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Project no: 043982
CROSCOG
Cross Sectoral Commons Governance
in Southern Africa

Instrument: Specific Support Action

Thematic Priority: Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area

http://www.ifm.dk/croscog/

Project Execution

Introduction

The commons is a general term for shared resources in which each stakeholder has an equal interest. Many Southern African natural resources are legally recognized as commons and the focus of the CROSCOG was sharing research on the governance of the commons in that region. The governance of commons in Southern Africa has received a good deal of attention from both researchers and the responsible government agencies. While considerable research has been carried out in respect to commons governance within specific sectors, there is a real need for sharing information about effective commons governance across different ecosystem types – including marine and other large water body coastal zones, arid and semi-arid grasslands, savannas and woody patches, and floodplain ecosystems. CROSCOG built on existing research on commons governance done by institutions specializing in particular resource management problems. It took as its starting point the insight that addressing natural resource degradation in Africa means finding ways to identify reproduce and encourage existing positive practices of commons management across wide scales.

The CROSCOG project was carried out in two phases each with its own theme:

- Knowledge, power, economic transformation and existing commons practices; and,

- Building on existing practices to achieve effective governance across extensive scales.

For each theme a series of papers was produced by the network. During Theme 1 these papers were focused on one of 10 particular cases each representing a particular ecosystem type. During Theme 2 some purely case-based work continued, but there were also some comparative papers that focussed on cross-case issues that emerged as interesting during the Theme 1 discussions. These cross-case issues included tourism and the commons, the commons and addressing historical discrimination, and co-management institutions and the commons.

The contractors on the CROSCOG project included:

1. Aalborg University, Denmark (coordinator)
2. The Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies, South Africa
3. The Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi, Malawi
4. The Centre for International Cooperation, the Netherlands
5. The Department of Fisheries: Malawi, Malawi
6. Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre, Botswana
7. University of Zambia – Lusaka, Zambia
8. Aquaculture and Fisheries Information, Zambia

The specific objectives of CROSCOG were as follows:

1. To create a network of researchers and practitioners on commons governance that reaches across the boundaries of particular resources and eco-systems;

2. To identify and share lessons from recent research carried out by the partners and others about encouraging positive conservation practices across large areas;

3. To identify and share lessons from recent research carried out by the partners and others about the management of multiple-use commons with a comprehensive eco-system based approach and;

4. To share these lessons with a broad audience including the global scientific community, policy makers in Southern Africa, and local communities in Southern Africa through specific, targeted outreach efforts.

Outcomes in respect to the creation of a Network

To meet the first objective, CROSCOG sponsored four networking events. Two of these events focussed on building the CROSCOG network and two of them focussed on reaching out towards building a larger concerned with managing African commons.

The first event was the CROSCOG kick-off meeting in Cape Town in April 2007. It brought together members of our advisory panel and scholars working on fisheries, grass lands, and flood plains commons in Southern Africa. The kick-off meeting lasted three days and, while project planning certainly received sufficient attention, even more time was spent in exchanging substantive ideas.

The second event focussed on the CROSCOG network was, the Theme 1 workshop, which took place in Maun, Botswana in December 2007, again bringing members of the advisory committee together with the people working in the field. Presentations on all cases were made and presenters received feedback from the group.

The first event that focussed on reaching our towards a large commons community was the presentation of CROSCOG papers at the Biennial meeting of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) in Cheltenham, England in July of 2008. Through this event the CROSCOG work was able to reach a large international audience of scholars and practitioners interested in commons governance.

Finally, in January of 2009, the Theme 2 workshop was expanded into a major dissemination event through attracting co-sponsorship and policy makers, scholars and practitioners from all over Southern Africa. This Policy Event took place in Cape Town. Co-sponsorship for this event was secured through the IASC who agreed to make it an official IASC regional meeting, from the World Fish Centre (WFC) and from the Ford Foundation. Thirty nine scholars, policy makers and commons practitioners attended the Policy Event. Papers were presented within the broad area of the governance of multiple types of natural resource commons within nine themes identified by the organisers. The first two themes were the CROSCOG themes, while the others were based on both new themes that had emerged from CROSCOG discussions or that were based on the presentations of other colleagues. The nine themes of the Policy Event were:

- Knowledge, power, and existing commons practices

- Building on existing practices to achieve effective commons governance across extensive scales.

- The African Commons and Tourism.

- The African commons and redressing historical discrimination, particularly in respect to race and gender.

- Recent challenges to management of the commons such as HIV/AIDS.

- Traditional institutions and the governance of African commons.

- The contribution to food security of the African commons.

- Implications of urbanisation and commercialisation for the African commons.

- Good Governance, Accountability and the Commons

Outcomes in respect to Identifying and Sharing Lessons

Objective Two and Three involve identifying lessons from recent research to be shared across the commons. To this end two "thematic" papers were finalized that provided guidelines for sharing modalities across resource types. A total of 13 papers, including the overall theme paper, have been submitted to a special issue of Development Southern Africa where they are under review. Each case also produced a paper or papers for Theme 2. A total of 10 papers, including two general review papers, three special issue comparative papers, one on tourism, one on redressing historical

discrimination in pelagic fisheries, and one on fisheries co-management, and 4 case-based papers, have been submitted to the International Journal of the Commons.

After the presentation of research by the CROSCOG team and others at the Policy Event two workshops were held to summarize the main messages. These messages became the basis of the dissemination work at the community and policy levels, discussed in the next section, and can also stand as a summary of the substantive conclusions of the CROSCOG project.

Messages to communities

Commons are life

You know how important the commons are to your livelihoods. Be strong and active in defending your commons and promoting ways to use and manage them sustainably to benefit local people.

You can take the lead

Communities do not always have to be the passive recipients or objects of outside policies, programmes and interventions. It is possible for communities to take the initiative towards outside authorities, pushing their own ideas and agendas without always needing to be in reactive mode. Seek ways to build collaborative platforms and coalitions between communities to represent your interests to outside authorities. Be ready to negotiate strongly with the state and the private sector when the acquisition or use of your resources is proposed – protect your interests! Seek advice and support from NGOs or other facilitators to strengthen your positions.

Your science is valid

Rural people have valuable environmental knowledge that deserves as much respect as the knowledge of outside scientists. Treasure and build on the environmental science in your community. Seek ways to apply it and to merge it with outside science.

Build on the strengths of your local institutions

Look for strengths in your existing local institutions for the management of natural resources – including your customary law - and advocate the roles of these local institutions where these can make an equitable and effective contribution to sustainable land use and livelihoods.

Seek ways to use the opportunities provided by local government

Learn the strengths and weaknesses of your local government systems. For example, it may be possible to enact district council bylaws that will help you to govern your natural resources. Exploit whatever opportunities existing legislation and institutional structures may offer you.

Messages to NGOs

The governance of the commons can succeed in southern Africa

There are many cases of successful governance of the southern African commons: programmes, projects and strategies that have benefited rural people in an environmentally sustainable way. Learn all you can about these successes, and help communities to learn about them too. It is important to affirm the commons, and communities' capacity to govern them and build sustainable livelihoods there. Despite the many threats and setbacks to sustainable use and governance of the commons, there is plenty of scope to succeed.

Co-learning with communities

Be ready to learn from and with communities, seeking insights into their systems of environmental knowledge, customary law and governance. Work with communities to build space for adaptive learning and management, deepening local scientific knowledge and building management systems that do not automatically depend only on exogenous science.

Create space for dialogue

Seek ways to create space and platforms for dialogue between stakeholders and interest groups within communities so as to build consensus and strengthen community positions for negotiation with outside authorities.

Help build coalitions

Communities can take the lead, but need support in building dialogue, coalitions and joint platforms to formulate and promote their interests and strategies towards outside agencies. They can be more effective when they scale up horizontally and take strong joint positions.

Avoid multiplication of local institutions

Communities suffer when each agency or project invents a new committee for forestry, conservation, water, wildlife or whatever. Work through existing structures whenever feasible and appropriate.

Help build community initiatives and authority

Respect community level institutions and initiatives. Help them build their political power in the natural resource management arena, to strengthen their profile vis-a-vis external authorities. This has economic and operational advantages: community resource management is often cheaper and better respected than the enforcement of statute law by outside agencies. Customary law may still have a significant role to play in this regard.

Ensure community benefits

Ensure that all conservation initiatives generate tangible benefits for local people and that these outweigh the costs that they impose on the community. Help them appraise proposals for commoditisation of their commons critically and to resist interventions that threaten their livelihoods. Develop NGO skills to support communities in negotiating hard deals with the state and the private sector that assure and promote community interests.

Seek profound simplicity and apply those insights

Avoid overly theoretical or scientific approaches. Do not automatically use templates for community consultation and involvement. Take time to learn and appreciate the profound realities and to express their operational implications in simple and practicable terms.

The power of maps

Help communities to counter outside constructions and mappings of their realities: use new technologies to help integrate and combine their spatial and environmental perceptions into larger scale maps of resources and management priorities.

Messages to policy makers

The commons are ecological systems that are critical for livelihoods

Most ecological systems are commons and shaped by human use that must be managed. This is true from local fisheries and grasslands to global commons such as the atmosphere. Commons are not an empty relics, they play a critical role in livelihoods and ecological systems even at relatively higher scales. For example, forest commons on the local level make an important contribution to solving problems of climate change that are themselves a global-scale commons. Commons need protection and the state alone cannot provide this protection. This requires local involvement. Local involvement means attention to meeting basic needs and promoting fair access to resources through effective policies.

The government's responsibility in enabling local involvement

Commons are owned by groups of people and government must create a legal and policy framework that respects group ownership rights. The problem is that commons tend to be treated as if there were no commoners, as if no one had rights to them. These rights need to be defined and enforced. In Africa these rights often stem from customary law. They can also be subject to rules developed by local communities through democratic processes. Community structures need to be legally empowered instead of repeating the all too frequent tendency to criminalize livelihoods through micro-management of the commons. Policy makers need to reinforce the critical role played by local communities and customary practices because they reflect the community's various moral, social, political, and economic incentives that drive human behaviour. Government achieves its objectives when problems are solved by local communities. The role that government must play is ensuring that these processes are transparent, fair and legitimate.

Scaling up existing practices is a key to sustainable commons.

The great challenge is that many commons involve huge numbers of communities, which gives government an additional coordination role. Some commons, such as the fish in a river, are shared over large areas; other commons are very complex because they involve combinations of resources. Large scale and complex commons can in fact be managed when local people are involved. Governments should start with what they find on the ground. Some actions tear commons down while others preserve and sustain them; it is these latter actions, these practices of sustainable commons management, which must be replicated to meet the challenge of large scale and complex commons. Many commons are cared for on smaller scales by existing practices such as resisting inappropriate fishing gears, organizing the collective use of pastures, or monitoring forest and wildlife resources. The local rules regulating these practises and government should facilitate the replication of these practices.

Final plan for using and disseminating knowledge

From the very beginning, as evidenced in the objective list above, an objective of CROSCOG has been the dissemination of its results.

Section : Exploitable Knowledge and its Use

As a policy analysis project, CROSCOG has produced no exploitable knowledge under the definition given in the reporting guidelines.

Section 2: Dissemination of Knowledge

The messages identified above have been and are being directed to specific audiences including community members, policy makers, and NGO working in sustainable development.

The most important dissemination activity was the Policy Event in Cape Town which was attended by policy people as well as scholars from across Southern African and with some representation from Eastern Africa and Europe.

The community and NGO messages are being distributed through a community information sheet and by radio broadcasts that have taken place in Zambia and Botswana.. This has been carried out by AQUAFISH, HOORC and PLAAS respectively.

The NGO and policy maker messages have been published as one of the well-known PLAAS policy brief series and have been disseminated through that organization's policy network.

Section 3: Publishable Results

CROSCOG has produced and submitted a total of 23 scholarly papers. These included two overall theme papers that pulled together information from all cases. It also included three cross-case comparisons on special themes: tourism, redressing historical discrimination in pelagic fisheries, and fisheries co-management. The remainder of the papers described lessons coming from specific cases of commons management.