

Theme Two: Building on Existing Practices to Achieve Effective Governance across Extensive Scales

Theme Two, Building on Existing Practices to Achieve Effective Governance across Extensive Scales, will help achieve the objective of this project – sharing research and experience about the governance of the commons between different key southern African ecosystem types. The purpose of this exchange is not merely to enrich the understanding within each resource system. Its broader intent is to build more practical insights into how the large scale problems of achieving sustainable livelihoods on the southern African commons can be addressed by large scale solutions based on the only workable foundation – **the existing integrated resource knowledge and governance practice of rural people.**

In earlier generations, some southern African societies developed effective indigenous institutions for the management of entire landscapes and their component ecosystems, when this was in their economic (and sometimes political) interest. The Lozi of the Zambezi floodplain in western Zambia are a well known example of this indigenous integration of livelihoods and natural resource management in a local government system (Munalula, 2000). Few of these integrated southern African systems are effective today. Meanwhile, most efforts to rebuild the management of the commons have been specific to certain resources or localised areas. Projects in many countries have undertaken a range of management initiatives, but these have rarely proved institutionally or – at least as important – economically sustainable. The same has been true of forest and fisheries (co-) management interventions (Hara, 2004; Sithole, 2004). Although often technically competent, these sectoral initiatives have failed to acknowledge the integrated ways in which livelihoods depend on multiple natural resources within landscapes and ecosystems, and the integrated ways in which resource governance must link into other dimensions of local governance. Conversely, the smaller number of ecosystem-wide land use planning initiatives that have sought to enhance overall environmental health have been dominated by technical approaches that failed to understand the differential roles of resources in the spectrum of local livelihoods, and failed to achieve the required broader reinforcement of local governance. Theme two will remedy this by integrating scale – landscapes, ecosystems, and governing systems - into the process.

The dual policy challenge on the southern African commons now is to achieve a practical understanding of the **livelihood roles** of the various resources in these ecosystems, and to build enhanced and **integrated governance** of these resources into reinforced and legitimate local government systems at scale across the region. This challenge cannot be effectively tackled through conventional project approaches, which are typically limited to environmental sub-sectors or localised areas. Instead, policy must build on the indigenous foundations of integrated environmental management that many rural societies still struggle, imperfectly, to practise. It must focus not only on the specialised challenges of natural resource management, but on the general challenges of building effective local government in rapidly changing rural societies.

The dual research challenge is to support these policy imperatives. We need to generate more evidence about the differentials, integration and trends in livelihood dependence on ecosystems and their effective management. At the same time, research needs to explore effective ways to build enhanced natural resource management into enhanced local government in and by rural communities. This project aims to tackle both dimensions of the challenge through workshops drawing upon these lessons from each commons type.

In these rapidly modernising societies, the dominant driver of effective grassland management is what Murphree and others have called economic instrumentalism. People will make the effort to govern their resource access and promote sustainable use when they believe that this will combat

the scarcity and economic hardship that over-use and degradation cause. In some cases, they will go beyond sustainable natural resource management and undertake nature conservation, when they are persuaded that setting resources aside from consumptive use will yield economic benefits for them. In all cases, effective grassland management depends on the broader health of local governance as a whole. Where local government is weak, natural resource management cannot be strong. Sadly, this is often the case today. Although traditional authorities have proved resilient across much of the region, they are now generally in decline. Modern local government systems are typically under resourced and lack authority and effectiveness. Central government cannot or will not do enough to help them. They are sometimes degraded by corruption. Non-governmental and community-based organisations play important local roles, but are unable to operate at larger scales.

Recent research on southern African grasslands reflects the diversity of these **ecosystems' livelihood contributions and governance challenges**. Much, but certainly not all of it has found expression in discourses on community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), an increasingly prominent environment and development paradigm in the region since the early 1990s. Jones (2004) and Turner (2004a), for example, have analysed the economic contribution of CBNRM, primarily in grasslands, to the livelihoods of the poor, and the potential role of enhanced commons governance in poverty alleviation. Shackleton has written extensively on the contribution of wild plant resources from grasslands and their interspersed forest patches to the livelihoods of the poor, and the issues arising from the commercialisation of such production (Shackleton and Shackleton, 2004; Shackleton, 2005). Other work has focused on the governance challenges, addressing such concerns as the interface between national political and decentralisation processes and local sustainable resource management challenges (Rihoy and Maguranyanga, 2006) and the thorny challenges of defining rights to specified management units on the commons (Mosimane and Aribeb, 2005). This grassland commons research offers two key lessons for other commons ecosystems. First, research must understand and explain how the use and management of particular natural resources links into dependence on other natural commons, and other economic sectors. Sustainable development solutions must be integrated, not resource specific. An ecosystem approach is thus highly appropriate. Secondly, governance challenges on the commons cannot be divorced from the broader challenges of local governance in their national political and administrative contexts. Southern African societies do not have the luxury of creating totally separate governance structures for the commons. Commons governance must be integrated with the wider functions of local government.

South Africa's marine and coastal resources provide a unique case within the project because of the contrast between remaining commons areas and private areas in a much more developed economy. Some of the human uses include coastal cities, coastal villages, recreational beaches (including beaches where people can drive their 4 X 4 vehicles), ports and harbours, fishing and of late coastal golf estates. The fear of impact of these on both the environment and humans is such that the building of golf estates has been legally put on hold in South Africa. Also to be found along the coast are marine protected areas and coastal national parks.

South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) has recently adopted an ecosystems approach to marine resource management. The shift away from sectoral management of marine and coastal resources to the broader perspective of ecosystems recognises that plant and animal communities are interdependent and interact with their physical environment as ecological systems. The complex interplay of socio-economic, ecological, political and legislative processes underscores the need for an integrated approach to management of marine and coastal resources. Clearly there is need to integrate the management of natural and human systems in order to sustain the benefits that humans derive from marine and coastal resources. Besides, the fragmentation of human and natural communities could be counterproductive if this interfered with the basic ecosystem functioning.

Theme Two, Building on Existing Resource Management Practice to Achieve Effective Governance across Extensive Scale, will thus apply the **integrated livelihoods** and **ecosystem** in a sharing of views through paper distribution and presentation in the workshop by commons researchers about how to break out of the project mould and work with local people to govern their natural resources across ecosystems and landscapes. As Turner (2004b) has emphasised, most rural societies on the southern African commons retain at least some elements of their indigenous resource governance systems and continue to modernise and apply them to the extent that local institutional and economic conditions permit. Research and policy need to explain to themselves and each other what the strengths and weaknesses of this ‘everyday’ resource governance are and how support to it can be mainstreamed in enhanced local government practice throughout rural society. Spatially and sectorally limited, project-based approaches to this challenge have proved inadequate. What coastal, flood plain and grasslands researchers must contribute now is an integrated understanding of how to build on what the people of the southern African commons are already doing in the total context of their livelihoods and governance.

Integrating commons practices is a critical sub-theme of the project, we intend to stimulate a convergence of understanding about the ways in which apparently separate ecosystems and resources are integrated into the livelihoods of most rural people, together with resources held and managed under more individualised tenure (such as crop and residential land – the latter often an important site for food production too). This livelihood integration also links rural resource dependence into local and remote economic activity in other forms of self- and wage employment, as well as an increasing dependence on state safety nets (such as pensions and child allowances) in some southern African states. Theme Two will thus bring scholars of different kinds of southern African commons to a more effective and practical application of their respective insights to integrated strategies for **sustainable development** and **poverty alleviation** in the region.