

Development Difficulties among the Basubiya: Community-Based Natural Resource Management

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This summer I travelled to Botswana in Southern Africa to conduct anthropological research among the Basubiya (Vekuhane) people and a development project that has been ongoing since the early 1990s. The Basubiya occupy northern Botswana along the Chobe river and Namibian Caprivi Strip. They are members of a group of villages known as the Chobe Enclave. The Chobe Enclave is composed of five villages spread out along a pot-holed and dusty dirt road that stretches south through the territory of Savuti on its way to Maun and the Okavango Delta. The Enclave villages, traveling north to south, include Mabele, Kavimba, Kachikau, Satau, and Parakarungu. The project itself falls under a development paradigm known as Community- Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM).

The residents of the Chobe Enclave live near the Chobe National Park (Botswana's largest) in an area that includes impressive populations of elephants, hippos, lions, hyenas, and crocodiles among other wildlife. The effects of this living arrangement have many repercussions, including the loss of crops and livestock. Because of risks that have accumulated from living near this wild environment, poaching and poverty became significant issues within the Enclave villages. The idea of CBNRM was to resolve this problem of opposing forces by granting the local communities a measure of control over the wildlife populations nearest them. This control is achieved through the

allotment of hunting quotas provided by Botswana's Department of Wildlife and National Parks. The authority over these hunting quotas is devolved to a trust committee that represents all five villages. The Chobe Enclave Conservation Trust (CECT) is made up of officers and voting members from all five villages. Their headquarters are located in the village of Kavimba, and CECT is responsible for negotiating the sale of this hunting quota to a nearby commercial safari operator. The funds are then distributed among the five villages, each with its own village trust committee.

After traveling around the region with Professor Brian Child's research



team of UF students and young African professionals, I settled in the village of Kavimba because of its status as the headquarters of CECT. Kavimba is a village of about six hundred inhabitants nestled into the sloping side of the Botswana plateau as it descends into the Chobe River valley that stretches out for miles into the Namibian wetland. In Kavimba, I rented living quarters from Dickson Sinka, the uncle of Lucksom Masule, who is the Basubiya historian. Much of my time was spent working with Masule, making contacts and learning the history of the Basubiya.

My methods included informal interviews and participant observation. From my findings, it appears that CBNRM in the area is struggling. The hunting quotas bring in profits, but much is spent on administration and projects that are not self-sustaining, such as a hut they transformed into a public internet booth through the use of a satellite dish. Projects such as this do not cover their own expenses and require continued funding from future quota profits. From my interviews, I discovered that what people want the most is better education for their children and more opportunities. There is a plan in the works for a partnership with a lodge operator to co-finance another lodge, which could provide more opportunities for the youth of the villages. This could take years to develop, however, and it is uncertain how much success it might sustain. These challenges make CBNRM an unpredictable development program in the Chobe Enclave, even though it has seen some of the greatest success in the country. Further research is needed to fully understand the complexities of the socio-political structure within the development program and its connections with the DWNP before suggestions can be made to improve the success of the program.

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