

Nature, Wealth, and Power

Emerging Best Practice for Revitalizing Rural Africa

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Access and control over resources ... is the bread-and-butter issue on which democracy must deliver.

Natural resource management is central to good governance and increasing enfranchisement of rural peoples.

Natural resources—land, minerals, forests, wildlife, and water—are a major source of wealth and power in Africa. Natural resources are central to the livelihoods of 70 percent of the population and dominate some African economies. Even so, Africa's natural resources are significantly underutilized, and in many cases, their full potential is not even known, let alone realized. Moreover, despite this rich potential, many rural Africans remain mired in poverty, resources are often mismanaged, and rural people are largely disenfranchised.

With industry and the service sector only beginning to emerge, natural resources will continue to drive Africa's economies for decades to come. Thus, access and control over resources becomes the major governance issue, especially for rural people, and it is the bread-and-butter issue on which democracy must deliver. Natural resource management is central to good governance and increasing enfranchisement of rural peoples.

Nature, Wealth, and Power (NWP) is about rural development in Africa, a preliminary statement of lessons learned from more than 20 years of field experience. Twenty years ago, natural resource management programs took a predominantly technical approach to getting rural development moving and responding to perceived environmental crises. The limitations of this approach were subsequently revealed as projects failed to meet their objectives and be sustainable. This led to development of economically more realistic approaches. These were more successful, but inequities and inefficiencies still existed. More recently, it has become clear that the governance aspects of rural development are also key.

Consideration of the resource, economic, and governance dimensions of natural resource management is critical for success. Natural resource management rests on the interaction of resource characteristics, policies, institutions, skills, and economic signals. Experience demonstrates that programs that integrate **nature** (environmental management), **wealth** (economic concerns), and **power** (good governance) have promising results. Today, several cases and proven strategies demonstrate where the management of natural resources has *simultaneously*:

- Led to increases in the productivity of the resource base and conserved biodiversity
- Provided dramatic economic growth for local communities and national accounts
- Helped move rural people along the path from subject to citizen, leading the way toward a more democratic, decentralized, and vibrant society.

This experience has generated a set of **principles** and **action steps** that can serve as a *guide* to investment in rural Africa. The three case studies presented—Namibia, Madagascar, and Mali—illustrate the effectiveness of the integration of all three dimensions and the various principles and actions recommended under each dimension.

NWP is an opening statement in a dialogue on rural Africa, one to be undertaken in the next few years together with African partners and within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The aim is to provoke a debate and generate an integrated view of rural development and practical “best bets” for decision and policy makers.



in collaboration with





Looking to the Future

Natural resource management is a unique entry point for economic and political development in rural Africa.

The fate of Africa's natural resources cannot be separated from the broader context of the economic and development challenges Africans face—nor can Africa's economic and development future be separated from the management of its natural resources.

In the past 20 years, enormous transitions have taken place in Africa—in terms of social aspirations, mobility, communications, the breakdown of traditional authority systems, the role of the state, roles of youth and women, economic and technology options, new ideas, and new forms of political organization. In governance terms, the scale and pace of change is creating tremendous ambiguities that can become either obstacles to or catalysts for investment, economic growth, and improved resource management. Change is likely to be even more rapid, more profound, and more widespread in the next 20 years.

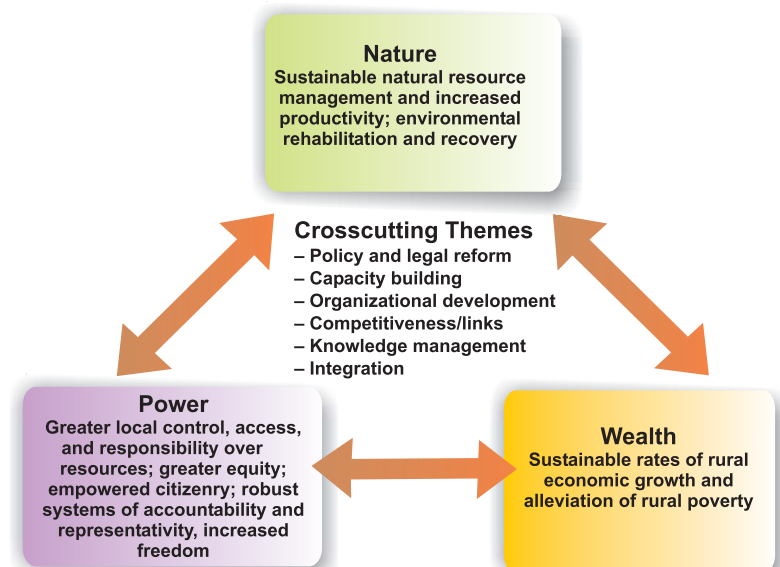
The fate of Africa's natural resources cannot be separated from the broader context of the economic and development challenges Africans face. Successful natural resource management strategies must take into account and leverage the broader economic dynamic that is shaping peoples' lives and choices in Africa.

Environmental management is increasingly linked to national development, social equity, and governance. The relationship between governance and environment is complex. However, with some notable exceptions, the stronger the democracy, the better the environmental management. Although the relationship clearly depends on a range of factors, democratic principles, such as transparency, participation, and accountability, are fundamental for sound environmental and natural resource management. For effective environmental management, economic development, and social well-being in Africa,

investing in democracy and good governance is a sound strategy.

Getting rural development moving is a complex and daunting task. It is important, however, to accept the complexity and avoid “one size fits all” solutions. No single approach—whether export agriculture, community-based NRM, ecotourism, “biodiversity enterprises,” or anything else—is a solution for everything. Although natural resource management has to be seen in a broad development context and will not solve all problems, it is a unique entry point for economic and political development in rural Africa.

Bringing the rural areas of Africa into the mainstream of economic growth and good governance is not a luxury. It is the economic and governance issue of the day for Africa. Although it will not be easy, it is also not a mystery. Best practices and innovations are emerging around the continent. Many of these represent an upsurge of bottom-up, unscripted efforts. Although changes are required and these changes threaten some interest groups and some governments, the benefits for the majority of Africans far outweigh the costs.



Moving Forward—Outcomes and Crosscutting Themes