



COMMUNITY BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



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CONTEXT

Community-based forest management (CBFM) was initially defined as “any situation, which intimately involves local people in a forestry activity”. Different countries and programmes have continued to develop and adapt this broad definition to fit their own CBFM activities, whether these are local people using woodlands and scattered trees in dry areas, via community management of planted trees on farms and commons, to the activities of forest dwelling communities, as well as whether the forests are owned by or leased to the communities.

Early CBFM initiatives, many of them in Asia, were focused on forestry challenges of the day and place, e.g. provision of access to the forest in exchange for labour, models of buffer zones to forests, and co-management (JFM) approaches (normally between local communities and governments). Also, CBFM stems from the forestry profession’s efforts to initiate new partnerships with local people to respond to the needs for improved subsistence and livelihoods of people living in or near forests. This perspective was influenced by an increasing awareness that resource conservation and sustainable development could only be achieved if people enjoyed a secure livelihood. Involving rural communities in forestry required a new understanding of the many important links between trees and people, related, for example, to nutrition, food security, off-farm employment, energy, integration of trees in land use for risk management, and security of tenure over resource bases.

Available information from Africa in 2002 showed that CBFM was underway in over 35 countries, involving more than 100 projects and 5 000 communities working in more than 100 national forests and 1000 protected areas. Five years earlier, there were

much less than half of this number, indicating the very rapid rate of spread of the process despite lack of significant national government material support. In some countries, e.g. Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ghana, more than 20% of the total forest areas are under some form of CBFM.

Most CBFM initiatives in SSA are less than five years old and the rest usually less than ten years old. The bulk of them are still on-going and it is often too early to draw conclusions from them. Most begin under the aegis of discrete, donor-funded projects, and are often backed up with bilateral or international NGO support, a factor that entails some risk to their sustainability (when donor funding ceases). However, many countries are currently taking steps to introduce CBFM as a tool in their forest management and to create a favourable enabling environment. A few, e.g. Gambia and Tanzania, have even developed supportive land and forest management policies and enabling legislation, which explicitly recognize the community as autonomous owner-managers of the forests. Most other countries still prefer to enter into ad hoc temporal (normally 5-15 years) agreements with communities.

One of the studies commissioned under the *Sustainable Forest Management in Africa (SFM)* project was on the performance of community-based forest management with the intention to identify:

- ✳ Factors that contribute to the long term economic, social and environmental viability of CBFM in SSA;
- ✳ Extent to which CBFM is contributing to the provision of goods, services and income to the local communities;
- ✳ Possibilities to extrapolate the experience and the necessary and sufficient conditions for promoting wider adoption of CBFM in SSA.

The full report by Jeff Odera is available on AFORNET’s web site www.afor.net.org



Local community management of forest resources and sale of wood and non-wood products can potentially increase rural incomes.

SOME KEY ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

By their very nature, experiences and lessons learnt from different applications of CBFM are location specific and vary widely along numerous socio-economic, ecological and institutional gradients. And, although communities have always related in one way or the other to surrounding forests, experience from organised CBFM is very recent in SSA and there is a lack of methodology to analyse lessons and a typology to describe them. In view of this, it is obvious that the following key issues identified by the study and the many discussion forums organised by the project, will not apply equally to all situations:

- ✿ CBFM appears to have a potential for rural economic development and community empowerment but the potential is not fully utilised because of a lack of understanding of the combinations of economic, ecological and institutional conditions under which it functions, and when it does not.

- ✿ The equitable sharing of costs and benefits within communities, between neighbouring communities and between communities and outside stakeholders (the public and private sectors) is often a major issue.

- ✿ The knowledge base and technical capacity to develop the full potential of CBFM in different settings are often very weak, both at community levels and among institutions and organisations providing support and advice to communities.

- ✿ Existing national policies and legislation regarding forest land and resources are often not conducive to a rational development of CBFM approaches; also traditional local and usufruct rights are often in conflict with effective forms of CBFM.

LESSONS LEARNT

There are few cases where CBFM has been practised and monitored for a sufficiently long time to derive any conclusive lessons from when it works and when not. Some lessons, however, are emerging:

- ✿ On the positive side, there are a growing number of cases where CBFM initiatives have led to the emergence of strong local institutions and social and economic empowerment, both of whole communities in relation to authorities and of otherwise weaker groups within the communities.

- ✿ Also, it is apparent that where there is strong support for the concept among policy makers, a pre-existing functioning local institutional base, clarity on issues of tenure rights over resources, and a good technical back-up - conditions which prevail in some cases in Tanzania, for example - the initial experience is very positive.

On the other hand, there are numerous cases where CBFM has encountered problems:

- ✿ Unclear institutional, legal and tenure conditions governing CBFM projects as well as inequities in cost and benefit sharing among and between stakeholders within and outside the communities invariably lead to uncertainty and to implementation problems.

- ✿ Where CBFM projects are based on resource-poor forest areas, e.g. with a low stock and growth of marketable wood and non-wood products, and/or where the potential for value adding (e.g. where communities only have access to small local markets) is limited, the absence of concrete economic benefits often lead to communities losing interest in the activities.

- ✿ Likewise, there is often too much focus on community benefits at the expense of the potential for raising family incomes, which also result in people losing interest. This is sometimes more true for some NGO- or scientist-led projects where the enthusiasm for community approaches per se outweighs the professional economic and technical ability of identifying and developing business opportunities.

- ✿ The technical back-up to communities involved in CBFM by national institutions, e.g. public forest administrations (PFAs) and research institutions, is normally very limited, either because of unclear mandates of these institutions in relation to CBFM or because of lack of resources and personnel with the right knowledge and experience.

- ✿ Finally, it is becoming increasingly obvious that if CBFM shall fulfil its promise to be an innovative way of managing forest resources by communities in order to sustainably increase their incomes, rather than just a way of legalising traditional subsistence use of forest resources, there is need for a massive training and educational effort; otherwise, many CBFM efforts may turn into "poverty traps".

THE WAY FORWARD

In order to realise the full potential of CBFM to contribute to sustainable management of forest resources,



Poor communities need large amounts of wood for many aspects of life - if they are able to manage the resources themselves it will increase their commitment to SFM.

income generation and environmental enhancement in SSA, actions and resource investments are required at local, national, regional and international levels.

✿ For countries where CBFM already has a proven or obvious potential, the appropriate government bodies should develop national plans and policies for how to fully realise this potential, including establishing clear rules and rights regarding support systems, land and resource tenure/ownership arrangements, cost and benefit sharing, market analyses, etc.

✿ This should include a clarification of the desired structures and modus operandi of institutions responsible for planning, supporting and implementing CBFM activities, i.e. institutions at national, local and community levels; at national level it is important to redefine the mandates of PFAs and how they relate to communities and farmers, e.g. by establishing demand driven and stakeholder controlled *Forest Extension Authorities*.

✿ Develop protocols and mechanisms for assisting communities with resource inventories, cost/benefit analyses, monitoring and evaluation systems, provision of market intelligence and credits, linkages to the private sector for value adding, training to build technical and managerial capacity at all relevant levels, etc.

✿ Adapt scientific and educational programmes to include CBFM-relevant technical, economic and social parameters in curricula and research programmes, and make these more explicitly demand-driven

by establishing mechanisms through which communities, farmers and the private sector can influence their contents.

✿ It is important for governments that embark on these kind of developments to be aware that the efforts must be sustained for a very long time and that sufficient resources must be allocated to them in order for them eventually to be sustainable by generating economic and social “surpluses” at local and national levels.

✿ Initiate regional and sub-regional analyses of the potential of CBFM. These should be based on properly stratified ecological, economic, social, tenure and institutional situations as a guide for countries who have not yet sufficient experience of CBFM to decide about whether to give priority to its development. Such analyses should draw upon the considerable knowledge and capabilities of international institutions such as FAO, CIFOR, ICRAF, ITTO, and others.

✿ Finally, it is important to establish information sharing networks and other mechanisms to ensure that lessons learnt and technical and other experiences from various CBFM programmes are made available to government institutions, communities and other stakeholders in an efficient way; also this would be most logical and economical to do on a regional basis, e.g. through AFORNET, FAO’s regional office for Africa, AfDB and NEPAD, or through sub-regional mechanisms such as EAC, SADC and CILSS.

The project, “SFM in Africa” for short, has been jointly managed by the African Forest Research Network (AFORNET) at the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry (KSLA) and the Forest Department of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

The policy briefs are based on commissioned reports which are available in full at the web site www.afornet.org. The reports contain all relevant references to information sources used.

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