

# ERSA Research Brief

March 2019

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## **Can local communities afford full control over wildlife conservation? The Case of CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe**

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Zimbabwe's community-based conservation model, which brings together peasant farmers in a tourism-focused approach to wildlife management, has enjoyed limited success since its inception during the mid-1980s due to a number of reasons. Community involvement in wildlife conservation is one of the major factors influencing the success of integrated conservation and development projects through lack of ownership of the project and increased human-wildlife conflict. Policymakers and development practitioners usually do not consult local people when designing and implementing programmes thereby resulting in policy failure and lack of ownership of community projects. Supply-side intervention do not take into consideration the needs and wants of local people, who are often viewed as beneficiaries in the development fraternity. The current conservation model in Zimbabwe is characterised by an uneven playing field where the power dynamics are in favour of state institutions and the private sector jointly working together to maximize their benefits, but at the expense of local communities.

Comparing the status quo with a conservation model where local communities are given full control over wildlife in a hypothetical devolution exercise show that local people would support such an initiative as first best option. Communities care more about appropriation rights, developing their own management rules and monitoring their own resources compared to a situation where government institutions are in charge. Increasing devolution of wildlife management from the Rural District Council into the hands of local people in Zimbabwe will not only improve the flow of benefits from the state to communities, but will also lower monitoring and enforcement costs since they live and interact with wildlife on daily basis. This may also generate the incentives to manage wildlife in a sustainable manner.

If local communities are not given this opportunity, then the second best option would be to work with the private sector under public-private partnerships. Communities feel that the distribution of benefits in a conservation model that involve direct interaction with the private sector is much better than the model which involve the government because the benefits are dissipated by the system and the fact that communities may not have control over the activities of the state. Future policy reforms in the wildlife sector should therefore consider the needs and wants of local people since this has bearing on ownership and success of conservation and development initiatives. Training related to wildlife management and awareness campaign in protected areas facilitate ownership and success of community wildlife projects because trained beneficiaries have better knowledge of wildlife conservation.