Values of people and the environment. Implications for sustainable governance

Key Findings and Recommendations

Environmental rules and laws are insufficiently enforced
TFO’s governance analyses confirm that both statutory and customary authorities feel responsible for regulating natural resource management throughout the Okavango Basin. Nevertheless, it has also been observed that the effectiveness of different rules and laws related to natural resource management varies greatly. While the regulation of land access functions relatively well, the coordination of, inter alia, logging, grazing and hunting is rather ineffective, resulting in an unsustainable resources management.

On the one hand, insufficient enforcement results from a lack of capacity among lower-level authorities. Traditional authorities on the other hand have been increasingly weakened in their capacity to regulate natural resource management. Nevertheless, the wide community is still largely following customary law as far as it is in line with their deeply rooted cultural norms and beliefs.

A consequent subsidiary enforcement system is recommended. Within defined frames, communities should be given authority to determine and enforce their own laws. In cases when norms and social sanctions are insufficient to ensure environmental law compliance, the state should reliably step in.

Relation between traditional and national laws
Traditional and modern rules regulating the access to and the harvesting of natural resources need to be harmonized and strengthened. Institutional change is required in particular where new market opportunities encourage the commercialization of natural resources. Taking into account that it is especially costly for the states to provide institutional services in rural areas, the harmonizing of customary and statutory law can be an effective means to monitor and enforce natural resource laws. In particular in the context of community-based natural resource management programs by-laws should be developed which are more strongly based on deep-rooted norms. A consequent subsidiary enforcement system is recommended. Within defined frames, communities should be given authority to determine and enforce their own laws. In cases when norms and social sanctions are insufficient to ensure environmental law compliance, the state should reliably step in.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Challenges for society and governance
Ecosystems and social systems in the Okavango Basin are interwoven in very complex ways. People do have both, economic as well as perceptive, emotional and spiritual relationships with their surrounding environment. All these factors shape their values and influence their decisions with regard to ecosystem services. These interactions have to be seen as embedded in a globalizing world that rapidly transforms, and which demands similarly rapid adaptations to these changes. A responsible and social governance policy is faced with the challenge of identifying value-based decisions and frame conditions under which the extraction of goods, and the conversion and the destruction of ecosystems can be mitigated while taking into account the holistic nature of human valuation and environmental action.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The focus of the research project ‘The Future Okavango’ was on sustainable resource management in the Okavango Basin, comprising the adjacent regions of the Okavango River in Angola, Namibia, and Botswana.

Key Findings and Recommendations

A general debate about the values of people and their threatened environments under massive processes of global transformation is necessary. Policy needs to react to an increasing devaluation and commodification of resources.

- Natural resources continue to play a very important role in the livelihoods of households in the Okavango River Basin.
  - Policy supporting rural development should acknowledge the diversification of household livelihood strategies and the issue of (in)equality and social stratification.
  - Policies should secure more livelihood options (e.g. the regulation of casual labour, labour opportunities in the agro-industrial sector).

- People value material and immaterial properties of nature simultaneously.
  - A focus on market-based material or monetary valuation alone will not be successful in influencing a sustainable behaviour.
  - Under global transformations people and households increasingly face trade-offs between goods from nature and goods from other sources and thus increasing commodify natural resources.
  - Decision-makers should take into account the material and immaterial values of existing ecological and socio-cultural systems. A process of rapid transformation of subsistence land use systems towards cash-based consumer systems must be mitigated.
  - Development should not be considered only as driven by economic and cash-market-based values and incentives but also in terms of the continuous functioning of social-cultural systems and the ecosystem.

- Environmental rules and laws are insufficiently enforced.
  - Traditional and modern rules regulating the access to and the harvesting of natural resources need to be harmonized and strengthened.
  - A consequent subsidiary enforcement system is recommended.
Values of people and the environment. Implications for sustainable governance

Key Findings and Recommendations

Natural resources are collected by 98% of the households for the purposes of building, energy, food, medicine – and are increasingly sold for cash income. Natural resources continue to play a very important role in the livelihoods of households in the Okavango River Basin. In the TFO core sites of Cusseque, Mshare and Seronga, natural resources are collected by the majority of the households (above 98%) for the purposes of building, energy, food, medicine, and others. In each of the TFO core sites, specific items play a particularly important role: In Cusseque, extraction of honey amounts to 23 t and plays an important role in cash-income generation (11.5 t or 50% of harvest). In Mshare, the trade of thatch grass is already of high importance for 7% of households, and fish is increasingly becoming a commercial good. In Seronga, fish is a major contributor to food security, with 120 kg fish consumed per person per year for the whole population. However, grazing grass is by far the most important ecosystem good, and is extracted from the environment to the extent of 18 thousand tons per year. Yet, only 42% of the households own cattle.

But the use of natural resources is unevenly distributed across the rural households. Households making the most of the commercialization of natural resources are often endowed with more assets (knowledge, skills, transport possibilities, access to cash). For households that have access to the market, the retail of natural resources can be a springboard to a ‘modern’ industrial lifestyle. In parallel, there is a rising need for the sustainable management of these resources to mitigate the growing inequity and to preserve biodiversity.

Diversification and stratification of livelihoods

Policy supporting rural development should acknowledge the diversification of household livelihood strategies and the issue of (in)equity and social stratification within villages, in terms of wealth as well as the use of and access to agricultural assets and natural resources. In addition to agricultural development policies should also secure more livelihood options (e.g. the regulation of casual labour, labour opportunities in the agro-industrial sector). Since there may be unexpected outcomes of policies, e.g. the fact that access to cash may increase the collection of natural resources, holistic approaches for rural development and natural resource use are required for policy design.

Local land users experience material and immaterial values of nature simultaneously in everyday activities.

Stakeholders in the Okavango Basin value nature both for material (e.g. food, timber) and immaterial (e.g. belonging, religious) ecosystem services. Those services are typically not experienced in separate places and at separate times (e.g. work and leisure), but simultaneously, e.g. while fishing. Thus, changing land use and economic activities will not only change the material services attached to them but also the immaterial services provided during those activities or in those places.

Under global transformations people increasingly face trade-offs between goods from nature and goods from other sources which affect their valuations, and also their consumptive behaviour.

People in the Okavango Basin perceive their lives as being shaped by poverty, lack of jobs and deficits regarding development, and as part of a world that seems to be transforming towards ‘modernity’ with increased levels of consumption of things and services that are coming from ‘outside’. In a setup that was formerly dominated by subsistence, cash-incomes have now become enormously important. Cash is suddenly needed for all sorts of purposes (e.g. school fees, electricity) including to meet new desires for consumer goods (artificial hair, cell phones, airtime etc.). That means that people have started valuing their own lives with reference to those who have been successful in adapting to modernity. They overvalue things that they do not have. By the same token they tend to undervalue many of their natural resources. These things and services from nature are often being used and sold without even knowing their exact value; e.g. planks of timber, wild medicine, thatch grass. This whole process is driven by changing global structures and the advance of capitalism, and by an economic model that so far seems to be the main paradigm for environmental political decision making.

Policy answer to globalization

The significant and rapid advance of modernity comes along with 1) a transformation of formerly cashless land-use systems based on subsistence towards cash-markets, and 2) unprecedented levels of consumption of all sorts of new global goods requiring the input of all sorts of natural resources. This process requires a political mitigation or intervention. Decision-makers should take into account the material and immaterial values of existing ecological and socio-cultural systems. The advance of markets and investors purchasing land and natural resources or importing commodities offers short-term monetary opportunities, but also poses threat (like cash-driven commodification of charcoal, thatch, timber, honey). Development should not be considered only as driven by economic values and incentives, but also in terms of the continuous functioning of social-cultural systems and the ecosystem.