Challenges in forestry conservation in East Africa. Is community based forestry the key to forest survival? [1]

By Kunga Ngece, East African Ecotourism Development
and Conservation Consultants
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East Africa's forests are rapidly declining due to pressure from population increase and other land uses. Although most of the three East African states have enabling climatic systems for forest growth, only about 10% of the land is forested. This puts so much strain to forests, that are supposed to support over 50 million people, all depending on the natural resources emanating from them. FAO's Forestry Resource Assessment of 1990 puts Uganda as one of the countries with reasonable forest cover compared to its East African neighbors. However FAO warns that this state is quickly dwindling due to demand for more farmland or the increasing populations and the need or forest resources to maintain both urban and rural lives. With huge forests like Budongo and Mabira and tropical rain forests extending to the Congo basin, Uganda is lucky, although forest disintegration is quickly engulfing most of them. Tanzania is less lucky, although it enjoys a big-forested area from the Miombo woodlands. Kenya's situation is the worst. FAO, 1990, through the Forest Resource Assessment report states only 2% forest cover for Kenya, way below the standard. Reduction of the forest cover is severely imparting on the climate, streams, wildlife and human populations. Perhaps an area that needs to be addressed is the way forest reserves in private and government tenure systems are managed.

Conservationists are slowly coming to terms with the fact that developing enabling institutional environments is a key to forest conservation. There is now a high regard for effecting institutional frameworks, where both local people and the authorities have a say in forest management. Perhaps an area that needs to be addressed is the power of stakeholders in forest management.

This paper looks at stakeholder power in determining the success of forest resource conservation. It tries to argue whether communities should really be involved in forest resource management through various case studies.

The Kaya forests of the Kenya's coast

Kaya forests are disintegrated patches of the once expansive lowland forests of Zanzibar –Inhambane Regional Mosaic, each averaging about 10-200 ha in an area of about 250 km. These floral and faunal diverse forests occupy the coastal plain and hills of Kenya as studies by the National Museums of Kenya and Worldwide Fund for Nature have revealed (Robertson and Luke, 1993). Their botanical potential is regarded as the highest in terms of holding endangered species, found in few other areas of Kenya.

The Kaya forests have withstood being wiped out due to the sacred nature the coastal people accord them. The local 9 tribes (MijiKenda) people's beliefs, history and culture

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that these forests sheltered villages over three centuries ago from being pursued by enemies make these forests unique to them. However, belief is that after the warring time elapsed, the people abandoned the shelter o the forest, and began cultivating them, hence the present high disintegration. Some patches were however left and the Kaya elders had to have them protected. These served as burial grounds and places of worship. Today, a decline in traditional values and a rising demand for forestland to be converted to agriculture, mining, fishing and other forest products have put the forests in danger. Widespread poverty has duplicated the rate at which these forests are being exterminated.

This has prompted concerned conservationists and scientists to have a drive to enhance protection of the forests, leading to them being declared as protected as National Monuments.

Although this drive by the NMK has born some fruits, it has not succeeded wholly as was the case when the people managed the forests themselves through the elders. NMK has failed to put into consideration issue such as laws and institutions in regard to the local council of elders viz a viz those of the government. There has been no concentrated look at the policy, values and perceptions of the local community. Thos could help in determining how the local people were able to protect the forests, and what the modern government could do to ensure traditional values are put into consideration. Critical areas that also need to be addressed are the ownership and access to the Kayas. The local people have viewed them as personal property, and may not be happy to have other institutions manage what they have depended on or decades. Finally, the NMK need to look at the economic impact of the Kayas to the people, what these forests provide to the people and what they could provide with institutional management.

The Mau Forest Complex in Rift Valley, Kenya

The Mau forests are the largest remaining block of moist indigenous forests in East Africa., covering some 900Km2. First gazetted in 1932, many changes have changed in its management policy, resulting to excisions, boundary alterations and fragmentation. Prior to 1932, the forest was very intact under the management of the about 20,000 Ogiek, a hunter-gatherer community of forest dwellers depending on the forest for subsistence and shelter. The community divided the forest among their clans using natural features like valleys, rivers and hills as boundaries.

The Ogiek depended on the forest for a source of livelihood. Collection of wild fruits and nuts, hunting, honey harvesting were a daily routine. At no time was a patch of forest cleared for farming. The Ogiek had sound management systems that ensured that there were no forest fire outbreaks. Only the experienced elders were allowed to make beehives and harvest honey to avoid harming trees. Tree harvesting quotas were placed on trees such as *Olea euro and Dobeya goetzeni*, mainly used for honey harvesting and herbs. Cutting of these trees was totally prohibited. The elders only allowed the use of *Juniperus procera* fro making hives. The forest was also divided into blocks, each given to a clan, which divided them according to family lines. Each family was supposed to take care of its block. The elders had a sound management plan that ensured these forests remained intact.

Problems began in 1930 when parts of the Mau were cleared to pave way for forest plantations using exotic trees. This pushed the Ogiek further deep into the natural forest, from which they depended on. Sooner saw millers were issued with licenses for logging at very low fees. This culminated into intense logging. In 1943, the government introduced the *shamba system* to facilitate plantation establishments and food production for the local people. Problems continued further for the Mau with people being allowed to settle into the forest and the Ogiek being forced to settle by the government. The Ogiek do not like the idea, and the government has been continually evicting them from the forest, while at the same time settling in outsiders into excised land. No consultations are done with the Ogiek.

The Ogiek recognize the fact that they have been the "owners" of the forests and used indigenous knowledge to sustainably utilize the forest products. The Ogiek note that forest destruction in form of charcoal burning, timber harvesting, farming, commercial plantations and grazing is being done by outsides, and this impacts on their use of the unaffected forest areas. They state that traditional forest management systems need to be incorporated into the management criteria for Mau forest. They list among others issues that would ensure the Mau is protected as advocacy for sustainable forest management, promotion of activities that reduce pressure off the forest such as sericulture, butterfly, farm forestry and bee keeping. Although these could be solutions no other form of management of the Mau could work as the Ogiek traditional management system did.

The Mgori Forest in Tanzania

The Mgori forest is a 44,000 ha woodland managed as five village land forest reserves, with each village recognized as the common hold owner of the respective reserve. Before 1995, Mgori forest was Government land. When the Forestry department demarcated the forest, the community demanded the western part be excluded to allow them use it. This was granted but it became realized that neither the Forestry Division nor the Singida District Council could manage the reserve.

The government then turned to the communities for help, that the community (five villages) and the Singida district council could manage the forest through the 1995-1997 collaborative management. Since the district did not have enough officers to send to the ground, the villages recruited one hundred village forest guards. Fires, illegal harvesting and clearing for short term millet production ceased. Illegal hunting of Elephants was also contained.

Villagers achieved this through dividing the forest into five Village Forest Management areas, each demarcated and protected by their own youth. The boundaries were perceived as extensions to the villages, and defended by respective communities. During time for surveying village areas Singida District Council acknowledged the existence of local interests and confirmed each Village Forest Reserve as within the boundaries of the Village Areas. Village by-laws are in place regarding management of these forest reserves, and thus the community has protected the reserves well.

Mpanga Forest in Uganda

Mpanga forest is in Central Uganda, and was gazetted in 1932. It covers 453 hectares, and was part of a parcel of land belonging to the Kabaka of Buganda. The forest is part of what is today called the Guineo-congolian rainforest, scattered across Uganda, Zaire

and Kenya. The forest has remarkable biodiversity of plants, insects, birds and mammals not found elsewhere in Uganda.

Mpanga is one of the few forests in Mpigi district (the district hosts about 40 small reserves) that is still intact and less encroached. The forest has been able to maintain its state because of the management system that has been in place since pre-colonial times. Under the management of the Kabaka, the Fumbe clan controlled the forest. They used the forest as a burial ground for the clan members. The traditional beliefs that go hand in hand with respect for the dead made encroachment into the forest less. No cutting of big trees was allowed by the clan elders, although the 5 villages living around the forest were allowed access to protected water streams, firewood collection, wild fruit and nut collection, mushroom harvesting, hunting for small mammals and collection of other products as herbs and reeds. This was however controlled by the elders.

In 1932, upon gazettement of the forest, the crown government converted it into a research area, and the Fumbe clan was shown an alternative area where to site their burial ground. Conversion of the forest into research land, and denying local people their rights soon started bearing fruits of forest destruction. When management of the forest was taken away from the Fumbe clan and the Kabaka, other people saw a loophole in which to harvest forest resources. Soon, pit sawing became a daily activity, while billet cutting was rampant. Charcoal making started at an alarming rate. Soon the drum making business thrived along the road, endangering the softwoods in the forest. The government soon had to find a solution to this rampart destruction of the forest.

In 1997, the Forestry Department introduced Collaborative Forest Management with the village communities around the reserve. The process was supposed to ensure that all stakeholders in Mpanga forest (those with a stake in the forest) were involved in management of the forest, although ownership of the forest still rested on the government. Surveys for CFM were done by staff at Mpanga, and negotiations took place. During this time, forest destruction declined to some levels as the community now felt involved in forest management.

In 2000, the process stalled, and wanton destruction began once again. Charcoal burning took a renewed twist, while farmers encroached some forest areas. Drum stores started making booming business.

In 2002, representatives from the forest department and the local community held consultative meetings, and one of the things that came out clearly was that the people felt cheated by abandoning them in the CFM process. The people also wanted a share of the revenue generated from Mpanga Ecotourism Site situated within the forest. Although the site employs only local people, villagers feel that management of the forest should be restored to them. Some urgue that they know the people who destroy the forest, and placing management among the locals, the culprits would shy away from being denounced by fellow community members.

The way forward

From the above case studies, it is evident that involvement of local people in forestry management is a key factor for success in forest conservation to be achieved. Although some governments have maintained that they ought to manage natural resources themselves, this has proven difficult, and often brings conflict between government officials and local people. There is no way government s can deny local people access to

a resource they have lived with cohesively for decades, and expect to succeed in its management focus. The case of the Ogiek in Mau Forest, the Kaya forests, the Mpanga forest are but some of the many examples where community involvement of forests has been assumed. In South Africa, the Dukuduku state forest in Kwazulu Natal, inhabited by local communities has had violent outbursts of crisis whenever the government wants to have control over it. In Tanzania, the Sukuma pastoralists have been able to control communal grazing areas through restriction of cattle from grazing during particular times of the year. In Zimbabwe, the Karanga people use sacred controls to govern access and use of certain trees and woodlands. Guardians of some protected areas are installed and endowed with power over other would be users. The Loima mist forest in Turkana Kenya is an important dry season grazing area for the Turkana people. They have designed a management system whereby utilizing this forest only during the dry season, utilizing only dead wood for cooking, no cutting of large trees and use of water supplies from the hill in a sensible manner. This has helped control the forest as a dry season grazing area, without any interference by the government. Kipumbwi and Sange Villages committee in collaboration control the Msangasi Mangrove Reserve in Tanga, Tanzania with a forest officer. Villagers needing building material for domestic use require written permission from their respective village subcommittee, which spells out harvest conditions. A member of the committee supervises the harvest. The protection of the reserve is the responsibility of every villager. Two villagers accompany a committee member on each patrol in rotation. This form of management has enabled all local people gain access to the forest resources equitably. The local people also participate in replanting mangroves in areas that have been harvested.

For effective conservation of forests to be achieved, communities need to be considered as possible contributors to the management system. Although natural resources in any country belong to the governments, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure local people benefit most from them. Governments ought to respect and safeguard local livelihoods dependent on forests, otherwise having an impoverished community around a resource will not spare it from destruction. Tenure rights over lands need be bestowed on communities, who in turn need to put in place a clear mechanism of resource use control. Community power and decision-making as far as forest management is concerned should be respected.

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