

## Co-Management of Protected Areas

Globally, there is a trend towards decentralization of management rights to communities and the public with community involvement in protected areas being seen as a way to reduce costs, conflict and increase the legitimacy of protected areas. In South Africa co-management of protected areas offers opportunities to address land reform and restitution in communities affected by colonial and apartheid practices of dispossession and forced removals. Despite this potential, support for the processes and practices needed for successful co-management of protected areas are weak. The focus on ‘tools’ for co-management results in an unbalanced emphasis on technical aspects with insufficient attention being given to the social and political dynamics required for successful co-management. An ongoing engagement with the provincial government and six land claimant communities involved in the development of a co-management arrangement for the Legalameetse Nature Reserve [LNR] in Limpopo province provides important insights into these processes. Emerging from this action research and change initiative are specific recommendations related to the social learning and capacity development practices required to support more meaningful and sustainable co-management of protected areas in South Africa.

*“Co-management therefore takes place at the intersection of environmental, social, political and economic dimensions of protected area management.”*

Globally, nationally and locally, natural ecosystems, which include biological resources and provide numerous services to humanity, are deteriorating. The South African Constitution, and a range of supporting legislation including the National Environmental Management Act [NEMA], provide the basis for protecting and restoring functioning ecosystems. Section 2[4] of NEMA is particularly relevant with regard to giving local communities greater influence in the management of natural resources. Formally protected areas provide numerous global and national benefits and have the potential to contribute towards the livelihoods of local communities. Given the history of dispossession and exclusion in South Africa, the Land Restitution Act provides the legal framework for the restitution of land rights with or without the physical occupation of the land. The National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act [NEM:PAA] allows for the establishment of co-management partnerships between communities/ new landowners and government. Sections 41 and 42 of NEM:PAA are particularly relevant with regard to participatory planning and partnership agreements.

*“This in turn means that co-management is an uncertain and changing activity that requires adaptation and learning.”*

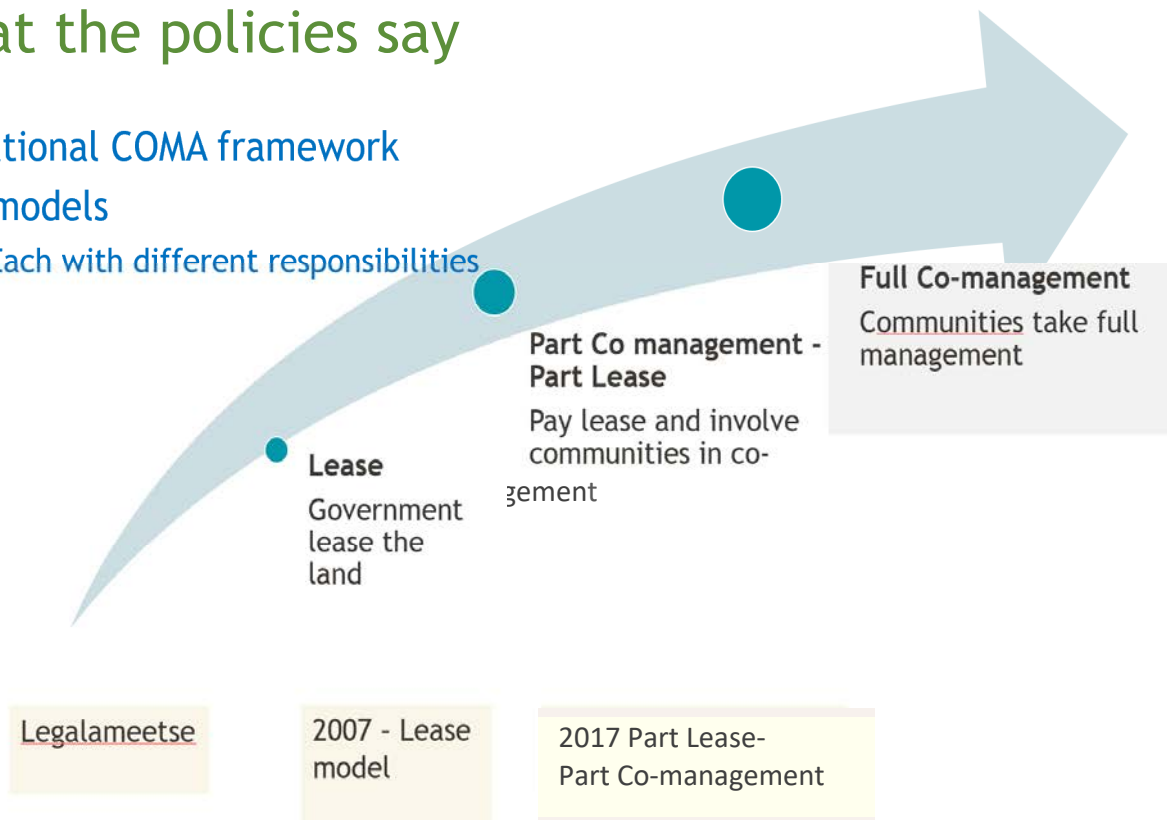
The National Co-management Framework describes three models of co-management [see figure below] varying from a full lease model [the new landowners have acquired title deeds but do not partake in the management or development of the protected area]; to a part co-management model [government pay a lease but the new landowner is involved in the management of the protected area]; to full co-management [the new landowner take full management responsibility]. Many of the issues at this intersection are complex, contested, change over time [emergent] and are specific to particular areas [contextual].

## What the policies say

### National COMA framework

#### 3 models

- Each with different responsibilities



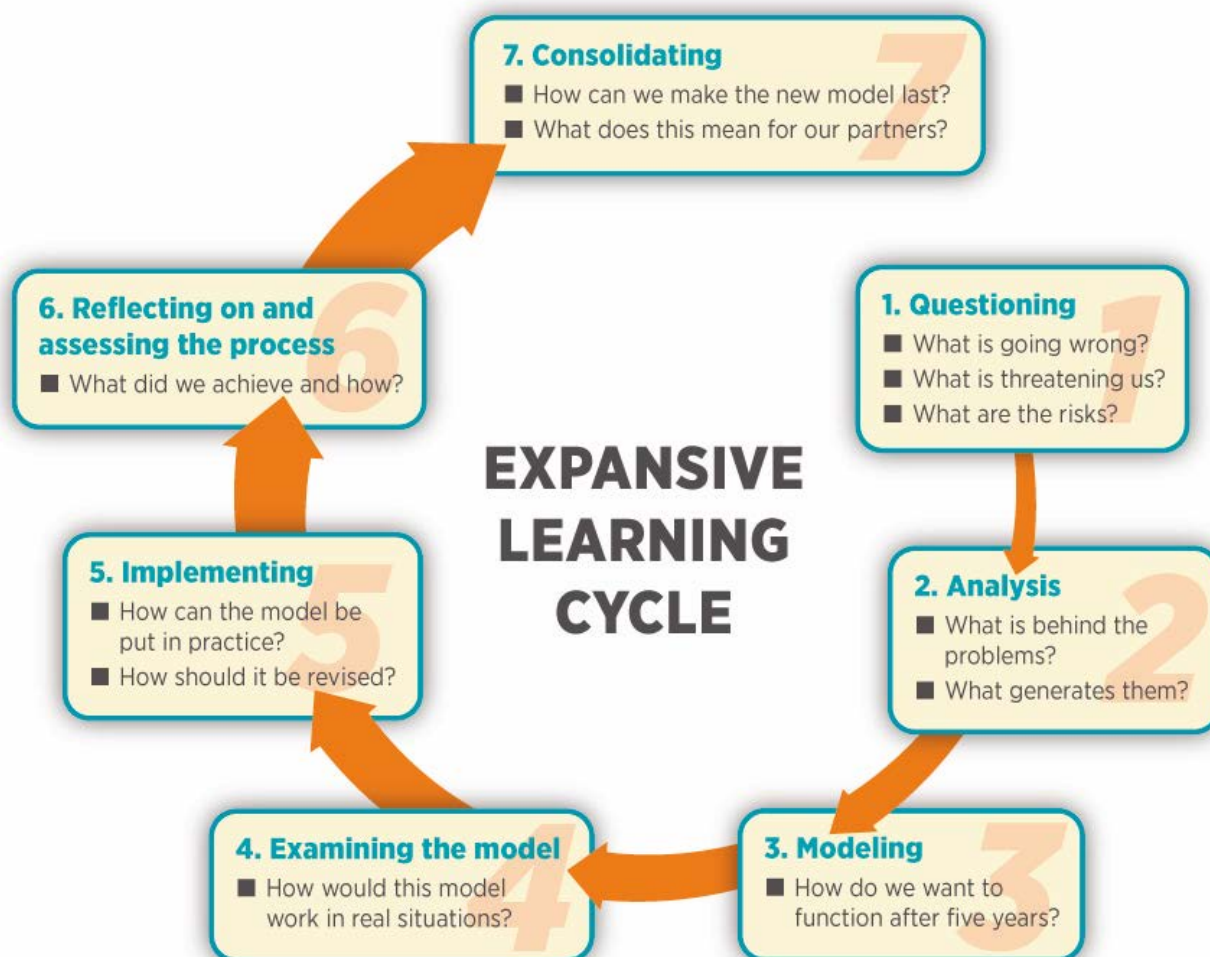
## Approach & Results

Co-management of protected areas is recognised as an opportunity to transform land ownership and the management of protected areas in ways that address shortcomings in both state and local level land ownership and natural resource management. This approach recognises the potential to transcend exclusive property rights and combine them in new ways that build productive, adaptive and mutually beneficial relationships. This will however require building high levels of trust between contracting parties within co-management arrangements. The struggle for six land claimant communities and the provincial government management authority to negotiate and implement a revised co-management agreement for the LNR provides an important case example.

The Association for Water and Rural Development [AWARD] was approached to support this negotiation and implementation process and has been engaged in this work since 2015. AWARD has drawn on their experience in rural development, co-management, participatory processes and on theories of social learning and adaptive management in complex and dynamic environments.



The development and implementation of the LNR co-management processes highlighted the fact that both the new landowners and the provincial management authority were engaging within complex and dynamic systems that required substantial learning and adaptive capacity. This in turn required the development of a range of tools that support questioning for understanding, analysis, modelling of new practices, examination of suggested models, implementation, reflection on and assessment of new practices and the consolidation and institutionalisation of new models of practice. During the engagement around the LNR, tools that supported the mapping of complex activity systems and the actions required to drive expansive learning [see figure below] and change were explored and developed. These tools and processes were required to enable participants to [re]describe and represent their challenges in a coherent way that facilitated systematic planning of future interventions as efforts to support co-management learning, contracting and implementation.



Source: Engstrom



## Implications & Recommendations

The current legislation makes provision for the co-management of protected areas. However, the interface between new land ownership, existing management responsibilities, ecological stress, livelihood requirements and new management relationships make this a complex, contested, emergent, contextual and uncertain process. Without significant support for systemic understanding, learning and adaptive capacity it is extremely unlikely that the co-management of protected areas will deliver the potential environmental, social and economic benefits. The current reiteration of co-management frameworks and basic templates are insufficient for equipping stakeholders to navigate this complex terrain.

Based on the above we make the following policy recommendations:

- 1** Review current policies with a view to operationalising the emphasis on capacitating government management agencies and local communities/ new landowners to engage in the development and implementation of co-management of protected areas.
- 2** Formalise the obligation that in order for legal requirements associated with co-management of protected areas to be considered operational they must be implemented, with appropriate funding in place, the enabling factors for meaningful participation and the necessary capacity to engage with complex and dynamic issues.
- 3** Move beyond tools and templates focused on the technical aspects of co-management agreements and develop tools, guidelines and processes that support understanding, learning and change in complex situations.

## Further Reading

Available on [www.award.org.za](http://www.award.org.za)

1. Co-Management: Reconciling Land Restitution, Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Alleviation in the Olifants Catchment [Technical Report 3]
2. Systemic, Social Learning Support for the Co-Management of the Legalameetse Nature Reserve [Brochure]
3. Three Beneficiation Models from Legalameetse Nature Reserve (2017) [Booklet]
4. Community Participation in Meetings and Engaging with Government (2019) [Guidelines]
5. Legislation influencing co-management (2019) [Guidelines]
6. Blyde Restoration Custodianship [Project Summary]

### About AWARD

AWARD is a non-profit organisation specializing in participatory, research-based project implementation. Their work addresses issues of sustainability, inequity and poverty by building natural-resource management competence and supporting sustainable livelihoods. One of their current projects, supported by USAID, focuses on the Olifants River and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems to sustain livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment.

### About USAID: RESIIM-O

USAID: RESIIM-O focuses on the Olifants River Basin and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems that support livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment. The 5-year program, involving the South African and Mozambican portions of the Olifants catchment, is being implemented by the Association for Water and Rural Development [AWARD] and is funded by USAID Southern Africa.

P O Box 1919, Hoedspruit 1380, Limpopo, South Africa T 015-793 0503 [www.award.org.za](http://www.award.org.za)  
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