

STRENGTHENING MEDIA ENGAGEMENT OF THE FOREST SECTOR



MEDIA ENGAGEMENT ON INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN
MAMA MISITU PROJECT AREAS

A PROJECT IMPLEMENTED BY MAMA MISITU CAMPAIGN

AND

SUPERVISED

BY

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1.0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tanzania is endowed with a wealth of natural resources that significantly contribute to the countries' GDP. It is estimated that the United Republic of Tanzania has 33.5 million ha of forests and woodlands. This is about 38 percent of the total land area.

Forest resources are not only a significant contributor to the GDP, but they also support a majority of rural livelihoods throughout the country. Yet there are a lot of challenges that the sector still faces today. The country, like several other African states, has suffered from inefficient governance evidenced by, among other things, failure to account for revenues and other benefits arising from these resources and ensuring that communities who are the custodians of these forests get a just return for their efforts.

There is also the problem of weak policies that do not advocate inclusiveness of all stakeholders in planning, developing and implementing those policies. Views, opinions and concerns of traders in forest goods, consumers of the goods, conservationists and those who actually live off forests are not considered, let alone taken on board, with the result that some of them undermine such policies and laws.

No wonder the potential of the forest sector as a big contributor to the country's economy and a significant forex earner has yet to be exploited. Lack of transparency and timely dissemination of forestry information is another challenge facing the sector.

It is against this backdrop that Mama Mimitu Campaign, a communication and advocacy programme was introduced with the explicit aim of ensuring that all stakeholders benefit from this resource through properly conserving and protecting it.

It is a campaign that seeks to ensure that communities take responsibility to conserve, protect and manage forests sustainably while getting adequate tangible returns for their work, government sets policies and laws that enable traders in forest goods feel compelled to abide by rules and regulations and are obliged to pay the requisite taxes, levies, duties and fees and consumers get value for their money from the forest products they purchase.

This is a campaign that is hinged on dissemination of information through various means. It focuses on availing information that is not only useful to the various stakeholders but which should bring about change.

For this reason Mama Mimitu has been working with all media outlets across the board, including print and electronic as well as mainstream and community media. In order to get the best results from the campaign, Mama Mimitu conducted training for a select group of journalists that focused on knowledge on forestry and reporting skills.

Another level of media engagement by Mama Mimitu on which this report gives details was meant to task the professionalism of the journalists with getting information from community up to district level that would not only put on the table the success of the campaign but also shine a light on what new pathways Mama Mimitu should take in order to further realise its goals. For indeed the success of Mama

Misitu Campaign is pegged on a robust media that can articulate issues and disseminate correct information and in a timely manner.

2.0. INTRODUCTION

Between January and February Mama Misitu Campaign conducted a media project that had several objectives: one was to highlight the gains made by communities in the course of their participation in conserving, protecting and managing forests. Another objective was to find out the problems that communities face in managing forests. The problems could be within the communities themselves, between various communities and between communities and various authorities related to the forestry sector.

But it was not just the issue of highlighting these issues and leaving them as they are. The project served to give Mama Misitu the opportunity to make changes in its strategy. This could entail bringing in new actors, change some aspects in the approach of the campaign or intensify efforts where weakness was revealed.

The media has been the right hand of Mama Misitu campaign. This project also sought to strengthen the media by exposing journalists to actual situations on the ground, thereby giving them the opportunity to compare what they learned in theory or heard from experts to the practical side of issues.

Journalists had a chance to observe forests and determine whether communities are conserving them as required, they had also the opportunity to gauge the extent of forest degradation arising from unsustainable harvesting and unregulated human activities.

It was also a chance for journalists to see the benefits gained by communities through managing forests resources as well as witness the practice of good forest governance at the lowest level of the country's administration, the village.

On the other hand this was a chance for journalists to sharpen their reporting skills so as to enable them to disseminate the information that they had gathered. Indeed journalism is not just about acquiring information and knowledge on a particular subject matter but being able to analyze such information and knowledge and send it to the variance audiences with the explicit aim of advocating change.

The project was therefore a learning experience for the media in terms of both skills and knowledge. It was an opportunity for them to observe the environment and acquire new sources of information which they would not be able to be in contact without taking part in the implementation of this project.

This report thus gives, among other things, details of how the media conducted the project as well as the quality and quantity of their work. It also sheds some light on the hurdles that has limited the success of Mama Misitu Campaign, particularly the sluggishness and sometimes the failure to act by some district council officials. More importantly, the report indicates the new zeal among men and women in the quest to conserve protect and better manage forests as shown by some villagers and traders in forest goods which, however, is being thwarted by dishonest government officials.

3.0. ACTIVITIES

Implementation of this project involved carrying out several activities. Each of them was separate building block of the project and these activities in their totality account for the success of the project.

3.1. Selection of team.

There were twelve journalists comprising those from mainstream media and those based in Mtwara and Lindi regions where the project was conducted. The selection was based on two points; those from the mainstream (national) media were selected basing on their performance in their daily work and their experience in journalism. Some of them had previously participated in training offered by Mama Mitsu and taken part in similar activities. The individuals were also among outstanding journalists in their media houses both in the print and electronic media.

All those who comprised the second batch had undergone training provided by Mama Mitsu in July/August 2015. While during the training they were given a chance to put theory into practice, this time around they would get a better chance because it would all be practical work. This combination enabled journalists to share ideas and learn from each other about knowledge and skills.

3.2. Reflection session

All journalists were given information on the objectives of the project and what they were required to do. Their work was to collect information on participatory forest management from all actors including men and women in the villages, village government officials, members of the various village committees and all other members of the villages whom they deemed had information to contribute.

In the course of their work, the team was advised to interview a cross-section of sources including those at the village and district level. Where necessary, they were advised to cite publications such as laws, policies and other documents. More importantly they were advised to leave no stone unturned in an effort to get all information that would serve to highlight success, gaps and new direction for the Mama Mitsu Campaign.

3.3. Field Visits

In order to collect a lot of information in a short time, the team was divided into two groups each of which comprised electronic and print media. While both groups travelled to Kilwa, Rufiji, Ruangwa, Nachingwea, Masasi and Lindi districts, each team travelled to different villages. This was meant to get as diverse views as possible from communities of the same district.

Each group had the opportunity to visit at least two villages every day and interview officials from the district natural resources office, the district forest office and where possible, Tanzania Forest Services Agency.

The teams also met traders who engage in sale of various forest goods. In total, the teams were out in the field for one week during which they collected information from various sources. The journalists also used their own observations to get some information which they later verified with other credible

sources. Villages visited include Nanjilinji A, Mchichiri, Nahanga, Mbangara, Ngunichile, Mihima, Soga and Ikwiriri.

3.4. Capturing the PFM panorama

Another key activity was to take stock of success, failures and gaps in communities that have been involved in the Mama Misitu Campaign and those that have not. The activity was also meant to take note of reasons for the success that has been recorded and likewise, where none has been recorded. It also served as a basis for making changes in the Campaign's strategy particularly taking note of which areas need more attention and thus redirecting efforts at the same. One more district, Kibaha, was added in this activity.

4.0. PRODUCTION AND MENTORING

Every journalist who took part in the project was required to write at least three features relating to the issues they had captured during field work. They were given three weeks to complete the work. However, before publishing their work, a mentor had to examine it and advise what changes should be made. This applied to both print and electronic work. Journalists were also free to write news stories as and when they found newsworthy material.

During this activity, it was found out that some journalists came up with good features that required minor changes before publishing. Other journalists had to rewrite their features twice before they were given a go-ahead to publish them.

There were also cases when some journalists came up with issues that did not relate to any of issues encountered during the field visits. They were thus required to change and write something that was actually a burning issue in the communities which they had visited.

There were still others who were rather slow in accomplish their work and sent all three of their features at once for assessment, requiring the mentor to work overtime so as to have them published in good time. Generally all the features that were passed for publication met the required quality.

5.0. PUBLICATION

All the features that were produced by the journalists were published. Some newsrooms did not post the same to the Internet so they have no links. However, hard copies were provided. In some cases there was unnecessary delay, especially in the print media, to publish the features, a situation which made the journalists fail to meet the deadline.

Some journalists went an extra mile and published stories over and above the requirement of the project. This was a credit to them and an encouragement to Mama Misitu Campaign; they know there are journalists out there who can find newsworthy stories in the forest sector without having to be told to do so.

Here are the stories and features that have been published:

Mashaka Mugeta (Nipashe)

Vijiji Kilwa vinavyobadili maisha kupitia misitu

Nachingwea inavyohamasisha vijiji kumiliki misitu

Wanakijiji watumbua majipu wahujumu misitu

Bernard Lugongo (The Citizen)

When forest conservation meets free education in Lindi

Maternity allowance for expectant mothers

Aisia Rweyemamu (The Guardian)

Bilham Kimati (Daily News)

www.dailynews.c.tz/index.php/features/47800

www.dailynews.co.tz/index/php/features/47727

www.dailynews.co.tz/index.php/features/47361

Christopher Lilai (Mwananchi)

Mohamed Mmow (Raia Tanzania)

Ukosefu wa utawala bora ulivyokosesha maendeleo Miima, Kiwawa

Tunalo jukumu la pamoja kupiga vita uharibifu wa misitu

Mapambano ya kudhibiti uharibifu wa misitu yaungwe mkono

Fatuma Maumba (Clouds TV)

Mary Mpandula (Pride FM)

Abdulaziz Abdulaziz (Channel 10)

Utegele Ibrahim (TBC TAIFA)

Mwanja Ibadi (Mwananchi)

Josephine Shibiriti (Mashujaa FM)

In total, more than 30 stories and features were published during the project. This is one very few cases when the forest sector has had a wide and quality coverage of issues. The important thing is to sustain this coverage.

6.0. STORIES THAT CAUGHT THE EAR.

One of the activities which formed part of the project was capturing stories that showed success, problems and gaps in the implementation of participatory forest management. Such stories would also underscore the relationship between communities and various authorities related to the forest sector and the level of awareness among villagers on the need to conserve, protect and manage forests and demand a fair return for their work.

Below are the headlines of story that express outstanding issues captured in the course of the project. Some of the stories have not been published in any media outlet as they were actually meant for use by the project proponents. Full stories appear in the appendix.

- Sesame farming: Farmers cutting the hand that feeds them
- When tractors grow on trees
- Learning from other and replicating the success story
- Timber trade: Dubious change in rules of the game irk traders
- Angry youths and the lorry that feeds runs of timber
- Promoting safe motherhood through proper management of natural resources
- Lack of information frustrates community conservation efforts
- New awakening among forest communities.
- Land use plans could protect forests, provide benefits
- Tree planting fund raises questions from traders

7.0. LESSONS LEARNED

In implementing this project, we have learned a number of lessons from both the media and villages that are involved in the participatory forest management programme. We have also learned something from authorities that oversee the management and sustainable use of forests.

7.1. Need for technical support

Communities who are successfully involved in participatory forest management and who have gained various benefits need technical support in terms of tree planting drives so that the rate of harvesting goes hand in hand with growing of new trees. This will ensure sustainable benefits for the villages. Technical support will is required in among other things, the type of trees to be planted for a particular type of soil and whether tree planting is meant to sustain the trade in forest products or to rehabilitate a degraded forest.

Technical support is also required to enable villages to draw business plans. In almost all cases encountered, village governments only have management plans and harvesting plans. But since they trade in forest products, they need to have business plans in order to sustain their trade.

7.2. Closing the information/communication gap

There is quite a significant information and communication gap between communities and district forest offices as well as TFS offices. The information flow from DFO and TFS is sporadic and does not often address the issues and concerns of communities. The information flows only when officials feel they have to tell villages something but there is no mechanism that allows communities to send information to the authorities as and when they need. This needs to be reversed.

7.3. Communities crave for education

We have also learned that some villages that do not have village land forest reserves would like to know how to go about it but they are at a loss at what procedures to follow. Again this falls squarely on the shoulders of District Councils and TFS who both have the due to ensure that as many villages as possible own village land forest reserves. This would reduce the burden on District Councils to budget for development projects for villages but also enable villages to be economically independent and ultimately fund the provision of social services in the villages.

7.4. Villages striving to improve lives.

All villages that own village land forest reserves have made significant strides in improving the lives of community members through provision and improvement of social service. The degree of improvement varies from one village to another but the range of improvement include provision of clean and safe water, building classrooms and equipping them with desks, providing uniforms for school pupils and building teacher's houses. Other villages have gone a step further and offer maternal allowances for pregnant women whether single or married and pay health insurance premiums for their senior citizens.

7.5. General improvement of governance

The state of good governance among villages that have village land forest reserves has greatly improved. Village government officials have become more transparent in the way they conduct their duties as communities have become more knowledgeable and thus demand to know a lot of things. The fact that many people now get benefits from conservation of forests has made them demand accountability on the part of their leaders so that the benefits become sustainable.

7.6. Need for training journalists and editors.

Journalists need training, especially practical training in covering the forest sector. This will help them improve their knowledge of the sector and in the long run, raise the quality and quantity of coverage in the local and international media.

7.7 Editors lack knowledge of forest sector and commitment

Many editors do not know much about the forest sector. This has led to the delay in publishing stories and features and sometimes badly editing the same. To a great extent, the forest sector and indeed the environment in general is not a priority to the Tanzanian media. In order to address this, training should be arranged for editors so that they can be exposed to the forestry sector and its dynamics

8.0. SUGGESTIONS

8.1. Training journalists

Training of journalists should be continuous, maybe twice a year, focusing on practical work and mentoring. Before a new training stint begins, those who had participated in the previous work should be evaluated and those who did not deliver should be dropped out from the programme.

It is also suggested new journalists should be include in every stint, leaving out others so as to have a wide choice when it comes to choosing participants to the project. Quality and not merely experience should be the criterion for a journalist to take part in the project. It is also suggested that a feedback/review meeting is held with journalists who participated in the project to review their work and identify areas of improvement.

8.2. Need to train editors

Since editors lack adequate knowledge in forest issues; ways should be found to enable them build some awareness of the sector. Editor's fora to discuss the state of coverage of forest issues in the local media could be one way to go about it. It should be noted, however, that most editors think they know everything and would leave everything at the training room or a conference hall once the session is over. There should be a careful selection of editors who would be invited to participate in such a session.

8.3. Make district councils sit up

Mama Masitu Campaign must step up efforts to challenge district councils particularly in Mtwara and Coast regions where some district councils are slow in enabling to process issues so that as many villages as possible own village land forest reserves. Kibaha and Masasi districts are cases in point here.

8.4. DC, TFS should educate communities.

Many village government officials and indeed ordinary villagers complained about having little or no education on issues of forest conservation. In some cases even village environment committees were not aware of what they should do let alone what conservation of forests is all about. Mama Misitu should liaise with the authorities and enlighten them on this duty and what it means to have in place a village environment committee that knows nothing about environment.

8.5. Study tours

Talk about conservation of forests and the success of participatory management, the South Eastern regions of Lindi, Mtwara and Ruvuma stand out as exemplary. Efforts should be made to publicize their success as far and wide as possible so that people from other regions should feel compelled to learn from them.

Signed:

Deodatus Mfugale

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Dar es Salaam

ANNEX 1: STORIES THAT CAUGHT THE EYE

Promoting safe motherhood through proper management of natural resources

Somoe Shaibu Kiyamba (28) of Nanjirinji A village in Kilwa district is eight months pregnant. When she attended clinic at the dispensary early this month, the doctor told her that all was well and she would deliver sometime in February.

Kiyamba is not worried about her health despite the fact that this is her first pregnancy. She has been attending clinic throughout and has been told that she would have a smooth delivery. She is also not worried about things she and the baby would need because she has some money for the purpose, thanks to a system set by the village government that provides financial support all pregnant women.

“We have made some savings but the village government has also given me 30,000/- to meet my needs when I deliver,” she explained.

The village government has established a system to offer 30,000/- to all pregnant women when they reach their eighth month. The money should help parents to meet some needs for the baby and the mother so that they both remain healthy.

“When we started earning money from Nambumbila forest which belongs to the village, we thought we should spend some of it to help mothers deliver safely and promote better health services for mothers and their children generally. The support is offered to both single and married women and is unconditional,” explained Abdallah Mnali, the village treasurer.

He was speaking to a group of journalists from various media houses who visited the village recently to learn how villages conserve forests, what benefits they get and if there are any challenges that go with conservation and protection of forests.

The journalists’ visit was part implementation of Mama Misitu Programme, a communication and advocacy strategy which aims at promoting good governance in the management of forests in the country. It also seeks to raise awareness among Tanzanians to use forests resources in a sustainable manner so as to reduce poverty among communities particularly those living adjacent to forests. The programme is coordinated by the Tanzania Natural Resources Forum and Funded by the Finnish government.

According to Mnali, 130 women have benefited from the programme since its inception in 2012. “Initially the village government offered 50,000/- to every pregnant women when they were in their eighth month of pregnancy. However, the number of pregnant women was increasing fast as a result of which we had to reduce the amount so that all of them could benefit,” he explained.

The treasurer conceded that the money is not enough to meet all the needs of the women. “The basic responsibility of taking care of the pregnant woman and later the baby rests of the family. The support given by the village government should only be over and above what families have prepared; this is well understood by all villagers,” he said. To improve services to pregnant women, Mnali said that the village

plans to buy an ambulance that would ferry pregnant women to Ruangwa district hospital when they develop complications.

The village government has also spent income from sale of forest products to improve other social services. According to the village government secretary Hamis Mitweo, funds have also been spent in the supply of clean and safe water.

“We have drilled three shallow wells and fitted them with foot pumps. These supply clean and safe water to the villagers who formerly fetched water from open wells. The latter did not provide safe water for domestic use,” he said.

With money earned from sale of products from Nambumbila forest, the village government plans to continue improving the welfare of the villagers with promoting good health as a priority. The financial assistance given to pregnant women and the supply of clean and safe water is proof of the village government’s commitment.

ENDS

When tractors grow on trees

Some villages in Ruangwa District are doing wonders with their forests. They are managing them, protecting them, conserving them and harvesting them in a manner that guarantees them of huge regular revenue which they have used to improve the economy and take some strides out of poverty.

Think of Nahanga, for example. The village owns a tractor worth 51m/- which they use to plough their farms and as a result of which every family is able to expand their farms and cultivate in time. And when the weather is good, they are guaranteed of a good crop. With enough food to feed their families and a surplus to sell in order to meet other needs, Nahanga villagers are slowly moving out of poverty through trees. Now plans are at an advanced stage for the village to buy another tractor. This will cost them 56m/-.

“They have the money,” says Ruangwa District Forest Officer Solomon Massangya. So where does this remote village get the money? Who is the donor....mfadhili? Basically this is a result of participatory forest management programme which started in the district in 2004.

“This programme empowers villages to establish their own forests so that eventually they can handle 100 percent of the revenue that comes from sale of forest products. It involves educating village governments and their environmental committees on the importance of forests but it also requires funds to prepare land use plans, to survey the forestland and for individual village governments to prepare by-laws that would guide the management of the forests,” explains Massangya.

He says that village governments also undergo training in preparing sustainable harvesting plans so that they may continue to collect revenue for many years to come. “It becomes their forests and they decide what to sell and where to sell; and they are responsible for all the 100 percent of the revenue that they collect,” he adds.

In the case of Nahanga and eight other villages, the initial cost of establishing their forest, education and other requirements came from the district council. “But the programme also got substantial support from the Finnish government. Today the village gets money from sale of logs, timber and building poles and they retain 95 percent of the revenue. It was their decision that they give five percent of the revenue to Ruangwa District Council,” says the DFO.

Learning from others and replicating the story of success.

Mchichiri village in Ruangwa district has a different story to tell. While other villages that are benefitting from forests began with financial assistance from the District Council, the Finnish Government or funding from TASAF, the village established their forest and went through all the procedures until they attained ownership through their own resources.

“We were motivated by Nahanga village. We found that our neighbours were getting a lot of money from their forest while we were getting almost nothing from ours,” explains Charles Joseph Sumura, the acting village executive officer.

He says that while the neighbouring village was making millions of shillings from their forest, Mchichiri could hardly make 100,000/- from their degraded forest. With money contributed by villagers and what was available in the village’s bank account, Mchiriri government set out to survey their village forest and followed the necessary procedures before they could legally own the village forest.

They also borrowed some money from Nahanga village in order to meet some of the costs. The district council chipped in with education and awareness raising campaigns as well as technical support.

“Our forest has not started breeding tractors yet but we have managed to complete construction of the village office building and paid all the money we had borrowed from our neighbours,” explains Sumura. “If we were to wait for the district council or financial support the government of Finland or from TASAF it would take us years to reach where we are today,” he adds.

According to Sumura, other villages should take their example and establish their own forests so that they can take responsibility for their own development instead of waiting for funds from the district council.

Districts have over 100 villages to attend to and in many cases it doesn’t have sufficient staff to reach all the villages. This calls for some villages to learn from their counterparts who made progress in managing their forest resources and subsequent revenue that they collect from sale of forest products.

In this way, a success story in one village can be replicated in another without having to spend substantial amounts from the district council.

Timber trade: dubious change in rules of the game irk traders

Danford Roman Kanani will live to remember December 1, 2012; that was the day when his life changed from an “accomplished” trader in timber and other forest products conducting business in Masasi, Mtwara and Dar es Salaam to a person who lives on alms.

For seven years before Kanani was involved in cross-border timber trade importing timber from Mozambique through the Mtambaswala border post in Mtwara region. However, the curtain was drawn against him when his huge consignment of timber was confiscated at the border post and this happened after he had paid all the required taxes. Until now, circumstances surrounding his case are not clear not only to him but to other timber traders as well.

“Authorities confiscated 2571 pieces of timber which I had legally imported from Mozambique and when I had paid all the required taxes and duties. I have since not been able to conduct any business because I feel I have been unfairly treated by some individuals who ostensibly claimed to be implementing the law,” he said in an interview recently.

For three years now, Kanani has been attending court sessions after he was charged with fraud, possessing illegal timber and conducting business using fake documents.

According to the businessman, he was not the only one importing timber from Mozambique at that time. While the procedure was followed smoothly, the rules were changed and this required the government to make a thorough scrutiny of all forest products that had been imported into the country but the owners were yet to clear their consignments from the customs premises at Mtambaswala.

“On completion of the exercise, we were all required to pay an additional 5,000/- for each piece of timber. Some of colleagues paid the extra cost for which no receipts were provided. I refused to pay because it was not within the schedule of taxes and levies that we were required to pay. The fact that no receipts were issued meant that the money would not go into government coffers,” he explained.

Almost four years down the road, Kanani still laments the secrecy that shrouds the cross-border trade in timber and other forest products between Mozambique and Tanzania. The lack of transparency that has engulfed the trade in forest products locally, he says, smacks of corruption and oppresses traders.

“The process to import goods from neighbouring countries is not good because it does not spell out clearly what traders are required to do. Everyone does what they think is right and the officials at the border post have the jurisdiction to declare who is right and who is wrong. Under the process some traders get their goods cleared without a hitch while others have to pass various bottlenecks. Why should there be such preferential treatment?” he challenged.

Mashaka Juma Waziri is one of the traders in forest goods who operate in Masasi town but frequently imports timber from Mozambique. He argues that traders are not happy with the current process where one has to pay many taxes to different authorities. “We see conflicting authority between Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) and the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS). We know, for example, that TRA is the right organ to collect taxes but we are often also required to pay levies to TFS. There is no

clear explanation given to us regarding the role of TFS,” he said, adding that the agency promotes illegal timber trade as it legalizes contraband consignments of timber in the forests.

The alleged power struggle between TRA and TFS is affecting timber business, with traders often succumbing to pressure from TFS. This has fueled illegal logging and subsequent illegal timber trade.

Dickson Daniel Kambuga, a timber trader at Ikwiriri in Rufiji District of Coast Region says that government through TFS often sets up rules and procedures of conducting business without seek the views and opinions of traders. This has not only fueled illegal trade but has forced traders to evade some of the taxes so that they can make some profit in the business.

“A simple example is how one pays for a whole tree but ends up using only 40 percent of it for business. We pay for a whole tree, 100 percent, from which we are supposed to make timber but we come out of the forest with only 70 percent of the tree, a log from which timber would be made. In the process to make timber, 40 percent of the 70 percent is lost and eventually we get only 30 percent of the tree from which to make business. Under the circumstances, traders and dealers are losers because we make no profit from the business,” he explained.

He argued that the prices of fresh logs and the amount of timber one can get from a log are set by TFS without the participation of the traders. Likewise the amount of furniture one can produce from particular pieces of timber is also set by TFS and their estimates always differ from actual situations on the ground.

Traders think the fact that TFS unilaterally sets procedures to acquire raw materials and the price of such raw materials without taking onboard their views and opinions makes trade in forest products difficult and forces them to engage in illegal trade and tax evasion.

Kambuga also decried the number of checkpoints that they have to pass through when transporting timber from the southern regions to Dar es Salaam. Some of the checkpoints are not official but if they bypass them they are charged 800,000/-

There is also a charge of five percent in the price of the tree felled for making timber. While the money is meant for tree planting to maintain forests, district councils have never planted new trees and traders think that the money does not go into government coffers.

Angry youths and a blue lorry that runs on timber

Youths at Mbangara village in Masasi District are not happy with the way their district council is managing the Mbangara forest.

The locals are not allowed to harvest the forest as it is still under conservation but illegal harvesting is rampant and district officials accused of collaborating with the criminals.

A team of journalists went deep inside the forest where they saw a logger’s camp that was temporary abandoned. Whoever had set the camp would certainly come back; there were stacks of timber and a

quick count took us to over 1,000 pieces. There were also pairs of tattered overalls which could still be put to good use by illegal loggers.

“This is all illegal stuff but you can see that all pieces of timber have been stamped, they have been legalized. We are not sure who keeps the stamp but it shuttles between the district forest office and the Tanzania Forest Services. What we do not know is who came to use the stamp here, ” explained Kimwaga, a native youth who took the team of journalists to the forest.

It emerged that while the district council had banned harvesting any products from the forest, illegal logging was going on allegedly with the collusion of some officials.

“Villagers are frustrated because their efforts to protect the forest have come to naught. They report the criminals to the authorities but no action is taken against the culprits. Informers are betrayed by officials and this has endangered our lives,” Kimwaga said.

So officially no harvesting is being done in Mbangara forest but the situation on the ground shows that illegal harvesting is rampant and it goes on with the blessing of district council officials.

“That is why we are angry,” said Hamis Rashid. “We feel cheated by the district council. This is a resource that should benefit locals and for the youth, allowing legal harvesting would enable us to get income and reduce poverty in our families. But now only a few people benefit from the resources. This is not fair.”

Salum Shomari later joined us in the forest. He was the acting ward executive officer for Mbagara ward. He told the group of journalists that communities were frustrated by the way then district council was mismanaging the forest particularly by failing to stop illegal harvesting. He explained that the some of the youth had become impatient and were collaborating with illegal loggers.

“Our poverty is to a great extent due to weakness in the district council leadership. Officials are bent on making money from the forest and not improving the lives of communities around the forest by empowering them to manage this resource through participatory forest management programmes,” explained Shomari.

As we headed to town, we discussed several issues. One which was discussed at length was the illegal harvesting that was going on in the forest when officials had banned such activities. Didn't the district forest officer, for example, know what was going on? And who had stamped the timber in the forest when officials knew that it was harvested illegally?

We had an audience with the Deputy Manager for Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS), Southern Zone, Boazi Sanga. Among other things he told the journalists that the agency was responsible for instituting sustainable harvesting of forests and cited illegal harvesting as one of the major problems the agency has to deal with.

“It is also our duty to see that communities benefit from forest resources because they are the ones who conserve and protect them. In collaboration with district councils we encourage villages to

participate in managing forests through programmes such as Participatory Forest Management Programmes,” he said.

There are known habitual offenders who harvest timber illegally. The journalists wanted to know what TFS does with such people. “They pay fines and we confiscate the goods. But they would still go back to do the same things and we would arrest them and they would again pay fines again. The way out would be to take these people to court but court cases are cumbersome,” he explained.

Outside the TFS offices stood a blue lorry loaded with timber. It was an illegal consignment that had been confiscated by the authorities. A source familiar with TFS operations who was at the office premises told the journalists that the owner of the lorry was a habitual offender. “If you come here tomorrow afternoon you will not find the lorry because the owner would have paid the fine and also bought the timber through an auction in which only he and a TFS official participate,” he explained.

“He would go back and harvest timber illegally and he would be caught again by TFS. He will then pay the fine and buy the timber in an auction. This goes on and on and people wonder why the agency is conducting business in that manner.”

New awakening among forest communities

We had mangoes for lunch; ripe, succulent and fresh from the trees. It was if the woman knew that we would pass by and we would need something to eat after a long day in the village.

But the mangoes were not for free although we paid so little money that we felt we were doing injustice to the seller. And in this village, a few kilometers from Soga in coast region, mangoes were plenty.

“How much is this?” asked Patrick. “And what about these small ones, how much are they?” The big ones sold at 100/- each while the small ones went for 100/- per group of five.

I don’t remember how many mangoes each of us bought but I know each of us ate one big mango and several small ones before we left the place. We also took some with us.

I also don’t remember if we washed the mangoes before we ate them; the woman didn’t serve any water but I think we had some bottled water that we could afford to “waste” as we would soon be in Dar es Salaam city where water (bottled water, I mean) is plenty.

“That was stealing....outright theft!” said Patrick soon after we had left the woman who had sold us mangoes. “She can’t sell them so cheaply; we should have offered more money,” he insisted, although I could not detect some seriousness in his voice.

“I think the price she offered was right because she has not invested anything in order to get them,” I said. “The mango trees have been there for decades; she doesn’t weed them or do anything to improve their productivity. She just waits for the season, and when they are ripe and fall to the ground, she picks them and sells them to passers-by like us. In fact she should be giving them for free,” I added.

Patrick was in his second big mango after having cleared several small ones. “Yes,” he paused to take a bite,” but it is still not fair. Next time I come this way during the season I will offer more money to whoever will sell us some mangoes,” he said.

We were a bit better now. Our stomachs were not rumbling anymore and a full stomach makes a person more eloquent.

The two of us had spent almost half the day in Soga village, discussing with various people conservation of forests, what they have gained so far and what challenges they face in their efforts to conserve and benefit from forests. We also visited some places to see what changes are taking place on the ground.

Soga is like an epicenter of forest conservation which influences activities in five other villages adjacent to Ruvu Kusini forest. The youth in the village have mobilized their counterparts in other villages to form a joint force to conserve the forest. They have also inspired them to conserve and protect their own village land forest reserves.

The last time I visited Soga three years ago, I had also a chance to visit Mpiji, Kipangege and Malangalanga where community participation in forest conservation was lacking.

Kipangege had started conserving its village land forest reserve but some of the youth were wary of their leaders. Word had been going around that leaders had reached an agreement with a rich Tanzanian of Asian origin from Dar es Salaam who wanted part of the village land including the forest in order to establish a zoo. The youth did not like the idea.

“No, the zoo is not there. The youth did not agree with the idea and instead they directed their efforts to conserve the forest because they know what they are going to get from their efforts. No one conducts consumptive activities in the forest and the youth mount patrols every day to make sure that there are no trespassers,” says Zaituni Mohamed, a member of the village environment committee, a position she has held since 2012.

Maybe the biggest change, according to Zaituni is that now women are in the frontline when it comes to protecting the village forest. “We also take part in patrols,” she says.

Further afield there is Ruvu Kusini forest which residents of Kipangege and other villagers have combined their efforts to protect. The management programme for the forest is now in place and the communities are now consulting the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS), Eastern Zone on, how best to implement the programme that would see villagers benefiting from their efforts.

“We have managed to stop almost all illegal harvesting activities in the forest. It belongs to none of the six villages in particular; it is public property you would say. But this is a natural resource that should benefit the locals, that is why we decided to conserve and protect it,” she says, adding that their efforts would soon bear fruits now that the management programme is in place.

Subira Juma of Soga village is a member of the village environment committee and leader of a group comprising youths from Soga, Mpiji, Kipangege, Boko Mnemela, Malangalanga and Kibwemwenda.

Besides spearheading conservation of forests in their own villages, the youth jointly work to conserve and protect Ruvu Kusini forest and liaise with TFS officials to enable communities to benefit from conservation.

Speaking about changes that have taken place among communities regarding conservation of forests, Juma says that people have become more aware of the need to conserve the natural environment now than they were four years ago. This is not only evidenced by patrols they conduct but also by the hunger they have shown for information and education of conserving the environment in general.

“Villagers now demand information from TFS, district natural resources office and the district forest office. They want up-to-date information on how best they can conserve their forests and gain sustainable benefits,” he says.

The high awareness among villagers has also made village government leaders to sit up because people are now able to question their leaders not only about environment issues but also on health, finance and development projects.

“Formerly village assemblies would take just about three hours but nowadays they may take the whole day. Now issues of forests and land take centre-stage during the assemblies and people want answers from their leaders,” says Juma, adding that for this reason, village government leaders have learned to become transparent in their activities.

The campaign for tree planting drive has also reached another level. While four years ago tree seedlings would be left to rot at the village government offices, now people scramble for seedlings that they plant on their compounds and on their farms.

Primary and secondary schools have also taken tree planting seriously with each school making sure that the trees grow. “Give us another year and villages here will be different,” says Tatu Iddi, the Soga Village Executive Officer.

According to the officer, one of the drivers of the changes is the improved relationship between village governments and TFS. For the past one year, village environment committees have been working closely with TFS officials in areas of raising awareness among communities on conservation of forests.

“Now many people know their obligations in conserving forests. They also know the benefits. That is why there is pressure from villagers for TFS to work with village governments in order to implement forest management plans. Without these we cannot embark on sustainable harvesting of forests when they are due,” she explains.

As we drove to Kongowe on our way back to Dar we could see huge stumps a few meters on either side of the road. These told a story that there used to be trees; huge trees in the area; but they had all been felled to feed the timber and charcoal market in Dar es Salaam. Whoever did it never thought of sustaining the trade, otherwise they would have planted others to replace what they had cut.

“I think we should come back here next year, probably around this time of the year again,” said Patrick

“Why? Not for the mangoes I think!” I teased him

“No, Kipangenge and Soga have village land forests. We should come to find out how they manage them and the subsequent legal trade in forest products,” he said.

Lack of information frustrates community conservation efforts

Subira Juma was born in Soga and has grown up in this village in Kibaha district of coast region. He is an avid environmentalist, mobilising the youth in in five other villages –Mpiji, Kipangege, Boko Mnemela, Malangalanga and Kibwemwenda, to conserve and protect forests.

They have also teamed up to conserve and protect Ruvu Kusini forest which was until recently home to illegal harvesting of its products with teams of environmental criminals coming from as far as Kigoma in the western part of the country.

The youth from the villages have nothing significant to show or tell anyone who visits one of the villages but they boast of conserving the Ruvu Kusini forest even now when there is neither a district nor national programme to conserve and protect it.

“There are a few cases of illegal harvesting of the forest but we have driven off all the gangs from upcountry that used to camp inside the forest to make charcoal, saw timber or cut building poles. Now we get 20 percent of all the fines imposed on people who are caught with illegally harvested timber or other forest products,” explains Juma, adding the percentage of revenue is merely a verbal agreement between the village and the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS).

He says that there is need to review the rates so that the village retains 32 percent of the revenue and TFS takes the rest and that such agreement should be written.

There have been allegations that the agreement has remained verbal because there were no guidelines on joint forest management which would also stipulate who gets what from impounded forest products from Ruvu Kusini forest between villages and TFS.

It has come to light, however, that the guidelines have been in place since 2013 and by December 2015, the same had been translated into Kiswahili for easy understanding of village governments, village natural resources committees and other stakeholders in the forestry sector.

Until January this year, the guidelines had remained unknown to village governments and TFS had not taken any measures to enlighten villages on the procedures.

“Lack of information has stalled efforts to conserve the forest among communities. If people knew about the joint forest management guidelines and what benefits they stand to gain from conserving the forest, then their morale would be high and the forest would be better conserved and protected. Moreover, the current village natural resource committee needs some training because all its members are new. They need a bit of education in order to perform well and TFS is not coming to rescue the situation,” explains Juma.

There is also the issue of part-time employment which TFS had promised communities. From time to time, TFS provides opportunities for part time employment such as planting trees, weeding or making fire breaks around some sections of the forest. These jobs were to be given to members of villages adjacent the forest but there are allegations that employment is done unfairly.

“There are locals who still make charcoal; they do it not for the love of the job because charcoal making is a tough activity. It hurts a lot. But they have to do it for lack of a better alternative. If TFS had kept their word about providing employment from time to time, few people would engage in charcoal making,” explains Zaina Ramadhan, a member of Soga environment committee.

The gap was further revealed when Ms. Ramadhan alleged that there is little flow of information from decision makers and government officials to communities who conserve and protect forests. As a result the latter do not have current information regarding issues related to forest resources.

“Villagers demand information but government officials are slow to act and provide up-to-date information. This gap has slowed down the conservation of forests,” she says.

Fadhil Hassan Lyombo is Soga village chairman. Speaking about conservation of Ruvu Kusini forest he explains that until 2013, it was heavily degrade because people from up country as especially from Iringa and Kigoma, had settled right inside the forest and engaged in massive charcoal making, among other activities. “This deprived locals of benefits from the forest. So we decided to drive them away. Now there are a few people from the community who make charcoal on a small scale in order to earn a living,” he says, adding that village governments are working with TFS to find ways of initiating other income generating activities that would reduce pressure on the forest.

Soga and Kipangege villages have their own village land forest reserves but they are not ready for harvesting. While conservation is going on, village governments have started the process to engage in participatory forest management programme so that when their forest are ready for harvesting they should be in a position to engage in sustainable trade in forest products.

“The youth are in the forefront when it comes to conserving and protect the village land forest reserves so they look forward to benefiting from their efforts when the harvesting plans are in place and the forests are ready for harvest,” says Juma Ali, member of Soga village environment committee.

Speaking on the situation of forests in Kibaha districts, TFS Assistant Zonal Manager, Eastern Zone, Bernadetha G. Kadala, says that the management plan for Ruvu Kusini forest is ready and the guidelines on the procedure to undertake participatory forest management are also in place. “But we have not started implementing them,” she says. “We will meet with village government leaders, environment committees and village councils of communities adjacent the forest to explain the guidelines. This should make them understand their responsibilities and obligations as well as their rights and benefits when conserving forests.”

She explains that officially no harvesting was going on in Ruvu Kusini forest although illegal logging and other activities are taking place. “Communities are doing a good job to protect the forest and most of the products are confiscated and their owners punished according to the law,” she says.



Land use plans could protect forests, provide benefits

Communities that have village land forest reserves might face some challenges in protecting their forests but with clear boundaries and defined land use plans, the task is easier than in areas where villages don't have land use plans.

“Communities that have no land use plans and without village land forest reserves face a serious problem in protecting their resources because they have no official claim to the resources and invaders have a ready excuse to engage in illegal harvesting of resources,” said Mwalami Kwangaya of Ikwiriri in Rufiji district in a recent interview.

He explained that where villages have land use plans and village land forest reserves, patrols can be easily conducted because the boundaries are known. Besides, invaders both from within the villages and beyond its borders are discouraged from illegal harvesting of forest resources because if they are caught they will be unable to offer any reasonable excuse.

“But it is not enough to have land use plans and village land forest reserves; villages must also have forest harvesting plans in order to use the resources sustainably. Without such a plan it is very likely that the village may fail to sustain the benefits they get from their forest reserve,” stressed Kwangaya.

Speaking about the need to have land use plans as a safeguard against invasion of village land forest reserves, Ruangwa District Forest Officer Solomon Massangya said that while it was easy to protect forests, land use plans also help to manage other resources in the village. “Since land use plans are known to all villagers, the responsibility to protect natural resources is thus shared among members of the village. A well protected village land forest reserve would yield more benefits to the villagers,” he said.

He explained that existing land use plans unite villagers in dealing with issues like bushfires and illegal harvesting of resources.

“Unless it is done in collaboration with village government officials and village environment committees, illegal harvesting can be controlled where there are land use plans. The important thing here is that the plans must be observed and adhered too by all villagers,” he said.

Seleman Rashid, the chairman of the environment committee for Nanjilinji A village says that the village has land use plans which are known to all members of the village. “The village land forest reserve, Nambubila has well-known boundaries so neighbours very well when they invade. It is also easy for us to conduct patrols because we know the boundaries,” he said, adding that as other land use needs of the village have been defined through land use plans, conflicts have been reduced

Tree Planting Fund raises questions from traders

Dickson Kambuga has been trading in forest products for about a decade. Sometimes he buys timber from registered dealers but in most cases he gets a license to buy trees and employ people to saw timber which he sells to various customers.

While many traders in forest products are not comfortable with the numerous taxes and levies imposed by the government, Kambuga is particularly disappointed by the tree planting tax.

“You see, the system in place is that for every tree one buys in order to process timber, five percent of the money should finance tree planting in the same area so as to address forest degradation and sustain business. I have never seen a tree planted in the forest where people make timber, so where does the money go?” he wondered.

He explained that no trader in forest goods is against the arrangement. “But we want to see that all the money collected is spent for the intended purpose. Otherwise we think this is a system which has been hatched to make money for individuals,” he stresses.

According to the system set by Tanzania Forest Services Authority (TFS), five per cent of money paid by a trader who buys a tree either for use as round logs or for making timber is collected and spent on planting new trees, taking care of them and protecting forests so as to sustain business and conserve

the environment. Regulations stipulate that TFS would issue quarterly reports giving details of how much money has been collected, and how much has been spent for what purpose.

“We have never been given any report. Whoever collects the money seems to have spent it on something else; that is why they have failed to account for it,” said Mwalami Kwangaya who works with a community conservation organization based in Rufiji.

He explained that when people do not get reports on how money has been spent, they become suspicious of people behind the system. “This also drives trade to engage in illegal trade because they cannot conduct legal business for the benefit of individuals,” he said. “TFS and the district council owe us an explanation about the money.”

While authorities collect money from communities allegedly for maintaining forests, the same have continued to be degraded as on the other hand, illegal harvesting continues unchecked. Cumbersome procedures of obtaining permits to get trees from forests and getting business licenses have fueled illegal business in forest products.

Under the circumstances, communities don’t realise any benefits from forest resources and have become frustrated. They no longer take part in conserving and protecting forest around them because they know they will never get a just return for their efforts.

Stakeholders have suggested that the district forest office and TFS should work transparently with village councils to ensure that communities benefit from natural resources.

“The most important thing here is that there must be a fair distribution of benefits from forest resources,” stressed Kwangaya.