



CBNRM Governance Manuals

VAG Management



Zambia Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Governance Manuals

Management of Village Action Groups (VAGs)

2023

Cover photo: Matt Sommerville/ILRG (top); North Luangwa CRB elections, ILRG (bottom), verbal consent gained.

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ACRONYMS

AGM	Annual General Meeting
BDP	Benefit Distribution Plan
CBNRM	Community-based Natural Resources Management
CRB	Community Resources Board
CS	Community Scout
GM	General Meeting
GMP	General Management Plan
HWC	Human-Wildlife Co-existence
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAG	Village Action Group
VLUP	Village Land Use Plan

I.0 INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Act (Act no 14 of 2015) provides for Community Resource Boards (CRBs) to be formed. The CRBs are constituted from representatives from the Village Action Groups (VAGs). CRBs are responsible for community management of wildlife and other natural resources within their chiefdom. In most cases, a CRB covers a large area and it would be difficult for a single committee to represent or interact with all the community members in the area. To address this, Chiefdoms are divided into zones which are referred to as VAGs.

A village action group consists of all the members living in a zone within the CRB. The village action group carries out community activities in that area in coordination with the CRB.

I.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VAGS AND THE CRB

VAGs are the “building blocks” of the CRBs. They are smaller areas, where VAG committee members can interact with the community at large and help to carry out community activities. The number of VAGs in a CRB varies and can be from two to ten VAGs in each CRB depending on the population and number of villages. Ideally, a VAG should not have more than 200 households and not less than 10 villages in its area – the fewer the better.

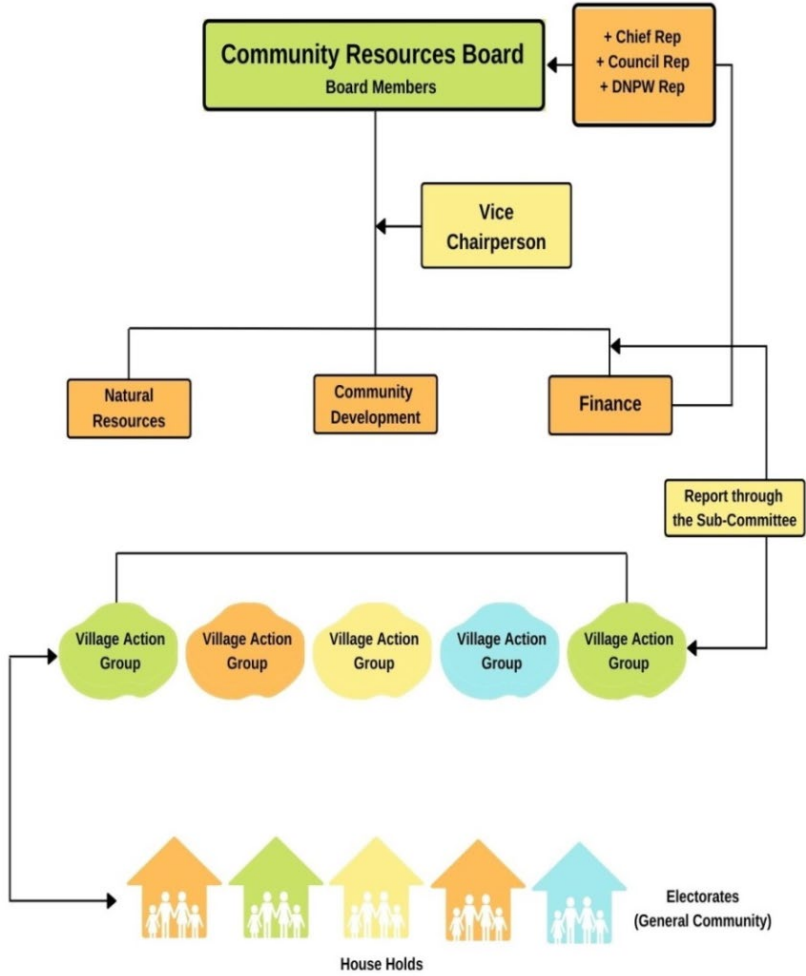
For the CRB to function properly, information about the CRB and decisions made by the CRB need to be shared with all the communities in the Chiefdom. In some areas the people are scattered in small settlements across a large area which makes this difficult. Accountability and good governance of the CRB can be achieved through the VAG committee which can meet with the VAG members regularly and easily share information.

The election of VAG committees is held at the VAG level every three years. The VAG elections determine the VAG chairpersons, vice chairperson and other positions of the VAG committee.

CRBs carry out their work and projects through the VAGs. The VAG activities and work plan are coordinated by the VAG committee with assistance of the CRB secretariat and CRB members responsible for supporting that activity. It is through the VAG committee that the Board reports back to the communities on its activities and is able to involve the communities.

1.2 THE VAG COMMITTEE

To be a member of the VAG (and thus also a CRB) a resident must be 18 years or older to vote, be resident in the area for the period stated in the CRB constitution and be willing to support and be active in the work of the VAG. Depending on the number of VAGs in a CRB the elected Chairperson of each VAG within the Chiefdom serves as a member of the Board of the CRB. Other elected VAG members may serve in the CRB depending on the number of VAGs forming a CRB.



2.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

VAGs are built upon the three principles.

1. Transparency – all decisions, all finances and the progress of all projects and activities must be known and done by the VAG members.
2. Participatory democracy – making of decisions and checking that those decisions are implemented are done in VAG meetings where all these matters are discussed, presented and agreed face-to-face.
3. Equity – every member of the VAG has an equal right and responsibility to share in the benefits, to make decisions, to support community activities and to get information about all the activities of the VAG, especially the finances.



These principles can be achieved by VAG committees and VAG members knowing and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. One of the key factors that help to achieve this is the holding regular meetings where information is presented to the membership in the form of well prepared and structured reports. VAG members have the right to receive information and discuss issues at general meetings (GMs) at least four times each year.

2.1 VAG COMMITTEES

The roles and responsibilities of the VAG committees include the following:

- To serve as members of the Board or the sub-committees as elected;
- To pass on information to the VAG members about the activities being implemented through the Board;
- To gather and pass on information from the VAG members to the Board;
- To hold quarterly meetings with VAG members;
- To help to organize the VAG Annual General Meeting (AGM) and other VAG meetings;
- To manage any funds allocated to the VAG;
- To develop proposals for projects and submit these to the Board or relevant sub-committees;
- To manage and report on VAG projects to the Board;
- To provide information or inputs to the Board - for example, when the CRB is hiring staff members, the VAG committee is required to provide a reference letter regarding the person who is being considered for a position; and

- To ensure that the by-laws of the CRB are adhered to and the General Management Plan (GMP) and Village Land Use Plan (VLUP) implemented (see section 5).

2.2 MEMBERS' RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

It is important for members to understand the relationship between rights and obligations - without fulfilling obligations, the enjoyment of rights may be threatened.

Rights are the powers or privileges that automatically come with membership.

The rights of VAG members include the right to:

- Attend, speak and vote at GMs;
- Request the VAG leadership to call for GMs;
- Elect members to positions within the VAG;
- Remove elected members, in consultation with CRB and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, who violate specified principles, by-laws and procedures;
- Inspect the records, minutes, financial statements, asset register and membership list;
- Have equitable access to community benefits;
- Propose and implement community projects;
- Protect wildlife and other natural resources in their area; and
- Participate in formulating by laws to support the GMP and VLUP implementation in their jurisdiction.

These rights are further defined in the Constitution of the CRB and additional rights may also be included.

Obligations are the required duties that come automatically with membership.



The obligations of VAG members include the following:

- To support the objectives of the CRB abide by the lawful decisions of the Board;
- To attend all AGMs and GMs;
- To hold their elected members accountable for properly managing the VAG activities; and
- To follow and adhere to the Constitution, the GMP and land-use plans.

3.0 VAGS AND BENEFIT DISTRIBUTION

The portion of the wildlife revenue allocated to the CRB is allocated as follows:

- 45% is for wildlife protection (paying the Community Scouts (CSs) and CRB logistics);
- 35% for socioeconomic development or projects (implemented through the VAGs); and
- 20% for the administration of the CRB and VAGs.

All CRBs need to have a Benefit Distribution Plan (BDP) which is based on the community needs assessment. This BDP explains how benefits that are gathered through the CRB are shared amongst the members. This plan states how decisions are made about the sharing of benefits amongst the members and also the form that the benefits might take.

The outcomes of the benefit sharing may vary from year to year depending on circumstances in the community, the needs identified in the different VAGs and experience of previous BDP actions, but the procedure for how to decide what to do should stay the same from year to year unless revised in the BDP.

Every year before the AGM, the Board will ask each of the VAG committees to give suggestions or requests in the form of a proposal. The Board may also make its own suggestions or proposals. All of these will be discussed at the AGM where a decision will be made about how the available benefits will be distributed or shared amongst the communities within the Chiefdom for various projects.

Once a decision has been made at the AGM and funds are allocated for a VAG activity or project, the VAG committee is responsible for

the implementation and reporting through the relevant sub-committee to the Board.



4.0 MANAGING PROJECTS

VAG committees can be allocated resources and funds to carry out projects. These projects could involve resource management (e.g. harvesting of forest products), community development (e.g. building a school or community hall), assisting the community with their livelihood activities or developing a tourism facility to benefit the community.

When a VAG is allocated funds and given the responsibility of carrying out a project, a work plan needs to be compiled so that the activities can be carried out in a structured way and so that everyone can be sure about their roles and responsibilities. A project work plan could look like this.

NO.	WHAT?	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?	RESOURCES NEEDED
1.	Drilling of water well at Mukwa village	Get quotes from 3 different contractors	Terry	Before 1 st February	3 people will be needed to assist the contractor. Transport of purchased materials to site
		Select best quote and make payment	Terry and Betty	By 15 th February	Money allocated from CRB
		Selecting position for water well	Fatima and George together with contractor	22 nd February	Contract must be ready for signing by selected contractor
		Construction of water well	Contractor and 3 volunteers	25 th Feb to 15 th March	Weekly inspections by VAG committee

NO.	WHAT?	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?	RESOURCES NEEDED
2.	Stationery for school	Purchase agreed list from town	Mercy	By 28 th Feb	Cash to be made available from VAG comm.
3.	Generate a quarterly report to present at the GM	Draft report Write out flip charts	Chair person	Before next meeting	Pens, paper Printing

In addition to the work plan which shows who is responsible for carrying out the various activities, it is important that someone is chosen to supervise and monitor the activities listed in the work plan. The Community Development Chairperson is responsible for the monitoring projects and reporting to both the VAG and the CRB.

In addition to knowing the progress made on the activities, it is also important for the VAG membership to know how the money that was allocated to an activity has been spent. For example, if the report indicates that building work is more than half completed, members would probably be pleased with progress and expect its completion soon. However, if the report indicates that the work is more than half completed but that the budget is used up - meaning that the building cannot be completed - then the community will be unhappy and have some questions for the responsible persons.

Reporting back to the VAG committee and the membership should include the following components:

- Progress on delivery of activities;
- Status of the work done so far;
- Budget allocated as well as the amount already spent;
- Problems and their impact on completion of the work;

- Planning for the completion of the work; and
- Suggestions for overcoming the problems experienced.

An example of a project report is given below.

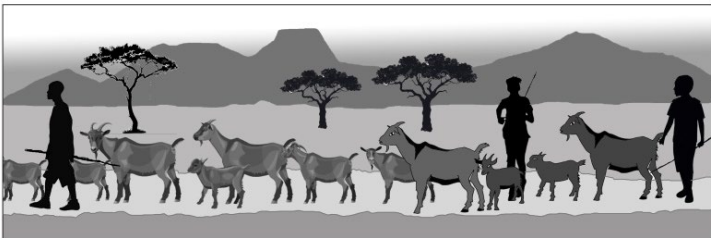
PROJECT REPORT TO VAG MEMBERS	
Name of VAG:	
Name of person reporting:	
Name of project:	
Budget: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount allocated: • Money spent: • Money remaining: 	
Date when started:	
Current progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has been completed and what still needs to be done? 	
Problems faced:	
Way forward: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for activities and names of those responsible. 	

5.0 SUPPORTING HUMAN-WILDLIFE CO-EXISTENCE

The success of human-wildlife co-existence (HWC) strategies depends on the involvement and actions of the communities within the Game Management Area and open areas. One of the main strategies for avoiding conflicts between people and wildlife is based on zonation. Zonation for the CRB is determined during the development of the GMP and more detail is provided in the VLUP.

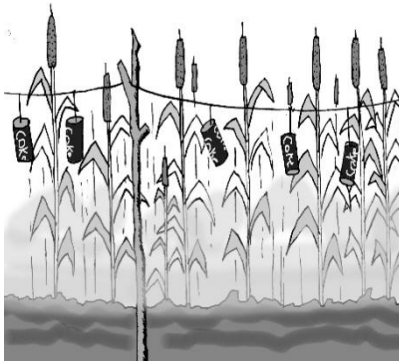
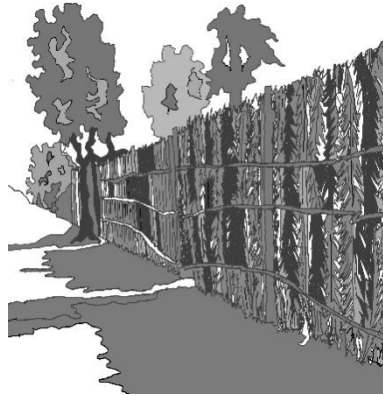
VAG committee responsibilities include:

- Supporting the development of VLUPs;
- Ensuring that local land-use rules are followed;
- Encouraging attendance of sensitization meetings;
- Facilitating information sharing on HWC issues and measures;
- Distributing of meat if problem-causing animal is controlled by killing;
- Receiving reports on incidents and report to the responsible department or conservation partner; and
- Implementing human-animal co-existence measures.



VAG households have the following responsibilities:

- Respecting and following the zonation requirements of the GMP as well as those of a VLUP if one exists;
- Implementing measures to protect fields and livestock; and
- Reporting incidents to the VAG committee, CS or WPO.

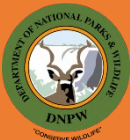


6.0 CONCLUSION

A CRB is only as strong and successful as its members – the communities represented by the VAG committees. Rate yourself as a VAG member by ticking the boxes that apply to you.

I voted at the last VAG AGM.	
I have seen the zonation map and remember what the zones indicate.	
I know what the CRB constitution says.	
I have attended a village meeting to discuss HWC measures.	
I attend all the GMs.	
I adhere to the village land-use plan.	
I am involved in VAG activities.	
With the help of my family I protect my fields.	
I participate in VAG projects.	
I have served as a VAG committee member.	
I am proud to be a VAG/CRB member.	

What is your score?



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