

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

A POLICY BRIEF



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INTRODUCTION

The successes of community organizations in management of natural resources depend largely on the ability of local communities to self organize themselves into collective action groups.

Natural Resource Management being an approach that integrates research on different types of natural resources into stakeholder-driven processes of adaptive management and innovation, local institutions may use collective action to improve livelihoods, ensure ecosystem resilience, improve agricultural productivity and ensure a sustained availability of environmental services. Since the introduction of a New Forest Policy in 2005, Kenya has now accepted the important role played by local community institutions in management of natural resources.

The New Forest Act and local institutions

The New Forests Act 2005 has a clear framework and incentives for community and private sector involvement in the forestry sector. It gives power to the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) to manage all forests with other stakeholders. There is also a Board responsible for the management of the KFS consisting of various officials from all ministries with a stake in forestry including local communities.

The new law promotes commercial tree growing by the private sector, farmers and communities through incentives, and will ensure market prices for forest produce. This will ensure the much-needed provision of wood and other timber products.



Members of Meru community involved in nursery establishment

Principles and objectives of the new forest policy

The goal of the New Forest Policy of 2005 is to “enhance the contribution of the forest sector in the provision of economic, social and environmental goods and services.” The following principles underline the policy:

- Integrated management
- Traditional and cultural values
- Stewardship
- Community participation
- User pays principle
- Intra and intergenerational equity
- Market value of forest products
- International cooperation

Three specific objectives of the new forest policy that touch on activities of the local forest associations include:

1. To contribute to poverty reduction, employment creation and improvement of livelihoods through sustainable use, conservation and management of forests and trees
2. To contribute to sustainable land use through soil, water and biodiversity conservation and tree planting through sustainable management of forests and trees
3. To promote the participation of the private sector, communities and other stakeholders in forest management to conserve water catchments, create employment, reduce poverty and ensure the sustainability of forest resources

The key elements of the new forest policy that include the involvement of forest associations include:

- Involvement of adjacent forest communities and other stakeholders in forest conservation and management
- Provision of appropriate incentives to promote sustainable use and management of forest resources

Since the main link between the forest managers and local adjacent forest communities are Community Forest Associations (CFAs), all the above objectives will be achieved through empowering local communities to manage forests through the community forest associations

THE CASE OF 2 IFRI KENYA SITES

Mt. Kenya (Upper Imenti): communities in Eastern side of Mt. Kenya have piloted Participatory Forest Management (PFM) since 2004. They have since formed a community forest association from among forest user groups whose objectives are the use, management, rehabilitation, protection, conservation, and maintenance of the forest. The user groups include the Firewood collectors, grazers and people who visit the forest. These are the groups, which formed Meru Forest Environmental Conservation and Protection (MEFECAP) community forest association. In total there are about 7,800 members of the CFA on the Eastern side of Mt. Kenya who are involved in the management of the forest.

The CFA consists of 11 smaller groups, and a total of 300 active members involved in its activities.



Local institutions in plantation establishment

Kakamega Forest: The Kakamega Community Forest Association (KACOFA) is an umbrella association registered under the Societies Act of Kenya. The development of the association was triggered by the enactment of the New Forests Act 2005 which requires that there be an association in each forest block which can negotiate with the KFS for management rights. KACOFA was registered in July 2006 with an initial number of 25 Forest user groups, which have since grown to 31. These groups included only those around the forest, which were involved in conservation activities.

The association is mainly involved in management and conservation of Kakamega Forest, which includes tree nursery establishment and afforestation. They however hope to conduct their activities according to the Kakamega Forests Management Plan. The association is also involved in sensitizing communities on conservation, monitoring the forest condition, monitoring activities carried out by member groups, re-forestation (They planted 10 000 seedlings in May 2006), training groups in nursery management and assisting in forest policing. There is also another group, Kakamega Environmental Education Program (KEEP) which is involved in forest education and eco tourism in the forest.



MAJOR ROLES OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Management role: Communities throughout the world are increasingly involved in the management of local natural resources and the environment. This trend toward participatory decision-making introduces challenges and opportunities for foresters. This is a role that the development agencies have often assumed cannot be done by the communities. However, for sustainable management of resources to be

realized, the involvement of communities and more specifically in local institutions must be considered.

Benefit sharing role: Community involvement in natural resource management and conservation has often been encouraged. The availability of both tangible and intangible benefits to the local institutions contributes to the cohesiveness of the members. The benefits ensure the sustainability of the groups and therefore the principle of benefit sharing needs to be strengthened and stressed in all local institutions. Further, it is evident that most institutions had been formed with the hope that they would in future reap real benefits.

Capacity building role: Most local institutions have people who have worked in the Forestry, agricultural and other natural resource sectors as members. These members have technical knowledge on management of the natural resources and can guide other members in carrying out natural resource management activities. There is a vast potential in the indigenous knowledge of members of local communities since they have lived in the locality for a long period of time. This knowledge needs to be tapped as a way of enhancing the sustainability of the natural resources.

Conflict Resolution role: The use and management of natural resources in brittle ecosystems is susceptible to multiple forms of conflicts. This arises due to the fragile ecological and social space characterized by the utilization of natural resources for multiple purposes by multiple users which invoke complex and unequal relationships among a wide variety of social actors and stakeholders. Conflicts lead to deforestation, degradation and displacement of people depriving many of their assets and livelihoods. Measures to reduce conflicts suffer in the wake of lack of clear policy guidelines and weak institutional setups to enforce social order. Social capital which is better achieved through local institutions is a potential least-cost means of addressing rural poverty which can be sustained at reasonable costs in a community.

LESSONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Various studies indicate that involvement of local institutions in forest management improves their conditions while improving livelihoods of the

communities, especially the CFA members. Performance of the CFAs is improved where decision-making is participatory and members make regular contributions hence enhancing their ability to self organize.

Efficient implementations of the local institutions require an elaborate framework and coordinated efforts rather than isolated efforts by different agencies and supporters all over the country. An implementation coordinating task force is thus needed to formulate such framework and coordinate the proposed efforts. The framework will enable good definition of roles and responsibilities of the various groups (governmental and non governmental) involved in the implementation as well as a forum for self evaluation and experience sharing as well as coordinating the above proposed social development programs and projects.

Local institutions have been evolving over time to adjust to emerging situations and to address various problems affecting them. As such, they have utilised their indigenous knowledge and sometimes in sync with the technical knowledge received from research and extension services. They have succeeded to some extent but due to various constraints ranging from high poverty levels to lack of incentives to be involved in forest management; they have not been able to realise their full potential. This requires that policies be geared towards fostering, building their capacity and improving their social capital to ensure that their involvement in natural resource management is effective and results into impact at local and national levels.

Although the government has instituted legal and policy frameworks that recognize local institutions, it should also strengthen the institutions by developing clear policy guidelines and crafting rules which indicate how costs and benefits will be shared among various stakeholders.

The national alliance of community forest associations (NACOFA) should be strengthened to harmonize the activities of the different local institutions and be a centre of dissemination of information for community forest associations and the member communities.

This brief derives its data from a ten year continuous research by IFRI Kenya in various sites in Kenya.