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Decentralization, Development, and Natural Resource Management in the Northwestern Kalahari Desert, Botswana

(Decentralized Authority: Community)

For centuries, local Ju/'hoansi San populations in Botswana's remote areas have *de facto* independently managed wildlife and plant resources, bolstered by a religious system emphasizing safeguarding of resources for future generations. The area is also occupied by Mbanderu. Legislation passed in the late 1980s allowed for community wildlife trusts to be established and granted *de jure* recognition of local management autonomy for some customary rights and responsibilities. The central government's interest and legislation have focused on wildlife for hunting and tourism, providing for conditional rights over the use and management of wildlife, contingent on resource sustainability, and not for ownership or autonomous control. Local wildlife trusts can oversee activities such as safari hunting, tourism, resource collection, and craft marketing and manage funds generated by exploiting resources under their management. The case study focuses on a wildlife trust, the /Xai/Xai Tlhabololo [Wildlife] Trust, in one small northwestern Botswana community, where decentralization has sometimes meant limited acknowledgement more than empowerment.

All adult community members belong to the /Xai/Xai Wildlife Trust, established in 1997 and officially registered with the government. The Trust receives technical assistance from the /Xai/Xai Community-Based Natural Resource Management Project, a joint effort of the Botswana government and the Netherlands Development Organization that began in 1994. The Trust concentrates on preserving cultural traditions and on enhancing the organizational capacity of the community to utilize and manage its natural resources. It engages in income-generating activities and works to diversify the local economy by expanding craft production and marketing, tourism, small-scale vending businesses, and food production. Trust members participate in training activities sponsored by several national and international agencies and development projects.

While recognizing local customary rights and responsibilities in law, the district councils and central government have actually increased their own authority, retaining control over most funding capacities. The central government



Ju/'hoan San (IKung) woman, resident of /Xai/Xai. In the traditional San social system, policy decisions rely on extensive public discussions in which all female and male adult community members have an equal say. There are about 300 Ju/'hoansi in 23 households living in /Xai/Xai today, and about 50 Mbanderu (Herero), in 4 households.

The complete Botswana case study, authored by Robert Hitchcock, is available online in the publications section of the BSP Web site at www.BSPonline.org.

government delineations of protected areas, communal lands, or institutional jurisdictions have often conflicted with local ones, limiting local access to land and resources. /Xai/Xai community members have sometimes perceived these differences as a means to exclude them from areas of traditional use, and have become concerned about their lack of legal title or usufruct rights to the land they still occupy and use. The present situation has also sparked internal community concerns. Some have seen the shift toward a community quota system not as a restriction on environmental destruction, but as an abrogation of their fundamental rights to hunt under traditional customary law. Others in /Xai/Xai have been concerned that local elites would take over the board of the Trust and thus control revenues from wildlife and natural resources management, though as safeguards community members are authorized to recall board members or call for a new election.

still sets the off-take quotas for wildlife and the wildlife management species lists. Central gov-

The Forest Ejidos of Quintana Roo, Mexico

(Decentralized Authority: Community)

This case study outlines an initiative for community-based management of harvesting and sales of mahogany and other economically valuable timber species in the tropical forests of Quintana Roo state, in Mexico's Yucatán

Peninsula. This initiative grew out of an early-1980s local movement to break away from a (bankrupt) state-owned timber monopoly and provide for timber revenues to go directly to local communities. With the political backing of then-governor Pedro Joaquín Coldwell, and extensive technical and financial support from a joint Mexican-German program, the *Acuerdo Mexico-Alemania* (AMA), in 1983 this initiative developed into the *Plan Piloto Forestal* (PPF—Pilot Forestry Plan), involving a partial transfer of powers to about 50 *ejidos* with considerable forested areas. *Ejido* refers to a legally recognized form of common property. By 1986 these *ejidos* had formally banded together in *sociedades* (societies), recognized under Mexican law as community enterprises dedicated to sustained-yield forest exploitation and joint sales. Prior to a



Mexican foresters measuring wood. In 1986, the *Acuerdo Mexico-Alemania* provided the impetus for the creation of formal associations of ejidos known as *sociedades civiles*, (civil societies), for-profit non-governmental organizations. Each ejido designates two ejidatario representatives for the delegate assembly of the sociedad to which it belongs. Each sociedad has a technical directorate staffed by professionally trained Mexican foresters, who work with ejidos to carry out forest inventories to determine species volumes and subsequently produce ejidal management plans that are approved by that ejido.

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