

## Continuing the CBNRM debate: Terminology, information and communication deficits



By Max Abensperg-Traun

In response to the CBNRM discussion started in SULiNews 5 by Robin Sharp's article [CBNRM: Does it have a future?](#)

Using the Vienna symposium on CITES and livelihoods (2011) as a prime source, Robin Sharp in his SULiNews issue 5 [article](#) asks "CBNRM: does it have a future?" Participants at that symposium agreed that while the broad concept of community-based conservation has wide application, the term CBNRM can symbolise a rather specific approach. However, outside southern Africa many community programs apply to a broader natural resource base. The symposium participants, who included representatives from southern and eastern Africa and South America, settled for CRM as a more widely recognised common terminology. Accordingly [IUCN Resolution WCC-2012-Res-092](#) notes that "*wherever possible and allowing for the legal system in force, 'community resource management' (CRM) may be an appropriate generic description*".

Another reason for a change in terminology is that Southern African representatives argued that local communities should not be treated any differently to other natural resource users, and discussions should focus more on the nature of resource management regimes rather than the actors carrying out the management (1). This met fierce opposition from South American co-sponsors of the IUCN Resolution just mentioned. Further consideration of this fundamental issue promises a lively debate.

CRM attempts to combine social, cultural, political, economic and ecological considerations to achieve desired conservation and livelihood outcomes outside protected areas, often under difficult political and economic circumstances. CRM needs to be seen as an open-ended "work in progress", with most programs, regardless of whether sustainable consumptive (or extractive) use is part of their strategy, providing suboptimal results, while some work poorly.

Participants to the Vienna symposium were nevertheless positive in their assessment of CRM's potential contribution to biodiversity conservation and livelihoods for rural communities. They also agreed that there are few alternatives for conservation of wild species outside protected areas, that ineffective tenure security is one of the most fundamental flaws in most CRM programs, and that within CITES, species listing decisions can either support or harm livelihoods, with community resource management programs being especially vulnerable.

Many CRM programs need to become more self-driven, but there is nevertheless much that external actors can do to help. There are several options where the IUCN, in collaboration with other organizations and donors, and affected communities, can play an important role at all levels of its organization to assist CRM schemes to achieve a higher profile for the valuable contribution they make to both conservation and livelihoods. For example:

### Cross-fertilization between relevant CRM programs and initiatives

In addition to political and economic factors that impact on CRM development and implementation, cultural factors and the availability and biology of appropriate wild species are important. It is thus unlikely that CRM programs practised in the Andes would significantly benefit from best practice examples from their counterparts in e.g. Southern Africa. Nevertheless, CRM programs that operate under similar ecological and/or socio-cultural conditions should interact to improve their ability to more effectively address conservation and livelihood benefits.

### Data collection

There exists an enormous and easily accessible body of published information of CRM programs. However, there are deficits in terms of relevant and quantified CRM data for easy use by decision-makers, as well as its strategic distribution. Where this is lacking, respective CRM programs (or perhaps a strategic group such as SULi) thus need to collate socio-economic and biodiversity information on the benefits gained. Such information needs to be bundled and proactively made available in an appropriate electronic forum for easy access.

### Scientific Committees in CITES

The consideration of livelihoods has been incorporated into CITES, but only in the implementation phase of species listings ([Res. Conf. 8.3 Rev. CoP13](#)). Advancing CRM in terms of public profile, information generation, communication and further recognition within e.g. CITES, would benefit significantly if it were included in the work programs of the Animals and Plants Committees. Discussions should thus be initiated in an appropriate forum whether the formal functions attributed to the Animals and Plants Committees ([CITES Res. Conf. 11.1 Rev. CoP16](#) on "Establishment of Committees") allows for socio-economic dimensions of wildlife trade to be included in the Scientific Committees. A first initiative could come from the CITES and Livelihoods Working Group.

### Decision-making at CITES Conferences of the Parties (CoPs)

In the run-up to CoPs, CITES decision-makers (e.g. the 28 voices of the European Union) evaluate listing proposals against listing criteria but are generally poorly informed of the livelihoods implications of relevant proposals. Communities, NGOs and national decision-makers thus need to collaborate to enhance effective outreach activities to inform the global CITES

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community of relevant CRM programs well in advance of CoPs to optimize the representation of their interests. Equally and where appropriate, Parties (e.g. the EU) should proactively reach out to obtain relevant CRM information to optimize the information base for positions on CoP listing proposals.

Local communities affected by listing decisions could be given an opportunity to represent their interests at CoPs, as were the Inuit communities at CoP16 (2013).

#### **High-level meetings**

Ultimately, decisions affecting national CRM programs are taken at high levels of Government. There is thus a need to raise CRM to a higher political level to advocate for the rural poor who share space and resources with protected species over large regions of the world, often at considerable cost to themselves and who yield a major influence about the fate of such species and ecosystems. A strong political signal by national leaders via the adoption of a Resolution on CRM by the UN General Assembly could well assist national policy changes as well as raise the level of awareness in the developed world of the need to acknowledge the importance of CRM in developing countries.

Having said this at the end of the day, it is communities themselves that will decide on how best to alleviate poverty, and it is they who should decide on the kind of assistance they may need. What is required is the more effective integration of community voices around decisions that impact on their lives and strategies to make their voices heard.

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#### **References**

(1) Martin, R.B. (2009) [scribe] [From Sustainable use to Sustainable Development: Evolving Concepts of Natural Resource Management](#). Conceptual Framework of the Southern Africa Sustainable Use Specialist Group. 54pp. Unpublished.