

## Brief Report

# The Schrodinger's Mythical Cat and the Legion of Community Voice in Conservation

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### Abstract

Analysis of community voice often overlooked in biodiversity conservation discourse may be at the core of community development. The paper attempts to dissect the anatomy of community voice. The paper suggests that community voice can be measured in metrics relevant to the social environment. The areas encompassing new ethics in community voice are highlighted. Individuals, headmen, ward chairmen, village chairmen, provincial leaders, councilors, council of chiefs, traditional authorities, healers and members of parliament have an equal chance in the decisive voices in environmental stewardship and are worthy of representing communities at international forums especially when negotiating up listings and down listing of species at CITES. So, called experts are best co-opted as advisers to community voices. The legion of community voice may be critical in choosing effective representation at international conventions and other important discourses. The paper should aid in policy formulation in rural development.

### Introduction

Who said the local communities are not entitled to a decision of their own in any issue? By definition community voice can be mass purposeful decisions directed at a plan of action in community agenda of change of livelihoods. Then who is the community voice? It can be gatekeepers of natural ecosystem stock and natural capital in the decisions governing change of lively hoods. Li et al [1] have vouched for application of game model for stakeholder management in construction of ecological corridors in the Yangtze River Basin. Environmental management issues are usually complex and readily apparent in top down and bottom up approaches because of cross cutting issues. Community voices may be characterized by privileged groups dominating developmental issues. In resolving environmental issues Constance and Moody [2] have considered stakeholder priorities in prescribed burning of fire dependent ecosystems. Common wildlife management issues rise from volatile issues of coordination and stewardship of natural resources. The rise of internationalized poaching and unmitigated loss of things has forced governments and donors to join hands in trying to combat illegal activities. Willingness to connect to other

local, regional and international action programmers has been the drivers of common objectives. This is critical in environmental management and stewardship. The assumption is that if all is well with wildlife management, there are fewer problems compared to other sectors of the economy such as industry, agriculture and mining. There is little information on what community voice is especially when striking representations in conventions. This paper throws light on the shadowy concept of community voice and its use value in biodiversity conservation at conventions.

### Community Voices

The nature of conflict may be conflicting agendas, contradictions, conflicting intentions between parties involved in development. It is in idealism that there is belief in power of ideas and cooperation to promote it. It is in idealism that there is belief in power of ideas and cooperation to promote development and conservation. Communities were not always poor but became impoverished through domination of imported ideas and forced incorporation into community by the top down approaches in decision making systems. The research discourse tilts in this focus towards qualitative research discovery, descriptive and holistic understand-

ing of processes to save in order to solve conflicting agendas. But can the community voice be measured? The metrics (ecosystem benefits not secured; benefits secured; benefits meet satisfaction; benefits exceed expectations) include several variables capturing constraints and shocks in the supply chain of natural stock and natural capital. This would include all aspects of inputs and outputs in time on land, labor and investment and loss control and risk. If community voice cannot be measured it cannot be known and studied and later on bother about it? Without metrics the status quo in local community well-being is not changed and this aspect is not desirable. Voice is driven by calibrated metrics. Why the community voice? Scale, direction and magnitude of change may be important determinants in the success of community projects. Determining and integrating the various types of knowledge and values of different actors can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social-ecological systems [3].

The measurement of benefits using community voices has been at the helm of discourse for eons of years. Different communities will have different value judgments of their community voices. How can community voice be measured? The approaches may be varied and include focused interviews, closed questions and open-ended questions eliciting change in community behavior. Observe conditions, behavior, events, people and processes or communicate with people about various topics, attitudes, motivations, intentions and expectations. Surveys are used to gather information about the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. There are many research instruments that may be used, that range from questionnaires, focus groups, interviews among other instruments to determine improvements or the lack of improvements in livelihoods. This research used the deductive as main tool and existing texts published or unpublished.

### Further Insights

Can the community voice have a legacy and which legacy? Poverty cycle is broken if community voice is strong and purposeful and measurable in environmental management. Dependency syndrome on donations is alleviated if there is unity and convergence of opinions. Community investments are the ultimate prizes and legacies. This may have made some local communities feel like excluded and separated from their source of livelihood hence some 'Sabotaging Traits' as in the chemical (cyanide) poisoning of wildlife in Hwange National Park and adjacent Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources Management (CAMPFIRE) areas [4].

Local communities may be described as victims, beneficiaries and losers in the struggle for ecosystem benefit flows if community voice is weak. But to make progress in stewardship of environmental management a guide using calibrated metrics (weak benefits; strong benefits and very strong benefits) may be employed [4]. Metrics determine sustainability of community initiatives. Harmonization in rules, procedures and metrics across

communities may not be an easy process and may be established on the basis of aspired benefits, which may not be realistic. Community voices empower local communities to put their money where their mouth is (Figure 1).

There may be the focal points, points of departure and convergence in environmental issues using community voices. The aim is to reduce natural resource depletion and degradation by improving environmental management systems. Consequently, community voice can be an instrument in natural resource regeneration, sustainable business practices and environmental protection. The rise of the price of ivory and rhino horn on the black market in Asia and Middle East made it easy to establish syndicates of illicit dealings in this forbidden business. The dealers would take advantage of the high poverty levels in Africa to connive and recruit even former security and army servicemen in poaching activities.



**Figure 1:** Villagers discussing problem animal issues and quota determination (After WWF, 1986).

### Community Representations

Currently there are conflicts in the identification of community voices and this leaves donors, traders and conservationist confused on who constitute community voices. Everyone wants to in the game of community representation. Where does the buck stop? Community voices may be the actual actors in the community. Individuals, headmen, ward chairmen, village chairmen, provincial leaders, councilors, council of chiefs, traditional authorities, healers and members of parliament have an equal chance in the decisive voices in environmental stewardship and are worthy of representing communities at international forums especially when negotiating up listings and down listing of species at CITES. They are custodians and keep registers of the affected and interested communities. Agendas have in most cases been hijacked by politicians for political expedience. Most of the social values in community development are elitists in the sense that they originate

from a small group of articulate, influential opinion makers who are invariably well-educated, well networked with the means and time to pursue their social vision [5].

What issues govern and regulate community voices may be in vested interests of project developers who control economic agendas. Many factors contribute to wildlife extinction, but an analysis of the responses shows that by far the most damage comes from mankind's clearing of the habitats of species in order to grow crops. Explanations given were that when plants used by animals as food becomes scarce, so go the animals. In some instances, it is not about settlement but scramble for resource utilization that threatens many species of flora and fauna. The exploitation of nature in rural Africa may take many forms; from cutting down forests (legally or illegally) for construction, furniture- or paper production, burning of forests/bush for agriculture (shifting cultivation) or for making of charcoal, which remains an important source of energy in many African countries and source of livelihood for wildlife. Similarly, the exploitation of game populations has intensified. In the past the size of the human population was relatively low and traditional hunting (subsistence poaching) was no a major problem. However, populations in many countries have multiplied and there is simply not enough game to feed all the hungry people while at the same time sustain viable game populations. Gandiwa et al [6] further explains that people and wildlife increasingly compete for area and food as human populations grow and wildlife habitat shrink.

Which conventions should hear community voices? Convention in International Trade Endangered Species (CITES), RAMSAR, KYOTO Protocol and REDD plus are often presented as good offerings to communities. Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures. It means using community voices local communities can cherry pick with modifications those ideas that trickle down to the grassroots.

What footprints should a community voice be identified with? Poverty, indebtedness and dependency are therefore, a result of the manner of the integration process of poor communities. Poor organic connection between members and within traditional structures may be the norm; lack of feedback in specified timeframes may hinder timely projection of community voices. External factors are responsible for the underdevelopment of the communities. The government concerned (inclusive of environmental issues where humans depend on for survival). Careful handling of human matters but knowing how to place states' interest in the international arena for the benefit of the government concerned (inclusive of environmental issues where humans depend on for survival).

The Fast Track Land Reform Programmed of 2000 [7] has been responsible for the decline in population of big carnivores

such as cheetahs and lions. According to Williams, the displacement of commercial game ranchers for new settlers was displacement of people with positive attitudes towards wildlife for the ones with negative attitudes. This saw replacement of the term carnivores for predators which best explains the 'new settlers' attitude towards these species.

Poachers may be divided into three distinct groups namely: subsistence, trophy and commercial. Subsistence poachers normally kill game for meat (consumption), this is normally referred to as 'killing for the pot'. Trophy poachers are not a serious threat in Southern Africa; they usually kill animals for sport trophies. The commercial poachers pose a serious threat to African wildlife; they are also seriously interconnected with subsistence poachers for ivory, rhino horn and hide. This makes subsistence poachers kill for more than mere consumption for uplifting of their welfare or living standards. Lucia et al [8] noted that

Wildlife management initially was controlled at international level. There is an ever-expanding list (CITES, RAMSAR and REDD plus among several many) in an attempt to protect some species or wildlife habitats. These international treaties and conventions were, however, absorbed or transformed into national/domestic laws that would help control wildlife. This is some kind of domestication of international law. Governments of Zambezi basin-Zambia, Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique. Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe signed the Zambezi Basin treaty to establish the Kavango-Zambezi Trans Frontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) which is one of the biggest trans frontier parks in southern Africa. This Trans frontier park was aimed at maximum economic benefits to member states and SADC as a whole by its concentrated tourist facilities that range from game parks, Victoria Falls, rock paintings of Botswana and the leisure facilities that have been created within these natural set-ups. Such settlement in areas previously designated for game would chase away wildlife, create conflicts between people and animals as elephants would often destroy crops, lions eat livestock and trap small game such as impalas and other primates.

In the TFCAs, national parks and Conservancies and CAMP-FIRE areas information on whether animals are dead or alive is of immediate concern and may be established using Indigenous Knowledge Mapping Skills (IKS). The Schrodinger's mythical cat [9] provides an immediate apparent solution by predicting outcomes using IKS. IKS may underpin the status of wildlife that seeks to benefit local communities at low cost but at high precision in comparison to other known competing methods. The Schrodinger's mythical cat a concept adapted from old classical physics illustrates here the bottom up link again strengthening community voices. Can animals be alive and dead at the same time is the paradox the community voices want to establish without delay. There is need for the community to find out. Using the Schrodinger's

mythical cat raises the bar in understanding of the role of community voices in biodiversity conservation paradigms. This vital information flow may be disrupted if community voices are distorted or simply not heard. Community partnerships with orthodox conservation agencies help remove suspicions and bottlenecks in resource management, quota allocation and benefit sharing schemes. Here lies the conceptual framework for fine tuning modus operandi of Campfire Critics confer that community voice has not been well understood and that it is a task best left to experts. Opponents to its use contend that the metrics that describe community voice need further definition and evidence support from a wealth of literature but there may not be enough time left. Environmental considerations in favor of local communities may need it defined sooner than later [10].

### The New Ethics

The new ethics is an adaptation of 'ethics' a word that means the right things for environmental management and the putting away of degrading environmental practices. In the premise of good governance Tafangenyasha [4] presented 10 key points as being relevant in community voices:

- 50 human environments 50 environment axiom
- Tragedy of the commons acknowledgement
- Legitimacy and voice
- Direction
- Strategic vision
- Performance
- Responsiveness
- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Fairness

### Conclusion

Community voice is an emerging concept important in contemporary biodiversity discourse. It relates to fairness in compensation and negotiations. So, called experts are best co-opted as ad-

visers to community voices. The legion of community voice may just be beginning to be identified for effective representation at international conventions and other important discourses.

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