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Management of Wildlife, Tourism and Local Communities in Zimbabwe

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Preface

Under its programme on Environment, Sustainable Development and Social Change, the Institute is currently focusing on the social dimensions of policies and initiatives for environmental protection. The purpose of the research is to analyse the implications for livelihood and conditions of life, especially of the low income groups, of a wide variety of projects to rehabilitate degraded resources and protect wild animals and plant species in national parks and reserves. This paper forms part of the work being undertaken within this research programme.

The paper looks at the relationships between people and parks in Zimbabwe and at the issue of land ownership in particular. The author argues that land dispossession and displacement of populations were central to Zimbabwe's colonial history, especially in the context of the establishment of commercial farms and protected areas. He describes how the establishment of many of the country's parks required forced removal of local communities and curtailment of their access to the resources within the area, and points out that this history continues to influence people's perceptions of wildlife, protected areas and tourism to this day. He examines what has happened to the people whose ancestors were evicted from their homelands not so long ago, and their livelihoods on the margins of park lands.

The paper attempts to explain the history and nature of this situation, as well as a recent endeavour at reconciliation between people and parks in Zimbabwe. The first section looks at the era of colonial dispossession and the early roots of antagonism, and the second section discusses the resources lost to and opportunity costs suffered by local communities when commercial farms were created. Section III discusses the growth of tourism in the country and the importance of wildlife to its international appeal. The experiences of other countries are included to highlight the kinds of problems associated with tourism growth that Zimbabwe has both encountered and managed to avoid.

As in other developing countries, the establishment of parks and reserves in Zimbabwe has brought local communities into conflict with park management. In addition to the alienation of their land, adjacent communities tend to suffer extensive crop damage from marauding animals. Revenue from tourism tends to flow into the central treasury and local people receive little compensation, if any, for destruction of their crops. Nor do they have access to park resources such as meat, grazing areas, wood or other products. The author points out that under these conditions, it is little wonder that poaching of wildlife and destruction of park fences have become increasingly common.

Realizing that this hostility towards protected areas could lead to their destruction, either through poaching of animals or growing popular pressure to have them converted to agriculture, the government of Zimbabwe — through its Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management — along with the University of Zimbabwe, the NGO Zimbabwe Trust and WWF, began a programme to return some of the benefits of wildlife, parks and tourism to local communities. Section IV of the paper discusses how the CAMPFIRE programme, which began in the mid-1980s, has attempted to build institutional and managerial capacity at the local level. The nature of CAMPFIRE projects has varied, but most of them have earned the bulk of their revenues from game hunting and safari operations. Several have also begun to explore the financial viability of other tourism-based activities such as photographic safaris, walking trails, canoe safaris and pony trekking.

The final section of the paper argues, however, that if traditional hostility towards park areas is to change into unqualified support, the CAMPFIRE initiative has still to make a significant step. Occasional access to benefits does not imply real ownership and management by communities of park lands. Until such proprietorship becomes reality, local communities will

not develop the full range of responsible practices that are necessary to ensure the survival of these areas as wildlife reserves, nor will the potential benefits of wildlife and tourism be clear to them. The government has not gone far enough to devolve responsibility beyond the district level, which for many communities is too remote and abstract. The author argues that authority over and ownership of park resources needs to be handed down to village level if CAMPFIRE's aim of turning former poachers into gamekeepers is to succeed.

Chris McIvor worked in Zimbabwe for the UK-based agency International Co-operation for Development. He has also worked in the Sudan and in Nigeria, and is currently based in Morocco as Field Director of Save The Children Fund. The project on the social and environmental impact of national parks and protected areas is co-ordinated at UNRISD by Krishna Ghimire and the majority of the research costs are covered by a grant from the Biodiversity Unit of WWF-International.

August 1994

Dharam Ghai
Director

Introduction¹

National parks in Zimbabwe constitute some 12.7 per cent of the total land area of the country. These parks are home to an exotic variety of wild animals in a relatively unspoiled natural habitat, and are the cornerstone of Zimbabwe's expanding tourist industry. It is an industry which now earns the country a significant share of its foreign exchange, following closely behind its rivals in agriculture and mining. Yet while the economy enjoys this revenue, and while the tourists enjoy the country's unique variety of wild animals, what of the communities that live on the edge of these parks? Do they benefit? Do they feature as an integral part of the "tourism, wildlife and parks" equation?

A brief look at one of the most popular tourist destinations in Africa highlights some of the main issues concerning the relationship between people and parks in Zimbabwe. Hwange National Park, covering some 1.5 million hectares of land in the southern part of the country, boasts large numbers of elephant, buffalo, giraffe, lion and cheetah. Its brochure to attract visitors is typical. "Come and enjoy an African wilderness untouched by human presence. Enjoy the provision of expert guides, modern air-conditioned vehicles and a luxury rest camp from which one can watch the wildlife from the comfort of one's own veranda".

Yet the price of maintaining this illusion is high — not so much in terms of the cost to the tourist as in the consequences for the communities living around this area from which they are excluded. Situated in a low rainfall area with infertile soils and inadequate resources, these communities are among the poorest in the country. Their thatched huts, unlike those in the park rest camps nearby, are not waterproofed against rain or air-conditioned against the heat of summer. The water from a few stagnant wells is very different from the imported refreshments enjoyed by the tourist. The revenues from tourism end up in pockets other than those of the people nearest the tourist destinations.

It is evident from talking to people from these villages that they not only feel largely excluded from the park's benefits, but that they are actively prejudiced by its existence. Many communities surrounding Hwange view the park not as a romantic wilderness, but as a region from where wild animals emerge to trample and destroy the few crops they have managed to grow. Protected areas have allowed wildlife populations to expand to a level where, in order to survive, animals must raid the fields of farmers on the edges of the park. What is worse is that the same animals which

¹ The author is grateful to Krishna Ghimire and an anonymous referee for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to Praveen Bhalla and Jenifer Freedman for editorial assistance.

are protected by law against killing by indigenous communities, even when they are destroying their livelihoods, are endlessly photographed, or in some cases hunted, by foreign visitors — for vast sums of money. Yet levels of compensation for crop damage, farmers are anxious to point out, are either minimal or non-existent.

Local resentment does not end here. The older villagers still recall a time when the land, now enclosed by park boundaries, was their's to use for agriculture, grazing their livestock, collection of firewood, etc. Even the wild animals were a resource that was available to them, and they managed to ensure that hunting did not reduce numbers to a level of possible extinction. But the colonial enterprise changed all that. It appropriated the best agricultural lands in Zimbabwe for a small élite of European farmers and evicted communities, like some of the ones around Hwange, from their traditional homes to make way for recreational reserves and safari hunting areas that only benefited the small European population in the country or foreign visitors. This story is repeated in many of the park areas of Zimbabwe as communities contemplate the lost resources and opportunities on the other side of the fences that exclude them. While tourism may have brought some jobs and even stimulated a craft industry around a few of the parks, it is that sense of alienation and dispossession that has remained uppermost in the minds of the people interviewed for this paper. For them, the best thing would be for the parks to disappear altogether, their animals destroyed and the foreign visitors transported to some other locations so that they could be left in peace.

This paper attempts to explain the history and nature of these problems, as well as a recent endeavour at some kind of reconciliation between people and parks in Zimbabwe. In order to understand the historical antecedents, the first section looks at the era of colonial dispossession and the early roots of antagonism. Land seizure lay at the centre of Zimbabwe's colonial history, and the second section thus discusses the resources lost to and opportunity costs suffered by local communities when commercial farms and national parks were created. The third section discusses the growth of tourism in the country and the importance of wildlife to its international appeal. Case studies are included from other countries to highlight the kinds of problems associated with tourism growth that Zimbabwe has both encountered and managed to avoid.

The history of land dispossession fuelled radical demands for change in the post-independence period. Political, economic and environmental constraints have prevented significant alterations to patterns of land ownership and access in contemporary Zimbabwe. Yet the picture for local communities in parks areas is not entirely bleak. Section IV describes how Zimbabwe has been attempting to reduce local hostility through a programme called CAMPFIRE, which aims to return benefits to the people most affected by wildlife and tourism. Nevertheless, occasional economic returns to neighbouring villages still leave the fundamental question of land ownership and management of indigenous resources unanswered. The final section discusses the need for devolution of further responsibilities for management, organization and ownership to local communities if CAMPFIRE is to achieve its objective of fully reconciling people and parks in contemporary Zimbabwe.

I. Control and Dispossession

Seizing Land

When the 196 men of the Pioneer Column crossed from South Africa into what was later to become Southern Rhodesia on 11 July 1890, they expected to find a fabulous land of wealth and riches. For several decades, travellers and prospectors had brought back stories of abundant gold to be found north of the Limpopo river in what was called the kingdom of the Mashonas. The English explorer, Frederick Selous, related that as far back as the fifteenth century, Arab traders along the coast of south-east Africa had spoken of extensive gold mining in the interior.

“The gold mines were being worked by the natives of the country, who used the gold as a medium of exchange to buy the goods brought to them by the Arabs, and for centuries before this time their ancestors had, in all probability, made use of gold whose value had been taught them by the ancient builders of the temple of Zimbabwe” (Selous, 1893:335).

The lure of the yellow metal, given impetus by the discovery of the gold fields around Johannesburg in the 1880s, turned the attention of entrepreneurs and prospectors further north in the hope that the vast fortunes realized in the Transvaal could be replicated in Zimbabwe.

The Pioneer Column was funded by Cecil John Rhodes, a wealthy British politician and businessman who had made his fortune in South Africa with the discovery of diamonds in the 1870s. On the pretext that colonial intervention was necessary in Mashonaland to protect the indigenous Shona people against the fierce and intrepid Ndebele, a branch of the Zulus who had entered their region several decades earlier, Rhodes negotiated with the British government for a royal charter for the British South Africa Company (BSAC) which he established in 1889. This charter gave him the right to occupy and exploit the land and mineral resources, including the gold deposits reputed to be in abundance throughout the area. With the promise of mining concessions and guarantees of land, the 196 volunteers he recruited penetrated to the heart of Mashonaland, and on 12 September 1890 raised the British flag at what was to be called Fort Salisbury, named after the prime minister of the time. The men of the Pioneer Column were soon joined by a wave of prospectors, administrators and adventurers from further south. By 1894, the European presence in Mashonaland had risen to over 5,000.

For the indigenous population, claims by these newcomers that they were there to protect them against the depredations of the Ndebele must have seemed a bitter mockery. Within a few years, the BSAC had constituted itself into a *de facto* government and established an administrative and legal infrastructure to run the country. Much of the financing for this was raised by the imposition of taxes on local people. Refusal to pay resulted in confiscation of their land, which was handed over in turn to the growing wave of settlers arriving in the country. Yet another aim of taxation was to create a ready supply of cheap male workers for the mines and European-owned commercial farms: peasants were increasingly forced to seek wage labour in order to pay hut, poll and dog taxes, and charges for dipping cattle; black farmers were forced to pay rents in white designated territories.

Six years after the invasion of their country, both the Shona and Ndebele rose in revolt, much to the surprise of the Europeans who had preferred to believe that both groups would never unite in opposition to them. Hostilities continued for over a year and it was only with the arrest and subsequent hanging of the leaders of the rebellion that the conflict finally ended. This war, however, which was popularly known as *Chimurenga*, was to inspire a later generation of Zimbabweans to fight for independence. From the arrival of Rhodes' Pioneer Column in 1890 to the establishment of democratic government in 1980, the reasons for conflict between the indigenous population and European settlers remained the same: the control of land and its wealth. Claimed one old man, born in 1902, “The whites did not take our country in a ceremonious way. They were feasting on our forefathers' blood. The only way we could get it back was through waging a war against them” (cited in Jensen, 1992:30).

Creating Commercial Farms and National Parks

Despite the establishment of numerous mines in the 1890s and early part of the twentieth century, the fabled gold and precious stones did not materialize to the extent hoped. When the directors of the BSAC toured the colony in 1907 they found that it was almost bankrupt. Yet what the country lacked in precious stones it made up for in vast tracts of rich, arable land found in many areas. Shortly after their visit, the BSAC adopted a policy to diversify away from mining and began to encourage the development of the European commercial farming sector.

To attract settler farmers, the state offered free agricultural training and a variety of services. In 1912, an agricultural bank was established to provide European farmers with loans for the purchase of farms, livestock and agricultural equipment, as well as to finance improvements in irrigation and fencing. Fertilizers, seeds and stocks were made available at subsidized prices. Roads and other facilities were constructed close to European settlements. These measures resulted in an 82 per cent increase in the number of European farmers between 1907 and 1911. By 1914 there were 2,040 Europeans occupying farms covering 183,400 acres, compared with the 20,000 acres worked a decade earlier (Schmidt, 1992:66).

During the first few decades of settler rule, peasants provided most of the produce for the local market — especially maize, livestock and vegetables to the mines and urban areas. In order to ensure that the increasing number of commercial farms were not undercut by cheaper peasant produce, the BSAC and subsequent governments in Rhodesia pursued a policy of discrimination against the indigenous population. Their first strategy was to appropriate the best agricultural land for the establishment of European farms. This policy was enshrined in law in 1920 with the adoption of the recommendations of the Native Reserves Commission. African farming areas were reduced, through forcible eviction of people, by one million acres of the most fertile, well-watered land closest to markets and communication routes. This land was then handed over to European settlers. The indigenous populations in these areas were removed to what were called African Reserves and later Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). After independence these areas were renamed Communal Lands.

Tribal Trust Lands were situated on arid, impoverished soils. Tsetse fly was prevalent, causing sleeping sickness in humans and a disease called *nagana* in cattle, which decimated African farmers' herds. Hunting of wild game was prohibited, depriving local communities of a traditional source of food during times of hardship. In 1923, wild animals were categorized as "royal game" belonging to the state. The indigenous people thus effectively suffered a double expropriation, denied both the better land suitable for agriculture and the wildlife which could survive in the marginal areas to which they had been removed.

Evictions were carried out without any warnings to or consultation with the people who had occupied these areas for centuries. As one peasant farmer recalls the removal of his family from a fertile area in northern Zimbabwe,

"We were made to move from our area by a European who had bought the land. 'Do you know an area called Marirangwe?' he asked us. We knew the area, and then he said, 'Now is the time for thrashing. That's what you must do and then you must leave this area and go to Marirangwe. This land is now mine.' Then he took some cloth and hoisted it as a flag.

We told the elders of our clan that they would have to go to Hartley [the administrative centre] and report that a mad European had come to our area. When they came to Hartley, they were told that it was Mr. Hallas and that they should hurry

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