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Interview conducted by Camilla Toulmin

Introductions: we're interviewing a number of people, Liz Wily, Julia Aglionby, Malian colleague Moussa Djire, and Hubert Ouedraogo. I'm trying to get a sense of how different people approach the issue of the commons. There's strong commitment and interest from the chief economist at AFD to make investment in and management of the commons a key part of AFD strategy.

Q1. Tell me about your first encounter with the commons

KH: Two things really. First, between 1972 and 1974 I was doing fieldwork for a PhD on primate ecology in the Tana River valley in eastern Kenya, working on riverine forest and grassland with communities of people who were farmers and fishers, and others who were primarily herders. Another colleague working some distance away was particularly interested in conservation. Together with the government he worked to establish a game reserve in this area with the aim of protecting these primate species. So I observed the situation, and saw how forests and grasslands that had been managed as common property resources were rather suddenly set aside for wildlife, without consultation. At the time I was primarily working with the farming community. Local people did quite a lot of forest clearance in anticipation of compensation from this new protected area (which is now a national park). This was their response, having been mainly left out of the consultation process. I also observed what poor understanding there was of the eco-dynamics of the riverine forest and flood plain ecology. The incoming administration and investors were putting money into structures in places that very quickly fell into the river. In a way, that sparked my interest in the commons, in local land use practices, and the politics of conservation. I'd trained as a biologist, so I hadn't really thought about these things before.

Then, in 1978 I took a job in the Zoology department at the University of Dar es Salaam. At that stage, under President Nyerere, you couldn't choose your own research topic. You were allocated a research topic, and I was given the task of carrying out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA). So from that point on, having really only worked in forest ecosystems, I discovered these pastoral grazing systems and did some standard ecological work there along with my colleague Alan Rodgers. We came to the conclusion that pastoralists were doing a pretty good job looking after wildlife, living alongside and using resources in a very sustainable way. Of course, the State didn't accept the results of this report. The NCA had been established with the aim of operating in perpetuity as a joint land use area for pastoralists and wildlife, but ever since it was established the Tanzanian State has been trying to get people out of there, so it wanted the EIA to provide the basis for doing that. Ever since that experience, I've really worked on pastoralist issues, mainly around livelihoods and livestock management, and the interplay of conservation and development. In Tanzania it's all involved working with people who have until recently been operating with their own common property resource management systems, but now are being coerced into community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) systems, which I see as very different. In some cases in Kenya they are being pushed into conservancies, which are a different thing again.

CT: *A number of people you speak to also say that when they start working in a particular area, it's the practical engagement that makes it impossible to ignore these systems, institutions, rules, etc. Please introduce yourself.*

KH: Yes, my name is Katherine Homewood, I'm Professor in Anthropology at University College London. I have spent 40 years working primarily in East Africa, on pastoral systems, focusing on the interplay of conservation and development in pastoral systems. I'm an academic, with a research group of students and post-docs that has produced a significant body of work on the impacts of conservation in the global South, and with common interests in the way that local land use practices affect biodiversity and how biodiversity regulations, policies and governance affect local people's wellbeing and livelihoods.

CT: *Why did you go to the Tana River in the first place?*

KH: Graduating with a zoology degree from Oxford, I decided I wanted to do a PhD on wildlife, particularly primates. I liaised with Louis Leakey and we initially set up a study working on different species in the Rift Valley, but when I became aware of these rather rare primates along the Tana River, it became apparent that I should work with them. It's a long time ago…

Q2. Can you describe a particular case, or research project …?

KH: I've been working on pretty much the same things for the last 35 years. But here I will choose a recent ESPA-funded project that I have been leading. It's called PIMA, Poverty Impacts of Management Areas, and it focuses on the social and ecological outcomes from Tanzania's wildlife management areas (WMAs).

To give you a brief background, Tanzania as you know was originally a strongly socialist state from Independence. It started to liberalise from the mid-1980s onwards. Since Nyerere's time, a large percentage of its land has been dedicated to conservation – currently around 40% depending on how you tot it up. From the first poverty reduction strategy paper, *Mkukuta,* which was put out in 2005, the Tanzanian State pinned its colours to the mast of CBNRM. It saw this as a way of kick-starting rural development through sustainable use of renewable resources. CBNRM was meant to bring sustainable economic opportunities to Tanzania's rural populations, and has played out in various ways to do with forest management and fisheries management.

This particular project focuses on wildlife management. We've been working in northern Tanzania, where obviously it's pastoralist commons that are being set aside under wildlife management areas, and in southern Tanzania in areas of *miombo* woodland. Again, you might see this as common land. And because these are CBNRM projects, you might see them as areas where villages have been encouraged to come together as authorised associations for a group of villages, which are then meant to set aside very significant portions of their village land. In the cases I've been studying, it's often around 90% of their village land.

This is quite a large project that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. On the quantitative side, we're looking at three wildlife management areas in the north and three in the south, using a before/after, control/impact research design. In principle, this allows you to make very robust causal attributions of the changes that take place. We did a survey in 2014 along with recall data from 2007 on the effects and changes taking place in villages and households affected by Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), to compare with matched controls from households and villages not affected by WMAs. We had over 13,500 households wealth-ranked in 2014 and compared the wealth ranks for the same households in 2007. Within that sample frame we had about 2,000 interviews from a stratified random sample of households spread across these WMAs, as well as interviews with about 1,000 married women.

Leaping to the results, they showed some very paradoxical effects. What seems to have happened, looking across Tanzania as a whole, is that broadly speaking, households are doing better across that period of time in terms of wealth status. But if you're a household in a WMA earning tourist income, you may do significantly less well than a matched household in the control villages. If you're in a WMA area which does **not** receive tourist income, you do significantly **better**. The reason this is happening seems to be that the CBNRM systems that the Tanzanian State has set up operate as a form of rural taxation. The State takes a third of all income coming back to the WMA, the WMA then takes half of what is left, and the remaining portion goes to the villages to be used for community projects such as repairing roads, schools, etc. A USAID-funded economic study that only looked at the operating costs of WMAs, and didn't look at livelihoods at all, concluded that they are not financially viable because the State takes such a big cut. If you look at local livelihoods, the opportunity costs are very considerable since these are people who produce crops, livestock, fish and forest goods, and the WMAs mean they have to forego the production they could have had from about 90% of their land.

CT: *And they're not able to combine these activities with wildlife management …?*

KH: This is what is really interesting. I'm extremely cynical about some current understandings of community-based lands and commons in Tanzania. For example, Liz Wily has produced this map with a vast proportion of the land area marked as "commons", which she interprets as land that is communally owned, accessed and governed. In practice, what these CBNRM schemes mean for most people is that you and your village get some sort of title to this land, but the form of title says you have no access to that land, nor ownership of wildlife, and if there are mineral resources under that land you have no rights to them. So basically, it leaves you wondering quite what that communal ownership represents. There's a lot of responsibility, and a lot of exclusion. In some cases in the north, these places have generated so much conflict that there have had to be negotiated solutions to allow for some livestock grazing. But it's done in such a way that the State has the option to progressively reduce the number of livestock allowed. It's not community-managed grazing, it's grazing that is managed by the State from the top down.

If I can come back to the paradox,[1] it's partly to do with the particular WMAs we chose. This happened rather unexpectedly. It turned out that there was uranium in one of the southern WMAs chosen for the PIMA study, and they opened a uranium mine while we were working there. The miners pay a very large sum or concession to the State to get mining rights, plus compensation to wildlife tourism operators who had themselves paid to acquire the right to operate in this area. Local people receive nothing. My Tanzanian colleague Christine Noe has written about this particular case in detail. The State gets the concession fee, the tourism operators get compensation, but local people get nothing. There's no formal mechanism for the people who are meant to be owners of this place to get anything back from it. The conservation organisations saw that things are going very badly wrong for this WMA, so they pulled out all the stops and created the 'Friends of Mbarang'andu', to which tourism and uranium operators contribute. But it's peanuts in comparison with the sums gained from the concessions and leases, and don't forget, these people really are very poor. Where Friends of Mbarang'andu hand out money for approved local projects, it seems to have made a real difference to people, but it's not sustainable or accountable, and bears no relationship to the original concept of CBNRM because it's entirely dependent on philanthropy. So you can see why I'm cynical about the CBNRM drive in this area.

And it's not just me - I'm sure you're familiar with Fred Nelson and Arun Agrawal's papers suggesting that the supposed decentralisation of NRM across East and South Africa paradoxically ends up with

[1] The paradox that households in WMAs with tourism income do less well than households in WMAs without tourism income.

greater centralisation. That's the conclusion which comes out of our work. It's turned out like a rural taxation programme, which is complicated and sometimes alleviated by conservation organisations that generate philanthropic interventions where it's not working at all, so people temporarily, briefly do better. That's why you get this paradoxical result. Where WMAs are not working at all, people briefly do quite well for as long as the philanthropy continues. Where they work according to the original concept, local households may do less well than households in 'control' non-conservation areas with no CBNRM.

CT: *Based on that experience, what might be a better way forward?*

KH: As a classic academic, my conclusions are pretty negative. In our experience, functioning former common property resource management systems are being swept aside by this tide of CBRNM. But the CBNRM practiced by the Tanzanian State, and by many other governments too, operates as a rural taxation system. The more valuable the resource, the more local people are pushed out. I adhere strongly to work by Sara Berry and Pauline Peters, who say that African CPRs are highly valuable and vulnerable to resource grab and elite capture. Once you start interfering with CPRs that are run on a customary basis – and I'm not romanticising how they work – once you start to interfere with them, you create opportunities for resource grab, elite capture and capture by the State that weren't there beforehand, so those are very negative conclusions.

That's what I have seen. I haven't really seen positive examples, although Terry McCabe has been looking at a conservation 'easement', a very particular case close to my study site, run by a family of expatriates, probably Tanzanian nationals, with strong commitment and deep-rooted history in this area. They pay for a conservation easement, which preserves this area as a grazing resource that people are allowed to use. It's much more participatory in a meaningful sense and much better accepted by local people.[2]

CT: *That's a sobering assessment of what's really going on, whether from the State's collective strategy or individuals within the State who see CBNRM as a way of increasing access to valuable resources. Moving onto* **Q4**, **what are the main issues at stake?**

KH: First thing, in the transition from customary CPR to 'community-based systems', the commons are very vulnerable to elite capture and being cast as a means of rural taxation. The decentralisation they claim to be achieving masks a form of re-centralisation. Second, who are the 'community' anyway? If you were to talk to my colleague Jerome Lewis about West and Central African states, he would be very clear that different ethnic groups, especially the Bantu, are able to constitute themselves as the 'community', whereas the Baka and other forest Pygmy peoples are not able to be included in that system in an effective way. Broadly speaking, who has a voice in running these community-based things, in terms of their awareness of what's going on, their ability to control any benefits and mitigate any costs? I've spent a long time talking about this in the PIMA project. It's clear that only 10-20% of women have any idea about how funds supposedly coming back to the village are used. 10-20% feel they have some influence with their representatives on the committees, but the vast majority of women aren't even prepared to answer that question because it's so sensitive. So I think that maybe because I've been in an Anthropology Department for a long time and we operate at grassroots level, there is a huge disjunct between what is experienced and said by people at the grassroots and what you hear when you talk to mid-level managers. You get a completely different picture. Obviously, there are strategic answers and vested interests at every level. Because of the way that aid money

[2] Although local people maintain the money is not important; what matters is that the easement protects dry season grazing for livestock and also, perhaps, acts as a marker discouraging further encroachment by state conservation agencies.

flows from USAID and DFID, and how conservation organisations like WCS and WWF operate, this approach is very much in the interests of mid-level managers. They need to show progress with CBNRM, and it's really not in their interest to dwell on household and individual issues, or gender issues that arise. So that's what I think about governance.

The second issue is territory and landscape. We were meant to be looking at the ecological evolution of landscapes. Taking remotely sensed data for 2007-2015 from implementation to the present day, these areas are so variable[3] that you can't see any directional trend during that period of time, but it's perfectly possible to imagine that with population growth and the spread of agribusiness one could start to see them as oases of biodiversity. They may not do much for the community but at least they stake the claim for biodiversity. But what I would say is that because CBNRM in Tanzania is essentially formulated in a neo-liberal mindset (what resources pay, how much and to whom?), the likelihood of destructive extraction is high. Look at the uranium mine in Mbarang'andu, which is meant to be a conservation area with very strict conservation rules. As far as local people are concerned, they're not allowed to collect thatch or fuelwood but it's possible to open a uranium mine there.[4] This suggests that the level of protection these areas get is very vulnerable to being overridden by economic interests, although this is not something I have spent time on. With issues around poaching, which did come out of our study, Neil Burgess reckons there is no sign that the WMA positively affects poaching losses in the south, and that there's possibly been quite a lot more poaching around these areas. There is so much corruption around wildlife hunting, it's so lucrative and so easy to sell the licences twice over, sell quotas twice over. It looks murky, but I don't really see any obvious signs of positive effects on the environment and biodiversity. On the other hand, if you take historical instances of places that have been set aside over centuries continuing with some level of protection, then maybe something will come of this.

You ask about public policy. I'm afraid I really do see the Tanzanian State as rapacious and kleptocratic. There are huge gaps between policy and practice. Having seen some of what Liz Wily wrote a while back – and it may have changed – it's very easy to see and read the policy and think that sounds great but not be fully aware of how it plays out at the grassroots level – where it is positively Orwellian. I can be a bit of a catastrophist, but I really do think it's 'double speak'.

CT: *Thank you. Now for* **Q6: Take the last 10-20 years or so, do you see an evolution in how CPRs are seen and understood? And if so, how and why?**

KH: I've seen that the emphasis on MDGs and SDGs translates into people looking for certain kinds of indicators around evidence of progress with these goals. So there's big pressure from above for States to demonstrate progress on these dimensions, and some pressure from below from activism and social media for local groups of various sorts. But I get quite concerned about the indicators people use, for the reasons I've just been banging on about. It's very easy for states to say "Look, 20% of our land area has been set aside for CBNRM." That looks good on paper, but there's no strong feeling for what that implies in reality for local people. I would have concerns about the way that it's used, and international awareness of how these terms are used. Overall, this is all Brundtland working its way out, but we've been in a period of strong Western dominance in terms of these global multilateral agencies. And you wonder if that's going to falter, if we're going to see quite a change. China sees these things very differently, India and Russia also. Those powers are going to have increasing effects

[3] Due to the unpredictable timing and amounts of rainfall (limiting in these arid and semi-arid systems), fire, and wildlife populations.

[4] With massive toxic polluting effects across the whole drainage basin.

in these areas, so I wouldn't be at all surprised if we see something different emerging in the next couple of decades.

CT: *And from your own academic point of view, have you seen a big shift in the interest that CPRs attract?*

KH: Compared with the 1970s, there's now far broader awareness of CPR management systems and issues. Although it tends to go down an odd trajectory with CBNRM, there is much greater awareness of how they can work. But they are readily taken over by certain types of procedure that have become mandatory in the development world, but which don't guarantee participation and commons-type processes. So the participatory processes used to establish these WMAs in Tanzania are a complete mockery of what was originally intended. There's a danger that things have been co-opted by participatory procedures and formulaic processes that are meant to guarantee certain outcomes, but which don't really do this.

CT: *And does someone like Ostrom figure much in your work?*

KH: Oh yes. I don't think you'd publish much on the commons without mentioning Elinor Ostrom. But at the same time, most anthropologists would say it's a mistake to develop principles for successful CBNRM and then try to reverse engineer them onto existing social and historical particularities and expect it to work as a customary system would. Ostrom derives these general principles – and I think the analysis is great – then says, "right, this is how resource management should work". Reverse engineering something and trying to impose it from the top down doesn't take full account of the complexities real life.

Q6: Why might it be relevant to analyse tenure practices in terms of the commons, and what actions might it involve?

KH: From what I've read, I think the issues around fisheries are very similar to those around wildlife. With forests, maybe it works a bit better – and we could talk about why this might be. More generally, the wording of your question means that we must focus on disentangling practice from rhetoric. This is why it's important to look at actual land tenure practices. They are all subsumed under terms such as CPR or CBNRM, but can be very different despite sharing the same classification. What happens in practice? It all comes down to differentiated analysis – who, what, how: who's excluded and who's not, and the type and degree of participation. What does participation mean in any particular context, what kind of access do different categories of people have? How do you have a voice in governance, or have some say in how the costs and benefits are distributed and managed? It's that differentiated analysis which is needed.

CT: *So do you think it would help to have a classification of different kinds of commons?*

KH: My feeling is that what's really needed is to interrogate the categories that are already out there and being used, because they mask a huge diversity, and are often used in a somewhat Orwellian way. They end up in practice being the exact opposite of what is claimed. There's a paper on Turkmenistan I really like by Roy Benhke and E. J. Milner Gulland, in *Land Use Policy 2016*. What's really good about it is that it's not only very interdisciplinary, mixing EJ's ecological and Roy's social stuff; what it also shows is the tremendous complexity of individual cases. So, Turkmenistan is a socialist state one minute – you have collectives everywhere based on commons associated with particular communal groups – and next minute it's post-socialist and privatised. What Roy shows in that paper is how in any individual place you get a palimpsest, partly determined by local conditions but with a huge amount determined by previous structures. You don't wipe away these things. The fact that the

regime has changed from commons to private at national level doesn't mean that overnight you get a shift. Part of what he shows is how blunt categories can be in terms of those sorts of historical hangovers. As I'm being unguarded, there is a series of publications I particularly dislike around managed open access. If you take standard categories, the big four – state land, private land, communal, open access – what Mark Moritz puts forward is a new category called 'managed open access'. It's widely cited but seems quite barren as a concept, given the cases they develop. Whereas Roy Behnke reviews ethnographic cases in a much more useful way in his current work. What Roy is doing is showing how the CPR/CBNRM categories are never going to be completely satisfactory in themselves, as they derive from Western economic assumptions that cannot reflect the detailed social and historical particularities of a given place. If you're going to understand how and why things are panning out in a given place, you need more socially and historically specific understanding. Don't generate a huge number of new categories without understanding the circumstances that give rise to them.

CT: *So some kind of classification is needed, but at a very generic level?*

KH: Yes, OK, but you need to be extremely cynical about the way terminology is used, and understand social and historical conditions in any given case. Because any one case will generate a subset within these categories that is completely different from any other. Does that make sense? It always helps to think in terms of bundles of rights rather than an overarching category of communal management. You need to have differentiated understanding of tenure and access, and it's always going to be complicated.

CT: *But you yourself have used pastoral, fishing and forestry in terms of resource systems, with some level of integrity…*

KH: Yes, broadly speaking, that's the common organisation of production systems, and how States organise themselves into sectors. In a practical sense I think they work. They're not mutually exclusive.

CT: *Moving on to* **Q8, given AFD's plans to support the commons, particularly land and NRs in Southern countries, what do you think they might do that would be fruitful and generate better outcomes than what you've been describing?**

KH: I suppose they're going to work with States, they have to work with States. There is pretty good evidence that many of the States they're working with are not necessarily committed to the welfare of their rural populations, so you have to go extremely carefully, and with a careful understanding of the effects at the grassroots. The more they can think about things from grassroots up rather than the State down, the better it will be for poorer and more marginalised peoples.

I think they need to be aware of just how political anything to do with resource use is going to be, how strategic people will be in what they say and how they act, at every level, so it's a minefield isn't it? Is there anything more political than this? That's what power is all about. Don't rely exclusively on conversations with middle management, you're going to get a very partisan and strategic take from them. You have to do a lot of work at the grassroots. Again, from having been in an Anthropology Department for a very long time, the longer you can spend in a place learning about it the better, but obviously it's expensive and time-consuming and it's not what development agencies are necessarily equipped to do in terms of time and resources. I realise it's not an easy recipe, but it's very necessary.

Q9: What might be some of the opportunities and obstacles for AFD?

KH: I think there are opportunities in thinking very hard about different understandings of property, and socially and historically specific understandings of property, but many of these are disappearing

completely. AFD needs to look very hard at and learn from societies that have a very non-Western, different conception of property. There are very large parts of South America with big indigenous populations, and others in other parts of the globe. My colleague Jerome Lewis works a lot with indigenous peoples and sees that many have a very different attitude to environment and property. They don't see people as legitimately able to own things in the way that Western systems dictate. Their attitude is much more akin to what we call stewardship, rather than ownership, and any use of those resources has to be negotiated with moral, spiritual or ethical principles, in a way that many Western systems have rather lost touch with. It may sound airy-fairy, but I genuinely think that this very neo-liberal concept of commons and CBNRM needs to be balanced, and can only be balanced by thinking about those other dimensions of environment and society in which people work. Talk to people who have worked in central African and South American forest societies. It's a real opportunity.

CT: *One of the books that's been resonating quite a lot is by David Graeber, on the historical roots of debt …*

KH: In terms of obstacles, it's basic political ecology that the well-placed are always likely to further their interests in relation to the less well-placed. Whenever you open up a new way of doing things, you open up a space for this to happen. All land and resource reform programmes have been vulnerable to this, wherever they are. There is always a distortion. The other obstacle is the Western dominance of conservation and development, which is probably going to be quite heavily challenged, given the seismic shifts in global economic and political power. I'll be very surprised if this doesn't start to change these things.

CT: *Can we have any confidence that this will encourage a more indigenous people-centred approach, or will it be just as kleptocratic?*

KH: I'm not great on the world scene, but what I have seen of Chinese interests in Africa is that they're very extractive and very destructive – but very much welcomed by states because they're effective in deploying infrastructure. That doesn't bode terribly well. We're now in a situation where the prices of food, fuels and fibres are rocketing because of the increase in global population. Africa and other areas in the South have relatively cheap land and water, and the pressure from global investors (especially China and Russia) is very high. I don't see any indication that states in the global South feel a strong need to resist those pressures, and they would find it quite difficult even if they did wish to do so. I don't see the brakes on human population growth … or more consumption at the most basic level.

Q 10. Can you tell us about any useful references or people we should try to contact*, such as J Lewis, Roy Behnke…*

The other names that come to mind are Jesse Ribot and Arun Agrawal. I'm also always interested in what they have to say. On CBNRM, it's the usual suspects – Dressler, Dan Brockington, Fred Nelson and especially Sian Sullivan, with her understanding of alternative views, how different societies look at this.

In terms of francophone work, Stephanie Duvail and Olivier Hamelynck perhaps, I've enjoyed reading their stuff. On pastoral commons, I think Roy Behnke is terrific, as are Cathy Galvin and Robin Reid. On central Asian commons, Fernandez-Gimenez ... and Khazanov writes overarching syntheses about trends around the global South, and what's happening with pastoralist commons in socialist and post-socialist states, and capitalist states – which is more or less the same. My colleagues Jerome Lewis and Marc Brightman (who works in South America) are very good on indigenous concepts of ownership and environmental responsibility, and indigenous assumptions about common property, which are violated by incoming CBNRM structures. Sara Berry and Pauline Peters are both seminal. Because of

the MDG SDGs, it might be worth talking to Maryam Niamir Fuller, who was meant to coordinate some process to come up with indicators around the commons for the SDGs. It was at this point that I began to feel how very Orwellian things were. Try to get a sense of what is being used as indicators, and by whom. In WWF, there's Jonathan Davies, who has a very conservation-driven approach. I'm probably more pessimistic. The big conservation NGOs like to emphasise positive stories and don't do justice to the 95% of reality that is not positive stories. My feeling is that Jonathan is very good at highlighting the positive stories, and I worry about this. If you're dealing with states, you focus on the positive and don't go near the negative because it's difficult. There's also a nice paper by Bram Buscher, Dan Brockington and Bill Adams in *Oryx*, discussing the idea that half of the land surface area should be set aside for conservation. They're really talking about why we need a different approach, it's not really about the commons but has a bearing on it. That's off the top of my head. I'm sure there are many, many others.

CT: *That's great. I should let you go. We'll keep in touch as the process develops. We're doing an analysis of ideas, discrepancies and views. We won't have public of [publish?] the full transcript. I very much appreciate your unvarnished views and being able to draw on 40 years of your work in this space* …

KH: 40 years of stumbling around! I do know one case of amazingly successful commons management in Zermatt, Switzerland, where a small number of original families kept complete control, for a very long period of time. A dozen families ran the place. They did phenomenally well. No-one paid taxes, they got dividends. Have a look!