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**The importance of the sub-district level for  
community-based natural resource  
management in rural Zimbabwe**

**Elizabeth Harrison, Lindsay Stringer  
and Andrew Dougill**

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# The importance of the sub-district level for community-based natural resource management in rural Zimbabwe

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## **Abstract**

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) in Zimbabwe has a long and varied history within a complex and dynamic governance system. Significant amounts of research have critiqued the successes and failures of Zimbabwe's CBNRM programme – the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resource Use (CAMPFIRE) – across its three decades of implementation. Past research has mainly focused on specific CAMPFIRE projects and their wider governance structures, in which the district level has been considered as the 'local' level. Studies have ignored the complex and important sub-system of natural resource management governance between the district level and the local communities. Thus, there is a lack of understanding of the intricate structures and processes involved in the sub-district system, and a shortfall in research that attempts to understand micro-level realities of managing and governing natural resources. This paper analyses natural resource management using survey, interview and focus group data from four study villages across Binga and Chiredzi Districts in Zimbabwe, all of which have been part of a CAMPFIRE project. Through qualitative assessment of the sub-district natural resource management governance system, the paper unravels past and present, and formal and informal, governance structures and processes. Governance gaps are identified, alongside the implications these have for the involvement of communities and local actors in natural resource management.

Findings stress the need to identify routes to bridge current local level governance gaps and prevent new gaps from forming, such that local knowledge and community empowerment are afforded a more central role in the planning and implementation of CAMPFIRE and other CBNRM initiatives.

## **Key Words**

CBNRM, good local governance, decentralisation, participation, CAMPFIRE, governance gaps, community participation

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## 1 Introduction

Since the 1970s, policy and field-based interventions have attempted to reconcile biodiversity conservation and local community development (Adams and Hulme, 2001, Jones, 2004). Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), which formally embraces these interventions, began in the 1980s in communal lands of southern Africa. From here, it proceeded to catalyse support from its neighbouring regions and spread around the world (Measham and Lumbasi, 2013, Roe and Nelson, 2009). CBNRM typically involves community empowerment and participation in decision-making and management activities for natural resource management, and the decentralisation of ownership to the communities integrally involved in resource use (Gandiwa et al., 2013). It considers that through integral involvement of the communities using the relevant natural resource base, appreciation of their traditional knowledge and their natural resource related needs, better resource management outcomes are encouraged (Armitage, 2005, Turner, 2004). Much of the discourse surrounding CBNRM argues that natural resources are best managed by those who use the resources in question for their everyday survival (Adams and Hulme, 2001, Larson and Ribot, 2004, Ribot, 2003). This has been officially recognised in Principles 10 and 22 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (United Nations, 1992).

CBNRM was taken up in Zimbabwe in the early 1980s. Conflict between Zimbabwe's rural populations and wildlife mega fauna (especially elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), lions (*Panther leo*), and buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*)) motivated the creation of the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). CAMPFIRE, implemented from 1989, created a novel approach to CBNRM which ultimately aimed to create an economic value for wildlife conservation for the benefit of the communities involved (Adams and Hulme, 2001, Jones, 2004). One of the central tenants of CAMPFIRE, in line with the wider CBNRM concept, was the key role given to local communities in managing and owning the projects, and in having responsibility over the revenue and development opportunities arising from them. This was considered particularly important given the limited livelihood options otherwise available to rural populations, especially in semi-arid parts of the country. However, this original design of community ownership was somewhat hindered by the relatively newly independent government of the late 1980s, which refused to allow full decentralisation to the rural communities. The compromise was for the Rural District Councils (RDCs), as the lowest legally recognised level of central government, to represent the communities within their jurisdiction, a process known as gaining

Appropriate Authority (AA) (Mapedza and Bond, 2006, Murphree, 2005, Shackleton et al., 2002).

Once implemented, CAMPFIRE soon had a reputation of success (Conyers, 2002, Logan and Moseley, 2002) and neighbouring countries soon followed suit (i.e. Administrative Management Design (ADMADE) for Game Management Areas (GMAs) in Zambia, and Wildlife Integration for Livelihood Diversification (WILD) in Namibia) (Balint and Mashinya, 2006, Measham and Lumbasi, 2013). However, over time this success, or perceived success, was eroded, and by the late 1990s many criticisms had begun to emerge (Logan and Moseley, 2002). In particular, critics noted the lack of participation, empowerment, and emphasis on the role of local communities, in the management of the local natural resource base. Underlying many of these issues was the oversimplification of complex local systems in project design and implementation (Measham and Lumbasi, 2013), and a lack of consideration for the complexity and diversity of the local level (Armitage, 2005, Ribot, 2003). These missing factors have been frequently shown to be imperative for successful engagement of local communities (Blaikie, 2006, Ribot, 2003, Shackleton and Campbell, 2001). Furthermore, decentralisation of both the management and the benefits of CAMPFIRE beyond the RDC and district level is invariably put forward as a way of overcoming some of CAMPFIRE's issues (Blaikie, 2006, Mapedza and Bond, 2006, Murphree, 2005). Yet this suggestion is not matched with simultaneous pathways that can guide towards this end. Even where there is appreciation of the complexity of the sub-district system, there is a continued lack of understanding of the structures and processes at this scale, and a lack of sub-district (local level) research that attempts to understand the realities of managing and governing natural resources both currently and as it would be in a further decentralised system (Ribot, 2003).

This paper addresses this research gap by providing a unique up-to-date analysis of CAMPFIRE. It is particularly timely, following a period of decline in research on CBNRM in Zimbabwe during the political and economic crises of the 2000s, from which the recovery of research has been slow. Unlike many other studies on CBNRM in Zimbabwe, it places the perspectives of local communities at the forefront of analyses.

Specifically, this paper aims to unravel the local governance structure of community-based natural resource management in Zimbabwe and to evaluate it against the UNDP (2004) building blocks for 'good local governance' (GLG). The concept of GLG is widely considered to cover the key aspects required for (more) successful democratic decentralisation and participation of local communities – central components of CBNRM design (Larson and

Ribot, 2004, Nsingo and Kuye, 2005, Ribot, 2003). Through this evaluation, the paper illuminates understanding of the problems within the current sub-district governance system of natural resource management and why these may have transpired, and provides key lessons from which future projects can learn.

The paper's objectives are therefore to:

1. Outline and explain the processes and structures, and the local perspectives of these, within the sub-district natural resource management governance in four rural Zimbabwean villages;
2. Critically evaluate these sub-district natural resource management systems against the UNDP (2004) criteria of good local governance; and to
3. Identify constructive, forward-looking lessons for decentralisation and participation applicable for future CBNRM based projects.

## **2 Background**

Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE is one of the most well-known CBNRM programmes in southern Africa. Child (2003) explains that CAMPFIRE's design had, at its core, "the empowerment of community members at village level to control wildlife and its revenues, the internalisation of costs and benefits at this level, and an underlying belief that wildlife was the most sustainable land use option in many of these remote areas" (p.6). The income from conserving wild animals provides an incentive for local residents to limit wildlife losses through poaching and habitat degradation (see Hackel, 1999).

Due to the central role of local communities, much of the relevant work on CBNRM engages with concepts such as GLG (UNDP, 2004) and decentralisation (Larson and Ribot, 2004, Olsen, 2007, Ribot, 2003) as mechanisms through which successful community participation and empowerment can be delivered. Decentralisation of decision-making power, financial capacity and political access are integral to the placement of local communities at the centre of such processes and structures (Nsingo and Kuye, 2005).

In reality, however, studies have revealed over time that incorporation of these aspects into CBNRM project design, or from design to practice, are often lacking (e.g. Balint and Mashinya, 2006, Gandiwa et al., 2013, Ribot, 2003, Shackleton et al., 2002, Zulu, 2012). Failure to provide benefits to the local communities and to successfully devolve management are just two of the many common criticisms (Blaikie, 2006, Shackleton et al., 2002). Specific criticisms of CAMPFIRE are listed below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Specific criticisms of Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE programme within the literature**

<b>Criticism</b>	<b>Relevant References</b>
Decentralisation of Appropriate Authority to Rural District Councils (RDC) rather than to the local communities	Average and Desmond, 2007; Conyers, 2002; Mapedza and Bond, 2006; Murphree, 2005; Wolmer and Ashley, 2003
Processes that are decentralised tend to be those that incur costs to the devolved authority rather than also the benefits (i.e. monitoring and enforcement)	Conyers, 2002; Ribot, 2003
Oversimplification of complex local governance systems (Measham and Lumbasi, 2013) resulting in a lack of understanding and acknowledgement of the hindrances to facilitating local empowerment	Blaikie, 2006; Brosius et al., 1998; Dzingirai, 2003; Shackleton and Campbell, 2001
Incomplete consideration of the complexity and diversity of local communities including the treatment of community as a homogeneous unit	Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Armitage, 2005; Brosius et al., 1998; Logan and Moseley, 2002; Ribot, 2003
Insufficient recognition of the interactions between different components of the natural system	Balint and Mashinya, 2006
Insufficient action to tackling problems of elite-capture of resources and wildlife-based tourist revenues within RDCs	Mapedza and Bond, 2006; Nelson and Agrawal, 2008; Whande et al., 2003

Overall, there is little understanding of the impacts and intricacies of not only project implementation but also of the above listed issues on the communities involved and at the sub-district level. There is a lack of understanding of the intricate structures and processes involved in the sub-district system, and a shortfall in research that attempts to understand these more micro-level, and integral, realities of managing and governing natural resources. With such a focus on decentralisation to local communities in the CBNRM concept, unravelling and understanding these realities and thus the practical implications of decentralisation and CBNRM projects for people in these communities is paramount. An

overall understanding of these complexities can reveal the weaknesses in current practice and offer valuable lessons for future CBNRM projects being implemented in the southern African context.

To understand these subsystems, this study identifies local perspectives of natural resource governance at the sub-district level and evaluates these in relation to the UNDP's (2004) characteristics of good local governance (GLG). Perez et al. (2007) suggest that in order to achieve their environmental targets, economic goals, and social benefits, such activities must be backed by strong rural organisations, legitimate and representative leadership, client driven extension, local capacity building, and informed and enabling policies. The concept of GLG supports these suggested requirements and forms a useful guide for analysing local governance for areas of strength and weakness.

GLG comprises six building blocks:

- i) citizen participation,
- ii) partnerships between key local actors,
- iii) capacity of local actors,
- iv) multiple flows of information,
- v) institutions of accountability, and
- vi) pro-poor orientation.

Each building block is a concept in itself, surrounded by a vast amount of debate and discussion in the empirical and theoretical literature (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004, Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Achieving GLG is difficult, especially without understanding the local context, structures and processes. Thus, before trying to apply the concepts of GLG it is important to understand what is actually happening in reality. As such, in this paper we define the concepts as they emerge from the data, thus grounding them in the reality of the participants in the research. This process supports claims by Olsen (2007) that "local government emphasises the need to look beyond the narrow perspectives of the legal frameworks and local government entities" (p.7), and enables this study to build on the realities of practice (Zulu, 2012). Table 2 describes the six building blocks of GLG in more detail in relation to this study. In this study, however, we only use five of the six building blocks for analysis. It is very difficult to measure and/or ascertain the pro-poor orientation in

these cases where the key actors are part of the 'poor' themselves. Thus, we felt it appropriate to exclude this element from our analysis.

Understanding community perspectives and roles in the sub-district governance system for natural resource management is imperative (Jones and Murphree, 2004, Nsingo and Kuye, 2005). With the stalling of research in Zimbabwe from the early 2000s, there is little knowledge about the modern system, and thus minimal understanding of how further decentralisation could or should take place. Existing analyses have also failed to establish why recent attempts at decentralisation have not garnered the results expected in terms of local community participation and empowerment.

**Table 2: The six building blocks of good local governance**

<b>Building Block</b>	<b>Definitions from Data</b>	<b>Key References</b>
1. <b>Citizen Participation</b>	The meaning of citizen participation here relates mostly to the involvement of local citizens in decision-making processes and information/knowledge exchanges. This corresponds well to the many similar definitions employed by other studies in the academic literature.	Poulton et al. (2006) Dyer et al. (2014) Rhodes (1997) FAO (n.d.) Ribot (2003) Arnstein (1969)
2. <b>Partnerships between key local actors</b>	Here a partnership symbolises a reciprocal, constructive, and respecting relationship between actors whereby they work successfully together for mutual benefit.	Foxon et al. (2009) GoZ (2002) Balint and Mashinya (2006) Sanyal (2006)
3. <b>Capacity of local actors</b>	Capacity in this sense refers to the actor's ability to fulfil its defined and expected role.	Dzingirai (2003) Sanyal (2006) Ribot (2003)
4. <b>Multidirectional flows of information</b>	Amended to multidirectional as this is more than just a flow in each direction but the mutual sharing of information for the benefit of both actors. Multidirectional flows are needed in order to build knowledge, skills, participation and accountability.	FAO (n.d.) Cash and Moser (2000) Pahl-Wostl (2009)
5. <b>Institutions of accountability</b>	Accountability brings together the previous building blocks. To hold an actor to account requires capacity, information, and participation, especially to form a well meaning partnership. Accountability discussions tend to focus on the lower level actors within a system and their abilities to hold higher levels to account. Lower levels are also held accountable by the upper levels, more so than the other way around, taking the form of taxes, law enforcement, and convoluted decision-making processes.	Mapedza and Bond (2006) Ribot (2002) Ribot (2003) Tsai (2007) Gandiwa et al. (2013) GoZ (2001)
6. <b>Pro-poor orientation</b>	It is very difficult to measure and/or ascertain the pro-poor orientation in these cases where the key actors are part of the 'poor' themselves. Thus, we felt it appropriate to exclude this element from our analysis.	Poulton et al. (2006) Hackel (1999) Jütting et al. (2005)

### 3 Research Design and Methods

#### 3.1 Research Design

This research investigates the sub-district section of an overall complex multi-scale, multi-actor phenomena of CBNRM. It takes a qualitative and participatory approach which allows concern with context. An inductive research approach has been adopted to enable concepts to emerge from the data. This was combined with a multiple case study strategy (Yin, 2003).

The two Zimbabwean Districts of Binga (northwest) and Chiredzi (southeast) were chosen as case study areas (Figure 1). First, on a logistical level, both districts proved more feasible than others for fieldwork. Second, despite having similar histories and characteristics, as listed below, the districts are anecdotally renowned for having considerably different levels of CAMPFIRE success, a point that was noted a number of times in the literature at the beginning of the study (Conyers, 2002, Dzingirai, 1996, Dzingirai, 2003). The districts share several characteristics. They:

- have a similar history in terms of CAMPFIRE implementation;
- gained Appropriate Authority within a few years of each other (1989-1991) (Conyers, 2002);
- contain comparable National Parks in size, species type and population, and history (Chizarira and Gonarezhou respectively);
- have populations derived mainly from minority tribes with a history of displacement (Tonga and Shangaani respectively) (Conyers, 2002);
- were both listed as being areas with high economic potential from CAMPFIRE (see Frost and Bond, 2008) and;
- are both located in the same agro-ecological zone, with similar associated problems such as minimal rainfall at less than 450-500 millilitres per year (Vincent and Thomas, 1960).



Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe Districts with Binga District and Chiredzi District highlighted (sourced from Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Johan van der Heyden)

Two villages from each of these districts were chosen for data collection. At the request of the RDCs in each district, the names of the villages are anonymous. Table 3 outlines the criteria used for village selection, how each of the four villages fulfils these requirements, and how they complement each other between districts. In determining the criteria for village selection it was decided that the maximum size of a village for the time available for data collection, and to ensure decent representation, was 150 households. Prior to starting data collection, permission was gained from the relevant district and village authorities.

**Table 3: Selection criteria for case study villages in Binga District and Chiredzi District**

Criteria	Binga District		Chiredzi District	
	Village 1	Village 2	Village 3	Village 4
1. <b>No. of households &lt;150</b>	100	89	91	81
2. <b>Varying distance from political and economic centre</b>	160km from Binga Town and RDC	35km from Binga Town	150kms from Chiredzi Town and RDC	40kms from Chiredzi Town and RDC
3. <b>Villages existed pre-CAMPFIRE implementation</b>	Residents relocated from Zambezi Valley in 1957	Yes	Yes, although many residents relocated from Mozambique in 1950s	Yes
4. <b>Accessible politically and logistically</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. <b>Other relevant information</b>	Considered the “Business Centre” of the area	-	Considered the “Business Centre” of the area	-

## 3.2 Methods

A mixed method approach was taken for primary data collection during January-July 2014 as shown in Table 4. Data collection consisted of a household survey (required by the research permit process in Zimbabwe), followed by semi-structured household interviews. Interviews were also conducted with local leaders i.e. Chief, Councillor, Teachers, CAMPFIRE members, and key local informants based on their availability and willingness. At the National level, interviews were conducted with relevant national organisations i.e. Environmental Management Agency, Centre of Applied Social Sciences, Department of Parks and Wildlife, CAMPFIRE Association, Carbon Green, Environment Africa, WWF-Zimbabwe, Ministry of Agriculture, Environment Officers.

Households were chosen to participate in interviews as outlined below. Finally, separate focus groups were conducted with men and women, and included participatory methods such as Chrice Matrices<sup>1</sup> (FAO, n.d., VSO, n.d.) and Stakeholder Mapping (Aligica, 2006). The data collected using the different methods were triangulated with each other to help ensure reliability of the findings.

The survey provided the opportunity to gather demographic and socio-economic information, data on livelihood activities and natural resource use in each household and the village as a whole. This informed the sampling strategy based on the identification of livelihood activities of the household and age of the household head.

The three main livelihood categories that emerged were: 1) agriculturally subsistent, 2) subsistent based on a non-agricultural activity, and 3) cash income based. Age was also considered important in respondents' perspectives given the historical aspects of CAMPFIRE being studied and a necessary consideration when dealing with a project that has spanned three decades (CAMPFIRE started in 1989) (Leach et al., 1999). The age categories are: 1) young - less than 35 years old as these participants would likely have little memory of life pre-CAMPFIRE; 2) middle - 35-55 years old as these people will have some experience of life pre-CAMPFIRE; and 3) senior - over 55 as these people would have been of working age pre-CAMPFIRE.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Chrice Matrix is an analytical tool for looking at previous efforts of problem-solving and drawing conclusions for future activities. It deepens awareness of possible constraints for a project idea. The lessons learned from it should influence the planning of new projects, tackling the same problem. In addition, it provides a historical overview of the village/community" (VSO, n.d.)

Respondents were first split by livelihood activity, and then by age category. For example, one respondent may be “agriculturally subsistent, young”. The same number of interviews was conducted in each of the livelihood categories within a village (4-5) and approximately 25% of households in each village were interviewed overall. This was to ensure a representative overview of perspectives was obtained.

The initial research design had intended to representatively sample male and female headed households so the sample corresponded to real proportions in each village. However, the absence of many men from the villages, whether through temporary migration or being absent from the household at the time of interviewing, meant that most respondents were female. Overall, there was negligible difference in responses between males and females, thus the gender of respondents does not appear to be a significant factor in this study.

Focus groups (FG) were held in Villages 1 and 2. All adults in the village were invited as it was not deemed suitable by gatekeepers to invite only a few village members. The size of each FG can be found in Table 4. During each FG, participatory Chrice Matrices (FAO, n.d., VSO, n.d.) and Stakeholder Mapping (Aligica, 2006) were undertaken. Due to a separate study that included FGs having been conducted in Village 3 just days prior to our arrival it was deemed inappropriate to hold FGs again. In Village 4 election primaries were underway during our stay and so group gatherings were not permitted by government.

Table 4 shows the overall data collected using each method in each village.

**Table 4: The mixed method approach conducted in the four case study villages and overall data collected**

	<b>Surveys/Total Households</b>	<b>Interviews/ Total Households</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Key Village Informants</b>
<b>Village 1</b>	97/100 = 97%	23/100 = 23%	Total: 3 2 x women (1x12, 1x30) 1 x men (1x8)	Chief Councillor Ex-CAMPFIRE Committee (Secretary)
<b>Village 2</b>	78/89 = 88%	18/89 = 21%	Total: 4 2 x women (1x35, 1x21) 2 x men (1x5, 1x11)	Chief Ex-CAMPFIRE Committee (Member) Primary School Head Teacher Chief's messenger
<b>Village 3</b>	43/83 = 52%	30/83 = 36%	None	Councillor CAMPFIRE Committee (Chairman and Secretary) Clerk at CBO
<b>Village 4</b>	41/81 = 51%	33/81 = 40%	None	CAMPFIRE Committee (Chairman) Village Heads

Data from all methods was input into NVivo either typed from notes or transcribed from voice recordings. Key themes that emerged from the data were taken as starting points for deeper analysis. Coding was conducted to identify key local actors and processes involved in natural resource management, local perceptions towards these actors, issues surrounding natural resource management processes, explanatory factors for these issues given by respondents, and respondents' general overview of village life. Sentences or responses related to these areas were coded respectively and each of the subsequent collections of data were further coded for patterns in relationships, attitude, and actions etc (Bazeley, 2007). Once coded, each issue area was examined, the results of which are presented in the next section.

## **4 Results**

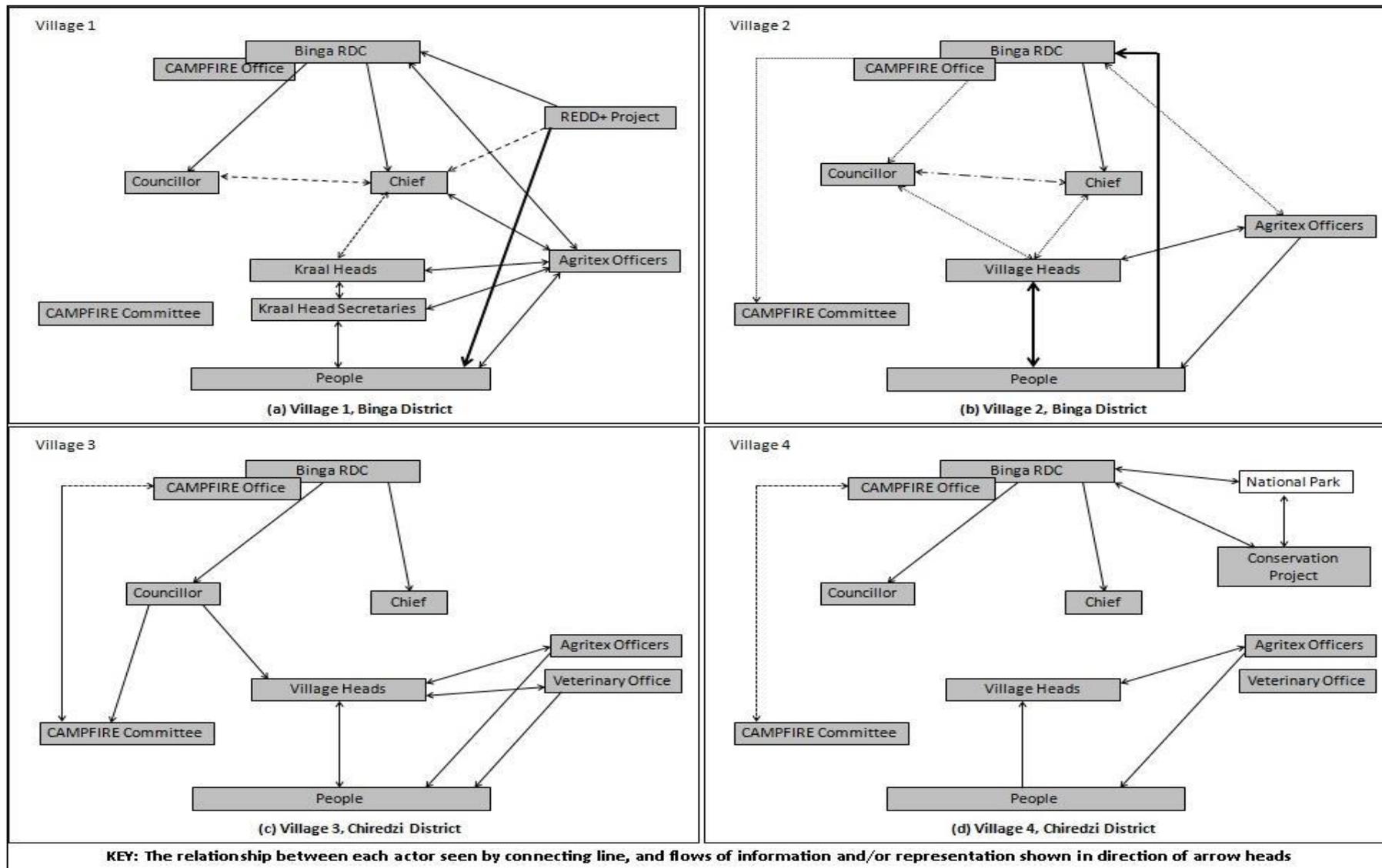
This section addresses each of the research objectives in turn.

### **4.1 Processes and local perspectives on sub-district natural resource management governance**

Figure 2 shows the sub-district natural resource management governance systems in each village, revealed during the analysis and triangulation of data from respondents' survey, interview and FG responses.

Four main perceptions emerged across the four villages: 1) that the Chief has limited capacity to resolve village problems and to represent his citizens at the district governance level, 2) that the Councillor (the elected and nominated sub-district representatives of the RDC) has a limited role in the village and governance system as a whole, 3) that the RDC is ineffective in resolving natural resource management issues, and 4) that there is an overall lack of knowledge on the part of the villages' citizens about their rights, a lack of capacity to enforce these rights, and a sense of apathy/acceptance of their negative situations.

Each of these themes is now discussed in turn.



**Figure 2: The sub-district natural resource management governance system**

First, there is a perception that the Chief has limited capacity (lack of finances, political power, and a general lack of enabling infrastructure i.e. roads, car, fuel etc.) to both resolve village problems and to represent his citizens at the district governance level. In Village 1, where the Chief resides in the village and is thus present in everyday society, this perception is mainly focused on his lack of voice at the district level and his inability to effect any changes in the actions undertaken by external actors such as NGOs and development organisations. The Chiefs in the other three villages reside at varying distances away from the village and so the communities' perception of their Chiefs' incapacities relate not only to the Chiefs' voices at the district level but also to their everyday relationship with, and accessibility for, villagers. With limited transport available to access all the villages under their jurisdiction, RDC meetings and other relevant events to which they may be invited, it is very difficult for the Chiefs to be accessible to their citizens, aware of the problems experienced in their communities and to take these to the required authorities. The result is that Chiefs are not in a position to realistically represent those reliant upon them. One respondent said: "The Chief does not have power for a lot of issues so he does not solve any of them" (Agriculture, Middle, Village 2, May 2013), while another stated that "We failed to get a proper leader who would tell us what to do because all these Chiefs were just looking and no one was doing or saying anything" (Agriculture, Senior, Village 1, March 2013).

Second, the Councillors are perceived as having a limited role in the village governance as a whole. This is the case in all four villages, but especially Village 4 where there is no Councillor in post. Across all villages the role of the Councillor is not fully understood by respondents. The Councillor is either seen as a messenger between the RDC and the Chief (and thus of no importance to the everyday citizen), or as a political actor there to represent the district level in the village. In all but Village 3, there is a very limited relationship between the village citizens and their Councillor. One respondent, for example, claimed that "He does not come. Normally people who have problems are the ones who go to Binga as the Councillor does not come" (Non-agriculture Subsistence, Senior, Village 2).

The reasons why the Councillors are perceived as having a limited role in the villages and local governance system are multiple. These are partly to do with the actions – or lack of – by the Councillors, through the role being politically loaded, and through the unclear understanding about what the role entails (see Zinyama and Shumba, 2013). These factors combine to ostracise the Councillors from the local governance system. There is scepticism amongst the respondents about politics. The knowledge that Councillors are political representatives of the RDC and main ruling party does not help affiliate them to the local communities. Interestingly, that citizens have a role in electing the Councillor was only recognised in Village 4. Overall, the

Councillors are not seen as having any power of their own but as messengers between the RDC and the traditional authorities, a perception supported by the Councillor himself in Village 3: “Councillors are given problems and take them to the RDC as a messenger”. These factors together mean that the Councillors are not seen as representatives of the people in their constituencies.

The size of the area over which both Chiefs and Councillors preside is another important factor in explaining the local perceptions towards these two roles. To represent their citizens both a Chief and a Councillor need to be able to understand and appreciate the society in which their citizens are living, including village issues and needs. In all but Village 1, the Chiefs and/or Councillors have jurisdictions which spread their capacity and authority too widely. In Village 1 both the Chief and the Councillor reside within the village. Villagers’ perceptions were less negative about them and it was suggested that there is more of a substantive relationship between them and the villagers than is the case elsewhere. Thus, having a smaller area to preside over for each Chief and Councillor – or conversely more capacity to move around to reach those villages further away – may help them to represent citizens.

Third, the perception of the RDCs as being ineffective in solving problems stems mainly from their limited role in resolving the ongoing conflicts people are having with wildlife, and in controlling the actions of external organisations. The RDCs’ capacities are limited in many respects but specifically in their lack of financial and human resources. The main complaint targeted towards the RDCs from all case study villages is the lack of assistance when a problem occurs, related mostly to human-wildlife conflicts (supported by Conyers, 2002), but also in terms of the general socio-economic conditions of the villages. Corruption and political favours were also mentioned (cf. Balint and Mashinya, 2006, Blaikie, 2006). Key informant interviews with RDC staff show that this lack of assistance to the villages does not come through apathy or ignorance, but due to the lack of resources available to elicit help. Having few resources, such as finances or human resources, results in an overall reduction in the level of power or control that can be exerted by the RDC. This is shown explicitly in the RDCs’ inability to control or hold accountable external actors, and is exemplified through the REDD+ project in Village 1 and the conservation society in Village 4. The REDD+ project is widely perceived to be having negative impacts on the village, and the RDC is viewed as having few options but to allow these actions to take place. The RDCs do not have the power or influence to manage these external interventions, and in some cases, their distance from the villages is a massive impediment. Likewise, in Village 4, a conservation society has fenced off all livestock grazing land, resulting in the starvation of cattle due to lack of fodder and thus a serious decline in livestock numbers across the village. In the eyes of the respondents, this is seen as

ineffectiveness: “The RDC does not come. We often go to them and report... they do not assist us in any way” (Agriculture, Young, Village 2).

The fourth theme to emerge in all four villages is the lack of knowledge on the part of citizens, not only about their rights, but about information regarding integral happenings in their villages. Overall there is a sense of apathy and acceptance amongst the respondents in all villages, and a feeling of helplessness that they are unable to change their circumstances. The lack of knowledge about their rights is compounded by their daily preoccupation with ensuring enough to eat, meaning they rarely hold their leaders to account or pro-actively push for changes in their society. A major issue underlying this is the recognised lack of education which has instilled in them a sense of worthlessness. Respondents explained that “[We] don’t feel like we have the right to know or input... who are we at the bottom level to deny them?” (Agriculture, Young, Village 1) and that “In our community there is only more poor people. No rich people. Only very poor people. Most of them have no mat to even sleep on... I just see this poverty. That is all I see... I don’t see anyone who comes to help me. I just sit at my home. I don’t know anyone who comes to teach me” (Agriculture, Senior, Village 4).

A lack of education, combined with little downward flow of relevant information and lack of capacity to access such information elsewhere, contributes to this lack of knowledge about holding leaders to account and the cycle of disempowerment (Gandiwa et al., 2013). Respondents failed to appreciate that their situation does not have to be permanent. The few respondents who are aware of the issues in the governance system and want to do something about it do not have the capacity to do so. They have little constructive representation, finances or fiscal power, no platforms from which they can ‘raise their voices to the right ears’ (a common phrase used by respondents), and limited access to those actors who do have the capacity to effect change. Therefore, there is a deep sense of despondency (see also writings on social justice i.e. Brosius et al., 1998, Schlosberg, 2007). One respondent explained that “People here are not educated and so won’t know how to do the things the organisations want” (BH26AM, Agriculture, Middle, Village 1). Another felt that “We can’t understand it, what is going on” (ML6AM, Agriculture, Middle, Village 3).

The issues and weaknesses highlighted within the sub-district natural resource management system above can be further analysed alongside the building blocks of good local governance (GLG) in order to categorise the key problem areas and identify where actions should be taken to improve governance at this level. The following section evaluates the findings against these building blocks to assess the state of good local governance in rural Zimbabwean natural resource management.

## **4.2 Evaluating the sub-district natural resource management governance system against the criteria of good local governance**

Using five of the UNDP's six building blocks of GLG as a framework to test local governance in the case study villages allows us to identify where actions need to be taken to improve local governance.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the GLG situation in each village.

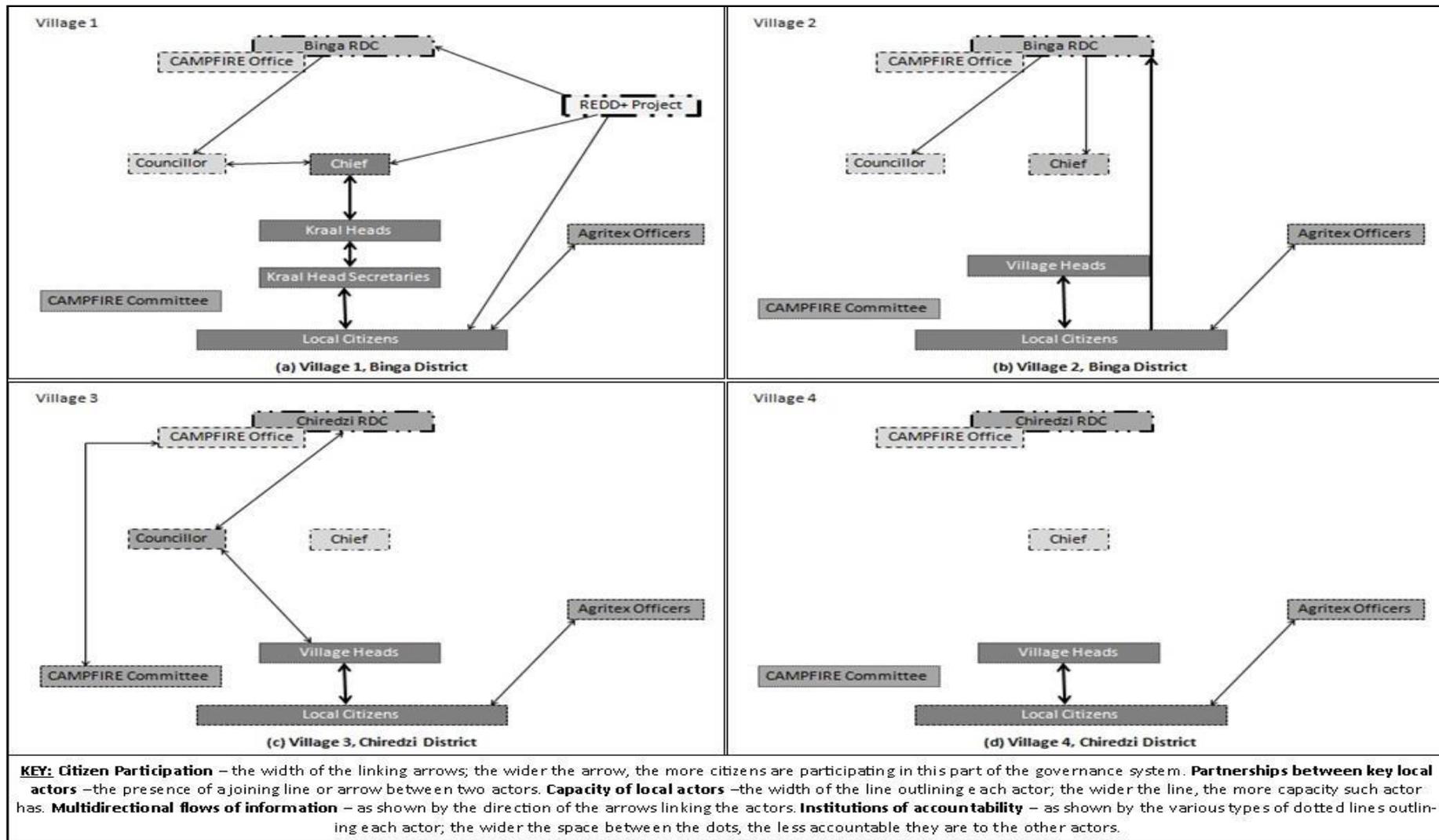


Figure 3: Overview of the sub-district governance system in terms of the building blocks of good local governance in each village

## **1) Citizen Participation**

Citizen participation is one of the essential elements, yet biggest sticking points, of CAMPFIRE. As a community-based programme, citizen participation should form a major part in the functioning of the governance system. However, in all four villages, the only constructive citizen participation taking place is in the lower levels of the traditional system i.e. between citizens and village heads. This has little constructive benefit for the communities. The lack of upward flows of information and citizen roles within the rest of the system gives little meaning to the notion of citizen participation in natural resource management governance.

CAMPFIRE design provides a good example of how community participation was given a central role within the 'community-based' part of the concept (Child, 2003, Logan and Moseley, 2002, Mapedza and Bond, 2006). However, the reality that emerged from its implementation was very different, and the term 'community-based' is now considered mainly rhetoric (cf. Armitage, 2005, Nelson and Agrawal, 2008). From key informant interviews with CAMPFIRE committee members, CAMPFIRE Offices, and through the review of secondary literature, a CAMPFIRE project is considered community-based if it has: 1) established a committee at the village level, 2) communication between the committee and the community, and 3) gives citizens a voice in choosing how the revenue from CAMPFIRE should be spent. These are all important but easily construed requirements and do not of themselves result in citizen participation.

The multiple issues in the local natural resource management governance system discussed in the previous section have drastically impacted citizen participation. The systems in Villages 1 and 4 have been overridden by the power of the external actors active in these villages, further diminishing the potential for citizen participation by undermining the functioning of the governance system overall. In Village 2, a new channel of participation has been created by the community in the face of a governance vacuum at sub-district level. This participation, consisting of a channel of unheard/unresolved complaints that by-passes the local leaders and directly contacts the RDC, is tenuous at best, especially as few positive results have come of it. Village 3 is the only village for which it could be argued that there is slightly better citizen participation (relative to the other villages). With the resident Councillor and a new telephone network, it is easier for village citizens to communicate with each other and the rest of the country, and thus gather information relevant to the governance of natural resources. People here still lack a platform for involvement in the governance system but increased awareness at least provides a stepping-stone to participation and empowerment.

## **2) Partnerships between key local actors**

Partnerships in the case study villages are rare. As shown in Figure 3, several arrows link some actors to others. However, it is the multi-directional relationship of the arrows that symbolise a partnership. The only partnerships found in this study are those between actors in the traditional part of the system. Even then, these are only fully functional in Village 1 where the village heads are a well-integrated part of the community. The close proximity of the Chief and his smaller jurisdiction in Village 1 compared to the Chiefs of the other three villages could be an encouraging factor in the establishment of partnerships between the traditional actors.

The most noticeable lack of partnerships is between the RDC and the sub-district actors with whom the Council should be working closely e.g. the Councillors and Chiefs. The absence of partnerships significantly erodes the effective functioning of the governance system by putting further distance between the RDC and the communities. The top-down role of external actors such as the REDD+ project, and to some extent CAMPFIRE, is felt to be a consequence of these lack of partnerships, as well as the RDCs' lack of capacity.

## **3) Capacity of local actors**

The capacity of an actor seems to increase the higher up they are placed within the governance hierarchy. This symbolises the lack of successful decentralisation within the system, despite that being one of the major aims of CAMPFIRE. It has been frequently noted elsewhere that only some aspects of the governing process have been devolved to the district level – such as monitoring and enforcement roles – without the devolution of the required fiscal resources or autonomy (Average and Desmond, 2007, Conyers, 2002, Mapedza and Bond, 2006, Murphree, 2005, Ribot, 2003, Roe, 1995, Wolmer and Ashley, 2003). Very little has been further passed to sub-district actors, significantly compromising the capacity of actors in the sub-district system. One explanatory factor that contributes to this lack of capacity is the aforementioned issue of communities not knowing their rights or having relevant knowledge to hold actors to account and to increase their pro-activity to enforce change (Conyers, 2002, Logan and Moseley, 2002). Coupled with their struggle for day-to-day survival which also compromises their capacity, the system is very constrained.

## **4) Multiple (multidirectional) flows of information**

Our data show many situations in which multiple flows of information are present but these can be unidirectional and thus not conducive to good governance. As can be seen from Figure 3, there are limited cases where the flow of information is multidirectional. In most cases the downward flow of information involves the reiteration or enforcement of rules and regulations rather than information that can aid in empowering and updating the lower level actors. Upward

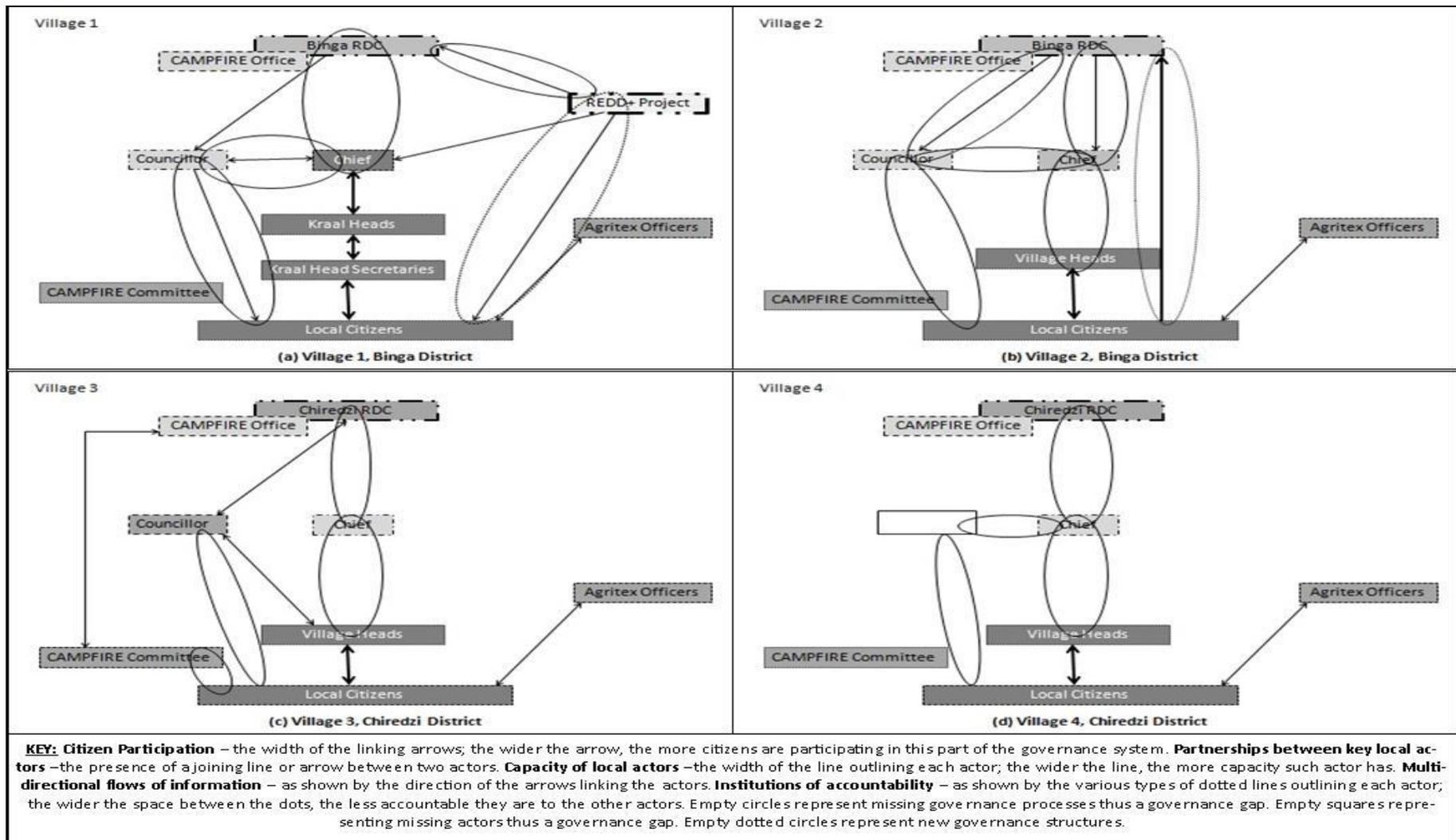
flows of information tend to stall at the district level or just before. The closest examples of multidirectional flows of information between actors that are informative and representative are those within the traditional system in Village 1. One of the main enablers of this is again likely to be the proximity of the Chief to the village citizens.

### **5) Institutions of accountability**

In all the case study villages, the unequal distribution of capacity – as the crux of knowledge, skills, finances, and power underlying all other elements – has resulted in inequitable institutions of accountability. Figure 3 shows that the higher up the system, the less accountability the actor has to those below and vice versa. Likewise, as an actor increases in capacity, the level of citizen participation decreases; as do the number of partnerships and multidirectional flows of information. This makes the actor less accountable, and more powerful. The cases of the external actors in Villages 1 and 4 provide good examples. Through their power – generated from having much higher capacity than the other actors in the system– the external actors in these two villages can by-pass the RDC and make autonomous decisions, further undermining the community-based element of natural resource governance.

## **5 Discussion: ‘Governance gaps’ and their implications for future CBNRM**

Our findings show numerous challenges within the sub-district natural resource management governance system in rural Zimbabwe. These result in failings of the governance system for community involvement and empowerment, and subsequently, result in the rhetorical use of the term CBNRM. We define these issues as *governance gaps: the lack of an active and responsible actor or process within the governing system that elicits the necessary qualities to contribute to good local governance*. This process of highlighting the key governance gaps in the sub-district natural resource management governing system (Figure 4) helps to understand and visualise where attention and concern are needed, and where there is potential leverage to create an enabling environment for the development of GLG.



**Figure 4: Overview of the sub-district governance system in terms of the building blocks of good local governance in each village, with governance gaps represented by circles**

There is a lack of governance processes between the sub-district actors and the RDC. The biggest impact of this is the lack of platform for the Chief and Councillor at the district level. This has resulted in little representation of the multiple sub-district actors and perspectives reaching the RDC, and thus, little understanding of village and community circumstances. It is therefore difficult for the RDC to help, not only with aspects of the functioning of wider society, but also in setting suitable by-laws or ensuring appropriate processes are in place. This is especially the case for the constructive management of natural resources and the management of external actors. New CBNRM projects need to be aware of the disconnect between the local citizens (as their key stakeholders) and what the RDC may believe and be happy to approve (see also Child, 1996, Logan and Moseley, 2002, Mapedza and Bond, 2006). Working more directly with communities in designing new projects may be a fruitful lesson for prospective initiatives, especially when RDCs have been shown to be so weak.

The lack of processes between the Chief and the Councillor is another important governance gap. This affects the representative information available to district leaders and external actors who tend to use these positions of leadership as gateways to the wider community. The lack of communication, or indeed a minimal relationship between these two actors, also creates confusion about the correct channels for other actors to communicate with the sub-district system, and where within this system an external actor or project can sit. As the concession or agreement for the establishment of CBNRM projects is made with the RDC, the Councillor is the actor most relevant for formal channels of communication and ensuring official requirements are met on both sides. For communication with the wider community and to garner participation and support amongst village citizens, it would appear best to do this through the Chief, and the respected and institutionalised traditional system. However, while these channels are relatively clear-cut when considering who should have these roles, the major disconnect between these actors is due to the physical distance between their residences and their citizens. To overcome this, there either needs to be an adjustment to the governing system whereby there are more Chiefs and Councillors appointed to preside over smaller areas/populations, and/or more capacity – in terms of financial and infrastructural resources – needs to be devolved to these actors, so that it is possible for them to transcend these distances and fulfil their obligations to their citizens.

This issue of physical distance between actors is a prominent factor behind the presence of governance gaps in Villages 2, 3, and 4, and reduces the level and potential for representation at the district level once again. When external actors or projects consult with the Chief and/or Councillor as the leaders of the area and representatives of their communities, this disconnect increases the risk of misconstrued or misinterpreted portrayals of village circumstances and

citizens' opinions. This is important to consider when implementing a CBNRM project and trying to encourage participation and buy-in from local communities. Currently, external actors are by-passing or ignoring some of the sub-district governance system due to these weaknesses and a lack of clarity. To ensure a level of community participation that is required for successful CBNRM projects, it may be that external actors need to put significant emphasis on establishing trustworthy channels of communication and representation. They should also use the resources at their disposal to encourage reciprocal and respectful relationships between the actors and processes within the sub-district natural resource management governance system, especially those between citizens and their local leaders.

New processes have emerged within the governance system to compensate for these governance gaps. In Village 1, the communication channel from the REDD+ project direct to the village citizens by-passes both the Councillor and the traditional system, undermining their roles. In Village 2, the citizens are taking their problems directly to the RDC, to overcome the gap created through the incapacity of the Chief and Councillor in the governance system. This further exacerbates the leaders' lack of capacity and the reduces the importance of their roles within the system.

This study shows how important it is that CBNRM projects, especially those developed by external actors, are designed and implemented with a thorough understanding of the context in which they are placed. As with CAMPFIRE, it was not the design that was necessarily problematic in terms of the issues surrounding the way in which the 'community-based' element was addressed, but the lack of cohesiveness between the design and the context (cf. Measham and Lumbasi, 2013). Evidence from the present study suggests that the new REDD+ project in Binga District is already making similar mistakes by not understanding or appreciating the complex governance structure and context within which it is attempting to operate.

The lack of understanding and attention paid to the sub-district governance system for natural resource management has meant that project implementation has negatively affected the system as a whole, including the people within it, as well as the project outcomes. This is not just the case in Zimbabwe. Blaikie (2006) explains that there is growing interference in, and resulting dissolution of, the traditional system in both Botswana and Malawi in the context of natural resource management (see also Jones, 2004, Mapedza, 2007, Zulu, 2012).

## 6 Conclusion

By unravelling and understanding the sub-district natural resource management governance system and structure in four case study villages it has been possible to identify governance gaps that are hampering GLG. This provides the opportunity to subsequently identify constructive and positive ways to progress with future CBNRM projects in rural Zimbabwe. The lack of GLG processes between the sub-district actors and the RDCs is preventing successful representation of local citizens at the decision-making level of governance and is hindering the flow of information and knowledge on natural resource management and socio-political-economic factors affecting rural society more generally. The conflict and governance gap between the traditional system and the modern system, as embodied by the relationship between Chiefs and Councillors, has created confusion and disconnect over the specific roles undertaken by each in governing natural resource management, and in terms of the appropriate channels of representation and participation. The physical distance between the key actors within the system exacerbates this.

The findings of this study are useful for CBNRM project design and implementation. CAMPFIRE has continued to try and operate in a system it increasingly did not understand and thus its structures did not map appropriately onto those operating at the sub-district level. As a partial result of this, the programme has largely collapsed in many parts of the country (Mapedza and Bond, 2006), including in the four case study villages. The benefits experienced by the communities involved over the projects' lifespans have been negligible. Now, new actors are implementing projects, e.g. through the REDD+ scheme, without taking into consideration the structure and gaps within the prevailing governance system. The sub-district level remains an often ignored yet essential part of the governance system when it comes to natural resource management, containing the key actors responsible for the everyday management of resources and for enacting any requirements and support for CBNRM projects. Unravelling and understanding such a system, its strengths and weaknesses, and the impact of the subsequently identified governance gaps is imperative to constructively consider ways to move CBNRM forward in southern Africa.

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