

Who Owns the Elephants? Neoliberal Environments and Recentralizing Natural Resource Governance in Southern Africa.

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Changes in governance of natural resources involve a reconfiguration of claims and rights over natural resource and thus are fundamentally about changing the relationship between the state and citizens. In the 1990s, there were several examples of democratizing decentralized community based approaches to natural resource management (CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe, ADMARE and LIRDP in Zambia, CBNRM in Botswana, Conservancies in Namibia). In southern Africa the end of Apartheid, and other minority racial governments in Namibia and Zimbabwe, and the end of civil war in Mozambique in 1992, all were political moments that supported such initiatives. Donors and civil society actors were able to capitalize on these to extend the efforts at democratization in other arenas including natural resource governance. In other instances, such as Zambia and Tanzania, the economic crisis and ensuing structural adjustment policies provided the conditions for bottom-up, participatory approaches. While decentralization and privatization are analytically distinct, often in implementation both have undertaken simultaneously. This is especially the case of policy making since the 1990s, where the distinction between decentralization and privatization' has often been blurred. Policies and projects that may involve transfer of authority to lower levels also tend to include a heavy element of public-private partnerships, that privilege economic rationality and markets.. The last decade in Africa has seen a reversal or stalling of democratic reforms that were initiated in the 1990s. A similar trend is evident in natural resource governance, where states across southern and eastern Africa states are reconsolidating central authority over natural resources and concentrating power in the executive branch. In Botswana, for example, where the executive branch has been growing stronger, the government is taking back more control over natural resource governance, among other reasons, to block potential indigenous claims of land in state reserves. Critics argue that these trends in recentralization subvert local claims and rights. This paper examines the implications of recentralization of natural resource governance for individual and group rights in neoliberal environments. By using practice theory as a conceptual frame the paper: (a) examines how citizens experience, demand and exercise these rights over natural resources;(b) identifies the range of strategies both government and civil society have considered when discrepancies between individual and group rights are debated; (c) highlight creative accommodations and repertoires of resistance by civil society.