

CHAPTER SEVEN

Women, Decision-Making, and Resource Management in Zimbabwe

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INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS play a fundamental role in determining the access to and management of natural resources, such as land, water, and woodlands. Studies of common-pool resource management have shown that institutions have a strong, positive influence on sustainable use, if users are involved in decision-making, rule formulation, monitoring, and enforcement (Ostrom 1990; Murphree 1991). In this chapter, the term “institutions” refers to rules, norms, and enduring practices that guide people’s behavior in a given society and make their interactions more predictable (North 1990; Uphoff 1986; Havnevik and Harsmar 1999; Leach and others 1997). Human structures that oversee the implementation and enforcement of these institutions are referred to here as “organizations.”

As the state shifts formal responsibility and rights over woodlands, water, and other natural resources to local users’ organizations (as representatives of the communities), these organizations control access to and facilitate management of the resource (Meinzen-Dick and Zwartveen 2001). It therefore becomes important to examine who within these organizations performs what tasks, who controls resource use, decision-making, and related benefits. These organizations and their internal dynamics¹ will be analyzed to determine their bearing on the position of men and women in relation to the institutions governing access to natural resources. In the context of communal lands,² the role of institutions that determine who has access to and control over which natural resources is often influenced by formal and informal relations between women and men and other social interactions in the community.

This study draws on examples from woodland resource and water use to highlight the importance of gender in the institutions governing use of natural resources. Focus is on the internal dynamics of these institutions and organizations at the

local level, particularly the roles of women in the management of natural resources. The chapter further examines the tactics and strategies women develop to influence natural resource management institutions and organizations for their gain. In this context, it is argued that while women may not always be represented in traditional or modern formal institutions and organizations, they use a variety of avenues to exert their views (cf. Chapter 8). Findings of the study presented in this chapter concur with those of Goebel (1998) in the resettlement areas and Fortmann and Nabane's (1992) study on social forestry in the Mhondoro communal area in Zimbabwe. While a study undertaken by May (1979) found that women use hidden strategies, such as withholding sex from men in order to be heard, this study finds that women's strategies for influencing decision-making are becoming more visible with the emergence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

There is a growing concern about improving women's role in and influence over resource management institutions and organizations and creating situations where their voices can be heard in the decision-making process (Jiggins 1997; Rocheleau 1991). The need to focus on decision-making processes, social organizations, and formal and informal rules in ensuring both women's and men's access to and control over natural resources is also highlighted (Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997). Literature on gender in development in general, and natural resource management in particular, often underestimates the role of women, because emphasis is often on formal institutions, rather than informal decision-making processes. This chapter shows that women employ informal strategies to ensure representation of their views regarding access to natural resources and that they have more bargaining power when they operate as groups rather than as individuals. Regarding access to woodland resources, women lack strong group organizations, so they have less bargaining power than men. With regard to garden plots, however, women tend to operate in groups, and their influence is much higher.

The specific study site is the Romwe Catchment, which is located on the southern side of Chivi District about 7 km from the main Masvingo–Beitbridge road in Zimbabwe. The mountain area, where Romwe Catchment is located, receives rainfall of about 800–1000 mm per year—higher than is typical of southern Zimbabwe, where the average is 400–600 mm per year. The environmental variations in Chivi District often lead to competition over the most productive areas, and in such circumstances, women may often be disadvantaged. Mazarire (1999) suggests that precolonial Chivi society acknowledged the importance of women in the environment in their day-to-day cosmology, their myths, totems, and even bodily decorations.³ As a result of the colonial land policies, the Romwe Catchment has a mix of Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups, who were relocated into this area in the early 1950s. The relocation history has influenced the formation of institutions and organizations governing access to natural resources, as well as influencing which leadership structures are more respected and viewed as legitimate by the local community and neighboring villages.

Conceptual Framework

The study of institutions is not a recent phenomenon in sociological research, but dates back to early institutional theory in sociology spearheaded by scholars such as Weber (1962; 1957). While this literature highlights issues of social differentiation, especially based on class, it is generally silent on the role of women in forming and maintaining institutions and the influence of institutions on women's access to productive and reproductive resources. Similarly, recent analyses of institutional arrangements for common-pool resources⁴ (Ostrom 1990; Meinzen-Dick and others 1997) has often centered on understanding what institutions and organizations are in place, how they are constituted, and what role they play in resource management, without recognizing how the internal dynamics of the local community are influenced by gender, age, and other intrahousehold characteristics. The analysis of formal decision-making arenas at the community level often takes a similar form. This chapter investigates the role of women within institutions for common-pool resources and examines the internal dynamics of organizations that influence the form and nature of resource access (North 1990; Ostrom 1990; Scott 1995). Investigating the internal dynamics of organizations entails analyzing the methods for making decisions, the nature and structure of membership and the processes for changing leadership. The different interests and levels of power among members lead to different patterns of representation and cooperation at the community level.

Women's access to many natural resource management institutions has not increased, even under the pressure of decentralization policies, because the institutions have been so dominated by men, especially in patrilineal societies (Meinzen-Dick and others 1997). Attention should therefore be paid to gender issues, especially women's involvement in local formal and informal institutions that govern access to and exploitation of natural resources. Gender analysis often complicates the analysis of institutions governing access to natural resources, given the unequal power relationships between women and men in most societies (Rochelleau and Edmunds 1997). These power relations are, however, not static and are influenced by complex webs of connection between various natural resource user groups and the resources that sustain them.

In the gender and natural resource management literature, women have often been viewed as being excluded from formal decision-making processes, although they have widespread knowledge of natural resources in their locality and they may be the only users. A few studies recognize that women often devise strategies to ensure their voices are heard. Ranger (1999, 8) highlights strategies that women use to exert their influence over men.⁵ Similarly, Schroeder's (1993) work in the Gambia shows how male landowners manipulated customary law to compel women to plant trees in their rented gardens, thereby attempting to phase out women's crops and displace the women from the garden site they had fenced, watered, and fertilized. Women resisted the attempts by male landowners to convert women's lucrative vegetable gardens to orchards and woodlots through both formal, legal means and subtle acts of sabotage.

With the recognition of such internal differentiation within communities, this study adopts the idea of gendered spaces and places, a conceptual framework for

the analysis of women's role in natural resource management institutions (Fortmann 1995; Leach 1994; Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997). This framework emphasizes the separation of women's and men's *activity* and *authority* in geographic space. Women's spaces in the landscape are not easy to identify (Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997, 1355). These are often the "in-between" spaces not valued by men but still quite useful to women. Firewood, medicinal plants, and wild foods (including fruits, insects, mushrooms, and wild vegetables) are found in these spaces and are often critical to women's efforts to meet their personal, household, and community responsibilities (Rocheleau 1991). The notion of gendered spaces can focus on both the household and community levels to illuminate the differences among women's interests, rights, and responsibilities; here the framework used to analyze data at the community level.

Recent studies emphasize that women are not a homogenous group (Bradley 1991; Nabane 1997; Nabane and Matzke 1997; Fortmann and Nabane 1992). For instance, Bradley (1991) finds that among the Luhya in Kakamega in Kenya, older widows have significantly greater decision-making power than do younger widows, with regard to the planting, care, and disposal of woodlot and fencerow trees. Nabane (1997) finds that in the Zambezi Valley in Zimbabwe, Korekore women have better access to benefits from a community-based wildlife management program, the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) as compared with women from the small Vadoma ethnic group. In Gokwe, Sithole and Kozanayi (2001; see also Chapter 8, this volume) find that wives of powerful leaders play a pivotal role in the running of local organizations. Differences among women with regard to access to space and resources have implications for their participation in decision-making in organizations. The gendered space framework therefore also provides a platform for investigating internal differentiation among women themselves.

Methodology

The research used qualitative methods of analysis, as they were found to be more appropriate for collecting data on decision-making processes and institutional relationships. These methods included participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools and techniques, attendance at village meetings, residence in a village for extended periods, development of extensive social networks in the community, participation in community social gatherings (such as funerals, weddings, and church services), and documentation of case histories of women in leadership.

In the PRA workshops, women's and men's groups worked separately on similar tasks designed to describe their use of the woodlands and their perceptions of institutions regulating access to natural resources. As Goebel (1998) has highlighted, PRA data may be fraught with problems. These problems include a falsely homogenized view of village perspectives and a static and misleading picture of social practices and beliefs. Despite such weaknesses, this study found that PRA generates useful data on general trends and perceptions. The data need to be cross-checked and verified through alternative research methods, such as individual and

key informant interviews, observations, and informal interaction with community members, as was done for this study.

I lived in the village of Romwe for a period of about 18 months with frequent two-week visits to the field between July 1998 and August 2001. My research assistant, based in the field on a full-time basis for three years, gathered additional information using participant observation. During the research process, I also developed extensive social relationships with individuals from wide-ranging socio-economic backgrounds.⁶ Making friends with people from both rich and poor households,⁷ I was able, with the help of Ndebele and Shona speakers, to interact with a variety of informants.⁸ These social interactions revealed complex webs of power relationships in the community and helped to explain why certain decisions were made and how they were implemented.

While based in the community, I attended both formal meetings and informal gatherings. During formal village meetings, the process and deliberations were documented (e.g., who said what and whose ideas were adopted), and male and female attendance was recorded. Among youths, it is often the boys who attend village meetings; rarely do girls participate. Yet, girls make crucial decisions about the environment, such as where to collect firewood since they are the main collectors.

Informal gatherings included spending time with groups of women while they watered vegetables at the garden projects, socializing at someone's home, as well as attending church services, funerals, and other open events where I could engage in discussions with community members. I also had to make contributions, both in monetary and labor terms during funerals. If a household member dies, other households in the village are expected to make contributions toward funeral expenses averaging about Z\$20 (US\$0.36 at the official exchange rate of US\$1 = Z\$55). I contributed the same amount as other households in the study area, so as not to raise people's expectations. Another in-kind contribution I made was transporting people to the business center to buy funeral items or to the Ngundu clinic, often at night. This service brought me close to the community members, and my interaction with them greatly improved over the period spent in the village. Thus I could better observe interactions between women and men and obtain some information otherwise not available.

For example, in early interviews women professed Christianity and thus denied using any medicinal plants. At a funeral, I took a walk into the bush with the women (there are no toilets in most households), and during the process saw women showing each other some plants that are used by pregnant women to relax muscles of the birth canal and other plants that are used to enhance sexual pleasure. If it were not for this close relationship, I might never have had access to such information. Thus data collection is a complex process that requires both formal and informal dimensions to generate a reliable picture. .

Case histories of women in leadership positions were also collected during the course of the research. In addition to the various methods used for data collection on the ground, a review of the research literature, as well as Rural District Council (RDC) and NGO documents, provided information on the broader context of community-based natural resource management in Zimbabwe and the study site.

Access to Natural Resource Spaces and Institutions

In reflecting on how gender influences institutions and organizations for community-based natural resource management, it is important to visualize the natural resource spaces. In this study, this visualization was done by mapping resource areas and products to capture the complexity of woodland resource spaces. Often, the conception of natural resources such as woodlands is of discrete areas of trees located away from human settlement. In the Zimbabwean communal lands, including Chivi District, this is not the case. The miombo woodlands, characteristic of the savannah region, comprise different tree areas in and around human settlement, pastures, arable lands, and hill areas. Resource areas highlighted by the community members in Romwe include the mountains, the river banks, and the edges of arable land and grazing areas, where people collect a wide variety of woodland products, such as poles, firewood, thatch grass, wild fruits, mushrooms, herbal medicines, and fiber (Table 7–1). Access to these resource areas is gendered in the sense that women and men have distinct uses of these areas and differential control over their resources. These patterns of resource use have implications for women's roles in natural resource management institutions and organizations.

Based on their roles and responsibilities, women and men have different mobility patterns, which reflect gender differences in resource use and other divisions of labor, e.g., in agriculture and cattle herding. The differential use of particular resource areas and products found in those areas leads to the association of certain spaces as gendered spaces. Women's spaces are not always easily identifiable and may overlap with men's. For example, women gather mushrooms, fruits, medicinal plants, and other nontimber forest products in areas, such as the Mapande Range, that are predominantly used by men for grazing and gathering poles and fiber.

This overlapping gender identification of spaces has implications for woodland-related management activities, such as participation in the establishment and monitoring of management institutions. Although women use the woodlands in the Romwe Catchment, they are not actually represented in formal woodland management structures and are therefore less likely (formally) to influence the institutions that determine access to these woodlands. Women therefore often devise a variety of strategies to ensure that their interests and views are considered in resource management decisions and in the formulation and enforcement of resource use institutions (see Chapter 8).

In Romwe, the hills emerge as the most important of the overlapping resource areas, because relatively large quantities of a number of products are gathered here. People also depend on a variety of areas for collection of the same products, indicating the interconnected nature of the resource areas. For instance, women collect firewood from the Mapande Range, Barura, Romwe, Siyawayira, Magegesa, and Chamanyoka Hills. Similarly, both women and men collect different resources from the same areas. For instance, in the Mapande Range, women collect mushrooms and firewood, while men collect fiber and poles and hunt small game.⁹ Institutions governing access to these resource areas are either area- or product-specific or can be justified by sacredness or civil contracts.¹⁰ For example, while specific rules govern mushroom harvesting in Mapande Hill, other rules govern

Table 7-1. Resource Areas and Gender Access to Various Products

| Resource area | Products | Major users | Who controls access | Rules governing access and management practices | | Comments on adherence |
|-----------------|---|--------------------|--|--|---|-----------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| Mapande range | Firewood, fiber, poles, mushrooms, sacred pools | Women, men, boys | Sabukus, chiefs, headman, Forestry Commission (FC) | Do not make bad comments about mushrooms. Do not cut wet wood. Do not start bush fires. Respect sacred wells. | Women no longer respect traditional beliefs, such as not making bad comments about mushrooms, because of the influence of Christianity. Men cut wet wood for poles, and the local leadership does not apprehend them. FC could enforce, but the officer is based about 60 km away and is responsible for the whole district. People adhere to the rule on forest fires. | |
| Barura mountain | Grazing, poles wood, fiber, mushrooms | Everyone | Sabukus, everyone in the village, FC | Do not cut live trees. Do not start bush fires. Collect dead wood only. | Rules are not always followed, especially those relating to tree cutting, because people do not have alternative sources of poles. Men sometimes cut wet wood for sale. | |
| Romwe mountain | Grazing, firewood, sacred pools, poles | Women, men, boys | Ancestral spirits | Do not bathe or do laundry in the sacred pool. Do not cut wet wood. | Men cut wet poles because traditional rites are no longer held in Romwe. Women generally follow rules, as they collect only dry wood. Headman appears to have lost interest in enforcing the rules. Only elderly women past menopause were traditionally involved in managing the sacred pool; now no one has that responsibility. | |
| Chana chaRomwe | Grazing, firewood | Women, girls, boys | Sabukus | Do not cut live trees. Do not start bush fires. | Rules adhered to because the hill is close to homesteads, thus making it easier to see offenders. | |

Table 7-1. Resource Areas and Gender Access to Various Products (contin.)

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| Siyawairaira mountain | Grazing, poles mushrooms, firewood | Women, men | Sabukus, chiefs headman | Do not cut live trees. Do not make bad comments about mushrooms. | Men cut live trees for poles, although they do not cut from one spot. |
| Chamanyoka hill | Fiber, poles, firewood | Everyone | Sabukus, everyone should police. | Do not cut live trees. Do not start bush fires. | Rules here said to be adhered to because hill is close to homesteads, thus making it easier to see offenders. |
| Magegesa hill | Firewood, poles, grazing | Women, men, boys | Sabukus, chiefs, FC | Do not cut live trees. Do not burn grass. | Men do not follow rules on tree-cutting. |
| Grazing areas | Grazing, firewood, fruits | Women, men, boys | Sabukus, FC, Agritex | Do not burn grass. Do not cut live trees. Do not harvest unripe fruit. Do not sell fruit. | Naughty children sometimes harvest unripe fruit. |
| Fields | Winter grazing, fruits | Everyone | Field owner | Do not allow outsiders to use the fields during the cropping season. | These rules are strongly enforced. There are a few cases of children stealing fruits in the field during the cropping season. |
| Mawunga stream | Firewood, water, grazing | Women, men | Sabukus, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) | Do not cultivate or graze along stream banks. | Neither women nor men follow this rule because they claim they do not have enough land in the area. Also DNR is not actively enforcing the rules, and sabukus say they are constrained by kinship ties. |
| Homestead areas | Mainly exotic fruit trees | Everyone in household | Household head and spouse | Do not steal fruit from other people's homes | Rules are followed. Community members tend to respect other people's spaces as well. |

access to the whole mountain range. In this case, rules governing access to mushrooms in Mapande specifically affect women, while the other general rules, such as prohibition to burn the area, apply to both women and men.

Observations indicate that men are more likely to break established rules, particularly those on felling trees and encroaching into grazing areas. Women's chores, such as collecting firewood for household use, can be met without cutting live trees, whereas men's chores, such as house construction or collecting firewood for sale, can be significantly more tedious if fresh wood is not cut. Thus, men are forced by the nature of their household responsibilities to cut fresh wood. Men, for example, are said to prefer live poles to dry poles for construction and to seek fresh wood rather than dead wood as firewood to minimize the time needed to fill the ox- or donkey-drawn carts they use to collect firewood for sale. Women collect head loads of firewood and thus find it easier to limit their harvests to dead wood.

Men also play a larger role in securing land for the family. Because settlement and arable land is in short supply in the area, men have been found guilty of encroaching into areas designated for grazing and woodland product collection. One example is that of a farmer who had a conflict with the traditional leadership over the privatization of the common-pool land resource in May 1999. In one of the villages, an area above the Barura Dam (part of the dam catchment) was designated as a grazing area. Some local young men, however, claimed that the local *kraal* head¹¹ had demarcated and reserved the area for his sons to use as crop fields. One of these young men decided to clear that land for his crop field. He vowed to continue converting the grazing area for his own crop field even if the *kraal* head tried to stop him.

This case is similar to that reported by Nemarundwe (2001) in which a young man established a well and a vegetable garden in a grazing area in Tamwa village in 1998. The *kraal* head did not take action about encroachment into grazing areas. It is usually young men who encroach into the grazing areas, which may be a result of the livestock ownership patterns. Generally, elderly men own cattle, while young men have few or no livestock. The *kraal* head's rules are sometimes broken because people feel they can afford to pay the normally small fines. The majority of interviewees first said that rules are respected and adhered to, but with further probing they revealed that certain rules are broken, as shown in Table 7-1.

Natural Resource Management Organizations

This section describes the natural resource management organizations found in the study area. The study analyzes the form and nature of membership in these organizations, as well as which actors are influential in decision-making regarding access to natural resources. Three main categories of organizations found in Romwe are explored, namely, the traditional authority, the local government administrative structures, and the project-related structures, such as the garden committees. The gender composition of membership was found to vary from one organization to another (Table 7-2).

Table 7-2. *Membership in Organizations in Romwe, by Gender*

| <i>Organizations</i> | <i>Total members</i> | <i>No. of women</i> | <i>No. of men</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--|
| Traditional authority ^a | 6 | 0 | 6 | Membership is all male. When asking people about the possibility of having a female kraal head, the first reaction was always surprise. They have never heard of a female kraal head. ^b |
| Village Development Committee (VIDCO) | 7 | 1 | 6 | The woman in this committee was elected because of the quota that specifies that there should be a woman representative in the VIDCO. |
| Ward Development Committee (WADCO) | 7 | 1 | 6 | The role of the WADCO is not directly felt in Romwe. Only the councilor is known and recognized. Asking villagers who was in the WADCO revealed that people did not even know the names of their representatives. |
| Chidiso Garden Committee | 4 | 3 | 1 | This committee has been in place since the inception of the garden project in 1991. At inception, there were 4 women and 2 men. One man, the original secretary, resigned in 1993, citing harassment by the vice-chairwoman and was replaced by the vice-chairwoman's sister-in-law. One woman who was a committee member also resigned the same year over some disagreement with the vice-chairwoman on how the project should operate. The original vice secretary of the committee, a community mobilizer, is no longer active as she concentrates on the Barura Garden Project. It is rumored that the vice-chairwoman has strong personal relations with the chairman of this garden committee, who is also a respected kraal head in the area. Thus she has power to harass other members regardless of whether they are women or men. |
| Barura Garden Committee | 7 | 6 | 1 | The garden began operating fully in 1999. Membership in the garden is predominantly made up of women, as is the committee. The majority of the members are also plot holders in the Chidiso Garden. |

Table 7-2. Membership in Organizations in Romwe, by Gender (contin.)

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Barura Dam Committee | 7 | 1 | 6 | The very influential kraal head in the area, who also holds the position of chairman in the Chidiso garden project, is the chairman of the Barura Dam Committee. The Barura Dam was constructed in 1985 to harness water for livestock, thus the predominantly male committee. The chairman of this committee claims that the dam project was his brainchild thus when it came to electing the committee, villagers agreed that he should be chairman. He has remained chairman of this committee. The Barura Garden Project Committee, which is made up predominantly of women, reports to the Barura Dam Committee. |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|

a. Traditional authority covers the kraal heads, headman and the chief. The chief is at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the headman, with the kraal head as the lowest rung in the hierarchy. In the case of Romwe, there are three kraal heads (Tamwa, Sihambe and Dobhani), two chiefs (Madzivire and Nemaazhe) and one headman (Chikanda).

b. These findings concur with what Lindgren (2002) found in Matebeleland South where conflict arose in the community because a woman was appointed Chief after her father (the Chief) died.

It is common to find a woman being elected as treasurer in these organizations, because that position is viewed as one that has to be given to a trustworthy person. Women are viewed as trustworthy with regard to management of money. The variation in the organizations' membership can be attributed to a number of factors, including the organization's role in resource management, the composition of its membership, the personalities involved, and the nature of kinship ties and other social networks affecting decision-making in each organization. The following section further elaborates on the form and nature of the three broad categories of organizations: traditional authority, local government (modern institutions), and project-related organizations.

Traditional Authority

The use of the term "traditional" is problematic in the literature because it has been applied to practices and institutions that are evolving, not static, and subject to modification by negotiation between various natural resource user groups and state institutions (Berry 1993; Havnevik and Harsmar 1999). The property-rights regimes often labeled as traditional constitute complex outcomes of cultural and environmental change, and thus should be understood as dynamic phenomena (Ranger 1993). In this chapter, "traditional authority" refers to precolonial and native colonial authorities, such as the chiefs and *sabukus*, as well as the religious beliefs, norms, and current rules associated with them, which are not codified. Most of the so-called traditional authorities were remolded to extend colonial rule over the African population through a system of indirect rule. For example, the term *sabuku* literally means the keeper of the book, i.e., records of taxes extracted from the African pop-

Box 7–1. Challenging the Legacy:

Women's Response to Traditional Authority Decisions

Historically, traditional authorities have been respected and rarely challenged. With recent support from external NGOs, however, women now sometimes challenge certain decisions made by the traditional authority, especially the *sabuku*. A case in point was the conflict over water in Barura Dam that occurred in January 2001. In December 2000, there was a dry spell in the area, and water levels in Barura Dam dropped. An influential *sabuku*, who is also the chairman in the Chidiso Garden Committee, unilaterally decided to close off the dam to reserve water for livestock. This restricted access to water by an innovative female farmer, as well as the rest of the Barura Garden Project, whose membership is predominantly women. There were claims that the influential *sabuku* held a meeting with a few of his right-hand men from his village to discuss the water level in the dam. At the beginning of the meeting he told them that no one should oppose his stance. He then selected three men to seal the spillway and instructed some women to cook food for the three men. This was done. The affected innovator and members of the Barura Garden Project Committee protested and requested the *sabuku* to revoke his decision, but the *kraal* head just ignored them. The group decided to send representatives to the CARE International offices in Masvingo to report the matter, as their crops were wilting because of lack of water. CARE officers came to resolve the issue and asked the *sabuku* to open up the spillway and repay the bag of cement he had forcibly taken from the Barura Garden Project for sealing the spillway. The *sabuku* was angry that people had disobeyed him and sold him out to outsiders, but at the same time he opened up the dam because he did not want external development agents to see him as a "bad" leader. He threatened community members that it would be their fault if their cattle died of thirst, as the water in the dam dried up. The women in the garden project and the female innovator were very happy that at last this influential *sabuku* had found his match, as he has always made unilateral decisions without being challenged.

Source: Key informants in Romwe (including said *sabuku* himself), February 2001.

ulation by the colonial governments through these leaders. Although traditional institutions did not have legal recognition at the local level until the enactment of the 1998 Traditional Leaders' Act, traditional authorities are respected for having mythical powers and applauded for their spiritual powers. A general tendency has been to perceive traditional authorities as though they are static, yet they have responded to both environmental and socioeconomic changes over time (Matondi 2001).

Traditional authority positions are inherited, and there is no history of women being, for example, *sabukus*. The mechanism of transferring power from an old *sabuku* to a new one is complicated by the fact that this transfer is often done after the death of the old *sabuku*, leaving no opportunity for a formal hand-over ceremony. Thus the new leader often acts on the basis of a mixture of experience and familiarity with what the old leader used to do. Similarly, traditional rules and regulations are not applied in a systematic manner. The majority of the rules are not formal rules but more "habits of the heart and minds," fitting within the broader social relations found in the community (Matondi 2001). Frameworks for understanding rule formulation processes tend to fragment rules (e.g., rules for water, grazing, and trees), yet at the local level rules are viewed in a more holistic manner within the broader way of life in the community. The traditional regulatory mechanisms include explicit and implicit rules and taboos.

There is some degree of social control over the traditional institutions and leadership, if the community does not approve of their decisions, through reference to the power of the ancestral spirits, as well as other forms of social denunciation. At a superficial level, traditional institutions may be seen as oppressing women, because women lack formal representation within their supporting structures, but women often develop strategies for manipulating the system. The case in Box 7–1 illustrates some of the strategies used by women to ensure that their interests are considered within traditional institutions for natural resource use and management.

The case also illustrates that, where women cannot employ internal strategies, they now rely on external development facilitators for support to ensure that their views are considered. In this case, the women sought and received support from an external agent. An alternative option would have been to seek assistance from the traditional village court (*dare*), but there was no immediate assurance that their case would be treated fairly as the traditional village court is made up only of men. Women participate only as witnesses in the cases tried by the village court.

Local Government/Modern Institutions

The term “modern institutions” is used here to refer to natural resource management institutions of the state, such as those instituted by the village development committees (VIDCOs) and ward development committees (WADCOs). In theory, VIDCOs and WADCOs are applauded as truly democratic institutions that allow broad participation, because individuals are elected into their positions. VIDCOs and WADCOs were created under the prime minister’s directive in 1984, ostensibly to democratize the process of planning for local development (Murombedzi 1994). VIDCOs are demographically defined administrative units that, in principle, are based on a system of popular representation. A VIDCO consists of seven elected committee members and represents about 100 households. Two of these seven positions are reserved for the ruling ZANU PF party’s women and youth leagues. A VIDCO is presided over by a chair and is tasked to design local development plans. About six or seven VIDCOs constitute a ward, which is presided over by an elected councilor, who represents the ward at district level.

The fact that one position in the VIDCO is reserved for women and another for the youth emanated from the numerous attempts by the government to make legal and institutional moves to promote gender equality. The government was influenced by the socialist ideology of revolutionary struggle and the role women played in the revolutionary war. This early commitment to gender equality affected the formation of new local institutions. Often ruling party, women’s league, and youth wing representatives were voted in or co-opted into the VIDCO. Although women have a specified seat in the VIDCO and WADCO, it is important to note that numbers do not always mean effective representation.

The community votes by show of hands for members of the VIDCO. Thus, voting lacks any privacy, and people can be influenced by peer pressure to vote for someone. In the Romwe Catchment, the VIDCO was found to be inactive. During the two and a half years of the research period, the VIDCO held only two

meetings where the process of decision-making could be observed. The first meeting was held to replace the late VIDCO chair, but this meeting was poorly attended. The second meeting was called to compile a list of beneficiaries of the food-for-work program. Thus, while there are women representatives on these committees, the committees' limited activity makes it difficult to assess women's contribution to decision-making processes.

The RDC expects the VIDCO to enforce rules on woodland use at the local level. In practice, however, enforcement is lax, and the current VIDCO chair says there is no incentive to enforce rules because there is no compensation. Members sacrifice time they could have spent in fields and doing other household chores to attend RDC workshops outside the area. The current VIDCO chair has threatened the councilor with resignation if the members' demand for allowances is not addressed. In talking to the chair's wife during his absence, I observed that the wife might have pushed him to resign. She pointed out that she did not support the idea of her husband continuing as chair of the VIDCO. All the meetings that he had to attend without pay at the RDC held up their household work. Their main house was blown away by heavy winds in November 2000, but as of August 2001 the house had not been repaired. Furthermore, before her husband became chair of the VIDCO, she used to go to Museva business center, about 5 km away, to sell vegetables and tomatoes. Now she has to do a lot more work at home and can no longer go to Museva. Thus, she has very little income of her own.

Project-Related Organizations

A number of organizations set up by NGOs or other government departments were found in the study site. These structures—for example, the catchment management, dam management, and garden committees in Chidiso and Barura—theoretically are established by democratic elections, as is the case of the VIDCOs. Participants are free to choose people they want to be in committees, and there are no conditions. NGO facilitators set the timeframe, usually two to three years, for the operation of these organizations. In the majority of cases, election of members is done at community meetings. Similar to the VIDCO elections, voting during the project committee elections is by show of hands. While this method is considered transparent, the downside is that some people may vote in a particular way out of fear of being accused of voting for the wrong candidate.

Committee members often attend training workshops and meetings at hotels or venues outside the village—they thus have more exposure and sometimes view themselves as superior to other people in the community. In some cases, committee members are seen as being “too forward” as a result of their exposure. This is especially so if they are women without husbands. Their “forwardness” is believed to be a result of lack of control over them by a man (see Box 7-2).

Women in the NGO-facilitated committees are very assertive. This may be partly due to the fact that women tend to predominate on those committees, and committee members receive formal training on leadership skills and attend confidence-building courses.

Box 7–2. Women Leaders and Innovators

The Community Mobilizer

One of the female leaders and innovators in Romwe is the community mobilizer for CARE International. She is a widow; her late husband was a soldier in the Zimbabwe National Army. She is also a daughter-in-law to the influential kraal head. She is in her mid-40s, and her household is considered to be rich. She owns a car, has positions in a number of committees, and has attended many training workshops. She has primary school education and can therefore read and write. Her views are respected in community decision-making arenas, but other community members do not copy some of her innovations. She often stands up in village meetings and speaks out in a polite way. Being polite is a strategy that she has used well to ensure that people listen to her. People respect her for being cool and to the point.

As a result of being innovative, she has diverted water from Barura Dam spillway for her own use and has a flourishing 2-acre (approximately 1 hectare) plot of vegetables, sugarcane, citrus fruits, and maize, which she crops all year round (outside the Barura Garden). Other farmers once raised concerns that she was using community water from the dam for her own private use, and she argued that she was only using water spilling on its own from the dam. She uses her open truck to ferry her produce to the nearby markets.

She also works with a variety of organizations on trials, e.g., maize seed trials with Seedco, drip irrigation with the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), wheat trials and indigenous tree planting with the Institute of Environmental Studies (IES). Being a progressive farmer, she interacts with many external agents and thus has been accused of being a prostitute, especially by men in the community. This perception was confirmed by one sabuku who called on the field-based male IES research assistant and said to him "My son, you have to be careful with some women that you work with. We know them. They are not good. They have had love affairs with many people, and they may disturb your work." One married woman noted, "This woman is such a hard-working person. It is her jealous relatives who accuse her of being a prostitute."

In other circles, the female leader in Romwe is also accused of manipulating people to her own advantage, e.g., making Barura Project participants buy her sugarcane for planting. She is believed to have made false claims that people from outside the area were coming to buy her sugarcane the following day. Thus if the project did not buy on that particular day, then she would sell to outsiders, and project members would have to buy elsewhere. This sent panic among the Barura Project members, and they decided to buy the sugarcane. Given that she has clients that come from outside the village to buy her garden produce, it was probably not a false claim that the sugarcane would be bought by other people if the project did not buy on time.

Where Are the Women?

Recent commentators on community-based natural resource management initiatives have questioned the representativeness of those institutions, especially at the local level (Narayan 2000; Mukamuri 2000). This literature argues that the more powerful members of a society may create institutions in order to regularize and entrench mutually beneficial relationships. Thus institutions do not necessarily serve the needs and interests of all, but mainly preserve the power of influential persons. Women and other poor groups are often at the periphery or excluded from natu-

Box 7–3. The Chidiso and Barura Garden Projects

Established in 1991, Chidiso was the first garden project in the area. The project was externally funded during the early stages. The garden is known as “Chidiso chaMwari” (God’s will) because, according to community members, no one from the community applied for it, not even the councilor. The villagers say the project came from God because they just saw a group of whites coming to drill a borehole well for them. Membership is predominantly female, and the members own plots in their own right. Project members point out that they have benefited from the garden and collector well since they now have a reliable source of water. They also get cash income from the sale of vegetables, as well as supplementing their dietary needs. Farmers participating in the garden are from the three catchment villages. The project has a committee that was put in place in 1991, which has not changed since it was established and is no longer active.

Formal decision-making in the committee is dominated by two members: the chair, who is the most influential kraal head in the catchment, and the vice-chair, who is a woman. It is rumored that the chair and vice-chair of the project have a strong personal relationship, thus decision-making is unlikely to be transparent. The vice-chair also belongs to a powerful family in the catchment. Members of this family call themselves *Zvidzavopa* (the powerful ones) and claim that no substantive decisions can be made without their involvement (see Nemarunde 2001). The majority of the decisions are made outside formal arenas, and the two leaders have taken the opportunity to push their ideas and interests forward. Reacting to this set up, some original members who are not happy with decision-making processes are now subletting their cultivation beds to tenants because they do not want to give up their claims to the land in the garden, yet they refuse to accept the garden decision-making process. At the time of the study, 80% of the plot users were tenants, without the right to vote. The majority of original members had moved to Barura Garden, where the use of a flood irrigation system makes watering a lot easier than in Chidiso, where they have to pump water from the borehole well and carry it about 500 m.

The Barura Garden Project was established in 1998 with support from CARE International. Membership in the project is drawn from beyond Romwe Catchment villages because water used in the garden is from Barura Dam, which also caters to other villages outside the Romwe Catchment area. Like Chidiso Garden, Barura membership is predominantly women, and the same applies to the project committee. Influential female personalities in the area such as the “community mobilizer,” one of the wives of the late councilor, and a widow from Tamwa village are all members of the committee. Thus women’s views are often taken into account, much more than among the Chidiso garden managers.

ral resource management institutions. As a result, women have restricted access to land and other key natural resources. In these situations, women sometimes devise strategies (both intentionally and unintentionally) to ensure they gain access to such key resources. Some of these strategies are highlighted in Box 7–3, which describes how women participate in community projects as a way of gaining direct access to land through ownership of plots in the gardens.

Box 7–3 demonstrates that decision-making processes are complex and cannot be easily traced, especially where decisions are made outside formal arenas. For instance, while the chairman of the Chidiso Garden is well respected in the area, he is influenced by the vice-chairwoman, who may be his lover. I observed that women use the garden projects to gain access to land that they can claim as their own. Although all communal lands in Zimbabwe officially belong to the state,¹² at the

local level, from the perspective of custom and tradition, men own land. Women gain user rights to land through their husbands or other male relatives. Membership in the Chidiso and Barura Garden Projects gives women an opportunity to own some piece of land registered in their own right. Thus women have become “official owners” of land portions, despite men’s traditional rights to own the fields, homesteads, and bushland near their homestead area.

A boom in women’s gardening projects is contributing to a gradual erosion of total male land-holding privileges. These findings concur with Schroeder’s findings in the Gambia, where women became landowners through the introduction of market gardening (1997, 489). In Romwe, women’s economic status is restricted by lack of access to vegetable markets and the resulting low profits from vegetable crops. This low profitability may explain why men are less active than women in the gardening projects. Men tend to prefer projects that generate relatively high incomes. This shift to women’s becoming “official” landowners through vegetable gardening underscores the contention that rural property systems in Africa are often quite dynamic (Bassett 1993; Shipton and Goheen 1992). Because women hold the predominant membership in community gardening projects, they also have an opportunity to gain leadership experience that they are highly unlikely to get in joint projects with men.

A recent strategy used by women in Romwe to gain access to traditionally male decision-making domains is to penetrate activities that men have dominated, such as tree-planting. Women, for example, are participating in action research by planting tree species traditionally used to meet male needs. The action research on trees involves experimenting with planting indigenous tree species. The project started off with 48 participants (12 men and 36 women) in December 2000. Tree species planted were *mukamba* (*Azelia Quanzensis*), *muuzhe* (*Brachystegia spiciformis*), and *mupfura* (*Sclerocarya birrea*). These tree species are used predominantly by men in the area for poles and carving. It is interesting to note that women are enthusiastically planting these tree species traditionally believed to fulfill male chores. The selection of species was project driven and not community initiated, but participants have developed a lot of interest in the project. This group has no formal representative structure, group members readily share information with each other. Participatory monitoring and evaluation sessions are conducted every six months.

Women indicated that one of the major reasons they wanted to participate in the tree research group, besides gaining knowledge, was to claim ownership of the land on which they plant their trees. Another was to secure unrestricted access to the three tree species that the group is planting. The participants, especially women, indicated that once their trees are big, they would be able to use them without restrictions. The common response when asked about their visions for the trees they have planted was, “If my trees grow, I will have my own trees that I can use the way I want without anyone refusing me access to the trees.” Asked what she would do if her husbands divorced her and she had to move elsewhere and leave her trees,¹³ one woman said “I will never leave this homestead, if my husband wants me to leave, he would rather kill me here. If it were exotic fruit trees I would leave because those trees grow much faster and I could go and plant other trees wherever I go. But now, these indigenous trees take a lot of work and if you see them grow

big, you should be a very patient person.” This shows the determination of the women in the action research regarding ownership of the trees they have planted, to ensure that the trees mature, while retaining control over their use.

Discussion

Power relations in local natural resource management institutions and organizations are gendered and also interwoven with other kinds of social relations, such as kinship ties. This is highlighted in the case of the vice-chair of Chidiso Garden Project, who draws her power from social networks and kinship ties as detailed in Box 7-3. To understand how final decisions are made, one needs an understanding of the broader community context of social interactions and networks that influence resource management institutions. This calls for a research methodology that allows for extensive observations in formal and informal arenas, as well as longitudinal studies that involve an extended stay in the community and participation in community activities.

Similarly, women’s roles in natural resource management decision-making processes cannot be easily understood apart from other social processes, in which they are embedded. For instance, marital status is important, because most women in key decision-making positions are assertive and are predominantly widows, elderly single parents, or *de jure* household heads (e.g., the CARE International community mobilizer, the Chidiso Garden Committee vice-chair). The need to separate women’s and men’s spaces has been overstated in the gender and community-based natural resource management literature. Findings from this study show that women and men share the same spaces (woodlands, for example) but use different resources. These findings concur with Goebel’s findings from a study carried out in the resettlement areas in Zimbabwe. There is a need to take these findings into consideration when using the gendered spaces and places framework for the analysis of natural resource management. The sharing of resource spaces by men and women to obtain different products is especially applicable to the study of woodlands products, where a variety of resources may be found in the same spaces and places.

The power relations between women and men are constantly shifting as they are negotiated and renegotiated in response to changing natural resource availability, and needs and interests of the actors involved. The challenge facing researchers is how to capture such continuous changes and their influence on decisions about who has access to what natural resources, which in turn has implications for the sustainable use of natural resources. Women’s bargaining power appears to be lower for woodland resources, where access is more individualized and where overlap occurs in the areas and products used by women and men. The women’s bargaining power is much higher in the garden projects where they operate in groups and where resource use areas are more discrete.

Decision-making arenas are not always public or formal. Informal platforms for decision-making also exist, and they are often very influential. For instance, when meetings are called, the agenda is not always formally announced but is made known through the informal social and information networks in the village. By

the date of the meeting almost everyone will know what will be discussed in the meeting, and some decisions are even made before the formal meeting. The majority of women in Romwe do not seem to speak up at public meetings. They largely use informal means to control powerful male figures in the community. An example is the alleged love affair involving the powerful and respected kraal head in the area, which sometimes constrains his power to make certain decisions (cf. similar situation in Mafungautsi, Chapter 8). Nonetheless, conclusions should not be drawn on the role of women outside the public arena without in-depth analysis. In the Zambezi Valley, I found that there was minimal communication on the agenda of meetings prior to the meeting, highlighting the need in those circumstances for women's participation in public decision-making processes, in order to have any influence.

Women in Romwe are actively involved in decision-making in smaller group projects, such as the garden project and the action research on trees, rather than in larger community arenas such as woodland management through formal administrative and traditional authority structures. The analysis shows that the membership in smaller project committees is predominantly women. This partly explains the number of women in these project committees. Despite the fact that gardens are traditionally viewed as women's domain, the problem of marketing and limited profits may make these projects less attractive to men. A similar conclusion may be drawn for the action research on trees project, where the benefits are realized only over the long term, if at all.

This study finds that participating in projects with membership structures that are predominantly female gives women access to natural resources that they would not otherwise have. For instance, membership in gardening projects has given rise to new forms of property ownership by women. These findings contradict what Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen (2001) found in South Asia, where, with the exception of female-headed farms, women often continued to be perceived as helpers of their husbands, and the household was seen as a unit of common interests. In the case of southern Zimbabwe, women now own individual plots of land.

Conclusion

Gender relations in decision-making processes within institutions that manage natural resources are complex. Sometimes outcomes are resource specific (e.g., woodland use versus gardening projects); sometimes they are influenced by social relations in the form of kinship ties, age, and the issue being discussed. For women, marital status seems to be a key to determining their chances of being elected to committees, as well as being listened to. For instance, in Chivi, widows and elderly single women tend to be given more positions in management structures, compared with married or younger single women. Widows and elderly single women tend to stand up and speak out in public meetings. These findings concur with what Bradley (1991) found among the Luhya tribe in Kenya, where older widows had greater decision-making power with regard to tree-planting and disposal of woodlots than younger females.

While the cases in this chapter are anecdotal, they are examples of how informal and less recognized ways of participating in organizations and institutions for natural resource management may be a platform for increasing women's participation in broader decision-making about the use and management of resources. The informal strategies women use to gain access to natural resources do not guarantee secure rights to natural resources. These strategies are very dynamic and dependent on patterns of social interaction that women may not control. Thus, the key issue facing women—and in turn the development projects seeking to support them—is not whether to choose between statutory (e.g., WADCOs and VIDCOs) or traditional (e.g., kraal heads and headmen) institutions to secure their rights and access to resources, but to maximize their claims under either or both depending on which benefits them the most at a given time.

The study investigated natural resource management institutions through a framework of gender spaces and places. It reveals that the dynamics of natural resource management institutions can only be understood fully, if attention is broadened to consider formal and informal institutions. The evidence suggests that lack of formal representation of women in resource management institutions does not mean that women have no influence over what happens within the organization. Women devise strategies to ensure that existing institutions address their interests and needs regarding access to natural resources. Given that informal strategies for resource access do not provide women secure rights to natural resources, it is essential that there be awareness raising on the importance of involving both women and men in formal decision-making processes. Simply mandating a quota system that sets aside positions of authority for women is not sufficient. While the quota system may be a good starting point to facilitate women's participation in formal decision-making, if not accompanied by awareness raising and leadership training, this approach may not yield the expected results.

Endnotes

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1. The nature of membership, roles, responsibilities, and jurisdiction over such structures influence the roles of institutions in determining access to and control over resources by women and men in a given society.
2. In the context of Zimbabwe, communal lands are the African smallholders' farming areas, formerly called reserves and tribal trust lands during the colonial period. These were originally created through land alienation by the colonial regime using the Land Apportionment Act of 1930.
3. Mazarire (1999) quotes Theodore Bent who describes an example of bodily decorations as the "breast and furrow pattern" believed to signify women as the chief agriculturalists in the area.

Bent wrote, “At Mlala, too, we were first introduced to the women who have their stomachs decorated with many long lines or cicatrices...executed with surprising regularity and resembling the furrows on a ploughed field” (Mazarire 1999, 46–47).

4. In the context of natural resource use and management, common pool resources are those that generate finite quantities of resource units so that one person’s use subtracts from the quantity of resource units available to others (Ostrom 1990). Most common pool resources are sufficiently large that multiple actors are able to use the resource system simultaneously and efforts to exclude potential users are costly. Examples of common pool resources include woodlands, ground water, grazing lands, etc.

5. Ranger (1999:21) narrates the story of Princess Koswa of the Varozvi Mambos (chieftainship): “They [Koswa and Nyahuwi] came into the country occupied by one Ganganyama, said to have been a giant of a man, and very hairy. Since fighting seemed dangerous, the two women seduced the rustic gentleman and persuaded him to take them both to his couch... Ganganyama readily acceded to their request after being fortified for the event with liberal quantities of beer, [and] he ventured forth to do justice to the situation. However, the two girls complained that their hirsute lover’s rank growth of hair so tickled them that they could not enjoy themselves. He granted them permission to shave him and so the poor man’s fate was sealed. With one quick cut of the knife as he lay under the ministrations of his two ‘amorous barbers’ he was slain.”

6. For instance, I was asked to pray at one respondent’s home because she was excited that I had paid her a visit, while other development workers, according to her, only visited certain “rich” households, November 2000.

7. This categorization is based on a wealth-ranking exercise done in the village based on community members’ criteria and indicators for defining socioeconomic status. Four wealth groups were identified, namely, the rich (*vanowanisisa*), average (*vanowana*), poor (*vanoshaya*), and poorest (*vanoshayisisa*).

8. Although I am Ndebele, my husband is Shona and comes from Masvingo province. This status accorded me respect and a listening ear from both groups. The Ndebele viewed me as one of them because I am Ndebele, while the Shona did the same on the grounds that I am married to a Shona.

9. Officially people do not acknowledge that they hunt small game. They tell you “people steal small game, but you should not write that down as it is like taking yourself to the police station after committing a crime.”

10. See also Nhira and Fortmann (1993) for the classification of resource controls in Zimbabwe’s communal areas.

11. A kraal head (or *sabuku*) in this area is a traditional village head who is responsible for land allocation, resolution of disputes, and other community issues that need to be dealt with in the village. This is not always his role (see Matondi 2001).

12. The Communal Lands Act of 1982 vests control of land in the state, with administrative powers conferred to the RDCs who are given authority to enact bylaws and to devolve authority to WADCOs and VIDCOs (Bruce 1990; Mandondo 2001).

13. In the case of divorce, women lose access to tree products in the homestead area (Luckert and others 2000). This pattern was also reported by Goebel (1999) in Hwedza district and Fortmann and Nabane (1992) who found that divorced women lost access to homestead trees, even if they had stayed in the village and planted and tended the trees. Goebel (1999) notes that, while the gender ideology does not restrict women from planting trees, the social construction of ownership is male.