

REPORT ON THE EDITORS FORUM  
CONDUCTED ATKIBAHA CONFERENCE CENTRE  
COAST REGION,  
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## **Executive Summary**

Tanzania is home to one of the largest tree covers in the world. A forest inventory conducted by the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS) in 2015 found that forests and wooded areas cover over 48 million hectares of land. It also found that wood remains the main source of fuel for Tanzanians, even in urban areas.

However, the country's forests are at risk. Records indicate that the current deforestation rate in Tanzania is about 370,000 hectares per year. The rate is probably the highest in East Africa. Deforestation could cost the country's economy up to \$3.5 billion dollars after one decade.

Trees are felled for firewood or for making charcoal. With a steady population growth rate of over 3 percent, community forests designated to supply wood for fuel are unable to support the growing demand. There are other pressures on the environment.

In recent years, forests have increasingly been overtaken by farmland and degraded grassland ecosystems due to rampant deforestation. Illegal logging, expansion of agriculture and establishment of new human settlements have all compounded the problem of deforestation. Even more alarming is the recent assessment by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which suggests that more than 5.86 million hectares of Tanzania's forests were lost to deforestation and degradation between 2000 -2015. That represents approximately 10 percent of the country's forests overall.

As part of its environmental strategy, the government requires every district council to plant and care for at least 1.5 million trees every year. The problem is that the survival rate of those trees after one year is unknown. Furthermore, the rate of reforestation still seriously lags behind the deforestation rate. Despite conservation efforts, Tanzania's forests are still under pressure.

In order to contribute to efforts to address deforestation and degradation, the Tanzania Natural Resource Forum (TNRFF) through its Mama Misisu Campaign (MMC) teamed with the media so as to promote good governance on environmental management for sustainable development in Tanzania. Their work has focused on but not limited to capacity building, advocacy, and networking with the objectives to advocate for good governance in environmental management, to enhance the capacity of media stakeholders to monitor governance practices in environmental management; and to network with like-minded organizations and other stakeholders with the aim of building a strong force that would bring change

in the management of the country's forests.

Mama Misitu Campaign is a communications initiative that aims at improving the governance of Tanzania's forest resources by reducing illegal harvesting of forests so that Tanzanians can increasingly benefit from sustainably managed forests. In implementing the campaign the initiative has expanded the scope of its mandate to cover outcomes including to generate a public debate on the need for improved forest governance and to work with the central government and its agencies so that they may provide more support to improve forest governance. Combat forest crime as well as enhancing standards of forest governance among district, ward and village authorities and law enforcers also fall under MMC's mandate.

Other outcomes are forest-adjacent communities effectively governing forests resources and equitably benefiting and demanding for their rights while participating in combating forest crime. It was the mandate of the initiative to ensure that businesses participate fully in improving forest governance and effectively complying with regulations governing trade in forest products.

In partnership with the Journalists' Environmental Association of Tanzania (JET), MMC sought to enable editors and journalists to gain knowledge on various issues of forestry and sharpen their investigative and reporting skills. This would help them to disseminate information that brings about change in the administration, management and utilisation of forestry resources. Ultimately the partnership was meant to raise the quantity and quality of reportage of the forestry sector in Tanzania. It is against this backdrop that the Editors Forum was planned and conducted.

## **Introduction**

The Editors Forum that was conducted in Kibaha town drew 12 participants from various media houses, both print and electronic. (See attendance list attached). In one of the rarest cases, the forum included an editor from Kiongozi magazine, a publication by the Catholic Church in Tanzania. In previous meetings with journalists and editors, representatives from faith-based publications have not been invited maybe because of the wrong notion that religion has little to do with conservation of the environment. MMC has helped to change this mind-set.

In the course of implementing the programme JET and MMC realised that although they had offered specific training on reporting forestry issues to some journalists, the results left much to be desired mainly because some of the gatekeepers (editors) had little knowledge about forestry issues. There was a need, therefore, to expose editors to and update them with topical issues of the forestry sector. It was also found crucial for the editors to refresh their reporting skills, hence the planning and implementation of the Editors Forum.

It was for this reason that the first day of the two-day forum was spent on interaction between editors and forest experts as well as media expert. Editors spent a good part of the second day interacting with members of communities and village leaders who are involved in conserving and protecting forests. They were also given time to discuss issues with officials from TFS.

The venue for the forum was picked with proximity to a forest site or a forest-adjacent community in mind.

There were three resource persons, two of whom dealt specifically with forest issues while the fourth dealt with journalism skills.

## **Objectives**

The main objective of the forum was to enhance the overall objective of MMC, that of improving forestry governance in Tanzania through appropriate communication by using available media outlets.

Specifically the forum sought to provide a platform for sharing knowledge between forestry experts and editors in order to increase knowledge of forestry issues among the latter. It also aimed to highlight and emphasize the role of editors in raising the quality and quantity of reportage of forestry issues by guiding reporters in their work and availing adequate space and airtime in their media outlets so as to reach a wide section of the general public. The forum also served to draw recommendations and strategies for improving and sustaining media coverage of the forestry sector.

## **Methodology**

On the first day various methods were used during the forum. They include lectures, presentations, Q&A and plenary discussions. During the field trip on the second day, editors took time to interview various people basing on their story angles. At the end of the forum each of them suggested ideas for their stories. (see attachment).

## Matters arising from Day One



**Editors participating in discussion during the training session.**

The following are some of the issues that were noted and discussed by participants:

- The role of the Vice-President's Office of Environment is not defined in conserving and protecting forests and the environment in general
- Government officials from various ministries do not sing the same song when it comes to conservation and protection of forests.
- There is need to formalise and regulate the charcoal business in order to increase government revenue from the forestry sector
- There is lack of coordination between ministries that are directly involved in protection and conservation of forests and the environment in general. Such ministries include MNRT, Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Ministry of Lands and Human Settlements and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock Development.
- Equitable benefit sharing is vital for successful conservation of forests
- Communities living adjacent to government forests need to be continually informed about developments in the forestry sector so as take appropriate measures in conserving, protecting and benefiting from forests.
- There is need to harmonise the functions of DFO and TFS District Manager.
- More transparency in managing forest resources will reduce corruption in the forestry sector.
- Traders in forest products need fair play in order to refrain from doing illegal business.
- Value addition of forest products will give more benefits to various stakeholders.
- To deal with diminishing size of forests and forest degradation, drivers of deforestation must be identified and be addressed.
- Current developments require decision makers to use evidence and data in order to make realistic planning and compelling decisions on the forestry sector
- As far as the forestry sector is concerned, the focus should now change from a major source of revenue to an area that requires more efforts of conservation through investments that would guarantee sustainable revenue flows.

## **Matters arising from Day Two**

The second day was set aside, for a field visit to see and observe South Ruvu Forest Reserve and interview different stakeholders. These included Government (TFS, FBD) representatives, village government representatives, MJUMITA network members at village level, and community members. The forest is owned by the central government but jointly managed with villagers. However, due to poor weather, the team could not reach the forest but nevertheless got information from villagers from Kipangege and Soga who conserve and protect it.

Before visiting the villagers, the team paid a courtesy call to the Eastern Zone TFS Manager where the Acting Manager, Bernadetha Kadala told the editors and journalists that information is the most important pillar of conservation of forests. She said that when people know and understand issues, they are likely to change their mind-set about how to manage forest resources so that they may continue to benefit sustainably.

Among things in Soga village that were of interest to the editors was the testimony given by an ardent environmentalist, Subira Juma, who has led youths from seven villages that are adjacent to South Ruvu Forest to conserve and protect the forest. Subira explained that the communities have acquired more than forestry knowledge.

“We are now more educated on conservation than we were before the Mama Misitu Campaign began; our awareness about conservation of the environment is high. We can now develop our own by-laws to protect the forest and we have also been trained on land use planning and our leaders have become more responsible because people always demand to know what they are doing about protecting the forest. We don’t get direct benefits from the forest now but we know how we will benefit in future.” said Subira Juma

Shomari Juma Mwishehe, the Chairman of Kipangege Village government was bitter that the Joint Forest Management Programme for Ruvu South Forest has not taken off mainly due to TFS in Kibaha District. “Since 2008 we started the process for JFM so that we could share the benefits but TFS has been slow in taking the necessary action in order to speed up the process. In principle the village government gets 32 percent of revenue collected fines levied on goods impounded from the forest, but this must put in writing and must appear in the written agreement between the villages and the district TFS. We have done all what we are supposed to do but it seems TFS does not want the contract to be drawn; maybe for fear that they are going to lose revenue from the forest. Right now they are not

even interested in what is happening in the forest and have left the villages to do everything while they are only interested in collecting revenue. This situation has affected conservation and protection of the forest," he explained.

One of the Editors who participated in the forum, Mashaka Mugeta, said that the two days of activities served to raise the knowledge of forestry issues among participants. The JFM was not known to them before the meeting but now they are aware of how much it can contribute towards conservation and protection of forests for the benefit of communities.

"The various villagers that we met in Soga showed a high level of understanding of conservation of forests particularly their ability to plan and implement conservation and protection measures and the general management of the forest. The key attribute is their demand to benefit from the forest since they are the ones who conserve and protect. It was from this knowledge that they expressed their anger at TFS for becoming a hindrance to their efforts to benefit from conserving the forest," he explained.



**Mr. Subira Juma, in green shirt, giving his testimony to journalists.**

Besides the testimony, the editors and journalists had the following takeaways:

- There is a big conflict between the villagers and TFS based on equitable sharing of benefits from the forest.
- Illegal harvesting still exists mainly because unfaithful villagers collude with criminals from outside the seven villages
- Villagers believe that they are able to own and manage the forest so they should be given that responsibility
- Many villagers are now aware of the need to benefit from the forest they conserve and protect and cannot be easily tricked by their leaders or other

authorities.

- Villagers have no doubt that TFS sits between them and ownership of South Ruvu Forest Reserve mainly because of revenue from trade in forest products.
- Forest conservation must be hinged on village ownership and provision of opportunities for alternative income generating activities in order to reduce illegal harvesting and pressure on the forest.
- Villagers are ready and willing to conserve but they need to see tangible benefits and these must be shared equitably.
- There is lack of transparency on the part of TFS, which is done to frustrate villagers from acquiring ownership and benefits.
- Today villagers are so aware of issues that they can challenge TFS on issues of forestry conservation
- TFS is not concerned with the contribution made by the villagers in conserving and protecting the forest; they don't know what is happening in the forest.
- Protection of the forest is becoming more difficult because village patrols are ill-equipped, use bicycles while criminals use motorcycles.
- Education and awareness campaigns can change the mind-set of villagers regarding how they use forest resources. These must be stepped up
- Conflicts abound between villagers and TFS over conservation of forests because the latter are bent only on collecting revenue and do little to promote conservation.
- Lack of transparency has led to suspicion, mistrust and conflicts between TFS and villages.



**Mr. Mzava from TFS Eastern Zone Office briefing editors on the agency's activities**

**Lessons learnt**

The forum revealed that editors and journalists have little knowledge about forestry

issues; hence it is advisable to offer them training even if it is a one-day event, to update their knowledge. Given the lack of transparency and communication between TFS and villagers, it would be a good idea to arrange meetings between the former and editors/ journalists so that they speak the truth and openly. On another note, villagers are ready and willing to conserve forests and the environment in general, as long as they get adequate and correct information and are rewarded with tangible benefits for their work. A third party like TNRF and the media are instrumental in ensuring that stakeholders equitably share benefits from conserving natural resources and communities are not bullied by government and its agencies.



**Participants of the Editors Forum and some Soga village residents pose for a group photo**

## **Way Forward**

Participants suggested that more such forums should be arranged to give editors and journalists an opportunity to update their knowledge on forest issues and sharpen their reporting skills. Such forums should be concretised by visits to forests so that they can meet people and observe the actual situation on the ground.

In order to sustain the relationship among participants, the editors and journalists suggested formation of a WhatsApp group so as to share information. A blog that captures selected local and foreign stories on forestry was also suggested. TRNF (MMC) was tasked to study the viability of the two options and give feedback to the editors.

Another way to sustain the knowledge and skills acquired is to give assignments or invite journalists whenever there is an event on forestry. They were of an opinion that participants need not be paid for such assignments as they would be treated as their daily beat. However it is expected that more stories would now be published after the forum.

While event-based stories were welcome, participants were required to write at least one feature every month. This would see 12 issue-based stories published every month, which is not a bad number to begin with.

## **Closing Remarks.**

In his remarks Mr. Emmanuel Msoffe from the Forestry and Beekeeping Division commended MMC for setting up the Forum in order to enlighten the editors and journalists on forestry issues. He stressed the need for information that is grounded on facts and data so as to make it easy for the public to understand. Speaking about charcoal and firewood as sources of energy, Mr.Msoffe said that majority of Tanzanians will continue to use these. Under the circumstances, there is a need to look for alternative sources of energy that are cheap and reliable in order to reduce pressure on forests. For this reason, charcoal and firewood must feature prominently in Tanzania's energy policy.

He noted with concern that the national tree planting efforts do not match with the current rate of deforestation and highlighted the need to step up efforts in tree planting and conservation. He said that the country has had plenty of rain this year but wonder if Tanzanians used the opportunity to plant many trees.

Regarding benefiting from forests, he said that government must cooperate with

communities to conserve and protect the resources in a bid to ensure these resources raise incomes for villagers directly or indirectly. Finally he tasked the media to play its rightful role of oversight of natural resources for the benefit of majority of Tanzanians.

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Dar es Salaam

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