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## **The “community” produced to manage natural resources: a cross-reading of the CAMPFIRE (Zimbabwe) and ACAP (Nepal) programmes**

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### **Abstract**

In the 1980s, criticisms of radical conservation methods led to the emergence of community-based approaches to conservation. This policy reset by conservation institutions, states and researchers was based on the principle of devolving management rights to “communities”. Drawing on a cross-reading of this strategy within two community management programmes, in Nepal (ACAP) and in Zimbabwe (CAMPFIRE), this article seeks to explain how it was conceived in the context of the methodological framework developed by the School of the Commons, but also to show how such “communities” enable individuals and groups to become part of local power networks renegotiated around development and conservation. At the same time, the article seeks to understand how these public policies, although operating through different forms of territorial control exercised by the central government, sustain the advance of two ecological fronts that contribute to the redeployment of that control.

**Keywords:** community, community-based management, social reconfiguration, Nepal, Zimbabwe

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## Résumé

Dans les années 1980, les critiques des perspectives radicales de protection de la nature ont fait émerger des approches de conservation communautaire. Cette redéfinition des politiques par les institutions de conservation, les États et les chercheur·euse·s s'est appuyée sur des processus de décentralisation des droits de gestion au profit de « communautés ». À partir d'une lecture croisée de cette catégorie au sein de deux programmes de gestion communautaire au Népal (ACAP) et au Zimbabwe (CAMPFIRE), cet article a pour but d'explicitier la façon dont elle a été pensée dans le contexte de diffusion du cadre méthodologique de l'école des Communs, mais aussi de montrer comment cette « communauté » permet à des individus et à des collectifs de s'insérer dans des réseaux de pouvoir locaux renégociés autour du développement et de la conservation. Dans le même temps, il vise à saisir la façon dont ces politiques publiques, même si elles n'interviennent pas sur les mêmes formes de contrôle du territoire par l'État, contribuent à la progression de deux fronts écologiques qui servent à son redéploiement.

**Mots-clés :** communauté, gestion communautaire, recomposition sociale, Népal, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

In the early 1970s, radical and exclusionary approaches to the protection of nature—also described as a “fortress” (Brockington, 2002) or “coercive” (Peluso, 1993) conservation—came under heavy fire (Alexander and McGregor, 2000; West, Igoe and Brockington, 2006). In the history of nature conservation, this shift leads to the formulation of a “counter-narrative” (Adams and Hulme, 2001) centred around the idea of “community conservation” (Barrow and Murphree, 2001) and to the emergence of new models, among them Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM). By combining the modes of community-based governance with market-based processes, these models replaced the forms of state intervention that had predominated in the 1970s and 1980s (Sauvêtre, 2019). Their origins are to be found in a “change in US development doctrine” (ibid., p. 46) and in the growing influence of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>1</sup>-funded epistemic community of the School of the Commons (Aubert, 2010). Under these principles, the commons gradually became dominant first in the lexicon of conservation, and then in

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1. As noted by Pierre Sauvêtre, “Michel Horowitz, an anthropologist funded by USAID to devise solutions to the crisis in the Sahel in the 1970s was one of the first to argue for the positive effects of traditional community practices and [so-called] indigenous institutions on the sustainability of resource management systems.” (2019, p. 48)

that of development, backed by international institutions, governments, civil society or political society (in the sense of Chatterjee, 2004). CBNRM programmes in particular contributed to the definition of a “community” to which the rights to manage natural resources should be attributed. This “community” is often characterised as possessing a common set of norms, an idealised conception that belies more complex realities (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999).

This article develops a critique of the notion of “community” as applied by two CBNRM programmes initiated in the 1980s, Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in Nepal and Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) in Zimbabwe, which we studied within the context of our respective doctoral theses.<sup>2</sup> Although the forms of state-exercised territorial control in these two programmes are different, they both reflect the institutional design (Ostrom, 1990) of the School of the Commons.<sup>3</sup> Through a reading of their impact in Hwange District in Zimbabwe and the Annapurna region in Nepal, the article begins by exploring how the “communities” in these CBNRM programmes were initially conceived. The second part analyses how this exogenous social category had the effect of redistributing powers and legitimacies within village societies. The final section investigates how these public policies have contributed to the advance of two ecological fronts and to the production of spatial injustices.

In Nepal, we studied the village of Siddhing, which extends from an altitude of 1,700 m to 4,500 m in the Annapurna massif (figure 1). It is situated some three hours by trail from Pokhara, the country’s second city, in a humid subtropical climate. The main activities in the village, which has a population of around 1,000, are subsistence agriculture, small livestock farming, the gathering of wild medicinal plants and nature tourism such as trekking or observation of local fauna. The village’s economy is also highly dependent on overseas remittances or investments made possible by the emigration of household members. Since 2000, the village has been part of ACAP which aims to support ecotourism for purposes of development and conservation.

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2. These two pieces of doctoral research entailed long immersion in the field: 11 months in Zimbabwe and 18 months in the Himalayas. We undertook ethnographic studies of the village management committees and conducted life history interviews, and established commented walks and mapping workshops around the space used by the villagers.

3. These parallels explain how we were able to establish connections with the institutional and academic bibliographies we work with, as well as formulate a few footholds for comparative analysis.

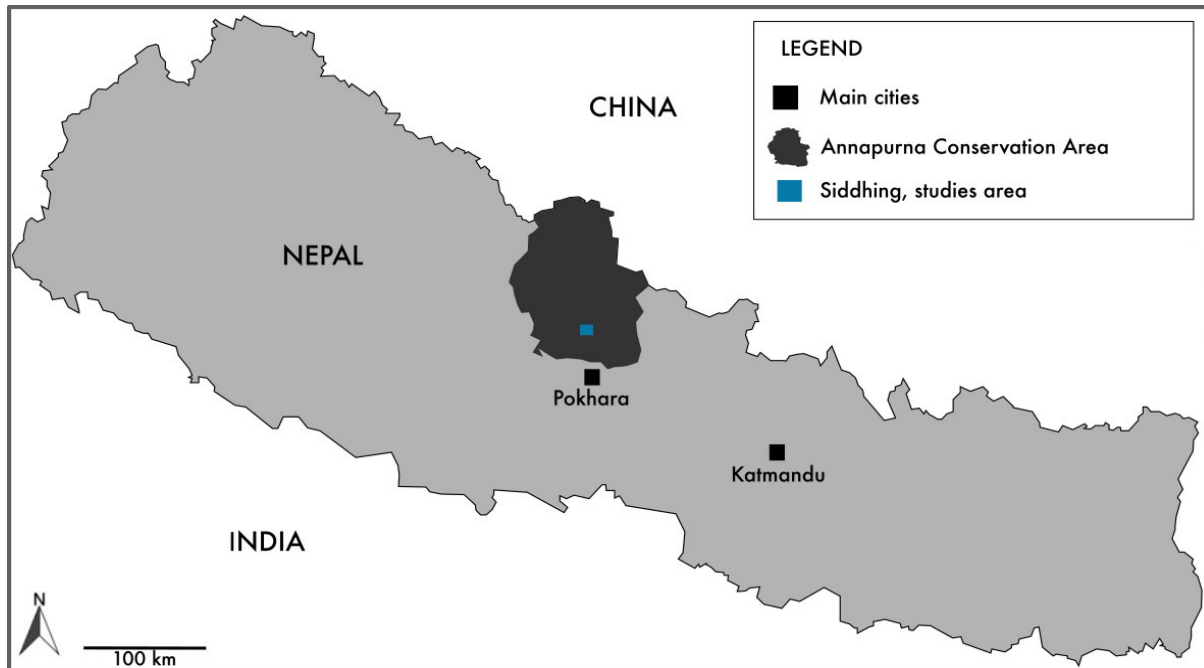


Figure 1: Location of Siddhing in the Annapurna Massif (Népal)  
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In Zimbabwe, we studied villages located on the communal land of Hwange District, in Matabeleland North Province (figure 2), a predominantly semi-arid zone. Within this wooded savannah, the inhabitants live from subsistence farming based on maize, millet and sorghum, from fruit picking and from extensive livestock farming around Hwange National Park, the country's largest protected area (14,561 km<sup>2</sup>). Because of this proximity to the park and the abundance of wildlife, this land is part of the CAMPFIRE programme set up by the Zimbabwean government. This programme was introduced in the district in 1992 so that local populations could benefit from the financial income derived from wildlife through the sharing of the products of trophy hunting, but also to help control the animals responsible for damaging the fields.

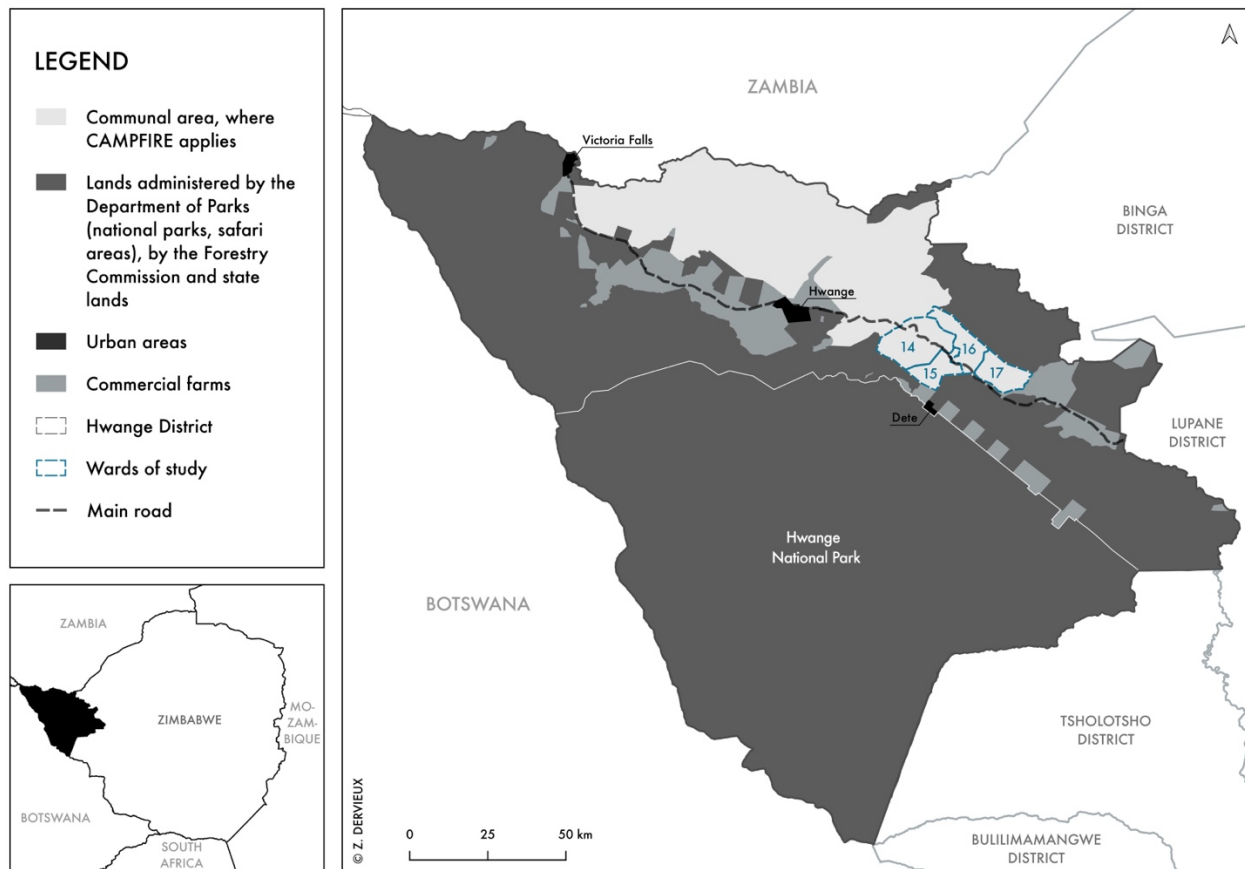


Figure 2: Location of the communal land in Hwange District (Zimbabwe) that falls within the CAMPFIRE programme

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## **CBNRM, a pillar of conservation and development in the 1980s and 1990s**

*CBNRM, an institutional design for rethinking development and conservation policies in the Global South*

CBNRM is a research framework developed in the 1980s by the epistemic community School of the Commons (Aubert, 2010). Inspired by the theories of Elinor Ostrom, these work shares two characteristics: a focus on institutions and an emphasis on the “local” (ibid.). They try to develop an analysis of methods of managing natural resources at local level through a combination of economic, social, political and environmental dimensions (ibid.). Pierre-Marie Aubert (2010) distinguishes between three approaches through which its studies explore the issue of the “local”. The first focuses mainly on environmental aspects. The second is centred around issues of

democratisation and decentralisation.<sup>4</sup> The third places greater emphasis on questions of poverty reduction and social justice. The latter emphasis is to be found in Melissa Leach's work, notably in the context of her collaboration with Tim Forsyth<sup>5</sup> (1998) at the request of the UNDP, where "the focus on the local and on institutions [...] is reflected in conclusions that place particular emphasis on the importance of the fight against poverty" (Aubert, 2010, p. 129).

Because of their affiliations, the epistemic community School of the Commons acquired influence in the debates on the management of natural resources and did much to give impetus to the idea of community management among international institutions, including funding agencies (Duffy, 2009). Its different protagonists influenced the tenor of the discussions by acting as advisers to the specialist institutions (Aubert, 2010). The international success of CBNRM's analytical framework, based on the paradigm of the commons, derived from the fact that it emerged in a context where the role of the state as a central agent of development was being challenged. Far from simply providing a list of "other" ways of managing natural resources than relying on the state or the market, this community devised a comprehensive methodological framework that was applied in development policies in the Global South through incorporation into state policies for environmental preservation (Locher, 2016). Interventions thus fostered the spread of a local level development model as well as a technique of national governance involving new nonstate actors.

### *The spread of CBNRM through the ACAP and CAMPFIRE programmes*

In Asia and in Africa, the spread of CBNRM relied largely on key donor countries, such as the US and the UK, which promoted community conservation through their overseas experts and through conferences funded by NGOs and international aid donors like USAID (Adams and Hulme, 2001). Apart from these big institutions, multiple international, regional or local structures contributed to the growth and production of this methodological framework. One of these was World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) with the establishment of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. As far back as 1984, in response to the growth of tourism, there were proposals for the creation of a national park in the Annapurna region. After a number of protests against the national park policies in place since the 1970s, in 1985 King Birendra issued a directive (Nepal Plan) inviting local communities to become involved in resource

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4. This was consistent with the work of Jesse C. Ribot who delivered a set of "policy guidelines" entitled *Building Local Democracy through Natural Resource Interventions—An Environmentalist's Responsibility* (2008) for the World Resources Institute.

5. He was also a contributor to the development of political ecology.

protection. He adopted the model proposed by WWF's Wildlife and Human Needs Program and then funded by USAID, under which 20 pilot projects were set up in countries in the Global South with the aim of combining conservation and development. Two Nepalese researchers from WWF-Nepal conducted a six-month field study with local leaders to establish the framework of the project, which would be funded (\$2.5 million) by USAID and Swiss NGOs during its pilot phase in 1986 (Stevens, 1997). In its second phase, starting in 1992, the project gradually became self-funding through revenues generated by tourism. As a result, ACAP became internationally recognised as a conservation model (Bajracharya, Gurung and Basnet, 2007).

In Zimbabwe, Brian Child claims that CBNRM first developed in parallel with the work of Ostrom, with the latter primarily serving to verify empirical experiments conducted at local level and "to sharpen the language to describe" them (2009, p. 11).<sup>6</sup> In his doctoral thesis, Estienne Rodary (2001) also showed that international involvement was less marked at the beginning of the CAMPFIRE programme. Initially (1989-1994), therefore, it developed independently of foreign organisations whose funding, mainly provided by USAID within the framework of the Natural Resources Management Project (\$7.6 million), remained limited. Indeed, its introduction coincided with political imperatives that were primarily national, indissolubly linked with the emergence from the white regime of institutional and geographical segregation. In the immediate aftermath of independence (1980), the decentralisation process reflected the need to dismantle racist administrative institutions.<sup>7</sup> In this context, CAMPFIRE proposed a legal arrangement analogous to that previously enjoyed by white landowners (who had possessed the right to exploit and sell the wildlife on their land since the 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act) and at the same time provided a way to get round the thorny question of land reform. The programme was thus shaped by a team consisting of white male Zimbabweans, including the socio-anthropologist Marshall Murphree. It was only subsequently (after 1994), as CAMPFIRE gained international impact, that foreign financial inputs rose (tripled by USAID over the period 1995-1999) and the programme's operations, by contrast with ACAP, became dependent on them.

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6. This author argued that the principles of CBNRM in Zimbabwe drew on the model of Intensive Conservation Areas (Natural Resources Act of 1941), in which resources (pastures, trees, wildlife) were managed by groups of landowners.

7. Despite these imperatives, this dismantlement came late because of the constraints imposed by the Lancaster House agreements, which prevented any reform of local administration before 1990 (Rodary, 2001).

### *The mythified community*

In CBNRM, the community is an indispensable category for the formulation of management policies. The content of the CAMPFIRE and ACAP programmes is thus structured around the establishment of joint management partnerships between central government, NGOs and local “communities”. The aim is to identify a community of users to which the state can transfer power over the management of natural resources, in order to contribute to local development and pacify social tensions in areas that are often at the margins of state control. However, the concept remains imprecise in its spatial and sociocultural applications or incompatible with local realities. The word “community” mainly refers to the inhabitants of the different villages administered by the project (figure 3), which are organised into management committees at different administrative levels (Ward and Village Development Committee). However, the foundations of this “community” correspond to local affiliations that are not limited to the categories of village, caste and ethnic group, and reflect the origins of individuals and collectives (settlement history, forced and spontaneous movements, migrations) and their multiple interests (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Barrow and Murphree, 2001).



Figure 3: Residential unit of a village in Ward 15 (*Silewu*), Hwange District  
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In CAMPFIRE, the “community” was originally conceived as a homogeneous socio-economic unit, numerically small and historically anchored in the territory (Murphree, 1993). The programme’s theoreticians thus defined it as a unit of production, management and benefit, principles adopted by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) as guidelines for the Rural District Councils (RDC). In reality, however, the community was identified in terms of political and demographic demarcations, which is to say that the CAMPFIRE committees (Ward Campfire Committee and Village Campfire Committee) are structures that parallel administrative categories.

In ACAP too, the community is seen only in terms of state administrative categories. Its members are perceived by ACAP’s agents as poor peasant farmers, permanent inhabitants of the village, with no education on environmental matters. The effect of this perception of the community is that social inequalities linked with cast, ethnicity, class and gender, which structure the uses of natural resources in the villages, are not considered. Similarly, ways of inhabiting and the various territorialities of mobility, such as male emigration or multiple residence within the village or between the village and the city of Pokhara, are criteria that are not recognised in ACAP’s definitions. Yet these are some of the factors that structure practices and forms of socialisation around village natural resources (ibid.). Social and political dynamics are not taken into consideration in the concept of community promoted by ACAP with respect to the management of natural resources, which has the effect of essentialising certain forms of structural domination and increasing inequalities of access to those resources.

The implementations and representations of these policies thus construct and shape the “community” in accordance with their expectations (Le Meur, 2008). In this way, they help to impose different regimes of visibility on social groups by trying to make them “legible” (Scott, 1999, p. 293). To this extent, the participation of “communities” imagined and reshaped by public policies for the management of natural resources makes them visible “as collective actors of nature conservation, endowed by the designers of these policies with ‘local’, ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’ knowledge, and ‘naturally’ [dedicated] to caring for conservation and the environment” (Le Meur, 2008, p. 297). In consequence, the opportunistic behaviours, the power and the exclusion strategies that result from the introduction of these programmes have reshaped local society (Ballet, 2007).

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## Deconstructing the ACAP and CAMPFIRE “community”

### *Delegation of oversight to the “community”*

In ACAP and CAMPFIRE, the communities are represented by natural resource management committees, operating at different administrative levels, which dictate the hierarchies of decision-making.

Siddhing’s Forest Management Subcommittee (FMSC) is the community management committee established by ACAP at the most local level, that of the ward. Oversight of this committee is entrusted to the Conservation Area Management Committee (CAMC), the district-level committee (Village Development Committee, VDC), which itself is under the supervision of the ACAP office in Lwang (one of the six offices scattered across the conservation area). It is the latter that has the authority to decide the rules for use of the forest and its resources, and for the redistribution of the revenues generated by the area, while ensuring that they conform to the legal framework governing forest use. It is also responsible for the application of the Forest Department rules and for punishing offences against the law. The roles of the CAMC and the FMSC are thus confined to carrying out a management plan at ward level that is designed at the higher tiers of ACAP and the Forest Department. If ACAP’s prescriptions are not followed, the Forest Department has the power to dissolve the FMSC, thereby restricting its autonomy, which leads Naya S. Paudel, Sudeep Jana and Jailab K. Rai (2012) to say that this form of power transfer is more a rhetorical veneer of participation than a real devolution of power to the local community.

In CAMPFIRE, it is also the RDC, that is an arm of central government, which has the authority to manage and exploit wildlife on community land and to redistribute the revenues generated by trophy hunting to the CAMPFIRE committees of the wards and villages, because the local community is not a legal entity (Child, 1996).<sup>8</sup> The lead CAMPFIRE representative in Hwange District argues that the fact that the communities cannot sign formal contracts directly with the safari operators is a key factor of failure:

“The producer communities are not involved in the tender processes and selection of the safari operators to hunt in the district. The prices of each and every species in the annual quota are negotiated and agreed upon between the RDC and the safari operator. This process has always been between the safari operators and the RDC, in most instances with total exclusion of the farmers. The ownership, management and

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8. The 1982 amendment to the 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act, the promulgation of the Rural District Council Act and of the 1989 Communal Area Act, gave this management authority to the RDC (Murombedzi, 1999).

decision-making have always been completely missing” (interview with the CAMPFIRE representative for the district, March 2017).

According to him, these difficulties arise from the retention of authority by the districts, their lack of trust in the local communities and their need to raise funds. Under this system, the hunter pays the safari operator the expenses for the trip (guide, tracker, meals, camp) but also pays the RDC in the form of a tax that is then redistributed to the local communities. From this tax revenue, 41% goes to the RDC, 55% to the wards and 4% to the CAMPFIRE Association, which is made up of the representatives of the districts covered by the programme. The role of the wards and the villages in the committees is essentially to approve the quotas and to decide on future expenditure according to revenues and local needs, and they play no part at all in setting the rules for wildlife management. The CAMPFIRE committees in the wards are supposed to have seven members and hold elections every 5 years, but the members have gradually abandoned these institutions. The survey showed that the elections are opaque and that the committees (sometimes nonexistent at village level) rarely meet (interview with a member of Lupote Ward, November 2017).

### *ACAP or the production of educated leaders*

In Siddhing (figure 4), interviews with the Senior ACAP officer and the chairman of the VDC revealed that participation by local people in the ACAP management system was central to their arguments and partly justified their presence in the area. However, interviews conducted with the current chair of the FMSC and other inhabitant in the village showed that, as in Hwange, the different management committees are not participatory structures. The chain of attribution of powers shows that what the programme means by “participation” is involvement by a small number of people from villages located in the conservation area, who are tasked with ensuring compliance with the rules established within the legal framework governing forest use. This also explains the fact that this forest management organising structure tends to “invite participation” from people who are considered able to understand legal documents and administrative rules and are familiar with the market economy. Questioned about the skills required to belong to the committees, the people interviewed in Siddhing often answer that one had to be “educated” rather than possessing specific knowledge about the forest and its uses.

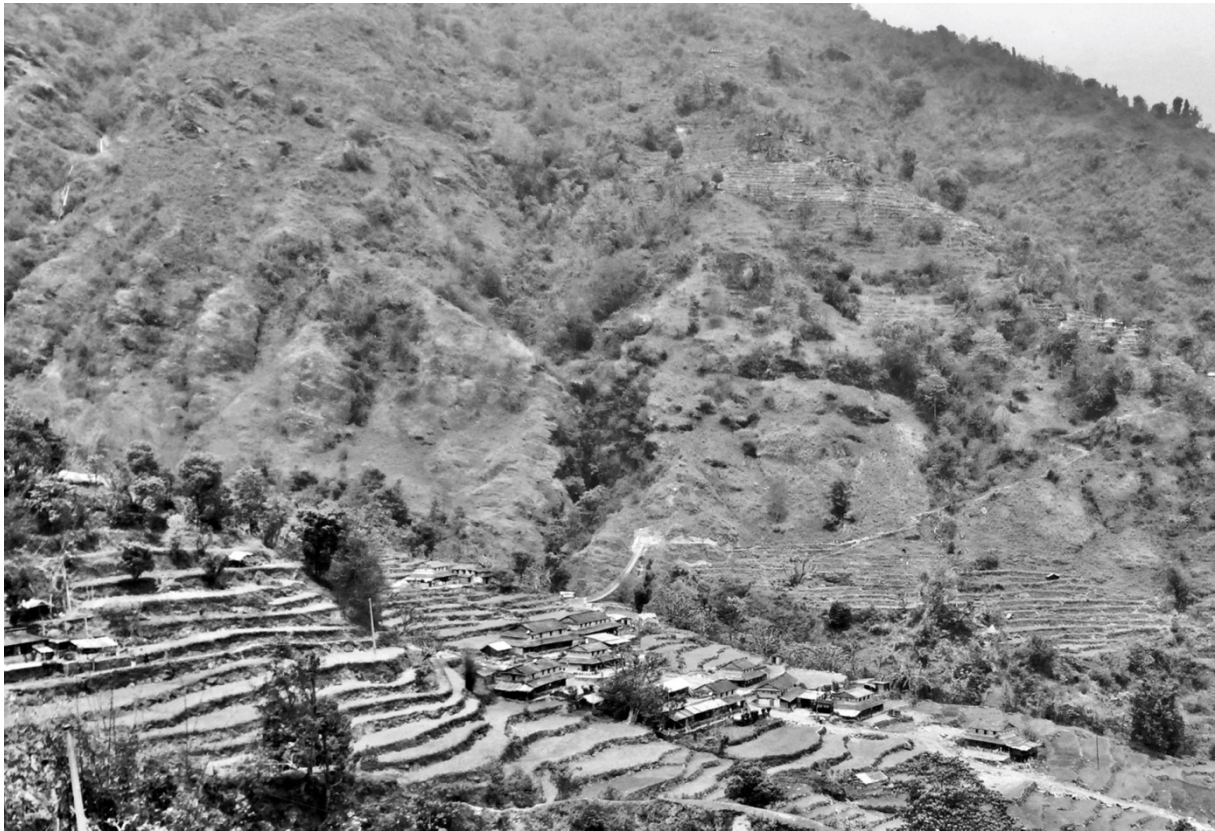


Figure 4: View of the base of Siddhing and of the different hamlets of north-east Siddhing from the end of the track leading to Pokhara  
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This category includes what Blandine Ripert in her thesis called “educated young people”, where “educated” does not mean that they read a lot of books but rather that they have been inculcated with a national culture in their time at school and have assimilated certain beliefs and ideas in addition to learning to read and write, factors that distinguish them from their fellows (Ripert, 2000).

In Siddhing, twenty years on, this category is no longer confined to people who can read and write and have assimilated beliefs and ideas about the nation of Nepal, but also includes social workers, local political representatives, actors involved in the tourist business. All these typologies of people talk about conservation, development, about the management and bureaucratisation of practices. K. Gurung, the chairman of the CAMC has an Master of Business Administration in Finance from Kathmandu and is a political figure in the region, having been elected to head the rural village of Machapuchare in March 2017 at the time of the last administrative reform and the

dissolution of the VDCs.<sup>9</sup> He also manages a tourist agency and owns tourist buses in Pokhara. K. Tamang, the current chairman of the FMSC, is 56 years old and, after 12 years working abroad, became owner of a hotel in Low Camp, whereas his wife, P. Tamang, manages a homestay down in Siddhing. Because of their other activities, all these people possess a range of skills and contacts that enable them to talk to state officials.

*CAMPFIRE, an arena renegotiated by the “less educated”*

In Hwange District, the field data reveal contrasting dynamics. The most striking aspect of the sociolinguistic composition of the CAMPFIRE committees in wards 14, 15, 16 and 17 is the absence of people who consider themselves Ndebele or Shona, groups that are nevertheless very present in the district for historical reasons (Ndebele invasions in the mid-18th century, postindependence immigration in search of work), in favour of people who identify as Nambya and Tonga (groups whose arrival in the region dates back to the 19th century). We met one of the first contributors to the establishment of CAMPFIRE in the district at Zimbabwe Trust, an organisation responsible for training and for the institutional development of the programme. According to him, this exclusion is explained by the fact that people seen as “outsiders” or “immigrants”, that is the Ndebele (owners of large livestock herds and cutting-edge farming equipment) and the Shona (small shop owners in Cross Mabale and teachers), are perceived as more educated and prosperous and better represented in political structures:

“Some people are seen as outsiders, like the Ndebele in Hwange. And then you find that the representation of the leaders is distorted because certain people are more dominant than other people. That causes a little bit of tension. For example, in Hwange, the Ndebele speaking people are a little bit more educated: they have gone to school, most of them, compared with the Tonga and the Nambya. So you find that at most decision-making levels, the Ndebele are always in the forefront, and the Nambya don’t. And the Nambya don’t quite like that” (interview with one of the members of Zimbabwe Trust, May 2017).

It is therefore noticeable that the members of the committees are elderly and are often co-opted by the headmen, representatives of traditional power at ward level, which makes sense given their expertise with fauna and flora and their local legitimacy in conflict resolution (Muboko and Murindagomo, 2014), whereas the municipal councillors in the wards in our study (wards 14, 15 and 16) are educated young men

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9. The impact of this administrative reform of ACAP’s management could not be assessed at the time of the doctoral fieldwork, since the reform had not yet been fully implemented in the study region.

who do not always come from the villages where they were elected as government representatives (meeting with a committee of Chabasichana ward, November 2017). In the surveys conducted with the committees, it was found that the Ndebele and Shona are referred to as being from elsewhere, as lacking the legitimacy to exercise rights over natural resources. These renegotiations are visible in the speech below, delivered by a Tonga and received approvingly by the committee members present:

“It is hard to control [the trees] today because of the intermarriages between different tribes,<sup>10</sup> the coming of other tribes. You find that for our part, we have been respecting *unkotonga* as a sacred tree. But some people from Mashonaland are using it for something different, with their own beliefs. So it’s hard to control or to manage. This area was only meant for Tonga and Nambya. The Ndebele come from Matabeleland South, the Kalanga as well, and the Shona from yet another place” (meeting with the members of the CAMPFIRE village committee for Chabasichana, Lupote Ward, November 2017).

In circumstances of substantial demographic pressure on resources, the meaning of the “community” sought by the management programmes is indigenised here in order to renegotiate power through the new committee arenas. By contrast with ACAP, individuals with the least sociopolitical influence appropriated the committees instead of the educated elites. As in other districts (Balint and Mashinya, 2006; Dzingirai, 2003; Mukamuri, Chirozva, Matema et al., 2013; Rodary, 2001), the composition of the committees is far from representative of the social heterogeneity of Hwange and reveals that these committees have been appropriated by the oppressed groups.

## **Spatial justice issues and state redeployment at the local scale**

### *The spatial redeployment of the state through decentralisation*

The CAMPFIRE and ACAP initiatives were both developed in response to the injustices associated with the local dispossession of rights over natural resources by 40 years of state authoritarianism in Nepal (Sacareau, 2009) and since the colonial era in contemporary Zimbabwe. At meetings of the committees, the reality is that villagers

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10. The use of the term “tribe” here revives the taxonomy adopted everywhere in Southern Rhodesia by colonial officials and ethnologists, which was based on a fundamental opposition between Africans (or “natives”), divided between Shona and Ndebele, and Europeans (Worby, 1994). The Shona were then divided into subgroups (with macroidentities including the Kalanga), which could then be subdivided into “tribes” on the basis of territories or clan names.

are encouraged to “accept decisions made at other levels (international and then national)” (ibid., p. 6) on the basis of an evolving but predetermined vision of conservation, development and environmental management, rather than to take concrete political and economic measures on the management of forests (ACAP) or of wildlife (CAMPFIRE). In Hwange District, CAMPFIRE’s “producer community” has thus become, as in other districts in Zimbabwe, a “community of distribution” (Murombedzi, 1994, p. 73) which fulfils a “wildlife management function” (Rodary, 2001, p. 460).

This political route is highly advantageous to the central government, which has been able to disengage financially in consequence. In ACAP, the local populations are trying to maintain tourism and forest management activities from which some of the profits are reinvested into the programme to fund infrastructures, but the fact that tourist operators are heavily represented among the intermediaries means that rural infrastructure development in Siddhing is structured through the prism of tourist development (building of hotels and roads, renovation of bridges on the trekking routes). Likewise, in CAMPFIRE, the revenues from the programme do not go to individuals but are reinvested to promote rural development projects.

### *CAMPFIRE and ACAP, products of two ecological fronts*

In the two areas studied, ACAP and CAMPFIRE represent a process of symbolic and territorial conquest associated with ecological fronts, a concept understood as an “‘ecologising’ appropriation of spaces, real or imaginary, which possess very high ecological and aesthetic value” (Guyot, 2017, p. 13). The different geopolitical conditions associated with internal colonisations specific to state forms (colonial, feudal, modern) and with their connections with international institutions, have produced ecological fronts that vary in their spatialities and temporalities. A spatiotemporal characterisation of these fronts, which appeared in the early phases of nature conservation, would merit further development but can only be alluded to in this article. We will therefore concentrate on the period (or “generation”) of ecological fronts described as the “global” phase, which began in the 1960s. This covers the “‘initiatives for territorial [re]conquest introduced with the aim of protecting the environment and biodiversity” (ibid., p. 40) and coincides with the development of decentralised CBNRM programmes and the role in nature conservation assigned to experts, governments and NGOs.

While these two programmes offer a new form of management based on the participation of local populations as an alternative to the restrictive approaches previously fostered by the National Parks model, they have been applied in areas that in practice were not previously subject to specific forms of natural resource regulation

by the Zimbabwean and Nepalese governments. The establishment of ACAP did not alter or relax a natural resource management system that was already in place, but applied this new management model to a pilot zone of 6,729 m<sup>2</sup> populated by almost 100,000 people. On similar principles, the establishment of CAMPFIRE on municipal land in Hwange District (4,222 km<sup>2</sup>) entailed expanding nature conservation for the first time to areas where monitoring and protection measures had not previously existed.

CBNRM policies are not the only ones to contribute to the propagation of ecological fronts. From a “back to the barriers” perspective (Hutton, Adams and Murombedzi, 2005), the criticisms levelled at community conservation in the 1990s prompted the international institutions to alter their position (Aubertin, Pinton and Rodary, 2008). Interventions from the global ecological front once again eclipsed the social dimensions of conservation actions in favour of their biological component (ibid.). This is the case of the Hwange Sanyati Biological Corridor Project (HSBCP) introduced between 2015 and 2019 in wards 15, 16, 17 and 18 in Hwange District and financed by the World Bank and the WWF. The hasty implementation of the “community management” aspect in the final month of the project attests to a “moral imperative” that these institutions set themselves (Brockington, 2004, p. 413). This is also true of the RU1 Program, introduced in 2012 and funded by USAID and WWF, which ACAP was tasked with establishing, without consulting local people, in order to identify the species most vulnerable to climate change and most in need of protection.

### *Spatial justice issues*

The particularities of the two areas studied help us to understand the spatial injustices generated by ecological fronts. In Africa, these approaches have led to “efforts by conservation NGOs to include the lands surrounding protected areas as buffer zones under the jurisdiction of the state” which generate “major implications for the politics of land” (Neumann, 1997, p. 560). CAMPFIRE was thus conceived in terms of the challenges inherent to postcolonial conditions. In the immediate aftermath of Independence, in 1980, just 6,000 farmers, most of them white, ran the big commercial farms located in the country’s most productive land, accounting for 39% of the land. In contrast, the vast majority of the inhabitants were left to make do with the existing communal land. In circumstances where local people were dispossessed of land and rights over wildlife, the CAMPFIRE programme was intended to restore power to these populations by devolving wildlife management rights, though without the possibility of land redistribution because of the constraints of the Lancaster House agreements



(see the “CBNRM, a pillar of conservation and development in the 1980s and 1990s” section).

In this sense, the CAMPFIRE programme offered the Mugabe government an opportunity for social justice that was not redistributive but political (decentralisation of rights and economic compensation). With the economic and political crisis of the 2000s, the collapse of the revenue generated by CAMPFIRE and the accusations of misappropriation in Hwange District (interviews with the customary leaders of Ward 15), popular discontent grew. The committee members complained bitterly that they were no longer receiving revenues from the RDC and, in Hwange, these tensions fed into demands that were both direct and indirect (Dervieux, 2019):

“We have got the resources, ain’t it? We have got everything, animals, and all that. But in our village, we are getting nothing. So, you will see the elephants, tourism and the national parks benefit, but the villages are getting nothing. They get everything but we are getting nothing.” (discussion with a woman of a committee of the CAMPFIRE Lupote ward, November 2017)

In the context of Zimbabwean land reform, the priority assigned to conservation goals in the areas involved in the global ecological front increasingly precluded the possibility of local populations to access again to conservation areas (national parks, protected forests) of which they had been deprived during colonisation.

For its part, ACAP was intended to offer a new form of land management from which local populations would not be excluded. It was in this perspective that, in 1992, the Nepalese government gave King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) legal authority to manage ACAP for 10 years. The promulgation of the 1996 amendment on the management of conservation areas (Conservation Act) legally recognised the CAMCs as ACAP’s local operators. It guarantees the participation of local communities in decision-making and ensure a certain level of consultation (Baral and Stern, 2011). However, this amendment linked the idea of conservation areas with the idea of “redistribution of conservation benefits which also imposed protection-oriented regime” in these areas (Paudel, Jana and Rai, 2012, p. 93). The management power of local and indigenous communities is “too technocratic” and the conservation areas remain controlled by the government (ibid.). For example, it is not possible for them to voluntarily declare a protected area and the procedures for establishing such areas have remained unchanged since 1970 (ibid.). The community is therefore a manager of ACAP in a context where economic decentralisation and liberalisation are leading to a reorganisation of state institutions. The ACAP “communities” are not considered owners of the land they use, so the spatial injustice

linked with state land grabbing under the National Park and Wildlife Protection Act continues.

Moreover, most of the inhabitants of Siddhing have no illusions about the government's objectives. C. Chhetri, a buffalo farmer in Kitchi, on the heights of Siddhing, explained in 2017 that every six years the CAMC can decide whether or not ACAP should stay in the area:

"If people say that they can manage their forests on their own and no longer need ACAP, then it can go. However, it is up to CAMC to decide this [not the inhabitants]. ACAP is no longer all that important for Siddhing Forest today. But if the *chowkidar* of ACAP leaves, it will be the Forest Department *chowkidar* who will replace him, that's how it was before. Or perhaps it will be the VDC that takes charge, but certainly not the village [ward]. If the right to manage their forests is given to the inhabitants, the *sarkar* (government) will no longer be able to raise taxes on the forest. It is not in the *sarkar's* interest to do that." (interview with C. Chhetri, a buffalo farmer in Kitchi, 2017)

## Conclusion

On the basis of a community in part imagined by the School of the Commons, the advance of two global ecological fronts under the impetus of ACAP and CAMPFIRE constituted a major turning point in terms of intervention by international actors in public action, enabling the governments to expand and reinforce their control over the administered territories. The decentralisation promoted by these two programmes took the form of state redeployment into areas newly drawn into conservation. This redeployment took the form of predefined and imposed arrangements that altered the organisation of the practices and day-to-day uses of natural resources by local people. In the case of ACAP, this has led to the forced integration of the inhabitants into the state. In Zimbabwe, the communal regime (established during colonisation and continued after independence) allows the state to extend its authority over remote rural areas (Murombedzi, 1999; Neumann, 1997) and to recentralise (Murombedzi, 1992).

The "community" component of these CBNRM programmes has produced a framework for populations to be governed through the introduction of new institutions. This community ("homogeneous", "historically attached to a territory", "poor") has also been renegotiated on the basis of local power balances and the histories of members and collectives that are sometimes co-opted or selected. The reappropriation of this category by the societies concerned (educated elites versus

“less educated” categories) implies that the “community” is not only imposed by hegemonic and violent institutions, but also is constantly reshaped by local forces. This is what is being expressed when members of the committees identify groups as possessing greater legitimacy to manage natural resources than others. The local collectives therefore reorganise and adapt their practices in diversion and avoidance.

### Note of the authors

This paper was submitted in 2020 and therefore does not reflect more recent changes in the countries it addresses.

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