

Building Capacity for Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Southern Africa

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I spent summer 2008 conducting exploratory and pre-dissertation research in the Okavango Delta region of Botswana and the Caprivi region of Namibia. Learning as much as I could about the place and building relationships critical to my future research success, I had the opportunity to be a part of Dr. Brian Child's cross-cultural, interdisciplinary research team in Botswana for five weeks of my two month trip. The group was comprised of faculty, doctoral, masters and undergraduate students from the University of Florida, young African professionals from throughout southern Africa, and undergraduate students from the University of Botswana. Academic research within the group ranged widely, including studies of economics, ecology, political science, psychology and anthropology. While the students brought knowledge of research methods and academic disciplines, the young professionals brought experience in natural resource management from their home countries and the practitioner perspective. I worked with a subset of the group who in turn worked with local community members to collect survey data from various rural communities involved with Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), looking at everything from governance and financial accounting to natural resource management. Called "the Dashboard" for its application as monitoring and research tool to provide quick and simple views of what's happening in a community, much like the dashboard of a car provides an overview of the car's functionality, a large team conducted surveys in a number of rural communities.



The interdisciplinary and cross-cultural character of the combined group of young African professionals and academicians created a dynamic and unique learning experience. Interested in how this type of research may help to build capacity for members of the group as well as the communities in which we worked, I conducted interviews and observations that will feed into my overall research plan and dissertation. I will continue studying this research process throughout the year, as students continue to work on their own research and collaborate with one another through Dr. Child's facilitation. I will also follow up with the young African professionals remotely, assessing how they are or are not applying their new techniques and research methods in their home countries. I will continue this line of research in my dissertation, looking beyond conventional capacity building methods, which are dominated by supply-driven training programs, to see how other approaches may serve to build the capacity of community members involved with CBNRM.

After working with Dr. Child's group, I moved from Botswana to Namibia for three weeks to join other University of Florida students conducting their dissertation research there. Though involvement in projects as diverse as conducting ecological transects to an economic study, I built a foundational understanding of the place, people and concerns related to CBNRM in the Caprivi region of Namibia. Beyond providing an opportunity to help with their work, fellow University of Florida students were invaluable contacts, introducing me to the key people and organizations with whom I hope to work again in the near future.

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