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Strengthening Traditional Governance Systems for Sustainable Biodiversity Management in Southeastern Zimbabwe

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In pre-colonial Africa, local communities lived in harmony with nature and used indigenous knowledge systems and traditional authorities to manage biodiversity. The introduction of European colonial regimes in Africa eroded the traditional institutional framework and capacity for sustainable natural resource management. The post-independence governments tended to perpetuate the status quo. This study analyzed the contemporary traditional governance systems for biodiversity management and assessed the effectiveness of traditional institutions and methods in protecting the ecosystem. Key informant interviews, questionnaire surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth document interrogations corroborated and yielded valuable data that sustained the discourse. The study revealed that traditional governance systems in Zimbabwe have been significantly weakened by both colonial and post-independence governments that consolidated and centralized power. Traditional authority is marginalized in the governance of mainstream natural resources despite the fact that indigenes' culture imbues the conservation of natural resources. The study underscored the dire need for traditional authority to be restored and enhanced; the need for roles of traditional leaders and local people be clearly defined; the need for responsibilities and accountability of all actors to be emphasized; and the need for institutional capacities to be strengthened to ensure sustainable biodiversity management and livelihoods for the local communities.

Keywords: *Traditional Governance Systems; Sustainable Biodiversity Management; Traditional Authority; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Traditional Leaders*

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The world we live in today is confronted with myriad environmental problems. Many studies show environmental degradation and deterioration of ecosystems are mainly due to selfish human actions (Makanyisa, Chenhuru, and Masitera 2012; McNeely and Camara 2007; Conway-

Gomez et al. 2010). Ironically, the environment and its natural resources are humankind's sole source of well-being (United Nations 1992a). Historically, human societies living in local landscapes realize the limitless significance of the environment and its rich endowments. These indigenous peoples recognize that biological diversity and ecosystems are important for food security, medicines, fresh air and water, shelter, and a clean and healthy environment (McNeely and Camara 2007). It is through such insightful experiences that these local peoples interact with their environments in exceptional, well-coordinated ways that enable them to live harmoniously with nature (Dore 2001; Chiwandamira and Mbengo 1991). Globally, indigenous people live a naturalistic life. While drawing guidance from a traditional institutional framework, they are guided by community-led approaches that utilize indigenous traditional ecological knowledge. This guidance has proven to be the answer to sustainability as it has been demonstrated by stable local societies, economies, and ecosystems' integrity (Lathan 2005; Matyszak 2010; Makanyisa, Chenhuru, and Masitera 2012). Such a way of life sees local people living off nature's income (ecological products) rather than its capital account (natural resources). Thus, local societies do not temper with the environment's capital stock; rather, they live off its goods and services. The traditional leadership must always consent to the harvesting of fruits, vegetables, herbs, and insects, as well as the killing of wildlife (Mapedza 2006). This approach sees local communities maintaining their standard of living while experiencing sustainable growth in civilizations; however, it appears that as soon as external culture and new institutional settings intrude into a local community, the center no longer holds an ecosystem's integrity causing local socio-economic systems to collapse precipitously. Such a scenario indicates the detriments of eroding existing traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, and institutional frameworks. Globally, indigenous peoples rely on local traditional ecological knowledge and practices, and look to traditional authority for natural resource management. This is local natural resource management based on customary power bases and traditional governance systems (Mapedza 2006). It has proven to be very effective for biodiversity management (utilization and conservation) in both spatial and temporal scales, however outside of local societies, a governance system that is capable of benefiting people and the environment across large areas and within reasonable time frames is still needed (Lovell, Mandondo and Moriaty 2000; Lathan 2005). Traditional governance systems have inbuilt mechanisms ensuring that communities have well developed and coordinated local monitoring skills and systems. The United Nations (1992b) recognizes that indigenous people have developed, over many generations, a traditional holistic scientific knowledge of their lands, natural resources, and environment. This assists in tracking the state and making audits of natural capital stock within given precise geographic jurisdictions and periods of time. Traditional governance is often held in high esteem for management of proximate natural resources and environments of areas that local people traditionally occupy (United Nations 1992b).

Biodiversity is a key natural resource for most rural communities globally, especially in developing regions (Defra 2011; McNeely and Camara 2007). It represents the vast wealth of different animal and plant species living in a region. Biodiversity is a source of livelihood for many rural peoples. It provides socio-economic resources such as wild honey, fruits, and vegetables; fuel wood for energy; edible herbs and medicines; wild game for skins, milk, blood, and meat; and aesthetic enjoyment and recreation. Most industrial products are derived from biotic resources (Defra 2011; Conway-Gomez 2010; McNeely and Camara 2007; Grundy and Le Breton 1998). Biodiversity also provides ecological services such as purifying water and air, nourishing and anchoring soil, influencing micro-climates, stabilizing the water cycle and food-producing ecosystems, and pollinating and cross-fertilizing vegetation (Surkar 2012; Conway-Gomez 2010). The Convention on Biological Diversity and World Heritage Convention recognize that biodiversity is about more than plants, animals, microorganisms, and their ecosystems. It is about people and their need for food security, medicines, fresh air and water, shelter, and a clean and healthy environment in which to live (McNeely and Camara 2007). Indigenous peoples are aware that biological diversity is a crucial factor in generating the ecological services and natural resources on which they depend on (Gadgil, Berkes, and Folke 1993). When local peoples rely on the immediate environment for the provision of various physical, socio-economic resources and services, they develop a stake in conserving and even enhancing biodiversity (Mapedza 2006).

Pronouncements by the United Nations (1992b) that indigenous people and their communities shall enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance and discrimination have not been honored, reflecting a long history of the dismissal of the rights of indigenous groups. Invasions of local areas and the subsequent conquests by powerful external groups started in the 16th century. The colonizers despised local traditional natural resource governance systems and dismissed them as primitive, simplistic, static, irrelevant, and overly ineffective (Mapedza 2006; Makanyisa, Chenhuru and Masitera 2012). Therefore, they introduced a new, foreign natural resource governance and management system that replaced traditional governance systems for natural resources. Naturally, such a development was resisted and antagonized by indigenous people and their communities as well as traditional leadership. Eventually, the colonial governments bribed the traditional leaders and co-opted them into their authority systems in a compromised capacity. Traditional leaders were utilized as primary policy implementers, and were given extensive powers as a means for colonial governments to exercise control over the rural populace and natural resources (Twine, Siphugu, and Moshe 2003; Matyszak 2010). Local communities and traditional authorities were weakened by the fractious relationship; they turned against each other; social cohesion and communal values were destroyed; individualism and household-centered behaviors emerged; and interpersonal cooperation (abandonment of the philosophy of *ubuntu* [respect of human life and rights while

upholding good morals]) and responsible resource-use practices by indigenous people declined (Guveya and Chikandi 1996; Campbell et al. 2001; Twine, Siphugu, and Moshe 2003; Matyszak 2010). Such is the recipe for the collapse of traditional common property regimes. The local landscapes and natural resources have been plundered and looted as general and widespread environmental degradation have ensued. The state and traditional systems of natural resources' governance rely on systems of legitimization and a unique corpus of regulation systems, which produce conflict between the two systems (Mapedza 2006). In this scenario, biotic resources are like grass bearing the brunt of two elephants fighting. This situation saw biodiversity loss increasing on public lands (Roe, Nelson, and Sandbrook 2009).

The indigenous people fought for their freedoms and rights, which culminated in political independence from former colonial masters. However, the post-colonial governments have inherited and perpetuated the colonial natural resource governance systems. They have maintained, empowered, and cosmetically restructured the same statutory bodies (Environmental Management Agency [EMA], Zimbabwe National Water Authority [ZINWA], Forestry Commission [FC], Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Authority [ZimParks]) and institutions (Village Development Committee [VIDCO], Ward Development Committee [WARDCO]) to exclusively manage natural resources on both state and communal lands (Mandondo 2000; Nemarundwe 2001; Matyszak 2010). These statutory bodies are manned by professionally trained natural resource managers who largely utilize western scientific knowledge and little or no local traditional ecological knowledge. All too often, the state and traditional institutions have competed and conflicted (but collaborated) because their sources of legitimacy differ (state versus customary). They operate without clearly defined mandates and articulated processes (Nemarundwe 2001; Lathan 2005). This has left the local people and their communities even weaker and confused. Traditional common property regimes, such as community-based natural resource management approaches in Tanzania, Namibia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, have struggled regardless of the corrective strategies adopted by post-independence governments (Nhantumbo, Norfolk, and Pereira 2003; Katerere and Guveya 1998).

Nonetheless, there has been a resurgence of traditional knowledge practices as a contemporary global phenomenon in a bid to preserve local biodiversity. Battiste and James (2000) contend that the demeaning, marginalization and subjugation of traditional natural resources management systems in favor of western systems has contributed to a crisis of environmental degradation and unsustainability around the world. There is now a conscious effort towards empowering local people and their communities into participatory local natural resource management. This largely follows the United Nations' (1992a) call for recognizing and strengthening the role of indigenous people and their communities in sustainable development practices. It cannot be overemphasized now that the role of hereditary traditional leaders (village heads, headmen, chiefs, and their

councils) in natural resource management should be clear with the view to increase communities' involvement in resource governance.

Given this background, this study seeks to establish a basis for the drafting of a framework that strengthens traditional governance systems for sustainable biodiversity management in Southeastern Zimbabwe. Firstly, this study analyzes the contemporary traditional governance systems in biodiversity management as pale remnants of their former selves in the pre-colonial era. Secondly, it critically assesses the effectiveness of traditional institutions and methods in protecting ecosystems' integrity. Lastly, this study proposes institutional and policy reforms for empowering traditional governance systems for sustainable biodiversity management.

Study Area

The study was conducted in five districts of the Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. The districts include Bikita, Chiredzi, Chivi, Mwenezi, and Zaka. Except for the Chiredzi district, which has an agricultural town and commercial sugar estates, the other four districts are largely communal areas dotted with service centers and a growth center courtesy of the Government of Zimbabwe's Growth Point policy. The study area has mostly a rural population totaling 952,458 (Zimstat 2012). More than 90 percent of the Masvingo province's population live in rural areas where they depend on the environment for their livelihood and sustenance (Zimstat 2012). The area is semi-arid to arid (agro-ecological zones four and five) with an erratic mean annual rainfall of 400mm or less, mean annual temperature of 22°C, and an excess of evapotranspiration over precipitation. The soils are largely dry, over-utilized, and now infertile, sandy loams with some pockets of dry clay loams, especially in the Chiredzi and Mwenezi districts. The vegetation is mostly open grasslands punctuated by thorny, bushy shrubs with pockets of miombo and mopane woodlots. The terrain is mountainous and hilly in both Bikita and Zaka, but gently slopes in the other districts. In terms of socio-economic development, the area has a modest share of the nation's educational, health, marketing, transportation, and agricultural amenities. The population derives livelihood mainly from agriculture and trade, though the climate is a bit harsh for dry land cropping. The average population density is 26 persons per square kilometer, which is below the national average of 33 persons per square kilometer. This is partly due to general environmental degradation and deteriorating ecosystem integrity.

Materials and Methods

This case study relies on both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. In-depth document interrogation was conducted to trace the historical governance of natural resources in Zimbabwe and acquaint the research with the general dynamism in the local institutional framework. The literature on several studies concerning roles of traditional

institutions in natural resource management, traditional ecological knowledge systems, state organs in natural resource management, statutory bodies and legislative instruments, and other related issues are deeply interrogated in this study. This exercise shapes the epistemology of this study and directs the research into real issues that would fill the information gap. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 50 adult villagers who were stratified, then randomly and proportionately selected from 134 wards in the study area (Table 1.1). The questionnaire yielded data on villagers' perceptions on and experiences with local institutions involved in natural biological resources management.

District	Total No. of Wards	Wards Sampled	Male Respondents	Female Respondents	Total Respondents
Bikita	23	8	4	4	8
Chiredzi	22	8	4	4	8
Chivi	27	10	5	5	10
Mwenezi	25	9	4	5	9
Zaka	37	15	8	7	15
Totals	134	50	25	25	50

Table 1.1: Sampled Questionnaire Respondents

The study also conducted key informant interviews with five EMA district officials, seventeen traditional leaders (targeted were chiefs, headmen, and village heads), five councilors, five district administrators, and five Agritex district officials from each of the five districts. The interviews were administered concurrently with the questionnaire survey. Data was also collected through five focus group discussions. The results from these discussions are triangulated with responses from the questionnaire survey and key informant interviews. The focus group discussions are organized concurrently with the interview and questionnaire surveys to save on resources.

Results

The study underscores that traditional authorities in the Masvingo province are deservedly legitimized through the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17) to exercise control and management of the land and environmental resources within areas under their jurisdiction. Legally, according to 17 (86 percent) of the government officials interviewed, traditional leaders are the custodians of customary laws and practices, hence they are entrusted with the responsibilities of ensuring the social cohesion of local communities. Institutions of traditional authority include the chief (*ishe/mambo*), who presides over a territory (*nyika*); the headman (*sadunhu*), who presides over a ward (*dunhu*); and the village head (*sabhuku*), who presides over

a village (*bhuku*). These institutions have endured and adapted to the ever-changing world order, and villagers in the study area unanimously rated them as the most respected of all local institutions. They fall second to the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) however, when it comes to influential and active participation in the management of land and natural resources on communal lands (Figure 1.1). The villagers identified the following as leading in advocating for the sustainable management of environmental goods and services: EMA, Agritex, Forestry Commission (FC), traditional authorities, Zimbabwe Water Authority (ZINWA), Rural District Council (RDC), Ward Development Committee (WADCO), Village Development Committee (VIDCO), and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

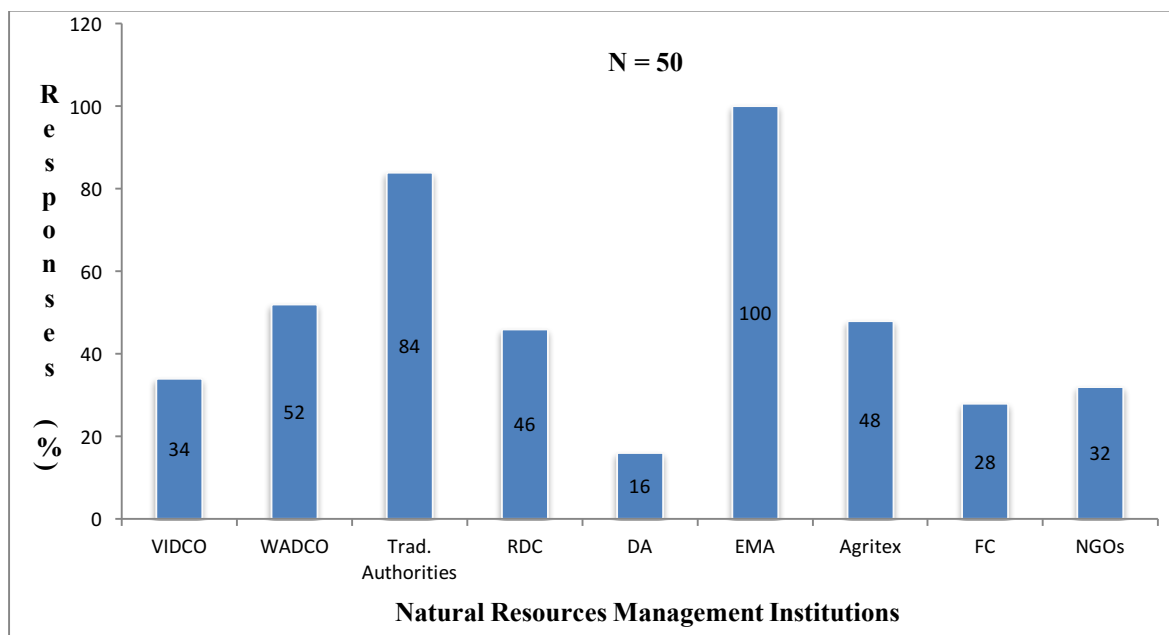


Figure 1.1: Perceptions of Villagers on Local Institutions for Proximate Natural Resources Management

However, when the villagers were collectively rating, on a ten-point scale, the historical role played by traditional institutions in the conservation and encouragement for the wise use of natural resources, in five focus group discussions, a declining influence is noticed (Figure 1.2). The average score of ten shows very strong influence and active participation, while the score of zero indicates no influence and no participation.

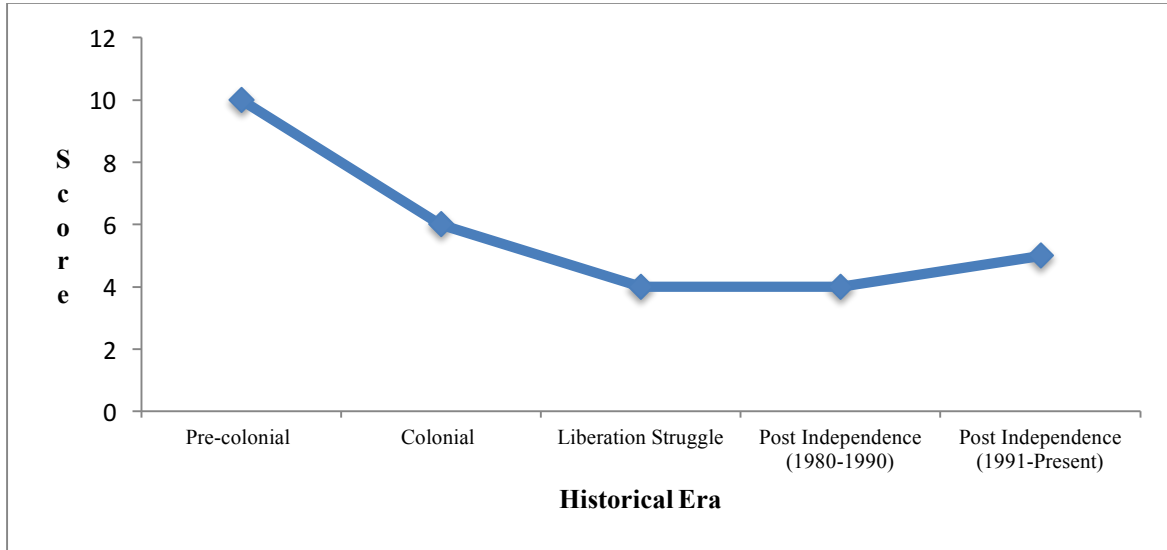


Figure 1.2: Historical Role Played by Traditional Authority in Natural Biological Resources Management

Traditional authorities relied on traditional ecological knowledge and practices to enforce and attain good management of the land and biological resources in the local environment (Table 1.2).

Methods	Perceptions on Contemporary Practices
Sacredness	Sacred areas are still being feared and respected.
Totems	The Karanga and Shangaan people strongly respect their totems and totemic symbols.
Implicit norms, taboos, and myths	Greatly threatened with modernity, most of these are being demystified by western science and Christianity.
Sanctions and quotas	Roles largely lost to state natural resources managers – uncontrolled harvesting patterns and rates have become the norm.
Customary law and practice	Is largely observed, but those convicted can appeal to the parallel state judicial system.
Metaphors and proverbs	No longer have their sentimental appeal to society, though some villagers are still being influenced by these rich language structures.

Folklore dances, stories, and plays	Little time is committed to these, hence they are dying.
Selective harvesting	Due to no entitlement to land, harvesting is no longer controlled.
Rituals	Modernity is slowly, but surely, eroding these cultural beliefs and practices – Christianity condemns such acts.

Table 1.2: Traditional Methods for Sustainable Biological Resources Management

The villagers noted that the traditional methods of protecting natural biological resources were systematically weakened and rarely observed. Figure 1.3 shows that villagers lowly rated the observance and practice of some traditional ecological knowledge systems and customary laws in contemporary societies. Ultimately, villagers feel no obligation to respect traditional rules governing management of proximate biotic resources.

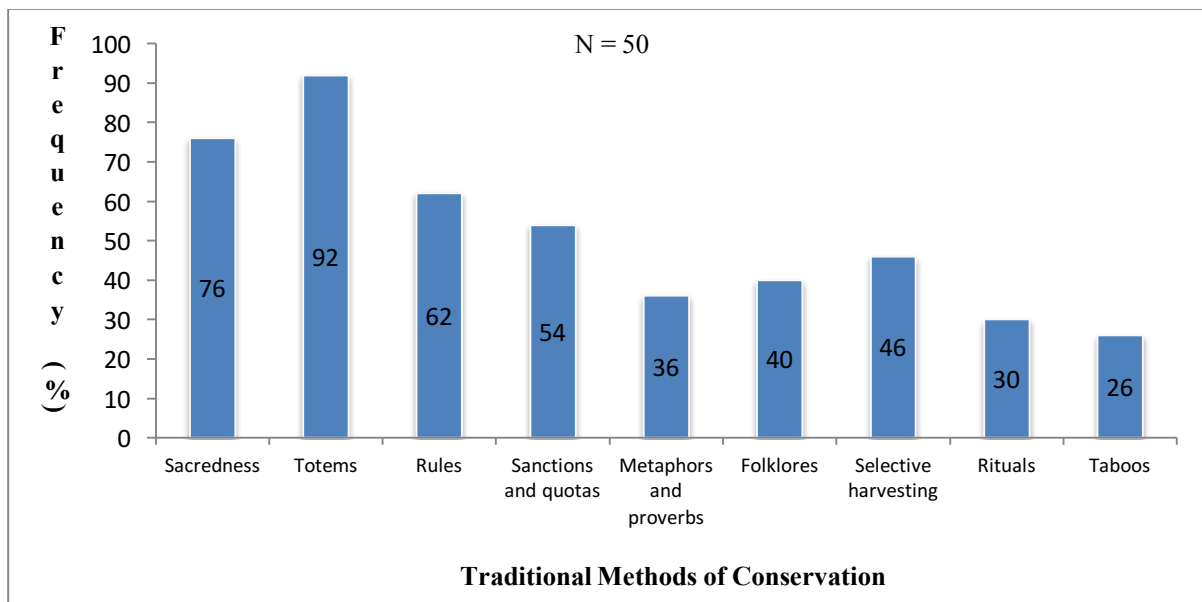


Figure 1.3: Traditional Methods of Natural Biological Resources Conservation

According to villagers' questionnaire responses, challenges confronting and weakening traditional authority (Figure 1.4) have mainly been exacerbated by modernity and a rise in the culture of greedy, individualistic, household-centered behaviors and materialism.

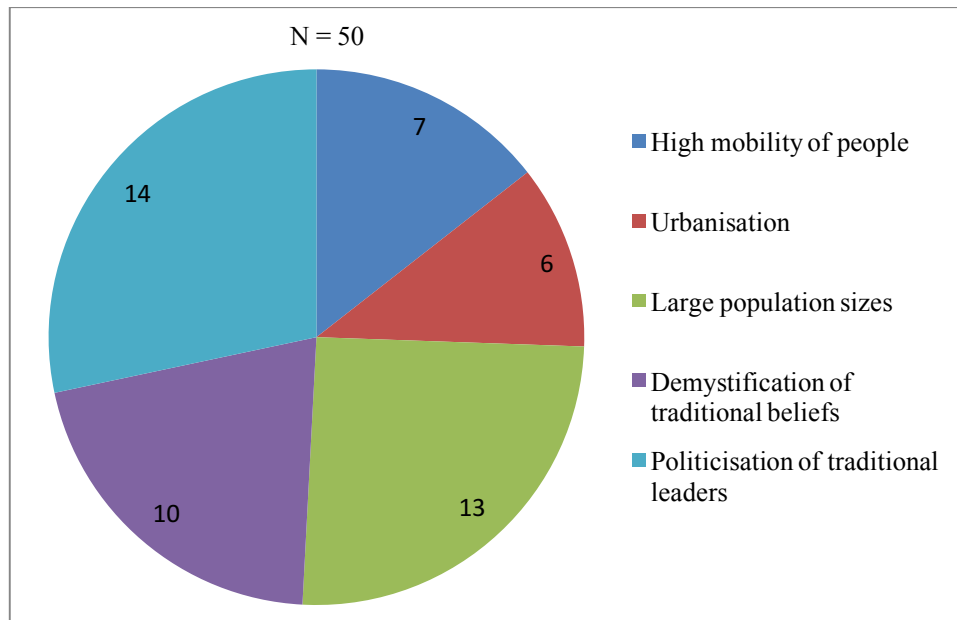


Figure 1.4: Factors Weakening Traditional Governance Systems in Biodiversity Management

Focus group discussions and in-depth key informant interviews yielded fascinating suggestions on what needs to be done to empower traditional leaders and strengthen traditional institutional capacity. Table 1.3 summarizes the actions needed to ensure effective and sustainable traditional governance systems in biological resources conservation.

Strategy	Explanation
Streamline the power and authority traditional leaders and institutions are allowed to wield	A clearly defined control system, rights, responsibilities, and accountability of all actors should be accented.
Assign clearly defined functions/roles and responsibilities of traditional leaders and their institutions	The tried and trusted mandates and duties of traditional leaders should be upheld and no interference with their authority should be guaranteed.
Training and capacity building for traditional leaders to foster endurance and adaptability of their institutions	Avail valuable information, knowledge, management skills, and capacity building to traditional leaders and their councils to improve local development and sharpen traditional natural resources management

	practices and administrative capacity.
Correctly appointing deserving and authentic traditional leaders	Appointment of the rightful traditional leadership instils confidence and evokes respect from community members, who would in turn offer genuine support and participation. The Karanga and Shangaan cultures recognize hereditary chieftainship only as authentic.
Draw committed budgets at grassroots level	Being fully resourced ensures that traditional institutions could now adequately finance their visions and aspirations.
Craft a well circumscribed interface between central government and traditional governance systems	The juxtaposition of such two governance systems engenders convergent management systems, a relationship of trust and mutual sharing.
Document traditional authority and ecological knowledge systems	This safeguards sanctity of local authority and the indigenes' knowledge and belief systems, and ensures their continual existence.
Allocating people more land (with secure tenure) under the ongoing post-independence resettlement schemes to decongest communal areas	Land and natural resources in communal areas have been over utilized because of high population pressure. Relieving these areas of excess people proffers opportunities for traditional authorities to restore traditional common property management regimes, which thrive where land is ample.

*Table 1.3: Strategies to Empower and Strengthen
Traditional Institutional Capacity*

Discussion

The study unequivocally shows that in the Masvingo province, the institution of traditional authority was quite formidable and effective in natural resource management before the invasion, subsequent conquest, and permanent settlement by the white European colonialists (Dore 2001; Zimbabwe Institute 2005; Chigwenya and Manatsa 2007). This was reiterated by chiefs, headmen, village heads, and their fellow villagers who participated in this study. In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, environmental resources were communally owned. Individual members under a

communal land tenure system possessed usufruct rights. The stewardship of the natural resources was held by the chief and allied traditional institutions (Mandondo 2000). The chief and his council had authority over natural resources. The members of this team were custodians of the local environment. They were the bearers of traditional values; therefore, they enforced the rules and guidelines on how to own, access, utilize, and conserve natural resources. Traditional methods of resource utilization were well adapted to conservation, enabling local people to survive in a balanced relationship with their natural and social environment (Chigwenya and Manatsa 2007). This hereditary traditional authority, originating within indigenous peoples' own communities, naturally earned respect and commanded compliance.

However, following the establishment of the British colonial administration (1890 – 1980), a legislative framework was put in place that created statute bodies and institutions, which had sole legal mandates to manage, among other resources, all natural biotic resources in the country (Mandondo 2000; Katerere and Guveya 1998; Guveya and Chikandi 1996). This saw the institutionalization of a top-down approach to natural resource management by state empowered natural resource managers, simultaneously sidelining traditional institutions that had historically intimate and intricate relationships with the land. In the process, local people were not only disenfranchised from their natural heritage, but were made to believe that their customary governments were weak, institutionally incapacitated, and headed towards biological calamity (Zimbabwe Institute 2005). All biotic resources were declared the property of the Queen of England, and their exploitation, both for domestic and commercial uses, required her express written permission. The colonial administration promulgated statutory laws such as the Natural Resources Act (Chapter 20:13 of 1941) and instituted the Natural Resources Board to manage environmental resources both on state protected areas and customary lands. The traditional leadership became the lowest-ranking representatives of the established colonial administration system. In the 1930s established Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) (now Communal Lands under a customary tenure system), ecosystem protection and integrity, as well as biological resource conservation, were all greatly compromised in the absence of secure land tenure rights for local communities. This state obtained (as the policing and criminalization approaches used by native commissioners resulted in sabotages and non-support of any state) sanctioned conservation initiatives and development programs (Mandondo 2000; Dore 2001). Therefore, the study underscores that inappropriate institutional arrangement is detrimental to sustainable natural resource management. The colonial governments attempted to revitalize the local institution of traditional authority, starting in the 1950s, but that only gave superficial autonomy to traditional institutions (Tribal Trust Land Act of 1967). The struggle for independence and the protracted war of liberation in Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, (1965 – 1980), were strongly motivated by the need for self-governance and restoration of indigenous communities' pride, as well as their entitlements to land and land-based resources (Mawere 2012). This asserts that people

deprived of their birthrights will always revolt, seeking redress and an alternative administrative order.

The post-independence Zimbabwean government, however, largely and ironically, regurgitated, adopted, and perpetuated the colonial governance system and institutional framework albeit with some cosmetic amendments to the environmental legislative framework (Dore 2001). Mandoondo (2000) expands on this by noting that the amendments, to date, have largely deracialized the colonial acts and policies without democratizing them. The 1982 Chiefs and Headmen Act (Chapter 29:01) retained chieftainship as a symbol of traditional values, but without any administrative or judicial functions (Zimbabwe Institute 2005). It relegated and condemned traditional authority to the peripheral zones of governance as the government sought to punish chiefs for purportedly collaborating with the oppressor during the liberation struggle (Dore 2001; Chigwenya and Manatsa 2007; Chakunda 2009). This act was repealed by the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17) of 1998, and some meaningful concessions were made to empower traditional leaders and their institutions. The Zimbabwe Situation (2010) acknowledges this effort as it records that the Zimbabwean leader, President Robert Mugabe, is a strong advocate of traditional leadership, and has facilitated the creation of powerful groupings for chiefs, including reserving parliamentary seats for them. Under the current legislative provision, traditional authority may adjudicate over issues of land, natural resources conservation, and management, in areas under their jurisdiction (land is held under a customary tenure system in communal lands of Zimbabwe). The study, however, hastens to note that the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27), Rural District Councils Act (Chapter 29:13), Communal Land Act (Chapter 20:04), Parks and Wildlife Act (Chapter 20:14), among other pieces of legislation, more often than not, effectively check the autonomy of traditional leadership when it comes to management of biological resources in communal lands of Zimbabwe. Of course, the state institutions responsible for the implementation of these environmental regulatory laws are manned by highly trained professional officers whose natural resource management capabilities are commendable. It is this study's quest, however, to advocate for the granting of absolute and exclusive legal jurisdiction to traditional institutions over management of proximate natural resources.

The Traditional Leaders Act is theoretically sound, but falls short of granting judicial autonomy and practical execution procedures when it comes to the governance of natural resources. This act defines one traditional leader's functions: to administer the needs of communities under their jurisdiction in the interest of good governance. The effort seeks to operationalize the sustainable traditional management of biological resources in communal lands of Zimbabwe by revitalizing institutions of governance at a local level, rooted in the indigenous system of governance (Dore 2001; Latham 2005). However, a management framework that mimics the pre-colonial era, in which traditional authority ensures collective action and common property management regimes,

is needed. In reality, the institution of traditional leadership remains very important in the sustainable management of natural resources in communal lands of Zimbabwe, as it often co-exists with introduced institutions (CRDZIM 2013; Nemarundwe 2001). In Zimbabwe, the challenge remains in which governance of land and land-based resources are replicated in various pieces of legislation, such as the Communal Land Act, the Communal Land Forest Produce Act, the Rural District Councils Act, the Traditional Leaders Act, and now, the umbrella act for natural resources conservation: the Environmental Management Act (Manzungu and Kajinga 2002; Chigwenya and Manatsa 2007). This institutional plurality leads to duplication, overlapping authority, conflict, and, overall, the exploitation of loopholes by environmental offenders. Matyszak (2010) also weighs in by noting that communal lands have to contend with the numerous tentacles of power emanating from different sources due to the bifurcated system (state and customary land control systems).

Despite being closely located in proximity to biological resources, and historically being the stewards and champions of their conservation, traditional authority in Zimbabwe has systematically lost autonomy over land governance. The colonial and post-independence governments of Zimbabwe have instituted state bodies and authorities to superintend the management of natural resources on both state and communal lands. Lathan (2005) notes that the central government lacks genuine intention to decentralize authority and control over natural resources or to place these things in the hands of the local level indigenous communities and their governance institutions. As a result, the traditional leadership and their communities have not only lost grip of their access and utilization of local biological resources, but have had their management systems despised, undermined, and dismissed as weak, ineffective, and primitive. The traditional authority has been significantly weakened as its autonomy and power has been usurped by state authorities who now have all power centralized to themselves (Mandondo 2000). This is despite the fact that the Karanga and Shangaan cultures are imbued with a culture of land and natural resources conservation. The relegation of these vital stakeholders resulted in the degradation of natural ecosystems and biodiversity loss in communal lands of the country. Hardin's Tragedy of the Commons (1968) sets in once a traditional common property resource (CPR) regime is allowed to progress without some well-defined and coherent user group. Non-entitlements to land being occupied, a governance system relying on externally imposed sanctions and rules (often lacking consensus), and an enforcement system using state natural resource managers, who rely on compulsory and coercive conservation methods, are a recipe for sabotage—both non-co-operation and non-participation. Meaningful stakeholder participation in natural resource management is not guaranteed at all under such a system. More often than not, the villagers regard any conservation effort introduced in their communities without consultation to be an 'EMA project' or 'RDC program'; that is, they dissociate themselves from the effort. Such a situation should be lamented, since non-participation by all key stakeholders, especially

the local communities, in any developmental project such as this naturally leads to its failure and collapse.

Traditional authority ensures a shared framework, is more accountable to local livelihood needs, embraces local interests and priorities, and grants people's rights to self-determination (Shackleton et al. 2002). Mapedza (2006) adds that traditional leaders are highly regarded because of responsiveness to local needs or aspirations, apt feedback mechanisms, and accountability to villagers. It is due to these virtues that local traditional institutions need to be restored, empowered, and actively involved in schemes, programs, or projects meant to benefit local communities. The study advocates for an empowerment drive that seeks to restore traditional authority's autonomy and societal cohesion through traditional ties and respect, as well as to observe and uphold the sanctity of the traditional institutions. This is envisaged because, as averred by Dore (2001), the threads of traditional institutions have remained largely intact despite the historical impositions. The communities need to be fully resourced and fully capacitated in order to pursue their developmental goals. This is only attainable if the central government accepts that the traditional governance system is a tried and tested natural resource management system that has survived many ages through endurance and adaptation, to reach this age of modernity. Also, the traditional authorities in Zimbabwe need to take advantage of the legal statutes in place (Traditional Leadership Act and the new Constitution of Zimbabwe, among others) which legitimize their institutions and recognize their indispensability. This study notes that in order to avoid policy discord, in which two or more policies seek to protect a common natural resource, room should be created for the clear definition of each stakeholder's roles, functions, judicial powers, and authority. Such a set-up nurtures complementariness and accountability, as well as justifies claims for legitimacy among the key stakeholders.

Of course, there are challenges that militate against the noble efforts of returning to the traditional way of life. Firstly, the traditional leaders have been dragged into the bureaucratic ranks of state administration, and answer to state officers who not only regulate their conduct, but are empowered to appoint, crown, and even discharge them from authority. This power-sharing is often skewed in favor of the state. The Zimbabwean president now acts as the paramount chief, possessing unlimited powers to force the traditional leaders to toe the state-defined line or that of the ruling party of the day. Secondly, the traditional leaders have been co-opted into national party politics, and have allowed themselves to act as party machineries to the detriment of their historic community status. It now appears impossible for them to proclaim their apolitical status as political parties seek to reap political fodder from their strategic positions in communities. Thirdly, the high population growth rate and pressure on land and natural resources seem to have outpaced traditional leaders' administrative capacity. Indigenous natural resource management institutions do well where societal dynamism is relatively and

progressively stable and slow, which is now impossible due to globalization. Also, traditional leaders receive salaries or allowances from the government, but have no central treasury budgetary support to finance their own governance systems. In the modern cash economy, no institution or organization may deem itself committed to meeting set goals without a supportive budget. The study notes, with regret, that although the traditional governance system is the ideal institution for the sustainable management of proximate biological resources, it is dogged by some practical challenges to really occupy its natural position. These, and other challenges, are not beyond the Zimbabwean community's capacity to overcome and move on. Focus, goodwill, full stakeholder participation, and, above all, political will are required for the traditional governance system to be fully revitalized for societal gains.

Conclusion

This paper argues for the restoration of legitimate power to traditional authority since they remain a key institution in the sustainable management of proximate natural resources. The institution of traditional leadership has a long history of active and effective participation in the legitimate conservation of local-level natural biological resources, which is widely attested to, across both the political and academic divides. The subsequent governments in Zimbabwe have sought to fully usurp the authority and autonomy of traditional leaders and centralize all the powers to themselves. Such machinations have, however, backfired, as the degradation of natural ecosystems and biodiversity losses have become the norm and not the exception on communal lands. There are opportunities at the disposal of both the government and communities to strengthen traditional governance systems and judiciary of natural resources to attain sustainable management of biotic resources in communal areas of Zimbabwe. Of course, there are challenges that must be overcome for such a development to become a reality. This study accentuates how the presence of difficulties in reconstructing traditional common property institutions in fact strengthens the process and makes the end product authentic and capable of enduring and adapting in the ever-changing global environments. The use of traditional governance systems in the sustainable management of biological resources is widely applauded and has won the full support of the United Nations, which actively rallies behind strengthening local traditional authority in order to achieve sustainable development.

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