the same way as they do with domestic animals and crops. It is the prerogative of Guruve RDC to engage services for safari hunting operations and to sign the contracts. Although CAMPFIRE Revenue Guidelines stipulate that communities must be consulted, the Masoka community denies that it was consulted when the current Safari Operator's hunting contract was recently extended by 5 years to 2009. This has affected attitudes towards wildlife in Masoka, and the year 2004 recorded an increase in the level of snaring and poaching, particularly around water points. The community alleges that the operator has not been assisting with problem animal control. As a result the community, by the end of 2004, called for either the cancellation of the contract "roll-over", or sub-division of the hunting area into two separate hunting concessions for the purposes of engaging their own preferred Safari Operator. The CAMPFIRE Association as part of its monitoring and evaluation function has assessed the extent of the conflict through attendance of meetings called by the community and advised on the economic and legal implications of such action by the community. In their determination to take advantage of what they perceive as an alternative means of maximising financial benefits from wildlife management, whether out of common or personal interest, the Wildlife Committee has proceeded to challenge the RDC's power to manage safari hunting operations in their area, through as yet unspecified ways.

As explained above, RDCs are mere custodians of both the land and its natural resources and they are established to also provide a wider range of rural development services beyond natural resources management. Wildlife in Masoka Ward, like all communal areas, comprises species, which reside within a single jurisdiction, as well as other species, which range across the jurisdiction of other wards; and others such as elephant that even roam across the international boundary into Mozambique. In general, no one ward is sufficiently rich in game to support a viable hunting concession, but given its isolation, Masoka could be considered an exception. Guruve RDC, even though designated as the Appropriate Authority, is in principle not the 'producer or ground manager' of wildlife. Without ownership of land and wildlife resources, both the RDC and communities are ill equipped to deal with the hands-on safari hunting management responsibilities in the same way as private landowners, who in most cases also double as safari operators. This has caused serious problems for the valuation and pricing of wildlife in the district, thereby affecting the performance of the programme. At present, the RDC is paid 45% of gross revenue earned by the Safari Operator, with little

room, until recently, for council to realise the true value of the wildlife utilised. The existing hunting contract limits the involvement of the Safari Operator in problem animal control, a source of the current disenchantment by the community, to the purchase of a vehicle, which has been done. However, the vehicle is stationed at the RDC offices, and the community has no control over its use. Until recently, the RDC was responding to problem animal calls in Masoka from a central base 30km away. The Safari Operator has gone out of the way to offer substantial additional support to community projects such as purchase of a rifle, purchase and transportation of part of the wire for the new electric fence, and grading of Masoka road, well outside the provisions of the contract. However, the community's relationship with the RDC and Safari Operator remains tense.

At the same time, the legal provisions for the utilisation of wildlife benefits by communities through RDC administered safari hunting operations is not strengthened by any legal instrument when it comes to the distribution of revenue. Although the current rate of payment (59%) is satisfactory and speaks for the material achievements of the Masoka community, this cannot be confirmed as applying to all previous payments since CAMPFIRE started, nor can it be assured that this will be maintained when the administration of council or its leadership changes in future. It is also particularly important to note that the Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee, which presides over CAMPFIRE matters in council, and is a statutory committee for all councils in Zimbabwe, is normally made up of councillors from wildlife wards. However, it has no authority to determine the expenditure of revenues received by council, as this is the prerogative of the RDC's Finance Committee, which itself is concerned the wider financial needs of the council and the district. Mistrust appears to permeate between and among the council leadership, down to community level.

A new Traditional leaders Act [*Chapter 29:17*] (2000) has formally restored the cultural value of tradition within the system of democratic governance and conservation in particular. It provides for a Chiefs Council at national level, Provincial Assembly, Ward Assembly (all Headmen, Village Heads and Ward Councillor), and Village Assembly (chaired by Village Head), which superintend over the original Village Development Committees, VIDCOs and Ward Development Committees, WADCOs, respectively. However, implementation of this policy is slow, and Masoka has had an Acting Chief since 2002. There is provision for greater community empowerment under the more recent Environmental Management Act [*Chapter 20:27*], (2002). This Act repeals the natural resources and agriculture or conservation

committee under the Rural District Councils Act and substitutes this for an Environment Committee at RDC level, as well as Environment Sub-Committees below the RDC. As part of strengthening decision-making at sub-district level on environmental matters, the new subcommittees, whose terms of reference are currently being discussed at national level, are legal entities with delegated powers over natural resources management.

5. Identification, Documentation and Analysis of Tenure and Rights Issues

Throughout several years of donor funding, CAMPFIRE implementation has been complemented by an elaborate research component, which has shaped its institutional development and control systems. Publications by both internal and external academics and other interested parties and monitoring and evaluating reports on the performance of CAMPFIRE across a wide spectrum of bio-physical, social, political and economic conditions, have been produced, and have guided most of the analysis in this paper. Under the auspices of the CAMPFIRE Natural Resources Management Project (1996-1999), the University of Zimbabwe's Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) undertook programme policy and socio-economic research and monitoring activities. This entailed the provision of critical analyses and publication of activities and impacts, existing policy issues, and the identification of policy options through research and discussion fora. A total of 39 research papers and written contributions have been produced under the CASS Publications Series. WWF Southern Africa Regional Programme Office, under the same project, has also produced The Wildlife Management Series, and several reports on monitoring of financial and economic indicators of performance, revenue generation and related marketing and management information conducted for the CAMPFIRE programme.

Compared to other similar programmes in southern Africa, CAMPFIRE is arguably a dynamic approach credited with setting up and testing innovative concepts, which other countries have adopted or modified to suit their specific contexts. Notwithstanding its contributions to nature conservation in both Zimbabwe and the region, one of CAMPFIRE's greatest strengths remains that of allowing and encouraging diversity. This has allowed CAMPFIRE communities to experiment, modify and develop their own operational understanding of community based natural resources management using simple principles. These principles proceed from the premise that the alienation of natural resources,

particularly wildlife, from resident communities deprives those communities of the use of such resources to support their livelihoods and so remove any vested interest they may have in conserving natural resources.

With custodianship rights over wildlife, it could be concluded, the Masoka community enjoy the right to manage, the right to sell, and the right to benefit from wildlife. The right to manage wildlife resources is demonstrated by their intimate knowledge of wildlife in the area. Successful hunts are undertaken when the community provides information about the most likely location of good trophy animals. The community has experience in developing the wildlife harvest quota each year. Even though the Parks Authority remains ultimately responsible for all wildlife management in Zimbabwe and is therefore required to monitor the performance of CAMPFIRE and wildlife off-take, the Masoka experience has created good grounds for CAMPFIRE, as a programme to put pressure on the Parks Authority to cede its rights over final quota approval to capable communities. At present, the rights of communities to sell wildlife are limited to consultation, since the RDC legally tenders and sells hunting concessions. However, while the RDC is accountable to central government, it has not always kept producer communities fully informed about decisions on the marketing of wildlife, leading to mistrust.

The Masoka experience however clearly demonstrates the right of communities to benefit from wildlife through a fair proportion of dividends, and the right to choose how to use the benefits. Consequently wildlife has not disappeared in Masoka. If this occurred, one of the few opportunities for sustainable economic development in such a remote rural area would have been lost. State control over the utilisation of other natural resources is however, less stringent in Zimbabwe, especially for non-consumptive ventures such as those in Masoka Ward, and for which Community Trusts have been established. The Community Trusts, when the eco-tourism projects are fully functional, will enjoy the right to negotiate contracts with the private sector, collect and manage the revenue, and pay the RDC a levy, in line with charges for other commercial operations in the district.

Masoka Ward could therefore be viewed as a case of successful pro-poor conservation without complete community empowerment, mainly due to the fact that government has devolved rights and responsibilities to the Rural District Councils, and not directly to producer communities. As can be concluded from the above, communities through CAMPFIRE have enjoyed these rights through unique administrative, and to some extent

informal arrangements. Although the legal rights for communities to manage and benefit from the conservation of natural resources may soon be achieved through the Environmental Management Act, it is difficult to predict the impact of this policy shift on pro-poor conservation, without a change in the land tenure system, and to some extent, the definition of the ownership of wildlife.

6. Extra Ideas about Rights and Tenure that Could Improve Pro-Poor Conservation

From CAMPFIRE's experience, there is evidence that the allocation of rights over wildlife and other natural resources to local communities is conceptually a most significant achievement given the predominantly top down resource allocation process in Africa. However until a few years ago, there has been confusion in the CAMPFIRE support movement, and huge resources spent on studies advocating for the devolution of authority from RDCs to the lower levels. Devolution in CAMPFIRE has been assumed to mean the granting of communities more responsibilities currently assigned to the RDCs and allowing communities to retain more of the revenue. This is clearly inadequate and has proved futile, as councils merely hold custodian rights over land and wildlife, which government has not changed. The call for the passing of enabling legislation to provide proprietorship (Appropriate Authority) at producer community level in Zimbabwe was not accompanied by a loud enough call for an effective and legal mechanism obliging RDCs to devolve the appropriate revenues to communities, which could have been easier to achieve. This could have answered the question of how pro-poor conservation can be managed through a local government system in Zimbabwe, a strong governance system compared to other southern African countries. As can be seen from the Masoka community experience, pro-poor conservation could have greater impact if local communities have authority to take decisions and the right to control access to resources.

That communities can benefit from secure communal land tenure cannot be contested. Security of tenure would enable local level institutions to better plan and regulate the use of natural resources, in addition to wildlife. In the case of Masoka, the difficulty associated with the demographic, and not ecological basis for the demarcation of village and ward boundaries does not exist. The community's unique location makes available land and natural resources that it could control with little or no external conflict.

There is no denying that with sufficient devolution, poor communities can manage resources sustainably and that this, under the right circumstances, has pro-poor impact. It is also clear that devolution of rights and tenure brings high levels of participation, transparency and accountability. However, against the experience of Masoka Ward and the CAMPFIRE movement in general, one could still ask: Should there be devolution of tenure and rights from the government to communities in Zimbabwe? The answer is yes, and to be realistic, this could be done on a pilot or exceptional basis for communities that live closest to the resource, bear the social and economic costs, and invest time and money in management activities, such as Masoka Ward. The advantage this would bring is a win-win for conservation and sustainable socio-economic development, borne out of the ability to learn from practical experience by people in remote areas with few economic survival options. Pro-poor conservation can be advanced through the innovative experiences of such communities, for as long as it can be shown that the objective is to address the management of natural resources, which could otherwise be lost.

7. Acknowledgements

This article is based on personal opinions and experience of the author, as well as various internal organisational documents and policies.

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