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Rising to the challenge: A framework for optimising value in collaborative natural resource governance

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ABSTRACT

Complexities of the post-NPM era have resulted into a new governance approach based on 'collaboration', a network-based model that links various stakeholders [state and non-state actors], ostensibly to maximise public value. The 'consensus model' has its underpinning 'rules of the game'; without which collaborative outcomes may end up being conflictual and counter-productive. Adopting a critical stage review, this paper draws mainly from theoretical and recent empirical literature to unpack the factors that catalyse successful collaborative natural resource governance. We reflect on these to design an 'ABC framework' aimed at providing signpost to agencies, governments and conveners of collaboration on how to execute this *socio-technical* process to maximise value. The framework hinges on three broad pillars: *A*dopting and advancing human skills, *B*uilding integrity and legitimacy and *C*reating a sense of attachment to the resource in question. We discuss these with specific indicators synchronized from recent natural resources collaboration experiences in the literature.

> *Mostly people and communities hold on to a perception that "their interests directly conflict with the other party's interests, even when creative win-win solutions are possible"* (Bazerman, *1986:128*)

1. Introduction

A much trumpeted approach to forest resources governance, especially from the 20th century is one that adopts a network governance approach, a multi-actor regime (Muller, 2010). This approach has become very popular and emanates mainly from lessons derived from the failure of the former approach, which tended to be too bureaucratic, centralised, state monopolised and, worse of it all, regarded local communities as destroyers of the environment and resources (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). The thinking of that time was based on "environmental management" that depended much on the technical know-how and expertise of state agencies, a bureaucratic and monopolised environmental approach; however, there has since been a paradigm shift towards what is known as environmental governance. The term *governance* suggests that various actors including state agencies are involved. According to Mitchell (2013), the concept of environmental management involves "actual decisions and actions concerning policy and practice regarding how resources and the environment are appraised, protected, allocated, developed, used, rehabilitated, remediated and restored, monitored and evaluated" (Mitchell, 2013:7). The notion of management connotes a hierarchical, top-down policy process where state agencies are pervasive and mostly influence policies through command and control as well as a great deal of reliance on expert knowledge. However, with the 'age of networks' that developed mostly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been a paradigm shift towards an emphasis on a 'people', 'stakeholders' and 'communities', where policies regarding natural environmental resources are devised through a deliberative democratic process (Chambers, 2003). This approach has become, *inter alia*, known as collaborative environmental governance or co-management. For the purpose of this paper, co-management and collaborative natural resource governance have been used interchangeably to mean the new governance system that emphasizes on different stakeholders [forging allegiance between state and non-state actors] to prudently and methodically govern natural resources. (See Tables 1–3.)

Singleton (1998:7) defines co-management as associated with "governance systems that combine state control with local, decentralised decision making and accountability and which, ideally, combine the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of each". The process through which state agencies forge links with resource communities, local leaders and groups and local institutions promises value to both state agencies and local communities. However, in most cases, it appears that state agencies tend to be oblivious of the *cumulative net value* of collaboration, and are often tempted to think that value flows only to their partners or community members. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) provide a critical teaser that if we were to ask for a fundamental reason as to why agency staff would want to collaborate with other actors or community members to manage natural resources, we are likely to hear

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Table 1
Factors for effective CNRG.
Source: Authors' compilation from recent literature.

Skills and experiences of agencies	Jones (2004) and Reed et al. (2013)
Context and institutional fit	Folke et al. (2007), Nelson and Agrawal (2008) and Plummer and Hashimoto (2011)
'Good will' of agencies and quality of approach	Idrissou et al. (2011a), Idrissou et al. (2011b), Davies and White (2012) and Birnbaum et al. (2015)
Role of institutions, power relations, benefits	Castro and Nielsen (2001), Buizer and Van Herzele (2012), Saarikoski et al. (2010), Idrissou et al. (2011a) and Idrissou et al. (2011b)
Greater autonomy to people and groups	Agrawal and Chhatre (2007) and Coulibaly-Lingani et al. (2011)
Community and group harmony, social network, stakeholder approach	Crona and Bodin (2006), Khanal (2007), Prell et al. (2009) and Scott (2012)
Neutral arbiter	Ford et al. (2002), Gray (2003), Berkes (2009) and Margerum (2011)
Relating to the natural resource	Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000)

laughable responses from agency staff. Some of these answers would perhaps be "the law requires this", or "it is politically correct" or an "agency leader's mandate", among other ridiculous answers, which suggest that most people do not know the actual value of collaborating with communities. We argue in this paper that collaborative environmental governance, when effectively carried out, provides a win-win solution for both the state agencies and the communities in question. The value it provides to state agencies is summarised in an argument by Putnam (1995) and forcefully brought home by Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000). The idea of collaboration is the foundation for developing 'social capital' – trust, legitimacy, norms and networks of relationships – which could lead to a better, more effective and efficient policy outcomes (Putnam, 1995; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). A more appropriate reason for collaboration and effective participation of communities is that "collaboration can lead to better decisions that are likely to be implemented and at the same time, better prepare agencies and communities for future challenges" (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000:23). 'Value' as used in this paper, denotes the extent to which natural resource collaboration provides mutual benefits to state agencies and the collaborating communities. See Fig. 1 below.

1.1. Developed by authors from Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000)

Whilst the above is the ideal value expected from collaboration, there is ample empirical evidence to suggest that poorly devised collaboration leads to unintended consequences that are even more devastating than the situation which prevailed before the flawed collaboration (Mwakaje et al., 2013; Silva and Mosimane, 2013; Kamoto et al., 2013; Scheba and Mustalahti, 2015; Thondhlana et al., 2015). Recent evidence suggests that this governance approach may at times result in elite capture, poor accountability, low community involvement (Kamoto et al., 2013; Thondhlana et al., 2015); domination by expert knowledge and community co-optation and disillusionment (Ribot, 2009; Scheba and Mustalahti, 2015); the potential to create new conflicts and even rekindle latent ones (Castro and Nielsen, 2001; Thondhlana et al., 2015). Collaboration ideally ought to come with benefits; if these benefits appear marginal or illusory, then sustainability of the process appears bleak. For instance, Scheba and Mustalahti (2015:8) put it succinctly: "in Mihumo/Darajani there was a general feeling of deep disappointment. … very little has materialised of what was promised; frustration, anger and disappointment about the lack of benefits have become dominant feelings in the village".

Given such experiences, among others, prospective collaboration or co-management arrangements with communities or groups are likely to face initial challenges. How could practitioners and conveners approach collaboration so as to meaningfully overcome these hurdles? Using a critical stage review, this article discusses pointers essential to natural resource collaboration, this we do through an ABC framework.

2. Methodology

This treatise analyzes from existing theoretical and empirical studies, mainly drawn from journal articles and relevant books to assess the challenges encountered in collaborative natural resource governance. The literature search covered all terms and terminologies as approximately related to collaborative natural resource governance: "collaborative natural resource management", "CNRM", "networked environmental governance", "co-management", and "collaborative environmental governance". In the process, we combined adjectives related to common obstacles faced in the collaborative processes; these words included 'challenges' 'constraints' 'problems', 'setbacks' and 'hindrances'. Finally, we also did include adjectives related to ways to enhancing the process; the words included 'value' 'enhancing' 'promoting' 'successful' 'effective'. The different adjectives and the concept of collaborative natural resource governance (CNRG) were combined in different ways to obtain a pool of more relevant literature on the study. The following three search domains were mainly adopted based on their relevance to the study and accessibility to the researchers: *Sciencedirect*, *Tandonline*, *and Google Scholar*. The large pool of articles from these sources was initially sorted for relevance by skimming through their abstracts. After this heuristic process, all abstracts were independently reviewed by each of the three authors. At the end of the process, authors met to eliminate duplicates and made a shortlist of abstracts for detailed and systematic review. The individual themes raised in each paper were then categorized and in various stages; through this, we were able to arrive at a more comprehensive classification of factors [ABC framework] which combine most of the elements discussed in the review papers and the relationships among them.

3. A Review of issues associated with CNRG

Co-management of natural resources promises high public value (see Fig. 1), yet contemporary experiences suggest that such processes are mostly challenging, *albeit*, not impossible to manage in practice (Hahn et al., 2006; McClanahan et al., 2009). Since co-management is socio-technical in nature, the complexity of societies and groups makes such ventures laborious; however, recognizing some of these potential challenges and adopting the right skills required for collaboration, the process could be more effective. This section highlights some key issues that constrain the collaboration process and discusses pointers to help address them.

3.1. Common constraints agencies encounter in collaborative natural resource governance

3.1.1. Poor experiences of co-management arrangements

Co-management arrangements are carried out with socio-economic and ecological benefits attached; however, observations tend to suggest that some co-managements appear not to have been very successful in qualitatively reducing poverty levels of communities and have not been effective in empowering the 'have-nots' in societies where these models have been implemented (Jentoft, 2000; Jentoft et al., 2003; Béné et al., 2004; Kamoto et al., 2013; Scheba and Mustalahti, 2015; Thondhlana et al., 2015). In some cases co-management processes end up reinforcing or even increasing the disparity between the poor and the rich by buttressing the existing social order. In other words, actors who are economically poor and politically weak appear not to experience any real impact in terms of equity, effective participation and benefit sharing, as observed by Wilson et al. (2006) in the fishery cases of four study countries – Philippines, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Indonesia; the same applies to India's forest management (Nayak and Berkes, 2008). With such experiences and news around, community members