

Sustainability and people empowerment

- a lessons learnt report from Ereto III (June 2009)

Introduction

The main goal of Ereto NPP when it started 11 years ago, was to support the pastoralists of Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) and the entire district of Ngorongoro “to become independent and self managing within the overall framework of the principles of multiple land use and conservation laid down in the NCA Ordinance of 1959”.

The last phase of Ereto NPP (Ereto III), ending in June 2009, has focused on phasing out activities in the most sustainable manner. A cornerstone in this process is to support the empowerment of communities to sustain interventions funded under Ereto NPP, and - more importantly - to create opportunities for communities to take further action on their own development. As part of the phasing out strategy, Ereto facilitated community empowerment through the formation of twelve Community Based Organisations (CBOs) at the local (ward) level in the areas where Ereto has been working. The creation and operation of these CBOs is a strong contribution to empowerment of the local communities and likewise a fundamental aspect in the sustainability of the interventions and investments made under Ereto.

The following report will be about the lessons learnt in the process of supporting empowerment in Ereto’s work with user groups, customary institutions and the CBOs. As the report is about empowerment and CBOs, it is considered important to let the people directly affected and involved with the CBOs to also speak for themselves, and hence, the report communicates a good number of direct statements from people involved.

Context

The project area in Ngorongoro District is the home to some 100.000, mostly Maasai, pastoralists practicing a mobile and extensive livestock production system. The district is large and remote. People have limited access to government services, and the few services that are available are not adapted to the pastoral way of life. Poverty is widespread. Local government in the District is elected, however the current political system is generally perceived not representing the interests of local pastoralist communities and far removed from their daily life. Customary institutional structures on the other hand, organise many aspects of daily life within the pastoralist communities, and these customary leaders are to a large extent respected by the people.

The Ngorongoro Conservation Area is a multiple land use area where the conservation authority has implemented many measures restricting the development and access of people and has only to a limited extent supported the local development initiatives. Little understanding has been shown of the fact that the landscape has been managed by pastoralists for generations after generations. Ereto has proved that pastoral production goes very well hand in hand with conservation, in no places has conservation values been destroyed from Ereto support to development. Based on the history of the area, the people and the conservation authority mistrust each other. In this context of mutual mistrust, the Pastoralist Council (PC) has been established by the conservation area authority to promote development. It consists of the various village and ward elected politicians and of some appointed members, it does not have independence from the conservation authority and it is by most people of the area not seen as truly representing them.

Generally, the pastoral production sector in Tanzania is characterised by low level of government support and acceptance. The pastoralists (around 1½ million people in Tanzania) living from mobile pastoral production are facing increasing difficulties in surviving due to loss of land and lack of supportive policies.

The empowerment process

Since the district government structures are not seen by people as being really supportive of the local communities, and since the Pastoralist Council in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area likewise is seen as being unable to promote the interests of local communities, it was strongly argued by the communities that Ereto should seek to empower the local people through support to the formation of CBOs. These would then take charge of the relevant local level project funded interventions after the phase out of Ereto. The process for local communities to establish CBOs was consequently fully supported by Ereto during the final 1½ years of operation.

Ereto has throughout the years assisted in empowering local level user groups to engage with project processes in relation to management of water development, restocking of poor and destitute community members, development of animal health services and promotion of women's economic activities. The process of forming CBOs has focused on organising these user groups that have worked with the project, together with many other community members, into CBOs in each locality (ward). The CBOs are registered entities, with members from local communities, with locally elected leadership, with strong participation of customary leadership, without political party involvement and with a strong focus on how to promote local development and furthering of rights and interests of local communities. The user groups, and later the CBOs, are perceived by the communities as a major step in empowering communities to decide on their own development as well as strengthening the communities' to hold government and conservation authorities accountable. Although Ereto has long history of seeking to support local representative organisations for development and empowerment, previous efforts have failed largely due to resistance from conservation authorities to any form of real representative organisations being formed within the conservation area. Having CBOs, which are strongly rooted at local level, is seen to be a more sustainable approach to community empowerment.

Outcomes

The user groups have implemented a range of development activities in relation to water, restocking, veterinary service and women economic activities. They have amongst others ensured that Ereto funded initiatives are continued in terms of maintenance of water schemes; continuation of the revitalised clan-based mutual assistance system where people in need are assisted with livestock; continued community support to community based animal health services; and protection of revolving funds in relation to women economic activities. The CBOs are working and, although they are still new, they do have an enthusiastic support from the community members. The CBOs can ensure that communities are better organised to defend common interests. And CBOs can challenge the way the conservation authorities address development in the NCA and also challenge the established political leadership at the various levels in the district.

The CBOs have accessed and raised funding to implement local development initiatives, and they are starting to function as organisers of local development activities. District authorities and the Pastoralist Council in the conservation area are recognising the CBOs, and have expressed interest in linking up with them for implementation of development activities. Some members (around 60) of the CBO executive committees from all the supported CBOs have undergone a series of trainings in planning, leadership and organisational development. Strategic plans for the CBOs have been produced in a participatory manner and the CBOs are, using their own funding and with their own initiative, in the

process of establishing a forum for all the CBOs to meet. Eventually this forum can represent the CBOs on issues of common interests, providing the communities with a common voice and promoting members' rights to development. The forum can also represent CBOs towards potential partners.

Views on empowerment and the CBOs

Views of some of the involved people in the local communities are given below:

“Our CBO is going to make our development more effective, we will coordinate the various development initiatives in our area, and we will be able to link up with new partners who will collaborate with us in our development efforts”

“Our CBO is like a marketplace, where people get to learn about things, our CBO will make sure that outsiders know about our development ideas and needs”

“The fact that our CBOs have been registered and we are here in operation is a strong sign that we have more power to stand up for our rights as the people from this area”

“No one is going to tell us what to do; our CBO is our own organisation, and unlike the government system, we are not accepting orders from the government - so only we decide on what we do in our CBO and on what we say. We can go straight to authorities with our demands without asking permission from anyone”

“We are using our CBO to demand accountability of local government and other organisations; we are a watchdog to ensure that promises are being kept by the various stakeholders”

“Our CBO is a way of mixing customary and modern leadership that can take up the challenges we face today, and the CBO is for the people – just like we as customary leaders are made to take an oath that we will work for the common good”

“Having our CBO is like giving us a voice, responding to our real needs for development and rights”

“We have several land conflicts in our area, and we use the CBO to fight for our land rights”

“When we go together with other CBOs in our neighbouring areas we can share experience and unite with others”

View of District Executive Director of Ngorongoro District:

“We are happy with the CBOs as they can be used to implement Government policies and development. We will monitor and audit the CBOs so that they are working according to government policies and so they are not cheating”

Lessons learned on CBOs and empowerment

Although the process of forming CBO has been relative short, there are a number of important lessons learned relate to sustainability and empowerment. The key lessons learned are:

- Supporting the formation of CBOs consisting of active local people, customary leadership, and incorporating local user groups is a feasible way of facilitating local ownership, empowerment, and sustainability of donor funded investments
- CBOs can, in a relatively short time after formation, start organising and undertaking small-scale important local development efforts (water, animal health etc)

- The concept of local CBOs is understood differently by the local communities and by government agencies. Whereas local CBO members clearly see the CBOs as empowering them and giving them voice, the government authorities are more likely to see the CBOs as purely working for local development, through implementing government policies. Government does not seem to feel that the empowerment aspect of the CBOs is important
- When supporting the formation of CBOs it is clearly an advantage that the process builds on previous positive collaboration with user groups and various local committees so that trust is established. This enables a relatively quick common understanding because the communities concerned have already been involved as partners in various development activities
- In a context of limited support from government authorities to specific groups of relatively marginalised people, it is necessary for development partners to look for alternative ways of providing support to these marginalised groups. In this respect use of CBOs and civil society is a good option
- Building CBOs structures from within the local society and taking a point of departure in locally accepted institutions facilitates the process of empowerment. Involvement of widely respected customary leadership in the CBO leadership is crucial in ensuring accountability and community support to the CBOs
- Linking empowerment with tangible livelihood improvements and poverty reduction efforts ensures that empowerment becomes directly related to the life of the people involved. Hence, CBOs should combine the immediate focus of promoting local development and livelihoods with that of promoting rights of its local constituency
- Information and decision making processes on forming CBOs and electing the various CBO leadership must be allocated sufficient time (at least ½ year) in order to ensure local ownership. In addition, CBO support should be done in several locations simultaneously in order to get a critical mass and to promote the effective use of involved resources. Moreover, the focus on several locations ensures that the CBOs can learn from each other (and push each other) during training and formation processes
- The CBOs have to be local in the sense of covering an area where people have common interests in terms of development, can meet without large costs (i.e. can to a large extent travel to and from the same day) and have some locally accepted common institutional structures that cover the area
- Membership of CBOs grows as soon as the CBOs are seen to function. CBOs are understood to be for all in a given community. Membership fees as decided by the CBOs are relatively high, but since the CBOs leadership knows all the people in the area, members that cannot afford are accepted at lower membership fees
- Election process of the various CBO leadership and committees can be relatively easily undertaken in such a way that it respects democratic principles and good governance

- CBOs can be used to hold local politicians and government accountable and do create an alternative democratic space for local communities. CBOs are seen by the normal community members to be the most representative organisation at the local level. There is often a widespread feeling among people in marginalised areas that the official local government system is not properly representing or addressing community interests
- In an area where several communities feel that they have a common interest to share experiences, link up to other organisations, and to speak with a common voice on their rights and demands, it is useful to support the formation of an umbrella organisation of the CBOs. Such an organisation should be an organisation empowering people to take actions on their own development. With this follow issues of common voice and rights.
- Despite the strength that CBOs have in being rooted in the communities, most CBOs do not have strong capacity to develop proposals, report and account for funding in the normal required formats. When working with local CBOs, it is important to take the necessary time to provide coaching and assistance in developing these competences, and not to immediately impose conditions that cannot be met. Imposing conditions changes the CBO and removes it from community control
- CBOs can link to relevant CSOs, which will bring the communities voice forward into policy dialogue and debate, as well as provide CSOs with the legitimacy that is often unfortunately lacking.