Community participation in forest management: the case of Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve, Mpigi District, Uganda

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SUMMARY

In Uganda community forestry takes the following forms: (i) local authorities establishing and managing local forest reserves for local benefits; (ii) collaborative forest management of the State forest reserves; (iii) private farmers growing and managing trees or forests on either private land or hired public land; and (iv) local communities managing small local forests of historical or cultural value. This paper is based on the experiences gained through implementing a collaborative forest management type of community forestry. Opportunities for this kind of community forestry have been identified as: sharing revenue obtained from the forest resources with the community; providing land lease offers at affordable rents to interested individuals, groups of individuals and companies for the establishment of commercial forestry; and changing the attitudes of some forest officials. The major limitations include the fact that: community forestry projects are externally driven and not locally initiated; the forest reserves given to local communities to manage are very much degraded; and communities lack tenure rights over the forests involved. The following elements have been identified as being necessary for the creation of an enabling environment for community forestry: institutional legal reform to ensure security of tenure and compliance with rules, and to empower local communities, together with secure markets for forest products.

Introduction

Forests in Uganda are an essential foundation for the country's current and future livelihood and growth. These forests are interspersed among agricultural areas, and the rate of degradation and deforestation is alarming. In 1993, FAO estimated the rate of deforestation at 65 000 ha (650 km²) annually (FAO, 1993). While there are many causes of degradation or deforestation, most observers agree that the primary causes in Uganda are clearing for agriculture, pitsawing and mechanical logging for timber, charcoal burning, cutting for commercial firewood, and road building and urbanization.

Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve, a natural moist forest about 1 096 ha in size, is found in Muduuma Subcounty (Kisammula-Lugyo, Malube-Nalubugo, Naziri-Buyala) and Kiringente Subcounty (Kagezi, Luvumbula, Mabuye, Kagaba, Sekiwunga, Galatiya, Nsujjumpolwe) (see Map 1) in Mawokota County, Mpigi District in Uganda. The forest has a legal status of a nature reserve and is located only 25 km west of Kampala. The highway from the city to the western part of the country passes through it. The forest is locally classified as medium-altitude *Piptadeniastrum-Albizia-Celtis*, the three genera being the most dominant (Howard, 1991). However, in the 1950s this composition was modified through enrichment planting. During this treatment the forest was planted with both indigenous species such as *Maesopsis eminii* and exotic ones such as *Burttdavya nyasica*, *Cedrela odorata* and *Terminalia ivorensis*. Despite its status as a nature reserve, Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve has been illegally overharvested for timber, charcoal and commercial firewood. The forest has also suffered encroachment by people growing vegetables and sugar cane for cash income. Currently, about 50 percent of the forest is severely degraded by these illegal activities.

Economic status of communities around Buto-buvuma

The communities surrounding Buto-buvuma are basically made up of small farmers who grow coffee and bananas as cash crops. However, the soils are poor and crop yields are low, thus crop farming is no longer financially viable. As a result tree harvesting is the most attractive economic activity in the area. Currently Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve provides goods and services for both monetary income and subsistence. However, its contribution to the communities' economy is most pronounced in the non-monetary sector. For example, the entire population depends on this forest for the provision of energy. The forest also contributes substantially to these rural communities by providing a wide range of non-wood forest products, including roofing materials, natural fibres, medicine, water and food. It also houses several historical and cultural sites for the Baganda ethnic group.

Past forest policy

In the past, the government did not involve local communities in the management of forests in their areas. It managed the forest resource by imposing restrictions in the form of laws, rules and regulations through the Forest Act. This act was implemented through policing by the use of forest guards. The past forest policies did not recognize the indigenous systems of forest management and indigenous rights to economically important tree species. This led to:

- loss of incentives by the local communities to protect trees;

- discouragement of local people from engaging in tree planting and reforestation projects; and

- excessive reliance by the State on punitive measures to enforce the law.

Present forest policy

As a result of continued degradation and deforestation, corruption among government officials, the high costs of monitoring the condition of forests, a lack of funds to carry out afforestation programmes and the current drive to decentralize, the Forestry Department has initiated schemes to involve local communities in forest management. These schemes have been labelled 'collaborative forest management'. This involves the formation of local forest committees that are involved in the management of natural forest reserves. In addition, individuals, groups of individuals and companies are encouraged to lease government forest land reserved for afforestation for the purpose of establishing forest plantations and/or woodlots.

**MAP 1 • Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve, Uganda,
and the surrounding settlements**
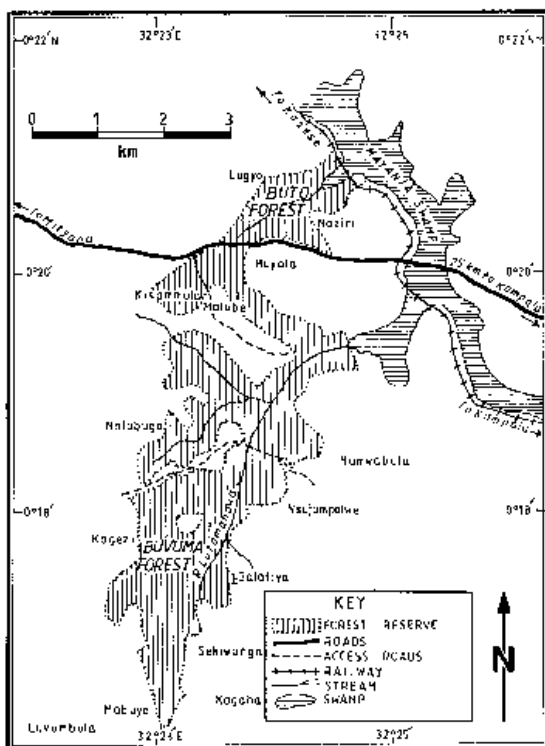
The process of involving local communities in the management of Buto-buvuma

Although the involvement of local communities in the management of forest reserves is a new concept in Uganda, community forestry is not. For example, during British colonial rule, local forest reserves were created to meet the needs of the local communities. In the 1970s the importance of community forestry was discussed within the Forestry Department in order to promote tree planting by the communities. The idea of zoning certain forest reserves for community use was included in the design of forest parks during the 1980s. However, during this period there was very limited direct participation of local communities in the management of forest reserves.

The current activities to involve communities in the management of Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve were initiated by the Department of Forestry at Makerere University and the Forestry Department, Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, in 1994/95 as a pilot case study. It was initially funded by the Forests, Trees and People Programme of FAO. Later, the International Forestry Resources and Institutions research programme initiated by the Community Forestry Unit of FAO and developed by Indiana University strengthened the research into institutional incentives related to use and management of forest resources by different local user groups using funds provided by the Ford Foundation.

The process of involving local communities living around Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve in its management started with getting to know people's concerns about the forest. The local people were concerned about:

- mismanagement of the forest;
- the high level of corruption among forest managers;
- 'outsiders' being given preferential access to the resource as opposed to local people; and
- lack of direct financial benefits to the local people.

The process involved organizing a series of local workshops within the communities to create awareness among both local people and forest staff within the district. In addition, 19 representatives of the various stakeholders were selected by the communities and visited Babati in Arusha, Tanzania, to study how local communities are involved in managing the forests they use. This team consisted of one representative from the two subcounties, elders, local councillors from the district council, women, young people and chairpersons of the subcounty councils. Upon their return, the members formed one committee to cover the two subcounties and three subcommittees (one in each zone), which undertook the task of educating the local people, patrolling the forest and drafting the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Objectives of collaborative forest management

The overall objective is to manage Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve in a sustainable manner, while the specific objectives are to:

- improve the condition of the forest;
- regulate utilization activities; and
- enable the forest to contribute directly to income generation for the communities.

The local people's perception of community forestry

The local population's perceptions of community forestry are mixed. Local commercial investors are attracted to it because of the market opportunities offered by the high demand for forest products such as fruits and woody products in the surrounding areas. Pitsawyers see community forestry involving collaborative forest management of the reserves as a positive development because

The local people living around the Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve have different perceptions of community forestry

Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve

Local communities around the Buto-buvuma Forest Reserve are involved in its management

they will have an opportunity to exclude outsiders. Women are not keen on this type of community forestry, as it is likely to make demands on their valuable time, which they would have spent on household activities. Male youths are not interested in participating in the management of forest reserves, as it is likely to reduce their illegal activities in the forests. Other issues here are lack of empowerment for those who are willing to participate, while the conflict of interest between stakeholders has been singled out as one of the serious limitations to community participation in community forestry. As for community forestry activities related to planting trees for subsistence, women are very much in favour of increasing the supply of fuelwood and ensuring food security by providing fruits. But the issue of land and tree tenure is a major limitation to their participation in this type of community forestry. For example, all trees of commercial value belong to owners of the land and, for the tenants to plant such trees, permission has to be sought from the landowners. As more forest products become commercialized, the number of tree species being upgraded to trees of commercial value increases.

The institutional changes made to enable community forestry

There has been a change in forest policy allowing local communities to participate in the management of forest reserves. The Forestry Department has institutionalized

community forestry within its operations at all levels. Staff capacity at all levels is being strengthened to implement community forestry. To help local communities manage effectively, the Forestry Department is giving 40 percent of revenue collected from the forest resources within the local areas to the community concerned as incentives. The government has granted constitutional power to local administrations to have the responsibility and right to manage forest resources for the benefits of the local people.

The central government has passed a Local Government Act (1998), which gives legal authority for the local governments to establish and manage small forests on public land to meet local needs. The same act established local committees or councils of governance with responsibilities that include natural resources. The local councils have the power and authority to plan and manage the local natural resources in their areas. To implement these measures the government is in the process of recruiting university graduate officers at sub-county levels, a local government unit of development.

The 1998 Land Act stipulates that where any group of people holds land communally, it may be held on behalf of the group by a trustee chosen by the group, according to the customs of such a community. This provision facilitates the registration of communal land and the management of forest resources as a common property regime.

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Constraints to community forestry

The main obstacles to community forestry include the following.

- Legal frameworks. Although the Forestry Department has institutionalized community forestry, there is no legal framework supporting collaborative management of forest reserves.

- Tenure. In rural areas where most of the forest resources are found, land is owned by very few people. Most youths are landless and have to find employment either by engaging in illegal activities in the forests or by migrating to urban areas for better opportunities. In the case of community forestry involving collaborative forest management, again the issue of resource ownership is quite grey. The communities would like to own these forest resources, contrary to government policy.

- Conflicting policies. In many cases government sectoral policies are not in harmony. For example, economic liberalization policy is encouraging increased agricultural output. In the absence of fertilizers, this means more forested land has to be cleared for agriculture. Current agricultural practices also encourage deforestation. For example, forests on private and public land are considered as potential areas for agricultural expansion. All existing trees are cut down during the conversion process. Farmers are discouraged from planting certain tree species (e.g. *Eucalyptus*) by politicians and environmentalists. This is confusing to local communities when it comes to forest management.

- Lack of alternative sources of income. There are almost no opportunities for the poor members of the communities to engage in income-generating activities apart from harvesting forest resources.

- Conservative, traditional foresters. Most forestry department staff were trained in traditional forestry and do not yet fully appreciate the new approach to forest management. Therefore, technical expertise for community forestry management is still lacking in the country.

Opportunities created for community forestry

The Forestry Department reacted to some of the constraints by initiating the following schemes:

- sharing revenue obtained from the forest resources with the community: 40 percent of revenue is passed on to the local authorities;

- collaborating with other sectors, e.g. the Uganda Wildlife Authority, agriculture and local administrations, at low levels for sustainable forest management;

- offering leases at affordable rents (US$1 per ha per year) to interested individuals, groups of individuals and companies for the establishment of commercial forestry; and

- encouraging the participation of forestry department staff in national and international workshops on community forestry.

Impact of community forestry on the conservation and management of forests

Changing attitudes

- Creation of awareness. In Uganda there has always been a tendency to believe that there are enough natural forest resources. However, as a result of awareness creation when community forestry began in the study area most local people now realize there is a need to supplement the existing natural forests with planted forest resources if the supply of woody products is to be sustained. Therefore, marginal agricultural land is being turned into woodlots or planted with fruit-trees. There is also increased awareness regarding proper utilization of forest resources in order to reduce waste.

- Emphasis on non-timber forest products. Forest products other than wood are now being considered by communities as sources of cash income. For instance, the non-consumptive use of natural forests for recreational purposes is being considered by several communities.

■ Ability to negotiate. The Department of Forestry at Makerere University, the Forestry Department and local communities have initiated the process of making legally binding agreements between the communities and the Government of Uganda. As a result local forest management committees have been formed through a negotiated process with government officials.

Tangible results

■ Local forest management committees have been formed and are involved in managing the resources, as well as collaborating with local forest rangers and local administrative units.

■ One MOU has been written and signed and five more are to be written.

■ At least three recreation sites within forests have been established and improved upon.

■ Illegal activities, especially cutting down trees in the forest, have been reduced.

Prospects for community forestry

■ Market incentives. There is an increasing demand for forest products. Communities will be able to earn substantial income from the resource they are managing.

■ Poor returns from crop farming are making farm forestry a profitable investment.

■ There is increased public awareness of the need to plant more trees.

■ Decentralization. Through the decentralization process, all subcounties are required to establish tree nurseries to supply seedlings for community forestry activities.

Sustainability of community forestry implementation

A process approach has been adopted with less focus on time frameworks and quantifiable outputs. The creation of awareness involves the use of local resources instead of relying on donor funds. For example, the government has started recruiting graduate foresters at subcounty levels in order to work closely with local people.

The local people in communities surrounding Buto-buvuma are currently involved in patrolling the forest in order to check on illegal activities, and as a result there is a decrease in illegal pitsawing and commercial firewood harvesting. The communities are also engaged in the process of making by-laws to regulate harvesting activities. However, they have not yet engaged in silvicultural activities to improve the condition of the forest because a management plan has not been drawn up.

External supports

Financial support is needed for: (i) technical aid; (ii) training of forest officers and local people as village forest managers; and (iii) production of field manuals and local forest management plans.

Shortcomings of community forestry

■ The government policy on community forestry appears to be externally driven and not locally initiated, so there are no local pressure groups demanding changes in the legal framework governing forest resources.

■ In the case of collaborative forest management, benefits are for all stakeholders; yet, costs are being incurred by a few individuals within the community, which encourages free-riding and rent seeking (bribing).

■ There are numerous interested groups and very limited tangible benefits from the forest because of degradation. Consequently, very few people are willing to invest time and money.

■ In rural areas there is a shortage of labour as many young, able-bodied people have left to seek jobs in urban centres. The implication is that community forestry is likely to divert the available labour from food production to tree management, which might have low returns for the individual.

■ Political interference. Powerful politicians can easily confuse the process with politics for political gains.

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Recommendations for the promotion of community forestry

Main lessons learned

- Incentives are essential to the success of community forestry. The incentives to the communities could be in monetary terms or in the form of products being harvested by community members, but the communities emphasize the monetary incentives.

- The communities need to be given more responsibility and the authority to exclude other users. Although the local communities can make rules and regulations regarding the use of the forest resources, they often do not have the capacity to enforce them. The élite, politically powerful individuals from government institutions, such as the army and the Forestry Department, do not comply with the rules enacted by the local forest management committees. This may be due to lack of legal recognition of the committees and nesting of them in local administrative structures.

- Once secure ownership rights are given to local people, then the stakeholders can be assured of continuity of their rights through generations.

- Communities are complex and in most cases react negatively to government-driven forest policies. Therefore, different user groups should be identified so that groups can be dealt with instead of communities. It has been observed that within user groups there are few conflicts over forest resources. Although traditional institutions exist within communities and there is rich indigenous knowledge regarding forest/tree management, for a long time these have not been used in forest management. Over a period of time they have become weak, mainly because of changes in value perception or marginalization by the State. Addressing the needs of particular user groups and strengthening of traditional institutions might ensure controlled harvesting at local levels.

- Political support is needed at the local level to mobilize resources and amend legal frameworks.

Conclusion

The lessons learned so far can be used to promote community forestry. In order to promote these lessons, public awareness has to be created and the local people (user groups) have to be involved in all stages of community forestry development. The local institutions need to be strengthened, e.g. local or traditional institutions must be legally recognized by the State. For this to succeed local politicians and local political organizations must also be involved in community forestry development activities. We believe these strategies are universal and can be successfully applied in any African country.

The following elements have been identified as absolutely necessary to create an enabling environment for community forestry:

- institutional legal framework reform to ensure: (i) security of tenure; and (ii) compliance with rules. Communities should be fully empowered (given full authority and responsibility) to manage the forests in their areas;

- secure markets for forest products; and

- the involvement of schoolchildren in community forestry.

Achievements have been registered in the area of creation of awareness in communities and bringing the Forestry Department and community into a cordial working relationship.

References

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