The African Resources Development Journal, Vol 7, No. 1, December 2023: 45-66

Decentralisation of Wildlife Conservation in Tanzania: Analysing Stakeholders' Power Relationship in Makao Wildlife Management Area

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Abstract
This paper examined power devolution in Makao Wildlife Management Area (WMA) using the descriptive research design. Three villages, Jinamo, Mwabagimu, and Makao, were purposively selected out of seven villages. The data collection method included questionnaires (281 heads of households), key informant interviews (9), focus group discussions (1 in each village), and a literature review. Results showed that WMA actors were internal (local community) and external (State agencies and investors). External actors were powerful and influenced most decisions in WMA, hence the lack of power devolution. Results further showed that the state remains a very authoritative player in all decision-making processes where stakeholders in the whole process are practically powerless, and formations of Authorised Associations do not empower the local communities. The study found several effects of power disparities like limited resource access, ineffective conflict resolution, insufficient enforcement of regulations and reduced accountability. This study recommends advocacy for local 'community empowerment to minimise power disparity among WMA actors through legal and policy reforms.

Keywords: *Decentralisation, Actors, Stakeholder power, Wildlife conservation, Makao Wildlife Management Area*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the milieu of natural resources management, Dahl (1957) typifies power as a relationship between individuals, while Nuijten (2005) relates power to interaction, restriction, compulsion, social relationship and societal consent. Power is applied in institutions depending on what is commonly accepted. Raik *et al*. (2008) state that stakeholder power is the degree to which stakeholders can influence or coerce others into taking specific actions and making decisions. Nevertheless, power manifests in various forms: Strategic, Structural or Domination, and Institutional or Government power (Lemke, 2003). Strategic power arises from everyday interactions among individuals and groups, taking shape through ideological manipulation, rational argumentation, moral guidance,

or economic exploitation (Lemke, 2003). Structural power denotes stable and hierarchical power dynamics that resist change, resulting in asymmetrical power relations where marginalised individuals possess limited freedom (Kajembe *et al*., 2016; Lemke, 2003; Nuijten, 2005). Government or institutional power pertains to organised, regulated, and reflective modes of power that surpass spontaneous acts of authority (Lemke, 2003; Nuijten, 2005). Institutional power establishes distinct subjectivities, such as citizens and civil servants, via discursive rituals and administrative practices (Kajembe *et al*., 2016; Lemke, 2003; Nuijten, 2005; Rose, 1999).

Therefore, "power" is a condition in which decisions are accepted and followed; however, counter-power occurs when some communities are marginalised and withstand the worst decisions (Kajembe *et al*., 2016). Some communities could raise their voices while others resort to soberer actions (Nuijten, 2005; Scott, 1986). According to Nelson (2010), power is a significant component of community-based conservation projects. This is because power predicts the 'actors' obligation. Power is gained through election, appointment, customary leadership, employment, NGO functions, and private investments. Ribot (2002) argued that power entrenched in a particular group/individual determines resource conservation and socio-economic development outcomes. According to Ostrom (1990), local community participation in natural resources management and conservation is higher when they have the influence and power to formulate or amend rules and decide how to use a particular resource. Therefore, power obliges when actors are well informed with essential machinery to make informed choices and have financial resources to implement conservation rules (IIED 2005; Raik *et al.*, 2008).

The actors involved in conservation possess differing levels of influence over policy and institutional decisions, as well as varying degrees of "potential" or "significance" in accomplishing specific objectives (IIED 2005; Nuijten, 2005). In wildlife management, community participation holds substantial importance, particularly when all stakeholders are actively engaged and inclusively involved in decision-making. This inclusive approach reduces the costs of implementing changes (Ribot, 2004). Full participation helps people develop a sense of ownership and a feeling of being the change realised and improving the acceptability and quality of mitigation and monitoring processes (Lwankomezi *et al.*, 2021; Ribot *et al*., 2006). Therefore, an actor's participation can be *a 'means'* and an "*end'*, as communities are given a chance to define and address resource problems and help in attaining the solutions, while the latter signifies the conservation outcome like improving conservation and socio-economic conditions and able to bare conservation consequences (Campbell & Harper, 2012).

In Tanzania, other types of protected areas exist, namely National Parks and Game Reserves, where human habitation was forbidden, and Game Controlled Areas and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, where settlement is allowed but

subject to strict regulations (URT, 2007), wildlife management has been decentralised by establishing Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) (Kicheleri *et al*., 2018; Nelson, 2007; Nelson & Agrawal, 2008; URT, 1998). The Wildlife Policy 1998 (revised to 2007) identifies WMAs as a new protected area category for community-based wildlife management. Villages agree to set aside their land to form WMA. Nevertheless, the processes and mechanisms that lead to efficient operation are lengthy and bureaucratic. According to Kiwango *et al*. (2015), WMA regulations and guidelines provide the first stage of WMA creation, which is the sensitisation of communities on the benefits, cost, and right of conserving wildlife, which is explained either by the wildlife division or conservation partners organisations like Conservation NGOs, Tanzania National Parks, District Councils, and Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority. The second stage allows the aspirant village, under the Trustees Incorporation Act (URT, 2018), to establish a Community-Based Organisation (CBO), draw a constitution, and become the Authorized Association (AA) responsible for daily operational activities of WMA on behalf of the local community (Mariki, 2018).

WMA was launched in 2003 and expected to be "community-based" and address local community development needs, according to the Wildlife Policy 1998. In contrast, the process of founding the WMA was government-driven and externally motivated (Mariki, 2015). In 2002, the Tanzanian government introduced the WMA regulations, providing principles and processes for creating a WMA. In 2003, WMA formation processes were launched, and 16 pilot WMAs were identified for establishment (Nelson, 2007), which saw them move to 38 in 2018 (Kicheleri *et al*., 2018; Mariki, 2018). Currently, there are 14 operating WMAs, and WMAs evaluations have shown some weaknesses in formulation and functioning (MNRT, 2022). For example, Wilfred (2010) and Lwankomezi *et al.* (2023) demonstrate a general lack of capacity to push the WMA implementation process forward. There is little or no legal capacity to draft constitutions and negotiate contracts. In addition, local communities are unable to generate resources for the creation of WMAs, and they are also unable to absorb and manage some of the investments.

From 2003 to 2012, the government implemented several initiatives, including developing guidelines for the designation and management of WMAs, assessing and evaluating pilot WMAs in 2007, releasing the Wildlife Conservation Act in 2009, and implementing new WMA regulations in 2012. These government initiatives give pertinent technical information for decision-making and smooth nationwide implementation of WMAs. However, Nelson (2007) argues that the nature of rights granted in Tanzania to communities serves as a significant constraint on implementing WMAs. In some cases, communities were not earning a substantial income from the WMA because of limited income-generating investments". Similarly, according to Kajembe *et al.* (2000), despite establishing WMA in Tanzania, local people saw the program as a restraint and a burden rather than a developmental alternative. At the same time, Wildlife

Policy pushes for complete community responsibility for wildlife management; in some locations, the CBO's rights and capacity to make management decisions in gazetted WMAs are limited.

Makao WMA was Established in 2007 and officially gazetted in 2009 (URT, 2012). Makao WMA holds immense significance in conservation within Tanzania's protected areas. It is a crucial wildlife corridor linking the Maswa Game Reserve, Ngorongoro Conservation Area, and the Serengeti National Park (URT, 2012). However, information on how power is exercised among stakeholders is equally missing. The Wildlife Policy 1998 (revised to 2007) envisions decentralisation by devolution in which the Authorized Associations are accountable to the communities. However, evidence has shown that Authorised Associations are more answerable to the central government than the local communities they save (Kicheleri *et al.,* 2018; Makupa, 2013). This goes against the devolution principle that envisages power transfers to elected local authorities.

It is, therefore, imperative to determine how stakeholders in Makao WMA exercise their power through the following questions: (i) who are the 'actors'? (ii) what type of power do actors own in Makao WMA? (iii) what are the actors' roles and interests in Makao WMA functioning? (iv) What are the effects of power disparities in WMA? The article aims to support decision-makers in designing ways to minimise power disparity among WMA actors.

2.0 THEORISING WMA GOVERNANCE, DECENTRALISATION AND STAKEHOLDER POWER RELATIONSHIP

The article draws from the common property resources theory expounded by Ostrom (2002). The theory is guided by the principle that resources are managed successfully if users can decide how they are used. Ostrom further argues that successful common property management requires the users of the resources to have a strong sense of community and to be able to cooperate effectively. In this article, "power" means how actors manage shared resources. Wildlife management areas (WMAs) are common property regimes (CPRs) in which communities are expected to manage and benefit from wildlife sustainably (Rihoy *et al.,* 2010; Shilereyo, 2010). The interconnection between governance, decentralisation, and power transfer in WMAs is crucial for achieving effective and sustainable exploitation of resources (Hutchcroft, 2001; Wunsch, 2001; Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). Governance refers to the complex system of procedures, rules, and organisational arrangements that oversee making decisions and distributing resources within a given society (Agrawal, 2001). In contrast, decentralisation refers to the intentional transfer of decision-making power and responsibilities from central governing entities to local or regional levels of governance (Ribot J. 1999; Zeitouna & Allan, 2008). Strong governance is essential to guarantee the fair and transparent allocation of resources while promoting sustainability (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006; Kiwango *et*

al., 2015). Decentralisation enhances this process by granting local communities and pertinent stakeholders a direct involvement in creating strategies for managing resources, thus promoting a more accurate synchronisation of resource allocation with local requirements and preferences (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006).
Power transfer within the WMA refers to the reallocation of decision-making power from conventional or centralised authorities to a wider range of stakeholders, such as local communities, indigenous groups, and non-governmental organisations (Dahl, 1957; Noel, 1999; Lemke, 2003). Transferring power can foster increased levels of accountability and equity in the management of resources (Ribot, 1999; Sanwal, 2004). This is because it allows individuals directly affected by decisions regarding resources to actively engage in developing these decisions (Lemke, 2003). Moreover, it fosters the possibility of generating adaptive and context-specific solutions, as local stakeholders generally possess a more nuanced understanding of the complex ecological and societal dynamics inside their areas (Sanwal M. 2004; Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). According to Zeitouna & Allan (2008), the interconnectedness of efficient governance, decentralisation, and power transfer forms a mutually reliant framework that, when carefully executed, can promote the objectives of sustainable and equitable management of natural resources. This is accomplished by engaging a wider range of individuals and organisations with vested interests and ensuring that the decision-making processes are guided by a deep comprehension of the specific circumstances and requirements of the local area (Agrawal, 2001; Lemke, 2003).

According to Lemos & Agrawal (2006) three distinct justifications for the decentralisation of environmental governance are available. It can produce greater efficiencies because of competition among subnational units; it can bring decision-making closer to those affected by governance, thereby promoting higher participation and accountability; finally, it can help decision-makers take advantage of more precise time- and place-specific knowledge about natural resources. However, it is argued that decentralisation in resource governance is not just an occasion for optimism that less powerful human agents may come to exercise a greater voice in how they and their resources are governed. There is also room for the cynicism that decentralisation policies have typically been motivated by powerful state actors to enhance their political positions (Nuijten, 2005; Lemos & Agrawal, 2006; Nelson & Agrawal, 2008). Without effective safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of localised power and clear relations of accountability, decentralisation may lead to forms of regulation even more suffocating than those encouraged by more centralised control (Noel, 1999; Wunsch, 2001). Therefore, the contingent outcomes of contemporary governance shifts depend crucially on how local actors mobilise and establish alliances across sociopolitical and administrative scales of governance.

3.0 CONTEXT AND METHODS

3.1 Description of the study area

Makao Wildlife Management Area is located in Meatu District, within the Simiyu Region (Figure 1). This significant conservation area was officially gazette in 2009 and spans an impressive 780 km^2 (Lwankomezi *et al.*, 2023). It encompasses seven villages: Jinamo, Sapa, Mbushi, Mangudo, Mwabagimu, Iramba ndogo, and Makao. Makao Wildlife Management is a vital wildlife corridor connecting the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Maswa Game Reserve, and Serengeti National Park. The study was conducted between 2019 and 2022, and three villages were purposely selected for this study Jinamo, Mwabagimu and Makao. The selection of the three villages was carefully made based on the indication that there are varying perspectives regarding the exercise of power within the WMA based on experiences from Ikona WMA (Makupa, 2013), Burunge WMA (Kicheleri *et al.*, 2018), and Wami Mbiki WMA (Mariki, 2018). The study revealed a notable disagreement among the stakeholders involved in managing the WMA. These villages chosen reflect the WMA's diversity of perspectives and interests (Lwankomezi *et al.*, 2023; Mgonja, 2023)

Figure 1: Map presenting three study villages Jinamo, Mwabagimu and Makao

3.2 Data collection and sampling procedures

The number of households was obtained from Meatu's socio-economic profile (URT (2019), and the sample size was given by the formula.

$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ Where**:** n – sample size, N- population size, e, expression constant SD (0.05). A sample of 281 heads of households was selected from the villages of Jinamo (91), Mwabagimu (95), and Makao (95) using proportionate stratified sampling, employing a village roster book. Subsequently, a random number generator was utilised to choose heads of households through simple random sampling for the survey. A structured questionnaire was applied with face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion, and a few open-ended questions were included to allow for further explanation. The questionnaire aimed to identify respondents' socio-economic activities, awareness of WMA actors (with awareness/no awareness), actor accountability, and effects of power disparity in WMA governance. Respondents were provided with several statements to determine the effect of power disparity, which were measured using Likert scales. The responses were grouped into four levels: (i) strongly agree, (ii) agree, (iii) disagree (iv) strongly disagree. Questionnaires were administered to heads of households at an agreed time and date by the first author.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were organised to delve further into the study's themes. Each study village hosted one FGD, with a group size of five participants per session. To capture the diverse perspectives within the community. Key informant interviews were also conducted with village executive officers from the study villages, district game officers, and officials from the Makao Authorized Association and Wildlife Division. These key informant interviews aimed to gather valuable insights and information from these knowledgeable individuals. Interviews with key informants were conducted until no new information could be obtained or until the data saturation point was reached (Guest e*t al.*, 2006). The focus group discussions and interviews with key informants aimed to identify the powers held by the key actors and the roles resulting from these power differences.

3.3 Ethical consideration

Before the survey, we informed the village leaders by explaining the objectives and methods of our research and sought their consensus. We also received permission from the Tanzania Wildlife Authority (TAWA), the Simiyu Region Administrative Office, Meatu District Council, and Makao WMA to conduct the study. Before the respondents were briefed on the survey's aim and then asked for permission to include the respondents in our survey. We proceeded with our interview after receiving their verbal consent. Answers were recorded anonymously, and during the interview, we obtained a private place to obtain minimum biased and reliable information. Confidentiality of their information and identities was ensured, and proper acknowledgment of sources was maintained.

3.4 Data analysis

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21. A frequency run was conducted for all variables to verify any values that may have been entered incorrectly and determine data entry uniformity. Descriptive statistics were performed, and later, inferential analysis was undertaken. Chi-square tests were used, and the statistical significance was set at p values <0.05. Content analysis was used to analyse data from interviews and focus group discussions, as suggested by Bengtsson (2016). Data analysed related to different categories of power possessed by different actors in the WMA. All data were recorded, transcribed, translated, and analysed by grouping 'respondents' answers to each question and developing information by classifying each group of answers. The responses were ranked by scores and categorised into related themes. Linked categories conveying similar meanings were identified, explained, clarified, and interpreted through the inductive analytic process (Creswell, 2013).

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Respondent's profile

The current study provides significant demographic insights about the study participants. Notably, there is a gender imbalance, with 65.5% of respondents being male and 34.5% female. A substantial portion of participants (21%) had no formal education, while the majority (69.4%) had only completed primary education, with 2.1% having a college education and 7.5% completing secondary education. Additionally, considering the diverse age groups in the study, 43.8% were aged 49 or above, and 33.4% were between 29 and 48. Regarding socio-economic activities, the current study found that livestock keeping was predominant at 45%, Crop cultivation at 43.4%, with only a minority, 6.4%, relying on wage labour across all study villages. Therefore, local communities in Makao WMA were predominantly smallholder farmers and livestock keepers who were heavily dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods.

4.2 Actors and type of power in the management of WMA

The results indicate that 65% of respondents were unaware of the actor's power in governing Makao WMA (Figure 2). This is due to a lack of engagement, which disconnects the local community from authorities responsible for conservation efforts. Another plausible explanation is limited participation, as Lwankomezi et al. (2023) identified. When people are unaware of the actors, they may be less likely to participate in conservation activities or comply with regulations. This undermines efforts to protect wildlife within the WMA.

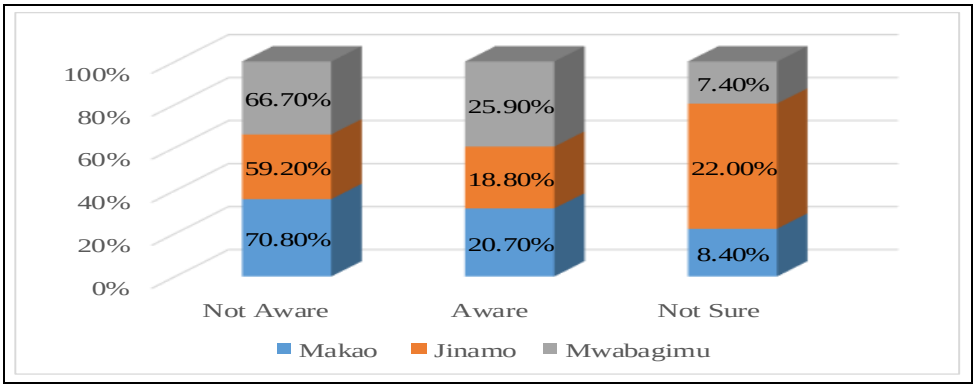

Figure 2: Local community awareness of actor's power WMA

Key informant interviews identified the following actors: local communities through Village Councils, CBO through Authorised Associations, District and Wildlife Division Officials, funding agencies, TANAPA, and investors (Table 1). Results further showed that the village council had institutional and structural power related to cultural or social positions in the community. The investor had strategic power related to wealth and education level, influencing negotiations. Authorised associations, the district council, TANAPA, and NGO's and Wildlife divisions hold institutional and strategic power. These actors have power that suppresses the local community's decision-making.

Table 1: Actors, roles, interests, and type of power in Makao WMA

Actor	Roles	Interests	Type of power
Village Council	Representing villagers in all matters about the 'villagers' wellbeing.	Protecting their fellow 'villagers' rights and promoting their interests	Structural and institutional
Authorized Association	Managing the WMA on behalf of the villagers. Ensuring wildlife conservation and associated benefits are realised at the WMA level.	Act as a power broker between the villagers and the central government agencies and local government	Institutional/governmental, strategic
District Council	Oversee management of the WMA.	Making sure wildlife is conserved. Generating benefits from the WMA	Institutional/governmental, strategic
Wildlife Division	Making rules for WMA management.	Increasing the area of protected landscapes. For example, wildlife corridors where most WMAs are located. Collecting revenues from tourism investments in the WMA.	Institutional/governmental, strategic
Non-Governmental Organisations (Funder)	Facilitating WMA establishment.	Conserving wildlife and ensuring the increase of protected landscapes, including wildlife corridors between otherwise protected areas.	Institutional/governmental, strategic
Investors	Entering into contracts with the Authorised Association to undertake business ventures in the gazetted WMA.	Generating profit through wildlife conservation.	Strategic
Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA)	Conserving Wildlife	Ensuring that Makao WMA acts as a buffer zone and corridor.	Institutional/governmental, strategic

4.3 Roles and interest in WMA management

The actor's role and interest are presented in Table 1. During the focus group discussion, it was indicated that village council is responsible for protecting their fellow 'villagers' rights and promoting their interests by providing land for the designation and establishment of a Wildlife Management Area, coordinating natural resources activities at the village level, approving mechanisms for benefit sharing among the villages forming the Wildlife Management Area in accordance with guidelines issued by the government from time to time; and ensuring that Authorised Associations implement sectoral policies while entering into agreements on the management of a Wildlife Management Area. The village council operates through the village assembly, where village meetings are conducted to deliberate issues regarding community needs. During the interview, it was revealed that Village meetings are the legal forums for informing community members about development issues, management, and governance of the WMA. The Makao WMA guidelines provide for the need to convene village meetings every three months, but this is not the case in Makao WMA, as local communities could not remember the date of the last meeting.

The article indicates that monitoring AA's activities was beyond the village council's capacity. The village council had no authority to influence any Makao WMA management activities, and the AA was not accountable to the village government. In support of the above, the village leader from Jinamo said, "*...AA has more power than all villages in the WMA. When they come to our village, we are informed of what has been done most of the time. We have no power to question the activities we think are important to our village wellbeing"*. Results further show that the village councils in all study villages were inferior to the WMA officials and could not influence WMA management decisions. This inferiority ultimately resulted in the local community's lack of information on WMA management through village assembly, reducing their influence regarding WMA planning.

The Authorised Association (AA) is central to Makao WMA governance, which determines the success or failure of the area. In addition to its role in conservation, the AA should serve as a power broker between local communities and central/local government organs. However, this study found that the Authorized Association mainly represented the central government, contrary to WMA regulation. Results indicate that the Authorized Association is not implementing its activities based on local community interests; hence, it is not accountable to the local community.

Wildlife Division manages wildlife management outside the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and National Parks. Also, the division is responsible for policy formation, coordination, and regulation. The study results revealed that the Wildlife Division performs another revenue collection function from WMAs. However, this contradicts the expectation of local communities, who were promised complete control and total management of benefits from wildlife

resources on their land. Communities believed the Wildlife Division had usurped AA's legitimate authority stipulated in WMA Regulations Part 1 Section (2), that*"... A community-based organisation, whose primary objective is to conserve wildlife resources for the benefit of local community members ordinarily residing in that area ...."*

The Strategic power allows investors to influence and win tenders for investing in the Makao WMA. Therefore, the investor uses its strategic power to stay in the tourism market by paying taxes to the Wildlife Division instead of local village governments. The study indicates that WMA investors had power above the village council and AA. Results indicate that investment contracts in the area were never discussed with local community representatives. The AA was called for negotiation to determine that the contract was already prepared and awaiting signatures. The District Advisory Board acted as a negotiation agent while abandoning its advisory role as stipulated in the WMA guidelines. One AA official said, "…We *did not discuss the contract nor participate in contract preparation. We were required to sign on the directive of the District Advisory Board…."* According to Makao, secretary of tendering, the process did not adhere to the procedures outlined in the Wildlife Act's Section 51(1). Section 31(7) was also subject to Sub-regulation (2). Findings revealed that the current investor was still awarded the contract despite not being rated as the best bidder by the evaluation committee and failing to meet the minimum scoring requirements. This action goes against Section 51-(10), which states that "… no *renewal shall be made unless the applicant has attained a minimum score as prescribed in the Wildlife Conservation (Tourist Hunting) Regulations*".

4.4 Effects of power disparities in Makao WMA

Results from the questionnaire (Table 2) indicate that the effect of power disparities in WMA management in order of preference was Ineffective Conflict Resolution (80.2%), Reduced Accountability (78.6%), Ineffective Conflict Resolution (76.3%) and Insufficient Enforcement of Regulations (59.2%). The results indicate no statistical difference (P= 0.878) among respondents in study villages on Power Disparities Effects in Makao WMA. This implies that the issues surrounding power imbalances are not specific to one particular village but are shared concerns among all communities within the WMA. This provides valuable insights into the perceived challenges posed by power disparities in the context of wildlife management, helping to inform potential strategies for improvement.

Table 2: Effects of power disparities in WMA

Power disparity effects	Responses in percentages (%)			Average	P-value
	Makao (n=95)	Jinamo (n=91)	Mwabagimu (n=95)		
Inefficiency Resource Access	71.5	87.9	63.1	74.2	.878
Ineffective Conflict Resolution	54.7	90.1	84.2	76.3	
Insufficient Enforcement of Regulations	74.7	46.1	56.8	59.2	
Reduced Accountability	86.3	57.1	92.6	78.6	
Ineffective Conflict Resolution	92.6	72.5	75.7	80.2	

Key –*percentage total to more than 100 because of multiple responses*

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Actors and type of power in the management of WMA

This study identified three types of powers: the village council had structural power, investors held strategic power, and the District Council, Authorized Association, Wildlife Division, TANAPA, and NGOs had institutional and strategic powers. The democratically elected Village Governments comprise the Village Councils representing the communities that jointly make decisions at the Village Assemblies. The structural power owned by the Village Council is related to cultural or social positions based on local communities' structures like household heads, clan heads, or tribe leaders. Kajembe *et al.* (2016) posit that traditional societies have widespread structural powers. However, structural powers cannot supersede strategic or institutional powers unless full discretionary powers are devolved. Therefore, the village's ability to influence Makao WMA management decisions was constrained. Thus, for structural power to impact various levels of governance, it should be supported by either institutional or strategic power. This study suggests that village councils have remained powerless despite centralisation. District Council, AA, and Wildlife Division hold institutional power to make the most WMA management decisions. The local community's ability to exert institutional power is constrained. Therefore, the institutional structure of WMA affects the village councils' capacity to influence WMA management and performance. This shows how the central government recentralises the WMA management.

Makao WMA investors hold strategic powers, allowing them to invest in village lands. The strategic power relates to the investor's wealth and level of education. Strategic power offers the investor an advantage in winning tenders for investing in the Makao WMA. Therefore, strategic power enables the investor to remain in the tourism market by paying taxes to the Wildlife Division instead of local village governments. Kicheleri *et al.* (2018) arrived at a similar conclusion in Burunge WMA.

Institutional power is related to the position owned by the government or external organisation actors, and they hold power that supersedes the local community in decision-making. Local communities believe that the external actors used their positions to manipulate them into accepting the WMA establishment in their village land. It was noted that NGOs like the African

Wildlife Fund (AWF) and World-Wide Fund (WWF) held both strategic and institutional powers. During the establishment of Makao, WMA manipulated local communities to advance their agendas. Therefore, the central government, investors, and NGOs held institutional and strategic powers. Meanwhile, democratically elected Village Councils held structural powers and lost most of their pre-WMA institutional powers to newly constituted AAs.

5.2 Actors' role and interest in WMA functions

WMA actors had different agendas when establishing Makao WMA. Local communities were interested in improving their livelihoods; the investors wanted profit maximisation. The Wildlife Division was concerned with expanding protected environments, such as wildlife corridors, and collecting revenue from tourism investments. Owing to conflicting interests - where some actors' pushed self-interests with no regard to other actors' - a power struggle in managing wildlife resources ensued between NGOs, state agencies, and local communities. Again, conflicting interests pose immense challenges, particularly in ascertaining conservation problems and solutions. The underlying cause for such conflicts could be power disparities among the key actors in WMA management. This, in turn, determined how the most influential actors perceive and design the rules and procedures for natural resource protection at the expense of local communities.

In line with these findings, Mukewa (2023) observed that local communities in Zimbabwe and Zambia managed not wildlife but revenues from wildlife because WMA proponents fail to involve and integrate the very people they want and expect to implement the programs. Ribot (2004) discovered that non-governmental organisations that design and support conservation policies and projects regard local communities as harmful and unsustainable. This led to strict measures limiting community involvement in accessing, using, and governance of wildlife resources. However, Nelson (2010) concludes that when local communities are denied their rights, they resort to illegal means like disobedience and theft to sustain their life. Mbaiwa & Stronza (2010) support improving the rural economy and empowering people to manage their resources for long-term ecological, economic, and social benefits. Changes in wildlife management are predicated on institutional reforms that decentralise authority to local actors (Muchapondwa & Stage 2015).

The study further suggests that the Village Council lacked the power to manage WMA as stipulated in WMA regulation Section 17 on responsibilities to be undertaken by the Village Council. WMA regulations Section 17 (g) states that the Village Council shall '*Monitor the activities of the AA* and *report to the Village Assembly and District Council.* 'Contrary, local communities through Village Assembly were rarely informed about all activities in the WMA through the AA. Similarly, Section 17 (i) states that the Village Council shall '*Ensure that the Authorized Association implements sectorial policies while entering into agreements on a Wildlife Management Area.'* Another contradiction to this

statement was that the WMA Regulations Section 24 excluded Village Councils as members of the District Natural Resources Advisory Board (URT, 2012). This study's view is that excluding Village Councils from this Board limits their ability to influence AA's governance of WMAs. This is similar to the findings by Kicheleri *et al*. (2018) in Burunge Wildlife Management Areas.

Furthermore, study results show that the investment contract in Makao WMA was between the Investor and Makao AA, not the Village Council, on whose land the WMA was established. This indicates that the Village Council's role in managing and overseeing village affairs was ignored with the creation of AAs, given the power to negotiate and sign contracts with the investor. This is stipulated in WMA Regulations Section 18 (i) that "*In compliance with the requirements of Section 31(7) of the Act, negotiate and enter into contractual agreements relating to the utilisation of wildlife resources and investment*".

Yet again, the investment contract for Makao WMA was never discussed with local communities or the AA. Instead, the AA was called for negotiation to find that the agreement was already prepared pending signing. In this instance, the District Advisory Board acted as a negotiation agent, thus abandoning its advisory role as stipulated in the WMA Guidelines. It was further noted that, during tendering, procedures were not followed contrary to Section 51 (1), which states that '…an *AA shall in* accordance *with Section 31(7) of the Act and subject to sub-regulation (2) have the authority to appoint a tourist hunting company to conduct tourist hunting activities in its WMA'*. These findings are similar to Kiwango (2017), who recommends WWA actors come to the drawing board to negotiate and renegotiate to avoid conflicts that arise due to their positions, interests, and power, hence jeopardising WMA development.

Findings from interviews show that the evaluation committee did not consider awarding the tender to the current investor during the tender evaluation. Since the company did not attain the minimum required scores, it still awarded the contract contrary to Section 51 (10), which states that "… *no renewal shall be made unless the applicant has attained a minimum score as prescribed in the Wildlife Conservation (Tourist Hunting) Regulations"* (URT, 2012*).* Results from Interviews further show that AA did not agree with awarding the investment contract to the investor. The investor prepared the contract to sign with the Meatu District officials' directives. This clearly illustrates that the AA was never involved in drawing the contract, which was supposed to consider community interest, hence not answerable to local communities.

Results from Interviews further revealed that AA was not accountable to local communities because local communities were only given information about what was going on and were not given a chance to be at the centre of decision-making, resulting in better WMA governance. Consequently, downward accountability was the main impediment to community wildlife conservation.

Wildlife's enormous value motivates central players to keep *de-facto* control even after *de-jurede* centralisation. Although WMA regulation Section 18 states, *"An Authorised Association shall be accountable to the Village Council*" (URT, 2012), this contradicts what is practised in the Makao WMA. This implies that power owned by the local community in resource governance is much restricted by the central government and repealed by the WMA regulations 2012. The Director of Wildlife or District Council again regulates all powers given to the AAs. Section 62 (1) states, "*An investor may not enter into an investment or joint venture agreement without the Director of Wildlife's prior approval*"(URT 2012).

This hinders decentralisation because the AA owns the full power of the WMA management. The consent is left to the Director of Wildlife. Section 62 (4) specifies, "*Under these regulations, the Director of Wildlife has the authority to advise the AAs to revoke, withdraw or change any investment agreement*" (URT 1998; URT 2012). This implies that the power to revoke any contract is also with the Director, not the AAs, clearly illustrating how dominant recentralization had occurred in WMAs. In line with these findings, other studies, for example, Kajembe, Kimasa, Monela, & Zahabu (2000), Kicheleri *et al*. (2018), Murphree (1993), Sibanda (1996), found that the intended local actors had not yet been granted 'Proper Authority' in management of resources in conserved areas. Decentralisation of resources has a role in shifting decision-making processes to a broader range of stakeholders with different interests. Decentralised resource governance aims to shift power, authority, accountability, and resource access to lower-level actors, bringing responsibility, acceptance, and decision-making. Kiwango (2017) arrived at a similar conclusion. Results in this study indicate that the central government remains a very authoritative player in all decision-making processes where stakeholders in the whole process are practically powerless, and formations of local management structures (CBOs) stay with the same notion of community disempowerment.

5.3 Effects of power disparities in Makao WMA

The study found several effects of power disparities resulting in power struggles in WMA governance. These include limited resource access, ineffective Conflict Resolution, Insufficient enforcement of regulations, and reduced accountability. Failure to decentralise power in the management of protected areas can have several negative effects on both the effectiveness of conservation efforts and the well-being of local communities; this confirms a study by Bluwstein *et al.* (2016).

The current study found the existence of resource-use conflicts in the study area. This is due to communities bordering PAs or sharing land with wildlife incurring many economic and social costs like denied access to resources, property damage through crop-raiding, livestock depletion, wildlife-related accidents, and transmission of wildlife diseases. Kideghesho *et al.* (2007) in Serengeti, Mariki

(2018) in Wami Mbiki WMA, and Lwankomezi *et al.* (2021) in Makao WMA arrived at a similar conclusion. The current study found that conflict incidences were not reported to authorities. The probable reason for this was that some reported cases were not taken seriously, and communities showed discontent with the bureaucratic nature of authority responses, especially crop damage and wildlife attacks. Therefore, local communities continue to endure costs associated with wild animals without obtaining sizeable benefits at the household level, diminishing community interest in supporting wildlife conservation.

In this study, local communities alleged that they had never been compensated for damages. The results are also comparable to those of Nelson & Agrawal (2008), who states that residents of the conservation area partially bear the costs of conservation in PAs and need compensation. Similarly, Mutandwa and Gadzirayi (2007) reported comparable findings in the CAMPFIRE Gonono ward, where community members claimed they had never been reimbursed for wildlife damage. The current study, nevertheless, found no specific participatory and transparent mechanisms exist to manage and resolve conflicts within Makao WMA. Instead, actors use different means and ways to push their agendas.

The current study indicates that centralised management has led to reduced accountability, as decisions are made by top authorities who are not directly affected by the consequences of their choices. This is similar to a study by Kicheleri *et al.* (2018), who found that most decisions in Burunge WMA were not made at the village level, undermining local community power to manage and influence most decisions. However, Kiwango *et al.* (2015) have said that making bottom-up decisions improves transparency and accountability, improving WMA governance. Moyo *et al.* (2016) indicate that effective decentralisation enables the development of sustainable livelihoods for local communities through activities such as ecotourism, sustainable agriculture, or non-timber forest product harvesting. Failure to decentralise can result in missed opportunities for poverty reduction and community development (Kajembe *et al.*, 2000; Kicheleri *et al.*, 2018).

The article indicates that, while there may be a shift of power from central governments, the study results indicate that it may be transferred to new, emerging elites instead of intended stakeholders. This leads to inappropriate power transfer that turns most decentralisation reforms into charades. This legislation excludes local communities from crucial resource management procedures and decisions and integrates rural livelihoods, and biodiversity conservation remains a lofty but elusive goal. Surprisingly, the state has remained a very authoritative player in all decision-making processes, where local stakeholders are practically powerless, and local management structures (CBOs) formations remain with the same notion of community disempowerment.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The article identified various actors involved in the Makao WMA with different understandings, interests, and roles. Actors included local communities through Village Councils, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) through Authorized Associations, District and Wildlife Division Officials, NGOs, TANAPA (Tanzania National Parks), and conservation investors. Despite their diverse perspectives, the primary objective shared among these actors is supporting wildlife conservation. The article further revealed that the Village Council holds institutional and structural power within the community due to their cultural or social positions. Investor possesses strategic power, influenced by their wealth and education level, enabling them to influence negotiations and secure tenders for investments in the Makao WMA. The Authorized Associations, District Council, TANAPA, NGOs, and the Wildlife Division hold institutional and strategic power, potentially suppressing the local community's decision-making authority. This power disparity suggests that decision-making processes are influenced by external actors who have more authority and resources, limiting the community's involvement and control over WMA management and leading to potential imbalances and reduced empowerment. The study found several effects of power disparities like limited resource access, ineffective conflict resolution, insufficient enforcement of regulations, and reduced accountability. This study recommends advocacy for local 'community empowerment to minimise power disparity among WMA actors through legal and policy reforms.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges the School of Education, St. Augustine University of Tanzania, for providing office space for research write-ups. Thanks are also extended to Meatu District and communities at Makao, Mwabagimu, and Jinamo villages. The author also acknowledges blind reviewers for improving this article.

8.0 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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