Assessing Local Community Representation and Perception toward Decision-making in Protected Area Collaborative Management: A Case Study of Band-e-Amir National Park, Afghanistan

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Local community representation and perceptions toward decision-making of protected area collaborative management in Afghanistan were assessed with a case study of Band-e-Amir National Park (BANP). Community representatives (CRs) were interviewed to assess their capacity of knowledge, participation in decision-making, information exchange with communities, and perception toward the park management framework. Local residents, government agencies, a park warden, and an NGO representative were also interviewed to identify their perception and views toward the park management framework. We found that the CRs had insufficient knowledge for decision-making and weak information exchange with communities. We also found, however, that collaborative decision-making increased their learning opportunities. Although the park warden and NGO show positive views about the park management framework due to conservation achievements, the lack of alternative livelihood sources and weak responses of the national government have resulted in the CRs and local residents having negative views. We conclude that accountable local community representation in decision-making and responsiveness of final decision-making bodies are essential to maintain local support for collaborative management of protected areas.

Key words: community representative, decision-making, collaborative management, Band-e-Amir National Park, Afghanistan

1 Introduction

For global biodiversity conservation, the “Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020” and the “Aichi Biodiversity Targets” of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) call for the expansion of protected areas (PAs), and their effective management through local community participation (UNEP, 2010). Collaborative management of PAs is advocated as a viable approach to provide opportunities for local communities to participate in PA decision-making (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004) and maintain effective and successful management (Kothari, 2006).

Based on the notion that an entire local population’s participation in decision-making affecting natural resources is neither possible nor favorable (Edmonds and Wollenberg, 2001), Inoue (2011) proposes the use of collaborative management committees and highlights the participation of community representatives (CRs). Wollenberg (2009) states that community representation for public decision-making is in principal a form of action on "behalf of others," so representatives who act on behalf of others need to be "accountable" and have the required "capacity" (Bickford, 1999; Larson, 2005). Although CRs may be expected to have great influence in decision-making processes, literature on PA collaborative management contains very little on studies specifically about capacity(1) and accountability(2) of community representation in decision-making and their relationship with local support. Weber and Khademian (2008) state that collaborative management increase learning opportunities, so how this opportunity can be practiced to improve capacity of CRs? Rao (1998) suggests that an accountable representative should build a two way communication, thus what factors may affect accountability of CRs in PAs collaborative decision-making? West and Brockington (2006) indicate that weak local support for PAs management is due to dissatisfaction of local residents, so what are the aspects of local dissatisfaction toward maintaining local support for PAs collaborative management and decision-making? An evaluation of community representation and perception about decision-making for an individual PA would help us to better understand the challenges of this aspect of collaborative management.

Afghanistan’s biodiversity is in a critical state. A considerable number of globally-important plant and animal species there have either gone extinct or are currently vulnerable (Johnson et al., 2012). Although PAs can play a critical role in conserving the country’s biodiversity, the country has a limited area designated
as PAs (MAIL, 2013). Concerning PAs management, PAs in Afghanistan suffer from a lack of institutional capacity, legal frameworks, and security (Johnson et al., 2012). The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), responsible for PAs management across the country, is lacked the financial and human resources and capacity to manage and govern PAs effectively (Kanderian et al., 2011).

Although based on the statutory the PAs in Afghanistan are owned by the state, local communities traditionally possess land in PAs and using their resources. Due to the decades of war and the lack of government capacity and control, PAs in Afghanistan have witnessed rapid declines in floral and faunal populations mainly because of deforestation, excessive shrub collection, overgrazing, dryland farming and illegal hunting (UNEP, 2003; Johnson et al., 2012). Since 2003, the government, with cooperation from international agencies, has been attempting to adopt and create policies, institutions, and legal frameworks for collaborative management. The aim of this approach is to encourage the participation of other stakeholders, particularly local communities living in or adjacent to PAs and using their resources for livelihoods, in PAs management, and conservation (Kanderian et al., 2011). According to this approach, a protected area committee is established for each PAs to involve representatives of the communities living inside PAs in management decision to enhance management efficiency and provide local support for conservation (ibid.). Although sufficient capacity and accountability of CRs with local satisfaction may increase management efficiency and local support for PAs management and conservation, there is no on-the-ground study that how local community representation and perception is maintained through this newly introduced management framework for PAs management in Afghanistan.

The objective of this paper is to assess local community representation in and perception of collaborative management, from the perspective of the performance of the collaborative decision-making body for BANP in Afghanistan. We had three main research questions: (1) What is the status of CRs’ socio attributes, knowledge and ability (capacity), to assume their responsibilities in decision-making? (2) How is information exchanged and how does it flow between CRs and communities? (3) What are the decision-makers’ and local residents’ perceptions toward the protected area management framework?

Band-e-Amir National Park (BANP) was selected for the study, because it is the only PA in the country where collaborative management has been formally introduced. It was introduced to enhance biodiversity conservation through the active participation of local communities in decision-making.

II Methods

1 Study area

Band-e-Amir National Park (BANP) is located in Yakowlang District of Bamiyan Province, Afghanistan (Fig. 1). Band-e-Amir was officially designated as Afghanistan’s first national park in 2009 to conserve its nationally unique landscape, with six travertine lakes and an ecosystem dominated by grassland. Concerning vegetation of the park, overgrazing, dryland farming and shrub collection have created plant communities dominated by thorn cushion plants, dwarf shrubs, and poisonous weeds (Bedunah et al., 2010). The park covers 613.3 km² and contains 14 villages (communities), with a total population of about 4,775 inhabitants (MAIL, 2011). Their livelihoods remain highly dependent on resources in the national park. They use the park rangeland resources for livestock pasturing, fuel for cooking and heating, medicinal plants for household consumption and selling. Livestock provide food, raw material for clothing, and dung for biofuel and farming manure. Irrigated farming and dryland farming are practiced for food production. The main sources of income of the local people are livestock rearing and farming. Sheep and cattle make the main type of livestock in BANP. Wheat and barley are the major crops cultivated either in dryland or irrigated farming land. Some people also, however, generate income from tourism.

The park natural resources are severely degraded mainly due to over grazing, extensive dryland farming, illegal hunting, and excessive shrub collection over the past decades of war (MAIL, 2011; UNEP, 2003). One of the major objectives of management in BANP is to ensure the active engagement of local communities in ways that rehabilitate natural resources, conserve biodiversity and improve the local communities’ livelihoods. Band-e-Amir Protected Area Committee (BAPAC) was formed in 2007 with the aim "to strengthen local community participation in park management decisions and to ensure that all decisions regarding the management of BANP reflect the concerns
and interests of the local people” (MAIL, 2011). The park office is under the jurisdiction of MAIL. It has a total of thirty staff members, including a park warden, a group of rangers, and cleaners. Since 2006, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) an international conservation NGO has been working in BANP. The mission of WCS is to save wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. In the 2020 strategy, WCS’s goal is to conserve the world’s largest wild places in 15 priority regions, home to more than 50% of the world’s biodiversity, by working with local communities and governments to effectively manage and conserve PAs (WCS, 2016). Toward this notion, WCS in BANP works with local communities and governments to support them and build their capacity for effective management (MAIL, 2011).

2 Data collection and analysis

For research questions (1) and (2), data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with individual leaders of all 14 of the communities. With regard to research question (1), the knowledge and meeting participation of the CRs were investigated by asking specific questions of each CR. For these questions they were allowed multiple answers (see Tables 1 and 2). With regard to research question (2), the status of information flow between CRs and communities was assessed through questions about holding community meetings before or after BAPAC meetings (see Table 3). CRs who answered “yes” or “no” were asked supplementary questions and allowed multiple answers. For research question (3), data were obtained through individual face-to-face interviews with the three local residents, two representatives from provincial government departments, two CRs, a park warden on BAPAC, and a staff member from the NGO. All interviewees were selected through purposive sampling (Morse, 1998) to conduct in-depth investigation toward the research objective. The main criterion for selection of the three local residents was the full awareness of BAPAC proceedings and for the other six interviews criteria were the participation in every BAPAC meeting as well as willingness and availability to be interviewed. A BAPAC meeting on August 21, 2013, was also observed, to identify additional factors important for understanding the participation of CRs. Field work was carried out between August 2012 and September
Semi-structured interviews with CRs (answers of research questions (1) and (2)) were transcribed verbatim and analysis of responses was carried out to identify themes (categorical and classification). The content of interviews was classified in categories responding to the research questions of the study. The findings of interviews for research question (3) were transcribed and analyzed based on theme of perception. Data from meeting observations provided information about CRs’ participation in meeting discussions expressed outside of recorded interviews. Additionally, secondary material (such as park management plans, agenda for BAPAC meetings, etc.) was analyzed to complement data on the BANP, especially in regard to the management objectives and the collaborative management framework.

### Results

#### 1 Outlines of collaborative management framework

The collaborative management framework model of BANP is close to the shared governance model of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Fig. 2). It initially was developed with close cooperation of WCS and MAIL and then introduced to the park office and local community in 2007. In this framework, the decision-making authority rests with MAIL but it is required, by Protected Area Turzulemal, to formally engage BAPAC, the collaborative management body, to obtain management advice from communities and local governments to develop management proposals. All management decisions in BANP are firstly approved by BAPAC, then must be officially approved by the national office of MAIL, and finally implemented by the park office. BAPAC therefore provides advice to MAIL with the aim of ensuring that management decisions will benefit from local knowledge and reflect the wishes of local people and the local government (MAIL, 2011). BAPAC is comprised of 21 members, consisting of 14 CRs from Band-e-Amir, six from local government departments, and one park warden. The WCS representative is not an official BAPAC member, but can attend meetings to be consulted for decision-making. Moreover, WCS’s representative attends BAPAC meetings to coordinate WCS’s activities including workshops.

#### Table 1 Community representatives’ knowledge of responsibilities and BAPAC objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of responses</th>
<th>CRs responses (max=14)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve conservation</td>
<td>11 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop tourism</td>
<td>4 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen participation</td>
<td>2 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships with other stakeholders</td>
<td>13 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express community’s concern and interest</td>
<td>9 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give advice and consultation</td>
<td>2 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge pathways</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAPAC meetings</td>
<td>12 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interactions with park warden</td>
<td>8 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park management plan</td>
<td>2 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author interviews with community representatives (August 2012 to September 2013).

Note: Total percentage exceeds 100% since some CRs gave more than one response.

#### Table 2 Community representatives’ capacity for meeting participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of responses</th>
<th>CRs responses (max=14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How CRs express their ideas in the meetings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Orally during the meetings</td>
<td>12 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submitting in written form to the chair</td>
<td>5 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing the meeting agenda</td>
<td>2 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>What kinds of constraints CRs perceive in the meetings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge constraints</td>
<td>9 64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being interrupted while speaking</td>
<td>4 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of time to speak</td>
<td>3 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author interviews with community representatives (August 2012 to September 2013).

Note: Total percentage exceeds 100% since some CRs gave more than one response.

#### Table 3 Information sharing between representatives and their communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>CRs responses (max=14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do CRs hold community meetings before BAPAC meetings?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10 71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If no, what the reasons are for do not hold community meeting?</td>
<td>Perceive meetings as unnecessary</td>
<td>8 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face problems gathering residents</td>
<td>4 28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel lack of time</td>
<td>2 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do CRs hold community meetings after BAPAC meetings?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6 43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, what types of meetings are held?</td>
<td>Hold formal meetings</td>
<td>2 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold informal meetings during community event</td>
<td>6 43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Author interviews with community representatives (August 2012 to September 2013).

III Results

1 Outlines of collaborative management framework

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and trainings for BAPAC members to enhance their capacity. BAPAC meetings are a decision-making arena in which members are expected to speak and vote on behalf of their community or organization. A decision can be approved when it is supported by more than 50% of the members present.

BANP management plan is developed by MAIL and WCS to guide overall management direction. It mainly includes the parks’ management issues and approaches, governance and administration. The term for a management plan is five years. It can be updated based on consultation and review by the CRs and government members on BAPAC after each term. It is distributed to all BAPAC members to study and understand the BAPAC objectives and their own responsibilities. A collaborative management agreement has signed between all members of BAPAC and authorized representatives of MAIL to formalize the rights and responsibilities of all parties to the terms of the BANP management plan. According to this agreement, “A CR has the responsibility to reflect their community’s views and interests at BAPAC meetings and to keep members of their communities informed of BAPAC proceedings and decisions by meeting with community members before and after each meeting” (MAIL, 2011). Based on the management plan, BANP is divided in five management zones. Certain conservation measures are adapted in each zone. Dryland farming and grazing, for example, are prohibited in strict protection zone. Local people, however, are allowed using rangeland resources in other zones. Although in return to conservation cost the livelihood development of local community through government projects is highlighted in the management plan, the park entrance fee is the only revenue source available to be shared with community. The community share of entrance fees is available to registered organizations for community projects. The project designation and implementation requires BAPAC approval. An organization was formed by some CRs on BAPAC in 2010 to distribute community’s share of entrance fees. Although CRs claimed that share of community from entrance fees was expended for the community development projects, there was no clear information available about the type of project as well as the amount of money expended.

2 Capacity of community representatives— Research question (1)

(1) Socio attributes of community representatives

There are 14 CRs on BAPAC, each representing one of the 14 communities in the park. Seventy eight percent of CRs is between 40 and 50 years of age, and all are male. The level of education among CRs is low,
with the 57% being illiterate or having limited ability to read and write. Sixty four percent was elected, while others were selected based on views and consensus reached among residents. Women have not been involved in either process of selection. About 85% of CRs have some kind of social status, such as religious leader, village leader, former militia commander, or person close to politicians, and most enjoy some privileges such as being customary decision-maker, and socio-economic benefits allotted to such positions in their communities. Fifty percent of them have been serving as community representatives since the establishment of BAPAC in 2007. About 78% of CRs attend every BAPAC meeting; however those living in the villages 2–3 hours walk from/to the meeting venue have faced some obstacles attending, due to the lack of a vehicle, or irregularity of meeting schedules. The CRs view their relationships with other BAPAC members as being cooperative and collaborative, and have not witnessed any major disagreements or disputes since the establishment of BAPAC.

(2) Knowledge about BAPAC objectives and community representative responsibilities

In response to the question “According to your opinion, what are the objectives of BAPAC?”, 78% of CRs mentioned “improve conservation,” 28% mentioned “develop tourism” and only 14% mentioned “strengthening community participation” (Table 1). Conservation constituted the most common category of BAPAC objectives mentioned by the CRs. Answers mainly referred to natural resource conservation in the park; for example, “The objective is to stop illegal hunting,” “Prohibit expansion of dryland farming,” and “Local residents used to graze their livestock near the lake, but BAPAC was established to prohibit grazing in these areas.”

In response to the question “According to your opinion, what are the responsibilities of a CR in BAPAC?”, 92% of CRs mentioned “build relationships with other stakeholders,” 64% mentioned “express community’s concern and interest,” and 14% mentioned “give advice and consultation” (Table 1). Building relationships with other stakeholders was the most common category mentioned by the CRs (Table 1). Answers mostly connected with personal relationships with other BAPAC members, for example, “First of all, a CR must build a good relationship with the park warden and rangers to report to them whether someone in the village does hunting or opens new areas for dryland farming.” Some mentioned community interests and concerns as responsibility; for example, “A CR should play the role of a bridge between community and government to connect the ideas and interests of both parties.”

In response to the question “How do you know the mentioned objectives and responsibilities?”, 86% of CRs indicated BAPAC meetings, 57% mentioned personal interaction with the park warden and 14% mentioned the management plan (Table 1). Most of the CRs answering this question referred to BAPAC meetings as the source of information; for example, “Last year, in a BAPAC meeting the case of an illegal hunter was discussed, and the importance of birds and other wildlife to the Band-e-Amir were explained by the NGO member presented in the meeting, and since then, I have realized how strictly we should protect wildlife here.”

(3) Capacity for meeting participation

In response to the question “How do CRs express their ideas in the meeting?”, 86% of CRs stated that they expressed ideas orally during the meeting, 36% by submitting in written form to the chair, and only 14% by influencing the meeting agenda (Table 2). Expressing ideas orally during the meeting constituted the most common method for the CRs to convey ideas from the community to the meetings (Table 2). Some answers are quoted: “I share my opinion just during the meeting discussion,” and “During the meeting when chair asks me to say my community statement I explain it orally.”

In response to the question “What kind of constraints do CRs perceive in the meetings?”, the majority of the CRs (64%) indicated that they experienced knowledge constraints (Table 2). Their answers referred mostly to the limited scientific knowledge on park natural resources; for example, “The reed collection for winter fodder from around the lake is scheduled for a certain time of the year which overlaps with wheat ripping time, but when I bring the issue to the BAPAC meeting, members such as park warden and others from government or NGO say that if the schedule changes, the nesting of birds will be affected. I have no counter justification to push them for changing the schedule, however, and I know that such information would enhance my own knowledge as well.” Twenty-nine percent of CRs experienced interruptions while speaking: “The district governor interrupted me while I was telling my idea about boat distribution in
the lake.” Some CRs perceived a lack of time: “Government members are in a rush in every meeting.”

3 Information sharing and exchange—Research question (2)

In response to the question “Do CRs hold community meetings before BAPAC meetings?”, only 29% of CRs stated they held community meetings before BAPAC meetings (Table 3). Regarding the top reason the majority of CRs who did not hold community meetings before BAPAC meetings, 57% perceived such a meeting as unnecessary; for example, “I have been the leader of this community for years and completely know all concerns of my community related to the park. I am fully authorized and privileged to decide on behalf of my people in BAPAC, so I think there is no need to gather people for an unnecessary meeting before a BAPAC meeting.” Meanwhile, 28% faced problems gathering residents: “Some work on their farm while some are with their cattle and sheep on the hill.” In addition, 14% felt there was a lack of time.

In response to the question “Do CRs hold community meetings after BAPAC meetings?”, 43% of CRs held no meeting, 14% held a formal meeting, and 43% held an informal meeting during a community event (Table 3). The informal meeting during community events was the most common response. “Although public events such as wedding parties or religious ceremonies are not regular, I wait and use such opportunities to share BAPAC meeting proceedings with people.”

4 Perceptions toward BAPAC and collaborative management—Research question (3)

Perceptions toward BAPAC and its performance were diverse among interviewees. Local resident interviewees had two main issues about BAPAC and its decision-making: (1) lack of initiatives for alternative livelihood sources and development, and (2) lack of transparency for the distribution of park entrance fees. One of them expressed this view: “BAPAC decided that no one in the village can collect shrubs from the park to sell as fuel anymore, while most households rely on such income for living here, there is no any other source of income from BAPAC instead.” Another resident said: “The share of money to community from entrance fee is not clear at all, ordinary residents like me cannot question representative on BAPAC that how collected money from entrance fee is distributed and shared with people.”

CR interviewees had both positive and negative views toward BAPAC and collaborative management. The positive views referred more to educational benefits: for example, “Before BAPAC, I didn’t know what national park means and why the birds should be protected” and “The people’s awareness and participation in conservation has increased.” The most negative view of CRs referred to the lack of responsiveness of MAIL to BAPAC decisions and local needs: A CR, for example, mentioned “The lack of responses from MAIL to the local needs that we mentioned and proposed in several meetings in BAPAC has undermined our trust in the national government.”

Government member interviewees and the park warden on BAPAC viewed BAPAC and collaborative management as important means of improving conservation through local community participation in management decisions. The park warden made this statement: “In the past, shrub collection for selling and hunting of birds by the local people were common among all 14 villages within the park boundary, but when BAPAC was established, we discussed the issues with the representatives of these 14 communities in the BAPAC meeting, and since then the illegal activities have drastically declined and there was even evidence that an outsider who committed illegal resource collection within the park boundary was arrested by the local people. Thus, I totally support participation of local community in park management facilitated by BAPAC.”

The interviewee from the NGO felt that BAPAC increased conservation through community participation. However, he emphasized the necessity for capacity building of CRs in management decisions: “In comparison to five or six years before, the natural resource condition in the park is much improved due to local community collaboration facilitated by BAPAC. So now our focus is to strengthen the communities’ participation in management decisions, and we work to build capacity among the CRs so that they can take on the responsibilities which current collaborative management imply.”
IV Discussion

1 Collaborative decision-making influences capacity of participants

Weber and Khademian (2008) stated that “collaborative management increases learning opportunities.” Collaborative decision-making through BAPAC meetings provides opportunities for CRs to learn from other members and increase their knowledge about the park conservation objectives and management. We find, as a result, that BAPAC meetings can be the most viable source of information for CRs to get knowledge about BAPAC objectives and their own responsibilities. However, CR responses suggested that majority of CRs do not fully comprehend the BAPAC objectives and their own responsibilities. Thus, one could argue that BAPAC meetings are not organized in a way to enhance capacity for efficient community representation in decision-making. Further, as a significant portion of CRs are illiterate, it also might be possible that they do not/cannot study the management plan.

Shackleton et al. (2002) stated that NGOs play an important capacity-building role in sharing views between communities and government agencies in collaborative natural resource management. Our results indicate that CRs on BAPAC feel constraints exist in cooperating and coordinating ideas with other members in the meetings. Thus, it might be possible that trainings and workshops provided for BAPAC members by WCS have not been efficiently considered this aspect of capacity building in collaborative decision-making.

2 The relationship between community representation and insufficient information exchange in decision-making

Quality of community representation in BAPAC is essential to reflect the community’s interests and concerns in decision-making in BANP. Community representation in BAPAC, principally, takes the form that representatives act on behalf of others. In line with the notion that for good representation, community representatives who act on behalf of others should have accountability “having a clear mechanism for aggregation to know what their constituencies want, exercising their voice in decision-making and build a two way communication” (Rao, 1998), community representation in BANP is not being efficiently applied in decision-making. CRs on BAPAC mainly come from elite social classes (customary leader, religious leader, etc.) that hold special privileges of decision-making and appropriation of benefits. They are not necessarily consulting effectively and broadly with lower social strata. Regarding the persistence of this traditional customary authority and elitism in BANP, it is instructive to note how Shackleton et al. (2002) describe—in the context of Zambia—how local elites were able to divert management decisions regarding natural resources to advance their own interests and benefits.

3 Constraints for maintaining local support

Local support is critically important for the sustainability of BAPAC and the future potential of collaborative management in BANP. Rather than providing local support for PA decisions, local people may cause conservation decisions to fail if they are dissatisfied with restrictions to their livelihoods by limiting access to a park’s natural resources, insufficient economic return, and lack of transparent distribution of park revenues (West and Brockington, 2006). Our findings indicate that local residents in BANP are dissatisfied of BAPAC decisions and proceedings, especially in terms of resource use restrictions and inadequate benefit sharing. Outcomes like this in turn can cause the loss of local support and participation (West and Brockington, 2006) or even as Holmes (2007) suggested, can trigger indirect protests such as non-cooperation and sabotage of the efforts of the management institution.

Respondents indicated that MAIL responses and feedback to the BAPAC decisions and local development are weak in BANP. This seems to be one of the reasons that BAPAC has failed to provide efficient alternative livelihood resources to the local people. Marega and Urataric (2011) suggest that this lack of consideration and feedback to the comments of local community representatives in final decisions could render meaningless the community participation in decision-making of a protected area.

V Conclusion

To conclude, regarding community representation and perceptions toward decision-making in collaborative management of BANP, we answer three main research questions investigated and discussed throughout this article.

Regarding research question (1), we found that the
capacity of community representatives to understand their responsibilities and the objectives of BAPAC is not sufficient. Our research results show that objectives of BAPAC and responsibilities of CRs identified in the park management plan and collaborative agreement have not been comprehended fully. CRs sense a shortage of knowledge and lack of appropriate skills to incorporate their ideas into meeting discussions. Based on evidence in this research, both BAPAC meetings and a commitment of support from the WCS can play a role to diminish constraints on capacity if meetings and WCS’s program are organized according to CRs’ needs and conditions for building the capacity needed in decision-making.

Regarding research question (2), we found that information flow and exchange is largely affected by the representation of local elites who are reluctant to have true accountability and transparency to their communities. We believe that the social context is not yet ready to allow women, younger, well-educated, and enthusiastic people within the community to play a leadership role or to be chosen as representatives on BAPAC. Given the feasibility and importance of informal meeting and personal contact, and the confinement of these meetings and contacts to elites, efforts to increase the accountability and transparency of CRs to the community would improve representation.

Regarding research question (3), we found that the perceptions and views of local residents toward BAPAC are not supportive. Our results show that a solely conservation policy without adequately addressing the local needs has caused dissatisfaction toward BAPAC decisions and performance. This can be corroborated with CRs dissatisfaction to MAIL responses to local needs. Although governments and the WCS acknowledged the importance of community participation in conservation, we argue that community support will not occur if participation is seen merely as a means to achieve conservation objectives. Thus, better responses to local needs and development issues are highly recommended.

Overall, we argue that accountable and effective local community representation in decision-making and responsiveness of the final decision-making body are essential to maintain local support for collaborative management in protected areas.

Acknowledgements
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Notes
(1) Accountability for a CR in this study refers to the state of having clear mechanisms for aggregation of input to exercise the local community’s voice in decision-making, being influenced by local residents, and ensuring a transparent flow of information about decision-making process (Rao, 1998; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004).
(2) Capacity in this study refers to the knowledge and ability of CRs to assume their roles and responsibilities in decision-making (Larson, 2005).
(3) Tarzulamal is a legal device specific to the Afghan legal system, usually translated as “procedure”.

Literature Cited


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