

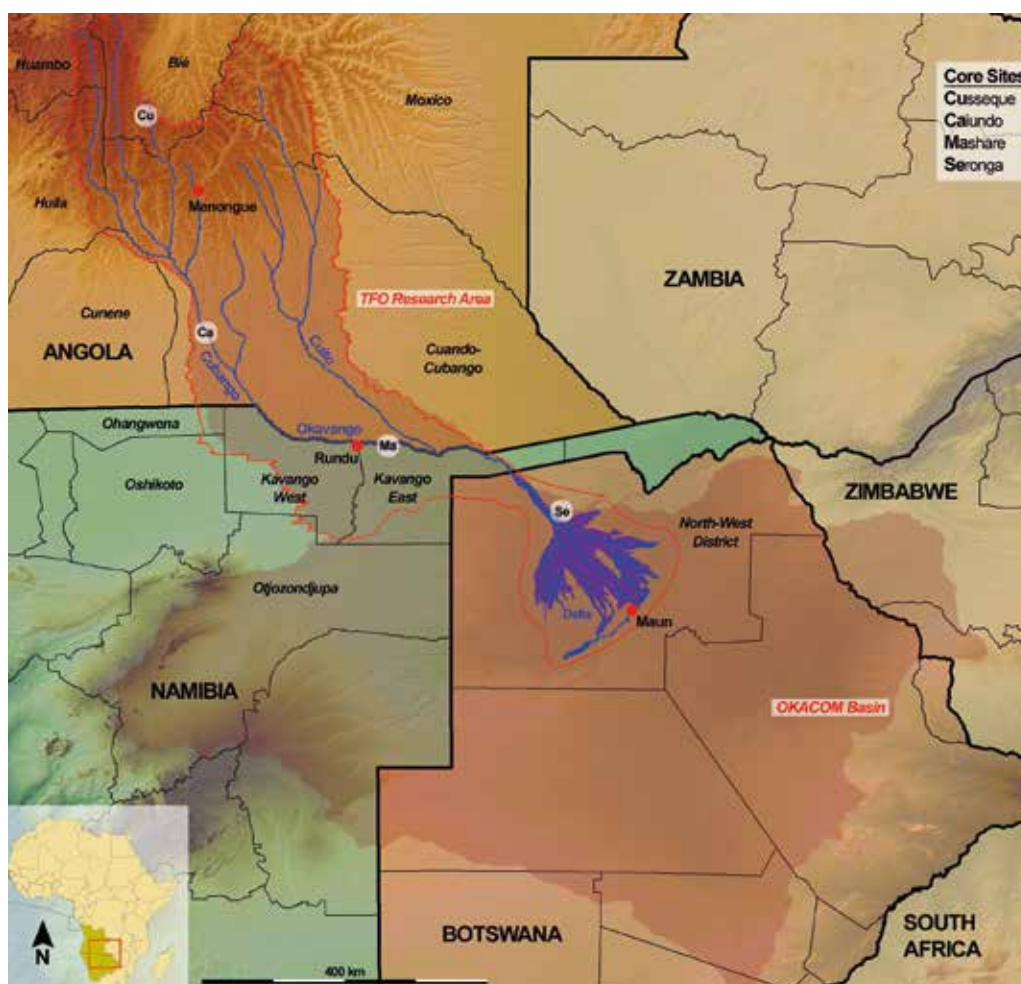
PUSH AND PULL RELATIONS BETWEEN VILLAGES AND CITIES FROM A RURAL PERSPECTIVE

Trade in natural resources between rural areas and the urban islands developing in them bears a huge conflict potential. In parallel to the traditional regulations on the use of natural resources, governments are intervening with privatisation and industrialisation in moves towards modern large-scale farming. Other conflicts arise through the shift from traditional techniques to quick wins as well as from social to individual benefiting. Our author depicts the push and pull relations of cities (and the world) to villages located in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin – a transboundary catchment area in Southern Africa.

By Stéphanie Domptail and Ernst-August Nuppenau

The Cubango-Okavango River Basin (CORB) is shared by Angola, Namibia and Botswana. The Cubango-Okavango River has its source in the plateau of Huambo in Angola and flows across the borders between Angola, Namibia and Botswana to end in the world-famous inner delta of the Okavango. Listed as a World Heritage Site since 2014, the delta is one of the largest protected wetlands on Earth. About 600,000 people live in the CORB and derive their livelihoods primarily from natural resources, livestock and agriculture. According to the 2011 statistics, the population remains largely rural. Yet major cities in the river basin, such as Menongue (approx. 200,000 habitants) in Angola, Shakawe (approx. 6,700 habitants) in Botswana and especially Rundu, counting around 63,000 habitants and the second largest city after Windhoek in Namibia, have been growing rapidly since 2010. Since the end of the civil war in 2002, Angola has been working on clearing mines and rebuilding its transportation in the Kuando Kubango Province, CORB. The recent completion of the main road connecting the Angolan to the Namibian and Botswana parts of the basin will surely sharpen the already rapid trend in urbanisation. In other words, the region is currently being embedded in the global metabolism.

In a study within the research project 'The Future Okavango', we used a social ecology approach and a political ecology perspective to investigate human-nature relationships in three villages of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin: the Kimbo of Caulololo in Angola (village of Cusseque), Mashare in Namibia and Seronga in Botswana. While Caulololo and Mashare are both located on the main road from the upper catchment to the Okavango Delta, Seronga, while larger, lies on the other side of the river and can only be reached by ferry and 4*4 vehicles. Our aim was to quantify how the villages use the resources of their environment to function and to which extent they exchange with the outside world.



Source: Jan Wehberg

A constructive approach complements this initial picture, in which we report and reflect on conflicts reported in 2013 by 80 stakeholders of the different countries on the use of natural resources. How are some resource use conflicts related to push and pull relations of the villages to cities and the rest of the world?

VILLAGE EXCHANGES WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

At present, the smallholder agricultural sector in the CORB produces only a very limited sur-

plus of mainly millets, maize and cassava, and the only agricultural food flows from the rural areas to urban and global world worth mentioning are in Angola, and even there, they are limited. However, wild resources, such as fish, game, medicinal plants, timber, honey, thatch grass and reeds (serving as construction material for people's huts) are transported in increasing amounts from rural areas to cities but also to the countries directly outside the CORB, or even sometimes as export flows, also illegal ones, to further away countries (reportedly South Africa for timber and China for some poached animals). For instance, in Caulololo in

Angola, agricultural products are sold at a share of 20 per cent in dry mass, while as much as 60 per cent of the hunted or collected wild fruits, vegetables and game are sold and hardly consumed at all. Honey as well as wild fruits and vegetables provide an important export to city markets and a source of cash. Honey from the larger Cauololo region (Chitembo municipality) is well-known throughout Angola, and the demand for it is rising. It also contributes greatly to the local diet in the more isolated village of Seronga. At the time of reporting, in 2014, charcoal made from local timber in Cauololo was also produced and sold by the roadside, albeit to a very limited extent. Its quantitative importance ought to have risen since then. In return, the flow of imports coming into the villages consists of communication and care products, but significantly also of energy (gasoline) and food. In 2014 and 2011, as much as 27 per cent and 40 per cent of the food (counted in energy units – calories) was imported in Cauololo and Seronga respectively. However, the bulk of the food items had low nutritional value, as it largely consisted of white flour-based products and manufactured alcohol.

THE CONFLICT OF MODERNITY

In the course of the study, stakeholders expressed a fruitful diversity of visions and strategies of land use for the long-term sustainable development of the basin. Among these, there were two key conflicting notions of agricultural production, with proponents of rural development facing proponents of a green revolution. The first group argued for the support of smallholders to improve their agricultural production with less environmental damage. The modernisation of agriculture would be led by smallholders as actors of innovations. The second group aimed to achieve an increase in yields and the production of world commodities via a high-input/high-output logic. The latter notion is triggered by the need articulated by the nations sharing the CORB to feed their urban population, reduce their food imports, and export some commodities while creating local employment. Some see the end of the smallholder agriculture approaching. This would mean in theory that most smallholders would either migrate to cities or become landless farm workers. One could argue that the first group prioritise the immediate well-being of the local rural people, while the second the well-being of the nation, including its urban population and economic aspirations.

Modernisation efforts in the direction of a green revolution are taking place today in the

GOVERNING LAND ALLOCATION AND LAND USE

From a governance perspective, a characteristic feature of the basin is that the customary system still operates aside from the formal statutory legal system. Traditional authorities exist all over the CORB; in Namibia, they are still organised in Kingdoms. Their power and responsibilities vary strongly from one country to the other. But throughout the basin, land in the rural areas is allocated by the village headman or headwoman, while he or she also regulates access to and collection of natural resources from the wild. Even today, land disputes in Namibia are settled by the traditional court. In parallel, the statutory system has also independently developed policies and laws for the protection of natural resources. In principle, the states of the basin strive to consult stakeholders, for instance through the establishment of provincial boards. Besides, new institutions such as Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) schemes, conservancies and Community Forests (CF) are presented as the devolution of management rights over resources from the wild from the state to communities. However, whether this really is the case is heavily disputed.

THE HUMAN FACET IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The recent peace has increased the pressure on natural resources in the CORB from different perspectives. First, countries now have safe access to the natural resources, including the Cubango-Okavango River, one of the few permanent rivers of Namibia and Botswana, in order to fulfil their national development aims. Thus, new actors stemming from outside the rural areas and sometimes even from outside the CORB have started competing with the local population and smallholders for land and resources.

Second, the infrastructure in building is creating a new connection between the rural areas of the basin and the cities. The infrastructure and the dynamism of the region to develop have increased the demand and created new markets for natural resources. Thus, the CORB rural natural resources now feed into global cash and material flows.

implementation of state production units in Namibia (Green schemes) and of private fazendas, large commercial farms, as well as major agricultural schemes such as the Angolan-Chinese rice production scheme in Longa, Angola. In parallel, the three countries are running reforms in land tenure towards the privatisation of land and the intensification of land use. Land registration and land-use planning are being put in place which foresee an agricultural production on fixed and permanently used pieces of land. These initiatives clash with the traditional slash-and-burn practices of smallholders in the basin and may have deterring effects. For instance, smallholders were deforesting more land than needed at the time of reporting in order to secure the option of rotating land in the future despite the change in the land attribution system. To adapt to the new context, they would need to re-organise their farming system. Yet, they lack knowledge and cash resources as well as support. Local stakeholders blame the government for constraining their livelihoods while bringing in little support to help them adapt and improve their practices.

OVERHARVESTING, ILLEGAL HARVESTING AND POACHING

“There are some changes that I have observed in people. Some of them are by all means

trying to live, to get some income. Now, most of them are concentrating on cutting grass, which was not done in the past. This is not good. Because by cutting the grass, they have to burn the forest again for the grass to regrow faster, which is putting a very heavy burden on the forest. And some of the species are getting extinct.”

Regional stakeholder, Namibia

In all three countries, stakeholders are expressing their concern with regard to the rising extraction of natural resources, for instance of charcoal-making in the Cauololo region or the thatch-grass business in Mashare and fish and reeds extraction in Seronga. The amount and methods of harvesting and the development of legal and illegal markets are criticised more than the harvest itself. Under these conditions, and subject to the growing demand from cities, businesses and the outside world, these natural resources are increasingly perceived not only as subsistence items, but also as commodities. Our analysis shows that a small number of individuals are even specialised in the collection and retail of natural resources from the village to the city, both in Seronga and in Mashare. While most stakeholders at higher governance levels blame the communities and smallholders for the excessive extraction, the latter report conflicts over the harvesting of sand, wood or grasses involving outsiders coming to grab re-

sources in a community's territory. Currently, neither the traditional authorities nor the modern statutory approach of prohibition (e.g. hunting bans, seasonal fishing bans, establishment of permits) nor the combination of both in the form of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in Botswana and Community Forests (CF) in Namibia seem to succeed in effectively controlling these trends. Initially, CBNRM and CF schemes are institutional innovations aiming to devolve management rights from the government to the communities. Yet, stakeholders at various governance levels have denounced the little decision freedom that communities de facto enjoy, leaving their individual members with a feeling of restricted access to resources for their own direct use. The return compensation is an often ill-organised flow of cash which fails to reach the bulk of the community members. Yet, poaching in Botswana and illegal timber logging in Namibia do occur, maybe also as a form of resistance. In Botswana, some stakeholders fear that state control may sharpen and even involve the military.

We argue that the new tools used by the statutory governance system are based on modern values. These are, for instance, the need to protect nature from humans rather than their interacting with it, as transported through the hunting ban in Botswana. Besides, the value of cash versus the subsistence economy is strengthened by the fact that permits have to be purchased in cash. Thus, some of the measures of the statutory system may contribute to alienating the smallholders from their subsistence culture and challenge their land use. In addition, the measures are administered from distant city offices, away from the rural reality.

TRADE-OFFS IN LAND USE WITHIN VILLAGES

Increasing links with city and further markets and their pull effect contribute to driving land use in rural areas. Some smallholders or individuals respond via a change in practices, while others seek to maintain their traditional livelihoods. Trade-offs between new and traditional land uses may arise within villages. In Angola, the urban demand for energy in the form of charcoal has stimulated the deforestation of major areas surrounding the largest cities of Menongue and Cuito. In the medium term, deforestation has a significant ecological impact on the Angolan woodlands and on the agricultural systems. Indeed, access to sufficient forest lands is the key prerequisite

for the sustainable shifting cultivation systems that were still in practice in the Cauololo region in 2013.



Charcoal smoke repels insects.

Photo: Stéphanie Domptail

But there is also an immediate trade-off. Not only is the current local charcoal production technique little efficient, but the smoke generated also repels insects, including bees. Yet, in the Cauololo region (Chitembo municipality), honey is more than a cash crop. It is traditionally a key energy and food source for the community that is also used for its medicinal virtues, as well as being processed into wine and playing an important role in social gatherings. The ensuing land-use conflict is that honey has to be collected far away from the charcoal pits, which are often located along the road.

A second aspect of the conflict is social. Honey is collected traditionally and requires specific skills and climbing; the harvest is seasonal, and so is the cash flow. The skills are held by experienced and older men who traditionally pass them on to the younger generation. Yet, younger people seem to be losing interest in this activity as the charcoal market expands. Indeed, the production of charcoal is described by honey-makers as an activity of younger men seeking immediate means of acquiring cash and no longer willing to take the physical and time risks related to honey collection. To a certain extent, the honey/charcoal trade-off represents a clash between values of younger and older members of the communities and villages, including individual versus social values. The youth are seeking ways to engage more quickly in the cash economy, and this often relates to activities which are conducted by individuals and where cash is appropriated by individuals.

The clash between the individual and social values is also apparent in a conflict mentioned

in a Namibian village opposing a smallholder who had fenced off a portion of the communal and common rangelands to increase his productivity of livestock and profit from the developing urban market in Rundu. He was in fact hogging resources from other community members and blocking passage. This, of course, poses a serious threat to the community property rights and the traditional tenure system, as an individual is reaping the fruit from shared resources.

In general, not all community members react to the market signals by harvesting and selling natural resources. The disparity and individuality of the responses of households and within households has the potential to create a stratification of households within villages and tension within families.

THE THREE EFFECTS OF RURAL-URBAN DYNAMICS ON RESOURCE CONFLICTS

Rural-urban dynamics, along with other factors more specific to the CORB region, are increasingly shaping land and resource use and related resource conflicts in three ways. First, cities have a pull effect on the rural areas, driving an extraction of rural and local resources and foods to urban areas and to the distant outside world. Second, cities are vectors of the world cash economy regulating human exchanges in the global world. The flow of money within subsistence economies affects people's relationship with their natural resources, and probably also their relationships with one another. Third, cities may be conceived of as the location and symbol of the statutory law system which competes with the traditional one; often, their combination does not effectively lead to the sustainable management of resources. As a result, the stigmatisation of smallholders and rural citizens regarding overharvesting and degradation increases. Clearly, traditional rules are being put to the test by the changes in the institutional and economic context, but how exactly this takes place requires more research. The customary system seems bound to change – but must it disappear?

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