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Expanding Women's Choices through Employment? Community-Based Natural Resource Management and Women's Empowerment in Kwandu Conservancy, Namibia

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Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) has been heralded for promoting development by creating employment in rural areas. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to the effects of CBNRM-derived employment on individual women. We use an empowerment lens to evaluate claims that CBNRM benefits communities because it creates formal employment for women. A case study of Kwandu Conservancy, located in Namibia's Caprivi region, generated 49 interviews of a wide range of female conservancy residents. Data were also collected through participant observation, document review, and 20 key informant interviews. Data analysis revealed that employment has a mixed impact on women's choices and their empowerment, bringing both costs and benefits to female employees. Understanding this range of experiences allows us to consider how CBNRM efforts can be structured to enhance employment opportunities more broadly within the social structures of a conservancy while anticipating and mitigating negative effects on women.

Keywords Caprivi, conservation benefits, development, employment, empowerment, gender, income

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) has at once been both heralded as a development tool and a biodiversity conservation strategy (e.g., Jacobsohn and Owen-Smith 2003; Mbaiwa 2004; Jones and Weaver 2009) and criticized for its failures to provide adequate and equal access to ecosystem-based benefits (e.g., Sullivan 2002; 2003; Dressler et al. 2010). In particular, some proponents claim that "successful" CBNRM implementation has brought development to rural communities by creating new employment opportunities (World Wildlife Fund [WWF] 2008), including employment in campsite construction (Mbaiwa 2005), wildlife and natural resource monitoring and protection (Jacobsohn and Owen-Smith 2003), and tourist lodges (WWF 2008). Given the importance placed on employment as a conservation benefit, there is a limited amount of scholarly

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literature on women's experiences with CBNRM-derived employment. We use an empowerment lens to evaluate impacts of CBNRM-derived employment on female employees in a communal conservancy. In so doing, we aim to deepen the conversation around CBNRM's costs and benefits by adding insights to its effects on women's empowerment. We explore the following questions: How and to what extent does CBNRM employment impact women employees' empowerment? And if CBNRM is fostering development, as claimed, is women's ability to exercise choice over their own lives enhanced by their participation in CBNRM-based employment?

Community-Based Natural Resource Management

Community-based natural resource management, in the context of southern Africa, is characterized by the involvement of local residents in natural resources decision-making and a focus on local development through conservation (Adams and Hulme 2001; Hulme and Murphree 2001b). The CBNRM approach to conservation devolves property rights to rural people, reduces incentives for behaviors that detract from conservation goals (Jones and Weaver 2009; Scanlon and Kull 2009; Boudreaux and Nelson 2011), and increases social and economic benefits to local populations (Bandyopadhyay 2009; Scanlon and Kull 2009). So while CBNRM has led to increased wildlife numbers in some contexts (Jacobsohn and Owen-Smith 2003; Jones and Weaver 2009), it has also, in some cases, contributed to poverty reduction and increased community access to natural resources (Hulme and Murphree 2001a).

Empowerment and economic development are strong motivations for CBNRM proponents. Jacobsohn and Garth Owen-Smith (2003, 92) assert that CBNRM participants in Namibia are benefiting from "social empowerment" through increased access to skills and knowledge. Similarly, CBNRM in Namibia is believed to be an "empowerment and capacity building programme" that creates income-generation opportunities in rural areas (Namibian Association of CBNRM Organisations [NACSO] 2013b). Indeed, employment by CBNRM organizations has been termed its "most significant benefit" to people living in CBNRM areas (NACSO 2010, 22).

While well intentioned, CBNRM's development goals can be undermined by inadequate and/or inequitable benefit sharing. Scholars have documented situations in which CBNRM has not adequately nor equitably distributed CBNRM benefits among community members (e.g., Mbaiwa 2004; Silva and Mosimane 2012; Suich 2012). Inattention to intracommunity differences, power differentials, and relationships between intracommunity groups and external actors impedes a uniform flow of benefits (e.g., Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Sullivan 2002; 2003; Belsky 2003; Dressler et al. 2010). CBNRM has been shown to provide women with paid employment opportunities, but with fewer overall opportunities for women than for men (Nabane and Matzke 1997). Special attention needs to be given to household-level divisions of labor and inequalities based on age and gender (Blaikie 1985).

Empowering Women through Employment and Choice

Theorists refer to the cyclical process of gaining power by moving from oppression toward liberation as "empowerment" (e.g., Carr 2003; Mosedale 2005; Freire 2009). Freire (2009) advocated empowerment through conscientization, a realized

awareness and rejection of internalized oppression, a process that occurs through a cycle of reflection and action. While women's empowerment requires both an awareness of existing power relations and knowledge of alternatives, the ability to act on awareness depends on the existence of attainable and attractive alternatives (Charmes and Weiringa 2003). Choice is consequently seen as central to productive power (Mayoux 1995; Kabeer 2005 and 1999). Kabeer (1999; 2005) portrays power generally as "the ability to make choices." Opportunities for exercising choices are based both on formal laws and regulations and on social norms (Lachapelle et al. 2004).

With an understanding of power as the ability to exercise choice, it follows that oppression blocks a person's ability to make choices. In fact, oppression may prevent the perception of any choices, as internalized, covert messages of what is "true" sustain unequal power relations (Foucault 1977a, 1977b; Bourdieu 1994; Rowlands 1997; Charmes and Weiringa 2003; Kabeer 2005; Freire 2009). Men and women perpetuate women's exclusion from decision making by promulgating beliefs that women lack time for opportunities outside household duties; that women are under the control of their husbands; and that women lack confidence (Longwe 2000). Discourse¹ has also rendered women's work less visible and less valuable than men's work (e.g., Sullivan 2000), with women's roles not only different but highly unequal (Gupta and Yesudian 2006). At a structural level, male-biased property rights (Agarwal 1994), curtailed sexual and reproductive rights (Edwards 2007), and global racism and imperialism (Johnson-Odim 1991), to name a few forces, also impede women's ability to exercise choice. The cumulative impacts of dominant discourse and patriarchal structures translate into increased psychological and material dependency on men for meeting subsistence needs.

At the same time, scholars warn against a simplistic empowered/disempowered dichotomy (e.g., Parpart et al. 2002). Cahill (2008) rather contends that everyone has access to networks of power and weakness, and that development workers should assist women in identifying their sources of strength. Like Cahill, Cornish (2006, 304–305) states that empowerment should be understood "in a way that allows for people to be empowered in one domain at the same time that they are disempowered in another." Consequently, empowerment and disempowerment refer to changes in power, as opposed to states of complete liberation or total lack of power.

We define gender empowerment as movement from oppression to liberation through a continuous process whereby a person's awareness of alternatives and ability to exercise choice is enhanced. We use an empowerment lens (e.g., Rowlands 1997; Mayoux 1998) to assess employment impacts on women because it focuses on the level of power, or choice, a woman can exercise over her own life. To assess the effects of direct employment on women's empowerment, we focus on choice, specifically assessing how employment increases and/or decreases female employees' abilities to exercise choice in their lives.

Employment can have both empowering and disempowering effects on women. It can empower by enhancing women's self-confidence (Foster et al. 2012) and self-worth (Kabeer 1997; Pankaj and Tankha 2010), improving access to financial resources (Kabeer 1997) and information (Khan 1999), reducing dependence on family members, increasing household-level decision-making power, boosting financial savings skills (Pankaj and Tankha 2010), and increasing women's solidarity and social mobility (Khan 1999). It can also motivate women to challenge traditional gender roles (Foster et al. 2012) and increase community awareness that, like men, women can make significant financial contributions to households (Kabeer 1997).

Employment can also disempower. It can create a “double burden” for women who must continue to fulfill household responsibilities outside of formal work hours (Samarasinghe 1993; Khan 1999), exacerbate social tensions between men and women (Bradley 1995), and expose women to harassment en route to and within the workplace (Hancock 2006). Relatives may exert control over a woman’s earnings (Khan 1999), inciting conflicts over household expenditures (Samarasinghe 1993). Women may lack control over working conditions (Samarasinghe 1993) and encounter wage discrimination (Pankaj and Tankha 2010). Finally, child care requirements can fuel women’s anxiety over their children’s well-being (Pankaj and Tankha 2010).

Evaluating the effects of employment on women’s empowerment requires attention to both tangible and intangible effects of employment within the context of specific social institutions (Carr et al. 1996). It demands a close look not only at woman’s access to income-generation opportunities but her ability to control her earnings, since control is influenced by her social position (e.g., her age, education level, and religion) (Kantor 2005). An in-depth assessment of employment also demands attention to the character of work (Jackson and Palmer-Jones 1999) and how it affects other dimensions of women’s lives.

Assessing the character of work requires a fuller understanding of the levels of control afforded to employees within their broader social structure (see Standing 1989). A job can incur its own costs, as women may have to pay for accommodation, equipment, transport, and clothing, especially when they must migrate to urban areas (Elson 1999). It can pose health risks, for example, via pesticide exposure (London et al. 2002), cramped and poorly lit workspaces (Khan 1999), or increased caloric intake requirements (Samarasinghe 1993). Employer flexibility can influence the amount of control women have over the number of hours they work, their ability to take leave, and when they do the work. Some types of work provide women with opportunities to network with other women (Tucker and Boonabaana 2012), as well as to improve their skills, knowledge, awareness, and understanding, enhancing their control over future employment opportunities and life choices (Standing 1989). Additionally, the physical location of a job influences the range of alternative livelihood activities an employee might access, as well as a woman’s ability to fulfill pre-existing household responsibilities (Tucker and Boonabaana 2012). Attention to the levels of control/power associated with specific employment therefore provides insights into its empowerment potential.

Methods and Site Description

Namibia’s CBNRM program developed from post-Independence efforts to devolve property rights and decision-making power to rural communities. Namibia’s CBNRM program was formally introduced in 1996 with the passage of the Nature Conservation Amendment Act. The act transferred wildlife ownership from the state to approved communal conservancies (Jones and Murphree 2001). Communal conservancies are “self-selecting social units or communities of people that choose to work together and become registered with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism” (NACSO 2008, 11). Some of the other requirements for conservancy establishment include clearly defined and undisputed boundaries, a defined membership, a legally recognized constitution, an elected body of representatives, and a plan for equitable benefits distribution to members (Jones and Weaver 2009). Registered conservancies gain the right to conditionally use, consume, and sell game, as well as

to enter into tourism ventures (NACSO 2008). Beginning in 1994 with the creation of Community Resource Monitor positions (Jacobsohn and Owen-Smith 2003), CBNRM organizations targeted women with direct employment opportunities.

At the time of writing, Namibia had 79 registered conservancies (NACSO 2013a). More than 60% of Namibia's CBNRM programmatic benefits are derived from joint ventures and trophy hunting, with additional income derived from community campsites, harvest of natural plant products, conservation farming, and other activities (WWF 2008). In 2007, conservancy incomes and benefits totaled N\$39,127,982 in Namibia as a whole, with individual conservancies receiving a low of N\$9,730 in income and benefits to a high of N\$2,354,860 (WWF 2008).²

Kwandu Conservancy (KC) is located in eastern Caprivi,³ bordering the Trans-Caprivi Highway, Bwabwata National Park, Zambia, and a state forest. It is 120 km by road from Katima Mulilo, the nearest urban center. KC was registered in 1999, making it among the nine oldest conservancies in the country. With an area of 190 km², KC has an approximate population of 4300 (NACSO 2008). The conservancy generates its income from joint-venture agreements with professional hunters, timber sales to commercial loggers, grants, and a community campsite.

Women face a variety of structural constraints in the Caprivi region, including poverty, illness, gender-based violence, and witchcraft. A 2003/2004 report by the Namibian Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS 2006) indicated that 28.6% of Caprivians were considered "poor," with monthly expenditures of less than N\$262.45 (CBS 2008). Katima Mulilo, Caprivi's urban center, has an estimated HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of 35.6%, based on antenatal testing (Ministry of Health and Social Services [MOHSS] 2010). Fear of violence, loss of access to resources, and the potential withdrawal of family support systems leave women with little bargaining power to influence husbands' sexual behavior, increasing risk for HIV/AIDS infection (Edwards 2007; Thomas 2007a). More than 80% of Caprivian women believe that under certain circumstances, a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife (MOHSS 2008), and most women do not see leaving an abusive husband as an option because men mediate access to key livelihood resources (Thomas 2007a). Finally, narratives of jealousy-induced witchcraft are increasing, disrupting livelihoods and increasing social tensions in the Caprivi (Thomas 2007b).

The primary household income sources in the Caprivi are wage work, subsistence farming, business, pensions, and remittances (CBS 2006). In KC, subsistence agriculture is the primary occupation of household heads (84% of households); formal employment (5%), informal employment (3%), and cash-crop farming (3%) are less dominant (Bandyopadhyay et al. 2009).

Women garner status in Kwandu Conservancy by accessing cash income through "respectable" livelihood activities like employment (Khumalo 2012), but since formal employment opportunities are scarce in the Kwandu area, women typically pursue formal employment in distant urban centers. Alternative cash income sources in Kwandu include agricultural work, operating a small shop and/or pub, and social cash transfers. Kwandu residents grow maize, sorghum, millet, beans, and pumpkins, as well as other crops for personal consumption and sale. Artisanal fishing, gathering wild fruits and vegetables, and collecting forest products also contribute to livelihoods in Kwandu Conservancy.

We employed an extended case method (Burawoy 1998) to assess the effects of CBNRM-derived employment on women's empowerment in KC. Consisting of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document review, the fieldwork

took place over 6 months, spread between 2010 and 2011 in KC. Purposive diversity sampling (or “sampling for range”: Weiss 1994) for different social characteristics (age, class, marital status, education, ethnicity, etc.) and types of conservancy participation (conservancy employed, natural resource harvesters, crafters, and passive residents) was used to select female residents of KC for interview requests. Our interview guide consisted of open-ended questions like “Tell me about your job at the conservancy” and “What is it like to work with community members?,” to allow respondents to introduce issues of importance to them. The lead author personally interviewed 49 female residents⁴ of Kwandu Conservancy and 20 key informants. Fifteen of the respondents were women directly employed by Kwandu Conservancy (10) or employed by CBNRM-affiliated organizations (5), and this article focuses on their responses. A Caprivan woman translated interviews in situ when needed. The interview guide was back-translated to improve translation accuracy. Interviews were formally coded by categorizing data into well-formulated concepts, beginning within each interview and then extending across interviews (Corbin and Strauss 2008). We selected excerpts for their clarity and to represent the full range of viewpoints that emerged.

Findings and Analysis

The conservancy offers three types of direct employment: salaried, stipended, and temporary. All employees must be residents of KC, and their parents must be registered conservancy members, limiting migration into Kwandu. Salaried employees are hired by conservancy staff, paid monthly, and they are employed on a full-time, permanent basis. Salaried positions range in skills requirements from no education or English-speaking skills (e.g., office cleaner) to a minimum Grade 10 education and English proficiency (e.g., manager). Stipended employees are elected by the community to be a member of the Conservancy Committee, which has governance responsibilities and paid monthly, but they earn less because their committee duties require fewer work hours. Stipended positions have no specified English language or educational requirements. Finally, temporary employees are hired for one day to several months to complete a specific task. Temporary employment opportunities are infrequently offered and provide significantly less income than salaried and stipend-based positions. Therefore, temporary employment is excluded from this discussion.

Between 2004 and 2010, the conservancy employed a total of 19 to 28 salaried employees annually, with women variably comprising 21% to 28% of the workforce. Women have held posts as conservancy manager, treasurer, and secretary, positions that confer decision-making authority, as well as game guard, nursery worker, and cleaner. Female employees have represented both of the conservancy’s major ethnicities groups (Mafwe and Hambukushu) and multiple marital statuses (single, married, and divorced), and ranged in age from 20s to 40s.

Once employed by the conservancy, staff members tend to stay, but male staff members have slightly higher retention levels. For example, in 2007, 80% of female and 86% of male salaried employees had worked in KC since 2004. In 2010, KC had retained 40% of female and 57% of male salaried employees from 2004 and 40% of female and 71% of male salaried employees from 2007. Conservancy records indicate that average monthly salaries for male conservancy employees ranged from N\$587 to N\$781, while average female staff salaries ranged from N\$620 to N\$758 between

2004 and 2010. Female staff earned slightly more, on average, than male employees in four out of the seven years. However, average salaries do not reflect the additional types of income earned by some of the conservancy's employees. Community resource monitors, game guards, and the field officer are all eligible for field allowances, paid for each night spent in the field. Conservancy records from 2004 indicate that 7 game guards, all of whom were male, each earned a total of N\$300 to N\$900 (an average of N\$25–N\$75 per month) in field allowances between March and June 2004. Since gaps were identified in conservancy records for some of the years studied, especially 2006, the accuracy of reported field allowances is not guaranteed. This limitation means that at least some of the staff members' monthly earnings are underreported, and that the earnings gaps between employees may be larger than is indicated by base salary comparisons.

Stipended employees primarily consist of members of the Management Committee (MCM), who act as communicators and decision makers in the conservancy. Their monthly income is less than salaried employees. In November 2010, the 11 MCMs earned N\$320 each month, while the Management Committee Chairperson earned N\$490 in monthly income (Kwandu Conservancy records). Analysis of conservancy records from 2004–2005 and 2007–2010 suggests that women have variably comprised 7% to 43% of the Management Committee, with no history of a female chairperson. However, gaps in the conservancy's MCM records render the MCM gender ratio an estimate based on months where records were complete. As mentioned previously, understanding the relationship between employment and empowerment requires a deeper analysis than levels of employment and earning. Specifically, to what extent do the character and meanings of direct conservancy employment impact the levels of control/power women exercise in their work and home lives? The following analysis is developed from interviews with existing or previous female employees. Four themes of changing opportunities for choice emerged from interview data: choice afforded by cash income, by employment location, by employer flexibility, and by learning opportunities. Each is discussed in turn.

Cash Income and Choice

Responses indicate that cash outputs from conservancy employment assist female employees to fulfill basic material needs and to overcome gender-based livelihood barriers. Women described using conservancy income to purchase food and clothing and to pay children's school fees. In 2010, more than half of Kwandu Conservancy's female employees were unmarried. Given that rigid gender roles designate field clearing, plowing, and house-frame construction as male-only activities, unmarried women with limited cash have a reduced ability to meet these needs. Conservancy employment provides cash needed to hire male laborers to complete tasks socially prescribed to men. As one unmarried, female employee expressed, "Since I'm not married it's now easy. I can tell someone to build me a house and pay that person. Now again I can still tell a person to prepare my farm and I pay that person. That is the difference from when I got that job."

Cash is particularly important for acquiring medical services. Illness and prevention measures can require significant expenditures, with cash payments required for taxi services to Katima Mulilo's State Hospital, accommodation, and food. In 2010, anti-retroviral treatment required that patients bring a treatment supporter with them to the Katima Mulilo State Hospital every month to obtain medication.

A key informant estimated the cost for such trips to be about N\$200–N\$300 per month.

While most respondents indicated that their income went primarily to meeting subsistence needs, earning income does not guarantee its control. Husbands or relatives may divert income away from a female earner. For example, one female employee stated that her husband decides how to use her conservancy earnings, although it is unknown whether or not his decisions aligned with her interests. However, most female employees indicated they do control their cash income. When one employee was asked whether it was she or someone else who decides what to do with her pay, she claimed, “It’s me, because it’s mine.”

Employment Location and Choice

A key aspect of conservancy-related income is its community-based location. Working in their community permits women to fulfill gender-based roles and responsibilities. It also allows them to engage in a broader array of livelihood activities than they could in an urban area. However, employment within their community can promulgate adversarial relationships with some fellow community members, and/or increase employees’ social standing.

Staying in one’s community can facilitate a broader range of livelihood options that can allow women to maintain gender-based roles and responsibilities. The Kwandu area affords female employees with opportunities to farm, to collect reeds and grass for home use and sale, to collect wild fruits and vegetables, and to catch fish, in addition to earning cash through KC employment. One woman conveyed that KC employment thereby indirectly frees her from depending on men for her livelihood. The multiple livelihood options keep her, she said, from “going in the wrong way.” When asked how her views of herself have changed as a result of being part of the conservancy, she replied:

Now I am happy in working Conservancy, and I’m always trying to encourage the women to support their children. I’m always trying to say “In this way which I’m always doing working in Conservancy is best for me.” Because when I stay home, I’m always going in the wrong way . . .

When I’m going in the wrong way, I stay in village from morning to sunset without doing anything. I’m having some friends who are always drinking some beers and going outside the village to town. And that life, me, I don’t like it. The life which I like is to stay home and plow the field and do some jobs like making some bundles of grass and reeds and selling to get money. Not to going in town, sitting doing nothing there . . .

The difference between me, always living at home, and people always living town is that women who are in town, they are not protecting themselves. Because they are always planning that “In which way could I get food? Unless to get a boyfriend in this town.” But at home, you think about “Can I make some means to get food? Can I go to the river to get some grass? Maybe someone can buy it and give me a small amount. I could buy that something which I need to solve my problem.”

Income earned in the community can more efficiently convert into goods and services in the villages than it can in the more expensive city areas. A conservancy

employee claimed that “staying at home it is nice to me, rather than working in town,” adding, “It’s too expensive in the town.” Notably, conservancy employees walk to work and are provided with uniforms when required, so they do not have significant job-induced expenses.

Another advantage to working in the Kwandu area is that conservancy employment can enhance the belief that one is supported by the community. For example, one woman described the positive experience of recently being selected for a conservancy position. She said, “I felt good because this meant to me that I was also a special person to the community. That’s why they chose me. Then I decided that this is going to be good so that I can take people’s opinions and ideas.” Her response indicates a level of pride in being selected by the community, as she sees herself as a “special person.” She also implies that she feels a sense of importance in her role as communicator, being both supporter and supported in her community.

On the other hand, KC employment may create tensions between employees and residents who resent conservancy policies and employment practices. Employees are the embodiment of conservancy policies, so they are sometimes the target of people’s anger at the conservancy as a whole. When asked what it is like to work with community members, one employee described facing hostility over wildlife damage to crops, a household’s food source. She explained:

In times like the plowing season, it’s very difficult to work with people . . . People complain much, especially this time of the year. You’ll find that other people will complain, “You see! The elephant trampled my fields.” Others will insult you. Others may say, “I will give you all my children so that you can take care of them.” So there are many things which people say to us.

Since the conservancy can only employ a small fraction of KC’s total residents, some residents claim that the conservancy only benefits a select few, sparking jealousy. Jealousy may in turn erode social support for conservancy employees and their families and even fuel witchcraft fears. Not surprisingly, interviews with conservancy employees show that they experience jealousy from other conservancy residents, and that the jealousy is based on their employment status. One employee said, “You can see that other people are jealous, especially those who didn’t want us to be [conservancy employees].”

When asked whether she worries about people being jealous of her having a job, another employee replied: “To my side, yes, when I was starting.” Jealousy produces fear in the Kwandu area because it is believed to fuel witchcraft and to detrimentally impact the material world. When asked what happens when people are jealous, a respondent said, “Oh, something can come.” When asked what can come, she replied, “Witching.” She then explained that witching can kill people, meaning that jealousy is perceived to cause death.

Employer Flexibility and Choice

The flexible nature of conservancy employment permits some women to engage in the responsibilities imposed by socially constructed gender roles. Given that women are generally expected to clean, cook, care for children and the elderly, farm, and

complete many other tasks, it follows that women may have difficulty finding the time to complete tasks required of conservancy employees. However, interview responses suggest that the conservancy offers its employees the time and flexibility needed to complete additional required and/or desired livelihood activities.

When one respondent was asked why she had decided to continue with conservancy employment rather than move on to something else, she credited the conservancy with providing her with time to pursue her farm work. She explained that working with the community is cyclical because there are times when the community members are too involved with farming themselves to require employees' services. She said:

By this time I like to stay with this job because it's easy. Sometimes you work. Sometimes you cannot work. Because let me say, when you are working with the community, there is time when they are busy with their fields, which means you cannot disturb them. You just leave them. Then you can also join your work to the field because the people, they are busy.

The work flexibility extends to other livelihood activities as well. The same informant explained that conservancy work offers her the ability to take leave and pursue small business ventures. In another part of her interview she claimed that she can sometimes "ask permission even to take leave. Then off I go, looking for whatever I want to sell." She views the conservancy as offering her the freedom to pursue things she deems important.

Learning Opportunities and Choice

The learning opportunities offered by the conservancy expand women's abilities to exercise control over future employment opportunities. As outlined next, employees gleaned new ideas for living healthier and fuller lives, while also gaining skills and insights that can transfer to other income-earning opportunities. However, data also indicated that female game guards have not received adequate training or equipment to protect themselves during fieldwork.

Employees gain transferable skills when they are trained to fill conservancy positions. Respondents identified numerous types of skills-trainings offered to conservancy employees, including financial management, bookkeeping, note-taking, contract negotiation skills, and fire management.

Gaining skills and knowledge as a conservancy employee enhanced some women's feelings of control over their lives. One conservancy employee explained that "I just saw that from now when I left from working in the conservancy, I just gained knowledge from there . . . When I was working in the conservancy, I could only get money by [doing conservancy work]. But for this time, I have knowledge that I can also still make money before end of the months."

The conservancy also assists employees and residents alike to prevent and mitigate HIV/AIDS-related illnesses. From 2007, the Integrated Rural and Nature Conservation Trust (IRDNC) has trained conservancy staff to deliver behavior change communication. Staff members are trained to encourage people to get tested for HIV and to use condoms, and conservancy employees who travel throughout the conservancy are asked to distribute informative reading materials and condoms as they go about their regular duties. In this way, IRDNC has promoted the mainstreaming of

HIV/AIDS prevention education into conservancy programs. While the impacts of HIV/AIDS education on high-risk behaviors in KC have yet to be empirically evaluated, it is clear that employment provides staff with access to current prevention and lifestyle information.

In addition to the importance of gaining new skills and feelings of control, respondents identified the centrality of general knowledge, experience, and exposure to new ideas and situations as motivation for working for the conservancy. For example, one woman claimed:

The most important thing which I have just learned is there are many different animals which the conservancy has to take care of which are very important . . . Again, I have learned that sometimes when there is a tour in the conservancy, you can also visit other places which you haven't yet seen and see different types of animals there.

Similarly, another female employee emphasized that traveling on behalf of the conservancy has exposed her to new places and people. In response to a question about what new skills she has learned since working for the conservancy, she cited social skills and public speaking ability, and then added, "I've even gone and seen some different countries, . . . like exchange visits to Zimbabwe and Zambia."

Finally, conservancy gatherings provide women with opportunities to exchange information, gain awareness, and build a support network among other working women. Formal conservancy gatherings for employees and conservancy affiliates are periodically held at the conservancy office, Mashi Crafts Market, and other locations. Meetings can bring groups of women together from different backgrounds and levels of experience, facilitating informal exchanges about women's difficulties. For example, a key informant described a quarterly planning meeting where women offered marital guidance to a troubled employee:

And when we were discussing, . . . she just voiced out and said, "I'm being mistreated by my husband." And then I explained. I said, "You know we had a workshop regarding women, . . . marriages and all those, mistreatment of [women]." And then I explained the . . . procedures. If somebody hurts you, where you go and how you handle this issue. Yeah, it worked.

Respondents described other informal conversations between women that occurred at the sites of formal meetings but outside the hours of formal presentations. Such side conversations provide a means for women to offer and obtain advice about sensitive and important issues.

While employment can enhance feelings of control over one's life, it also brings its own set of problems. Both male and female employees face physical risk while on duty, especially when their positions require them to patrol the forest. Respondents claimed that both campsite staff and game guards are particularly at risk for attack from wild animals and poachers. While Kwandu's female game guards were provided with firearms training in 2008, the two most recent female hires have not been trained. Moreover, none of Kwandu's female game guards actually carry firearms, necessitating dependence on male employees to defend them from dangerous wildlife during field excursions. This dependence likely increases their work-related stress and places women at greater risk than their male counterparts.

Discussion and Conclusions

Kwandu Conservancy has presented both costs and benefits to female employees. The conservancy has created new employment opportunities for women. Female employees indicated that access to cash improved their ability to acquire basic goods and services, offering a means to overcome rigidly gendered livelihood constraints. They also perceived KC employment, with its flexible work hours, to add to, rather than replace, preexisting livelihood activities, diversifying their livelihoods, reducing their dependence on men, and enabling them to stretch their money farther than they could if they worked in an urban setting. Women described KC employment as a means to acquire transferable livelihood skills, have positive experiences with new places, people, and animals, and informally exchange human rights information. Finally, women claimed that employment instilled a sense of pride in being someone important to their community.

Female employees also experienced costs of conservancy employment. Women described facing hostility from conservancy residents angry about crop loss. They claimed that some conservancy residents acted jealously toward their employment, amplifying the employees' fears of being bewitched and suffering material harm. Interviews suggest other costs. None of the female game guards carried firearms, showing the conservancy treats female employees differently than its armed male employees, and in so doing may expose women employees to greater injury risk. One employee said her husband decided how to spend her earnings, suggesting women employees have different levels of income control.

Kwandu Conservancy employment has had a mixed impact on women employees' choices and their empowerment. For many of the women in our sample, employment has expanded their opportunities to exercise choice over their lives by decreasing their economic dependence on men, expanding their knowledge, and instilling a sense of pride, as exhibited elsewhere (e.g., Kabeer 1997; Khan 1999; Pankaj and Tankha 2010). Women have held authoritative positions in Kwandu Conservancy (i.e., manager) and traditionally "male" positions (i.e., game guard), suggesting that conservancy employment empowers women by challenging the "patriarchal order" in the Kwandu area (see Raju 2005, 265), rather than mirroring women's lower social status (see Faulkner and Lawson 1991). However, conservancy employment has not yet challenged women's traditional gender-based roles and responsibilities within the household. While it permits unmarried women to hire male labor, it does not confront married women's gender-based responsibilities, suggesting that married female employees must fulfill dual (home-based and work-based) roles. Conservancy employment therefore fails to "transform" (see Kabeer 1997) women's household roles and responsibilities. More research is needed to ascertain whether employment has increased women's work hours, as found by Samarasinghe (1993) and Khan (1999). Tensions with community members, disparate on-the-job risk exposure, and unequal intrahousehold decision making also limit the conservancy's empowerment impact, similar to employment experiences elsewhere (see Bradley 1995; Khan 1999; London et al. 2002). While the conservancy offers women average salaries equal to men's, women have fewer additional pay opportunities.

We found that women comprise only a quarter of the conservancy workforce, showing a need to identify and remove impediments to women's appointment. Employees' connection to community elites, for example, was not transparent,

and merits further examination. Additionally, the very small number of employees relative to the conservancy's population begs examination of the conservancy's impacts on unemployed women, the subject of forthcoming reports. Employees' descriptions of jealousy and hostility suggest that to improve women's empowerment, CBNRM needs to ensure that meaningful benefits are expanded beyond employees and shared more equally among all conservancy residents.

The findings suggest that by investing in women's employment, CBNRM can enhance women employees' opportunities to exercise choice. However, bolstering their empowerment necessitates providing women employees with equal access to training, equipment, and additional pay opportunities, as well as introducing alternative ways to think about and respond to household responsibilities and community hostility. While conservancy employment provides benefits, women employees must overcome serious obstacles. Impediments to women's empowerment will persist without strong institutional commitment to transforming patriarchal structures within the conservancy and without responsiveness to the obstacles social norms present to women in the Kwandu area. Meeting the potential for empowering women employees will require an explicit and persistent commitment to promoting gender equity in Kwandu Conservancy.

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Notes

1. Discourse is a system of representation in which meaning and meaningful practice are constructed (Hall 1997).
2. N\$7 is approximately equal to US\$1.
3. In August 2013, the Caprivi was officially renamed the Zambezi Region. The renaming occurred after fieldwork and peer review of this article had been completed.
4. Note that 2 of the 49 respondents ended their interviews prior to the full implementation of the interview guide.

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