



“Summary of article by Peter G. Veit, Adolfo Mascarenhas, and Okyeante Ampadu-Agyei: African Development That Works” in Frontier Issues in Economic Thought, Volume 6: A Survey of Sustainable Development. Island Press: Washington DC, 2001. pp. 322-325

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### **“Summary of article by Peter G. Veit, Adolfo Mascarenhas, and Okyeante Ampadu-Agyei: African Development That Works”**

Despite the widely recognized failure of many traditional development programs in sub-Saharan Africa, many community-based initiatives have met with success. Between 1988 and 1991, the World Resources Institute, Clark University, and a number of African development institutions prepared 23 case studies of effective community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) from 10 countries as part of their joint “From the Ground Up” program. This article, which summarizes a longer WRI report titled “Lessons From the Ground Up: African Development That Works,” draws on those studies to identify seven key factors associated with effective CBNRM. Based on those lessons, six policy recommendations are offered.

#### **Seven key factors in effective community-based resource management**

**1. Reducing risks to existing sources of livelihood** — The goal of rural Africans in resource management is not conservation but rather sustainable use: it is designed to raise agricultural and livestock productivity to satisfy social and economic needs. Threats to rural livelihoods often increase the pressure on local resources. Those threats come from both within and outside the community, can be either natural or caused by humans, and may be gradual (population increases) or sudden (natural disasters, civil unrest). Whatever the source or severity, such threats cause communities to jeopardize long-term sustainability by overexploiting local resources.

On the other hand, when livelihoods are relatively free from danger, communities will practice CBNRM. Where household economies are diversified, such as with multiple crops or off-farm activities like trading or hired labor, rural livelihoods are more secure. Where the environment too is diverse and rich, economic opportunities are varied and farmers need not depend exclusively on one natural resource.

**2. Market incentives for sound CBNRM** — If environmental conservation is profitable, effective CBNRM will be promoted and will replace practices that degrade resources. People will engage in environmentally sound farming and animal husbandry only if they see such activities as profitable and if they believe such incentives will remain in place long enough for them to realize a profit. For example, people will engage in agroforestry only if they believe the market for future timber sales will be sustained until the trees mature and if they can support themselves until they do.

Sometimes, market incentives encourage CBNRM, for example in communities dependent on nuts or fruit that requires them to protect forests in a more sustainable manner. Sometimes, they do not. One Tanzanian community, responding to government incentives to increase maize production, brought so much land under cultivation that the local irrigation system collapsed under the strain.

**3. Cultural practices that promote CBNRM** — “Resource management is most likely to be sustainable when a culture — a shared system of values, beliefs, and attitudes, grounded and governed by traditional norms — encourages it.” (229) Given the difficulty of reshaping ingrained cultural practices, CBNRM tends to be practiced when local cultural practices encourage it and is difficult to implant when it does not.

Religious practices can encourage sound resource management. For example, in Liberia some villagers consider the Gbelaya River the home of the gods of fertility and rain, so all fishing is prohibited.

Traditional divisions of labor limit CBNRM by restricting the work of certain groups due to gender, age, or other reason. For example, land management is primarily women’s responsibility in most African societies. Due to household and child-raising responsibilities, women rarely have the time to fully practice CBNRM, such as in building terraces or improving irrigation systems. Similarly, traditional authority structures also influence resource management because they empower certain people, generally male elders, to control resources they do not manage.

**4. Security of access to land and other productive resources** — Security of land tenure is critical to sound resource management. Where people believe they have secure access to land and other resources, they make long-term investments that promote sustainable land use. The more secure they are, the greater will be their investment.

In most African states, most rural land is government-owned, a practice dating back to colonialism. Most land use is by leasehold. Even where such arrangements allow customary tenure, the farmer has no real legal protection, so no real security. Many government policies and practices discourage effective resource use. Often, to gain title inhabitants must clear the land, which promotes soil erosion.

Because many African governments cannot effectively manage much of the land they claim, most land remains in customary tenure, which often results in more sound resource management. Such systems are relatively adaptable to changing conditions.

**5. Organizational development and management skill in the community** — Resources are managed effectively where communities are well organized and have the skills to manage their resources. CBNRM also takes hold most often when resource users are able to coordinate their actions. Many factors contribute to such group cohesion: extended kinship ties; ethnic identity; similar and interdependent socioeconomic activities; shared interests; and mutual perceptions. Such factors inhibit competition and conflict while increasing cooperation.

Many of the most effective CBNRM practitioners derive from traditional organizational forms. They often rely on village rules and practices, customary users' rights, and local leaders. Organization can take many forms: village development committees in The Gambia, mobilization squads in Ghana, resistance councils in Uganda, village councils in Tanzania.

**6. Access to appropriate technology, materials, and resources** — The most effective CBNRM practices rely on local land, natural resources, household labor, capital, and indigenous knowledge. Given the growing scarcity of all of these elements, external inputs are often critical to the success of local CBNRM initiatives.

“Poverty and environmental degradation feed on each other in myriad ways, particularly in resource-based household economies. Most significantly, poverty keeps small-scale farmers from gaining access to critical inputs, thus limiting their management options and constraining sustainable development. Without the resources to participate and invest effectively, local people are often better off not even trying new management practices.” (238)

Government representatives, development agencies, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can provide needed ideas, knowledge, information, technologies, skills, capital, and material, but most assistance does not arrive when farmers most need it.

**7. Central government support** — CBNRM practices have the best chance of success where central governments support and legitimize such efforts. Though such support has the greatest impact when it takes the form of concrete project assistance that reaches local communities, even without such assistance governments can encourage sound resource management through policies and statements. These encourage local initiatives and help shift community behaviors and practices.

## **Recommendations for Effective Community-Based Natural Resource Management**

Based on these findings, the “From the Ground Up” researchers developed six policy recommendations, each based on concrete initiatives currently underway in at least one African nation.

**1. Policies and legislation that support sustainable development** -- National policies, with supporting legislation, need to link socioeconomic development with environmental management, clearly stating the country's goals in the areas of development and the environment.

**2. Market incentives for natural resource management** -- Market forces can be more effective than command-and-control regulations in promoting effective resource use. Governments should adopt a three-pronged approach. First, governments should encourage the development of resource-based economic opportunities in rural areas. Second, economic policies need to accurately account for resource-depletion in calculating the relative yields of production practices and ensure that sustainable production is more profitable than unsustainable practices. Third, the government must help put valuable resource-dependent economic activities in the hands of local people, particularly the poor and women.

**3. Security in land tenure and access to productive resources --** Farmers' access to land and resources must be protected, and policies and legislation should support sound land use and resource management. Governments should also recognize and build on the effective and equitable aspects of customary tenure rights.

**4. Decentralization --** In general, local governments, NGOs, and grassroots organizations are better positioned to respond to local needs than is the central government.

**5. Incorporation of independent input into government decision-making --** Grassroots organizations, NGOs and other civil groups should play a critical role in ensuring that government policies are environmentally sound. Business leaders are increasingly being incorporated into economic policies, but institutions driven by profit motives often do not make the best decisions when it comes to resource use.

**6. Direct support for rural farmers --** Governments need to increase support for local farmers, including technical assistance, training, and financial assistance.

“The 23 ‘From the Ground Up’ case studies testify to the wealth of unheralded local knowledge and capability in rural Africa, and to the interest and desire of millions of rural resource-users to manage their own resources. CBNRM will grow as more responsibility, authority, and capacity are handed over to the resource users.” (256)

(The 23 case studies are listed in an appendix to the article.)