

Collaborative Forest Management or Community Forest Management: The Case of Mpanga Forest Reserve, Uganda ¹

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Uganda, September 2002

Introduction

Forest management has been a difficult task for most governments in Africa, more so in areas where land tenure systems are ill defined. This has resulted to the essence of developing enabling institutional environments to arrest the cropping problems of natural resource management. When colonization caught up with most African states, such lands that were entrusted to kingdoms and chiefdoms ceased to exist in a number of areas. The new colonial governments set up management systems that mainly favored the white man, denying the real owner of the land, the African access to use some of the resources. After the advent of colonialism, the new African-led governments maintained similar policies as were installed by the former regime. Hence the government inherited problems that were soon to be the demise of conservation cycles. Such was the case where communal land was put under the trusteeship of the government without minding or solving the problem of resource use. This many a times has caused unending conflict between the government and local people. With the governments controlling all forested lands, corruption comes in, while management using local leadership systems could have contained this, as was the case in pre-colonial times.

The case of Mpanga forest follows a similar pattern. The case. Although it does not describe a definite process of its management could be used to analyze how trends in leadership and governance can affect the use of communal resources. The case further suggests how Mpanga could be managed sustainably.

History of Mpanga Forest

Mpanga forest is located in Central Uganda in what was formally the Buganda Kingdom. The forest is a living remnant of the Pleistocene period (15,000 years ago) when great climatic changes occurred throughout the world. Increased rainfall in Africa at that time caused the great forests of West and Central Africa to expand eastwards to cover what is now Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and Congo. By around 10,000 years ago, the climate became drier again and the forests shrank to what they were 200 to 300 years ago. As human populations increased, parts of those forests were cleared or burnt and slowly replaced by bush and savanna, leaving small islands of what is today called the Guineo-Congolian rainforest which expands from the Congo basin to Kenya. It is at this time that Mpanga was born, although initially it was joined to other small forests in Mpigi district like Kyansozi, Lwamuda and Navugulu. The forest covers approximately 453 hectares.

¹ This paper was written with support from Friends of Mpigi Forests Conservation and Development Organization (FOMAF)- Mpigi, Uganda and the East African Ecotourism Development and Conservation Consultants (ECOCONSULT)- Nairobi, Kenya. Other support came from VSO-Uganda and the Forestry Department- Uganda. The author can be contacted on P.O. Box 169, Mpigi, Uganda. Tel 077 580935 or email mpanga@avu.org. The comments in the article do not represent the feelings of the Forestry Department, but the author's field assessment.

Mpanga occupies the lower slopes of Nakyetema valley, in which a small permanent stream flows westward into Nabukongole swamp, which drains into Lake Victoria. Granitoid gneisses and schists of the Buganda series underlie the forest.

Mpanga under the management of the Kabaka and Fumbe clan

Before 1932, Mpanga was land belonging to the Kingdom of Buganda. Research shows that three Kabaka's of Buganda had special interest in the forest, and they established special mechanisms to ensure the forest was not encroached. Kabaka Mutesa I, Mutesa II and Muwanga all some interest in the forest, and its during this time that some nearby hills and other small forests were also declared the Kabaka's land to enable people utilize them. This gave Mpanga reprieve from utilization. Further, Mpanga forest was placed under management of the Fumbe clan, who were ordered to make it a burial ground. Questionnaires conducted around reveal that with the forest being a burial site, and under management of the clan surrounding the forest (Fumbe) use rights were controlled. The Baganda people give due respect to burial grounds, and people associated the forest with spirits. It was claimed that if one cut trees from the forest, evil spirits would attack relatives causing ailments that no medicine man could treat. The forest was therefore sacred and no destruction was evident. Elders of the Fumbe clan established utilization quotas. Hunting for small mammals in the forest was only allowed under authority from the elders, while each family was allowed to harvest one (*Polyscias fulva*), setala tree for drum making per half year. No cutting of standing trees for firewood was allowed. Women were allowed to collect firewood and mushrooms for food, and reeds for making mats for their houses. The clan medicine men were allowed to extract a few herbs from the forest. Elders monitored what was removed from the forest and anyone not obeying set quotas paid a fine.

The clan management system enabled the forest to remain intact, and as the crown government came in to manage the forest in 1932, Mpanga was very intact, with high rate o biodiversity. At the time species of primates that are no longer found in the forest, some endangered were abundant in the forest.

Mpanga after 1932

In 1932, the colonial government gazetted the forest as crown land. The Fumbe clan was then asked to stop management of the forest. Burying of the dead in the forest ceased and the clan was allocated an alternative place for a cemetery, still under use today. After the clan was ordered out of the forest, and control of the forest placed under the central government, various interested people came up, each wanting a piece of the resource. Some of the indigenous trees in the forest soon became target for harvesting or poaching. Resource use control that was practiced by the clan ceased. The government allowed all local people to have access to the forest, although only collection of dead wood, mushrooms, small mammal hunting, herbs and building sticks. Lack of control of the resource off take, and the fact that the forest guard was from the locality enabled fast decline in forest resources. Soon, poaching took a great toll on mammals such as Black and White colobus, the Baboon, De Brazzas and the Vervet, all of which no longer exist in Mpanga. Even the Uganda Red Colobus listed in the IUCN Red Data Book, as Vulnerable was a common species in the forest before 1960. The local people also heavily hunted the Wild Pig and Deer for beef.

In 1951, the government declared the forest protected for scientific research. Research plots were established in the forest, and experiments on girdling, frill poisoning, tree

increment in linear plots and natural regeneration initiated. With conversion of the forest into a research area, local people were totally not allowed to harvest anything unless dry wood. The government also allowed water collection from the protected natural streams, reeds and papyrus, raffia palm, Bisalu grass and mudfish. Hunting in the forest was prohibited, as well as sand and clay harvesting, cutting of building poles and medicinal herbs. Charcoal burning and pit sawing became a punishable offence.

Threats to the forest doubled for the community now turned to stealing what they felt was theirs but which they had been denied. Harvesting of tree species such as *Polyscias fulva*, *Erythrina excelsa*, *Antiaris toxicaria*, and *Ficus mucoso*, locally used for drum making became a daily activity, and soon drum making businesses started thriving around Mpigi and in Kampala. Young men started felling trees at night and ferrying them to their nearby farms for charcoal burning, or selling them by the roadside as firewood to tracks from the nearby Kampala city. The forestry departments reciprocated by arresting owners of drum flames found near the forest, or owners of charcoal heaps. Unexplained charcoal in trucks was also confiscated. This created hatred between forest department personnel and local people. Some claim that whenever their drum flames or charcoal was confiscated they try to avenge by cutting down more trees.

In 1997, an ecotourism site was opened at Mpanga, which the forestry department hoped could provide some local people with revenue. Some local people got employment within the site, and the department promised 15% of the revenue collection to be remitted to the local people for own projects. An ecotourism committee comprising of representatives from all surrounding villages was to be set up to ease communication problem between the department and the people. The people became optimistic that they could get some money from the department since the ecotourism site had started generating revenue from the *Bazungu*. The forestry department however never honored its pledge of the 15% and villagers became restless. As all this was happening, the community continued harvesting what they could from the forest, either by stealing or conniving with the forest guards who were also poorly remunerated.

In the same year 1997, the forestry department took a decision to engage in collaborative forest management with communities living around Mpanga forest reserve. This was in a way to try to win the confidence of the people, make them believe the forest resource belongs to them, although under the management of the central government. Promises about sharing of revenue and use quotas soon made the community stop the rampant clearance of the forest. A team began negotiations with local people, and there was excitement everywhere. The local people thought that they could now arrive at an agreement on forest resource utilization, and arrests could now cease. They thought they could at last benefit from Mpanga forest, a resource in their midst.

After less than a year of negotiations, the process stalled. Resource use quotas were not being introduced. The promised 15% was never remitted to them. Only a few of their people were employed in the reserve or ecotourism site. The people felt cheated. Soon, illegal harvesting took a new twist, and everyone wanted a share of the forest, without bothering about the law. Even farmers were not left out. Small farms were established within the forest, and encroachment was evident everywhere. The people started crying out revenge, and started destroying the department's property in the forest. Angry locals uprooted tourist way markers and directional signs in the forest, and other just cut trees for the sake of it.

In 2002, the forestry department tried to revive the collaborative forest management process again. While some community members welcome it, there are those who are totally opposed to it. Some argue that Mpanga forest management should be left to the local councils or forest committees.

Community management or Collaboration?

Although the forestry department wants to manage the forest, through collaborative forest management, local capacity need not be assumed. The community recognizes the fact they have lived with the forest and depended on it for decades. They have used their indigenous knowledge to sustainably utilize the forest products and ensured the resources are protected. They argue that their traditional forest management strategies should be incorporated into conventional forest management, and be involved in decision making as regards Mpanga forest. The people prefer the forest becoming communal land, and a management committee put in place comprising all the villages around it. In that way resource use could be controlled. The people argue that with government management, corruption has taken a high toll on the forest. They claim most of the poaching is done by non-locals who are issued with letters by the forestry department permitting harvesting, while local people are denied the chance.

CFM has worked very well in other areas where locals have been involved wholly. In Tanzania, Kipumbwi is a major fishing village in Pangani district of about 130 households, divided in four sub villages. A collaborative management plan for the management of the Msangasi Mangrove Reserve was put in place, which defines what kind of uses and the procedure of utilization. The plan states that forest users have exclusive rights to forest products made available through the management plan. The forest users are accountable to the village government. The central government provides advice for management only by demand. Villagers requiring building material for domestic use require written permission from their respective village sub-committee. The user is shown the area to utilize and is supervised by a member of the committee. The committee also controls commercial utilization of the mangrove used in boat building. Protection of the mangrove forest is the responsibility of every villager, and two persons accompany a member of the committee on forest patrols. This has worked very well, and could work elsewhere.

Before February 1995 Mgori forest Reserve was disappearing. After Community-based management was initiated where an agreement between the central government's forestry division, Singida District Council and the adjoining five villages were reached, things turned round. By 1999 the forest was managed as Village Land Forest Reserve, each village recognized as the common hold owner of its respective reserve. Although the district council has one supporting field officer responsible for the forest, the local people do all management. The villages recruited 100 forest guards from within themselves. Illegal harvesting, clearing for millet production, fires totally stopped and illegal hunting were reasonably contained. Dividing the forest into Village Forest Management areas, each demarcated and guarded by youth worked out the miracle. The boundaries were perceived as extensions of each village. The government spends totally nothing in the management of the reserve. Today the forest is in its initial state and all the animals have returned. It's becoming a good tourist attraction, although this has not been developed totally.

How to contain the Mpanga problem

Both community-based management and collaborative forest management could work in ensuring Mpanga forest is conserved. For degradation of Mpanga to be checked, the forestry department needs to heed some of the calls of the locals. There's a need to involve local stakeholders in decision-making and policy formulation for Mpanga. There is need to promote conservation of the forest through sustainable harvesting of the products and reforestation, and promotion of activities that reduce the pressure off the forest like sericulture, bee keeping, butterfly farming, development of fodder banks, farm forestry and bio-intensive agriculture. The department should facilitate capacity building of forest users in technical knowledge base in relevant fields such as species enrichment and management regimes.

Conclusion

Much effort should be taken to deal with the underlying causes of deforestation at Mpanga. Issues of community involvement should be addressed the sooner, rest the forest is totally wiped out. A leaf could be followed from Tanzania's Msangasi Mangrove Reserve or Mgori Forest Reserve.

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