Conservation in the making: territorial disputes over wildlife conservation corridors in Southern Tanzania

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A Abstract

Tanzania's policy on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) entails the creation of new territories for conservation of natural resources and wildlife on village lands (= community-based conservation, CBC). Underlying the policy is an idea of functional separation of landscapes for settlements, agriculture, photographic and hunting tourism, livestock grazing, and wildlife. Implicit in this separation is the creation of new territories within an institutional context that is characterized by competition over authority to spatialize, authority that is often claimed by means of producing maps. We show how territoriality for wildlife conservation operates within the context of historically evolving project-based attempts to demarcate and map community land and what effects it can bring to people that are targeted by community-based conservation interventions. We examine how neglect to adequately appraise challenges of boundary-making in combination with politics of conservation and development interventions foreclose a genuine participation and inclusion of local residents in decision-making over conservation territory and rules of access. This inevitably creates or exacerbates conflict and contestation of project-based processes of territorialization, further undermining the success of conservation interventions.

Background

Whereas the state alone directed the process of Protected Area (PA) creation ('fortress conservation') and villagization in the 1970s, donors, NGOs and consultant agents have played an instrumental role in the territorializations happening as part of CBC approaches launched in the 80s and 90s. Wildlife Management Areas represent Tanzania's CBC strategy since early 2000s. A WMA is comprised of several villages in PA buffer zones that jointly set aside part of village land to create a continuous block of land for wildlife conservation and tourism.

What do we study?

We look at the case of Nalika WMA in Southern Tanzania and explore how the repeated efforts at conservation-based territorialization (Table 1) have contributed to the reproduction of conflicts and disputes over land and access to natural resources.
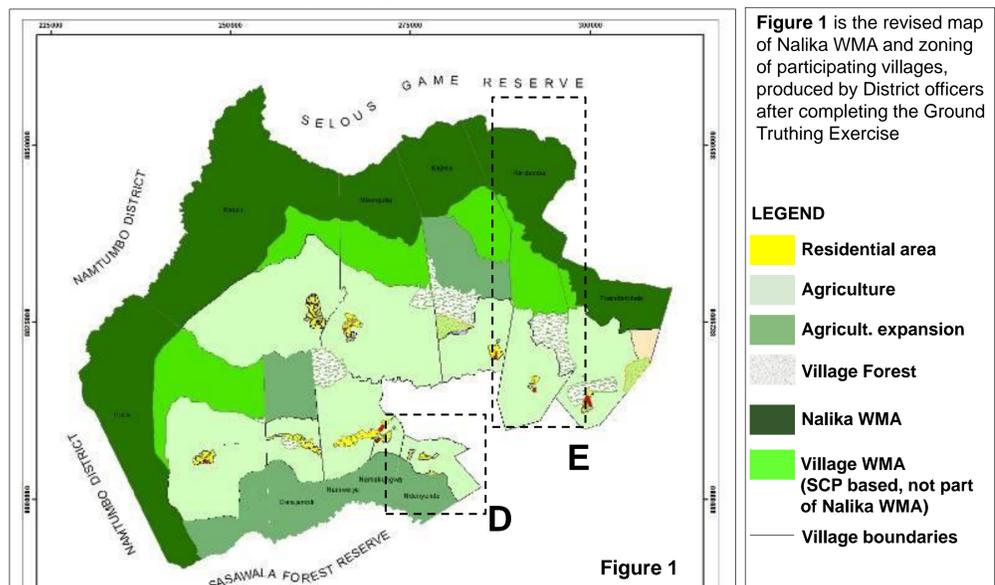
B

Selous-Niassa Corridor Projects	Project agencies, NGOs and donors*	Project Area	Project period
SCP (Selous Conservation Program)	GTZ	Selous GR buffer zone	1988-2003
SCP-CWM (Selous Conservation Program - Community Wildlife Management)	GTZ	Selous GR buffer zone (Northern villages of Nalika & Mbarangandu WMA)	1991-2007
SNWC (Selous Niassa Wildlife Corridor)	UNDP/GEF/GTZ International	Southern villages of Mbarangandu & Nalika WMA	2005-2009
SNEC (Selous Niassa Ecological Corridor), pre-feasibility study	KfW	5 WMAs between Selous GR and Niassa NR	2005
SNWPC (Selous Niassa Wildlife Protection Corridor)	KfW/JV Gauff-WCST	5 WMAs between Selous GR and Niassa NR	2007-2014**
RLP (Ruvuma Landscape Program) corridor	WWF (with USAID funding)	5+4 WMAs between Selous GR and Niassa NR	Since ~2010
REP (Ruvuma Elephant Project)	PAMS	5 WMAs between Selous GR and Niassa NR	Since 2011

Table 1: Selous-Niassa Corridor projects
GTZ: Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit   GEF: Global Environmental Facility
KfW: German Development Bank   PAMS: Protected Area Management Support Foundation
JV Gauff-WCST: JB Gauff Consultants & Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania
* The Wildlife Division of the Tanzanian Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism participates in all projects
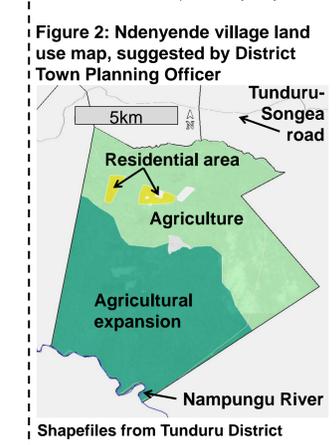**According to a SNWPC project-manager the next SNC project is in the pipeline and will include KfW and WWF

C Empirical findings: disputed boundaries in Nalika WMA

District Ground Truthing Exercise

In 2012 a team of Tunduru District officers conducted a 'Village Land Use Plan Ground Truthing' exercise in all 10 villagers of Nalika WMA. The exercise was commissioned by SNWPC, co-funded by KfW (Table 1). The goal of the exercise was to "to address apparent discrepancies in the map and perceived realities on the ground" (SNWPC project manager), or according to the District Ground Truthing Report "to check whether the zoned area is used as intended or invaded and used for other human activities. It was time for making comparison from what was in the map to the actual situation on the ground; [..] it was time to compare what was in the map to what Villagers know."
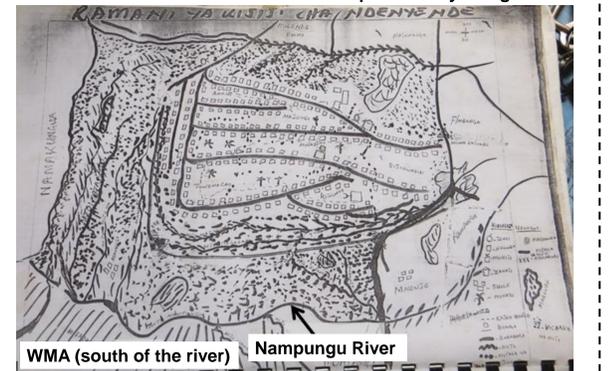

Figure 1 is the revised map of Nalika WMA and zoning of participating villages, produced by District officers after completing the Ground Truthing Exercise

LEGEND
- Residential area
- Agriculture
- Agricult. expansion
- Village Forest
- Nalika WMA
- Village WMA (SCP based, not part of Nalika WMA)
- Village boundaries

Figure 1

D Southern WMA villages:

Disagreement over location of Nalika WMA: north or south of Nampungu River?
- North of Nampungu river people are farming
- The river is the southern village boundary
→ Village government has a map showing WMA south of the river (Figure 3)
→ WMA leadership disagrees, they have a different map and see the WMA north of the river (where people farm)

Figure 2: Ndenyende village land use map, suggested by District Town Planning Officer

5km
Tunduru-Songea road
Residential area
Agriculture
Agricultural expansion
Nampungu River

Shapefiles from Tunduru District

Figure 3: Ndenyende Village Land Use Plan, provided by Village Chaiman

WMA (south of the river)   Nampungu River

Tunduru District Ground Truthing report: "According to [..] NALIKA map [..], WMA start near the residential area south of Tunduru – Songea road to Nampungu river ['agricultural expansion']. But Village Ground truthing team members, Village Council Members and [..] other Villagers [..] did not accept this boundary. They all said the WMA is after Nampungu river, and that Nampungu river is the WMA Boundary. [..] The southern Part of NALIKA WMA [4 villages] is used for human activities. [I]t will be difficult to make people vacate from the area, because Villagers did not accept the WMA boundary. This means [the 4 southern WMA villages] shall have no contribution of land to NALIKA WMA." (see Figure 1 and 2)
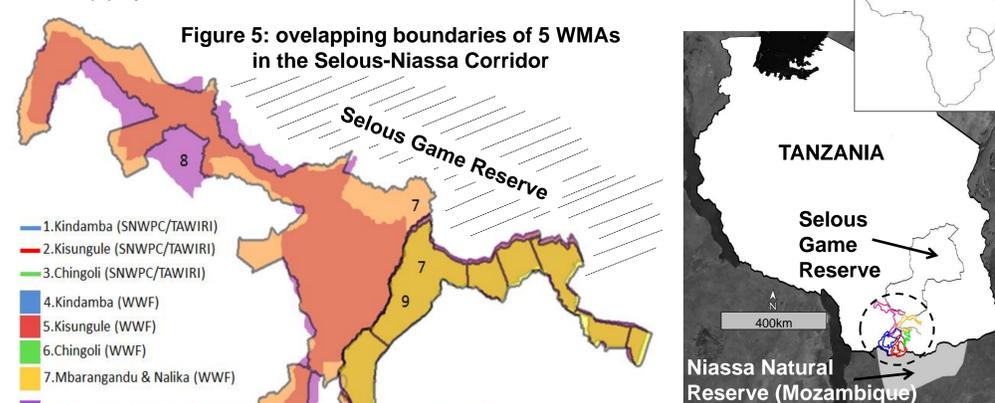
WMA leadership: "[..] the area belongs to WMA. [..] We know the WMA borders, we use GPS."

Village leadership: "No farming happens on WMA area in this village, even no trespassing, people accept the boundaries". "[T]here is a river that is a boundary, people won't cross the river." (see Figure 3)

E

10km
Nalika WMA
Likuyu River
SCP based village WMA
Forest
Agriculture

Shapefiles from Tunduru District

Northern WMA villager:

Villagers are uncertain over location of Nalika WMA boundaries
- District Ground Truthing Team recognized that villagers are confused over WMA boundary location due to past conservation interventions (SCP, see Table 1)
- Villagers think that WMA extends until Likuyu river while actually WMA stops at a river further north. They have more farmland than they thought
- Should this village land be given back to villagers or annexed to Nalika WMA?

Tunduru District Ground Truthing report: "in some cases, the WMA boundary was found to be a bit far from what Villagers know. Large portions of Village land [SCP based] were not included in the registered NALIKA WMA map. [..]This has to be considered as good chance to NALIKA because it's possible to revise the boundary and add more land to the registered NALIKA WMA."

Kindamba village leadership: "people from the ministry" came "to confirm the boundaries" that had been made in 1992 within the scope of the SCP. "[L]ater villagers discovered that there are some things there that people need. People should have had more time to decide. [..]The experts said that they are not here to solve conflicts, they are only here to confirm the boundaries that were made in the past."

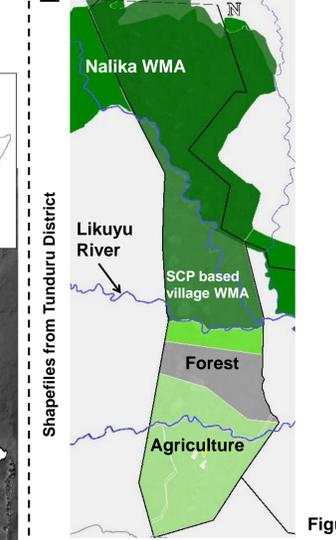**Figure 4: Kindamba village land use plan, by District Town Planning Officer**

F Empirical findings: Zooming out to the Selous-Niassa Corridor

Nalika WMA is not an exceptional case of conservation planning and implementation. Zooming out into the Selous-Niassa Corridor with its 5 WMAs, we see multiple overlaps between different WMAs, depending on what shapefile source we look at. We map WMA shapefiles from different WMA project-partners.

SNWPC project manager: "there are areas of conflict regarding the boundaries between [..] Chingoli [WMA] and Nalika [WMA], as well as Chingoli [WMA] and Kisunguli [WMA]. It seems, the coordinates of the different WMA maps sometimes overlap. I have the impression there is basically an error of the map projection based on the data which were collected."

Figure 5: ovelapping boundaries of 5 WMAs in the Selous-Niassa Corridor

Selous Game Reserve

1. Kindamba (SNWPC/TAWIRI)
2. Kisungule (SNWPC/TAWIRI)
3. Chingoli (SNWPC/TAWIRI)
4. Kindamba (WWF)
5. Kisungule (WWF)
6. Chingoli (WWF)
7. Mbarangandu & Nalika (WWF)
8. Mbarangandu (SNWPC/TAWIRI)
9. Nalika (Tunduru District)

TANZANIA
Selous Game Reserve
Niassa Natural Reserve (Mozambique)
400km

Niassa Natural Reserve
Tanzania-Mozambique border

Shapefiles from SNWPC, TAWIRI (Tanzanian Wildlife Research Institute), WWF, Tunduru District

G Discussion: conservation as a process of territorialization

We highlight two key aspects of conservation interventions that are often taken for granted and contribute to ongoing conflicts and contestations over boundaries for conservation:
1) The materiality of boundary-making and the challenge of creating stable territories
2) The politics of conservation

1) The Materiality of boundary-making

SNWPC project manager: "[..] the original work was sub-standard; which was done, the land use planning of [..] villages with a different overall village area [..] have been given exactly the same area for different land uses, it looks like'a copy paste', 'copy paste' exercise [..]. [T]here are areas where there are these kind of conflicts and I have a feeling that [..] in most cases there is a problem with the few data and the way they transferred coordinates into a map, we had the same problem when producing a map depicting the different land uses for the whole corridor area."

→ Contestation was compounded by the fact that new boundaries were not drawn on a blank slate, but onto layers of existing boundaries which exacerbated territorial disputes.

SNWPC project manager: "So we managed to transfer the file from the pdf format into a dwg [GIS] format. We matched Namtumbo with that one and then we had to combine Tunduru. We had files in a different format, the raster was different."

→ Information is lost when computers crash and projects end, projections are distorted in digitalization processes

2) The Politics of conservation

SNWPC project manager: "I have the impression that [..] the mapping which was done when Nalika WMA was established, I don't say it was done only behind the computer screen or in an office, but I have the feeling that the villagers were not very much consulted"

→ Despite no lack of recognition of the flaws of current boundaries and the shortcomings of the processes that led to their establishment, there is no willingness to re-open the process. Instead, the very process of having made land use plans and drawn lines on a map appears to move the WMAs beyond the point of no return into a territorial lock-in:

SNWPC project manager: "I would favour trying to find a solution without blowing the whole thing up. And I think that's possible, to be honest. [..] You cannot, in my opinion at least, question the WMA, the WMA was established, there are some issues, yes I admit, but the WMA is publicized [..]. If you want to re-do that process, it would be chaos."

WWF staff at Tunduru office: "So if we revise [WMA] again, we'll be contradicting ourselves, losing a lot of resources. [..] Once you designate the land for WMAs, it is WMA forever"