

# **Community Natural Resource Management for Sustainable Livelihoods**

**By:**

**Eileen Omosa**

**Forest Action Network**

**P.O Box 53626**

**00200 City Square, Nairobi - KENYA**

[eomosa@fanworld.org](mailto:eomosa@fanworld.org)

[eomosa@tropicalgroup.com](mailto:eomosa@tropicalgroup.com)

The paper focuses on one of the activities of Forest Action Network focusing on community natural resource management for sustainable livelihoods.

## **Forest Action Network.**

The Forest Action Network (FAN) works for a prosperous and just society, which manages its natural resources sustainably. The organization's long-term objective is to provide an enabling environment for collaborative management of natural resources. FAN facilitates stakeholders in the Eastern Africa region to participate in the sustainable management of their natural resources and to influence policy especially where it relates to forests and watersheds. This is done through increased institutional strengthening and capacity building, and increased information gathering and exchange to create awareness at the local, national and international levels.

To achieve the objectives, FAN works in collaboration with NGOs, relevant government departments, community based organizations, training and research institutions, inter governmental organizations, the private sector, the media, international development agencies, and interested individuals.

## **Status of NRM Sector in Kenya.**

Natural resources in Kenya are managed under different statutes. The forests are gazetted and under government management, unless found on private land. Land in Kenya is owned as either private or trust land or state land. The government is empowered by the Water Act to act as the custodian of the water resources in the

country. As a result, all ownership and control of water is vested in government, subject to any user rights that may be granted or vested under common law.

Each of the various types of resource management has been faced by challenges that have impacted on the status of the resources. The challenges are in terms of ownership, control and access of the resources.

Kenya's forest cover is critical with forests making up only 1.7% of the total land area (UNEP). Yet this minimal cover holds 50% of the country's tree species, 40% of the larger mammals and 30% of its bird species. The main forest ecosystems in Kenya include moist highland forest, dry forest, tropical rain forest, coastal forest and riverine and mangrove forests. Apart from the flora and fauna in forests; local communities living adjacent to most forests depend on these forests for the provision of basic needs like wood, fuelwood, and other non-timber forest products so that forests contribute up to 95% of the total rural domestic energy.

Forests play many roles such as the protection of soil, water catchments and regulation of river flow. Conservation of valuable gene pool of flora and fauna. Supply of fuelwood for the national energy requirement. Sequestering carbon dioxide and enhancing scenic beauty. Maintenance of wildlife habitats. Maintenance of ecological integrity and regulating climatic variations; and forest biodiversity as an important source of medicinal herbs, forage for livestock, handcraft and cultural values.

With all the above crucial services that forests offer, forest cover in Kenya is now very minimal. A reduced cover and limited access to communities in search of valuable forest resources implies that there will be conflicts over ownership, access and use.

Community Forestry in Kenya has existed many decades back as this was the main way through which forests were managed in Kenya. During the colonial and postcolonial periods, ownership of forests was under government. This legislation tended to confuse many as most people had for a long time related forests and

other natural resources that impact on their livelihood as being under their ownership and control for access to all.

For over four decades now, the government has been responsible for forest management, with minimal involvement of local communities and other stakeholders. This type of management resulted in forest degradation and destruction through unsustainable exploitation and utilization of the resource by government, timber, and pulp and paper industries; saw millers, other private enterprises and local communities.

Come the 1980s, the government started thinking in line with co-management of the country's forests as one way of conserving and regenerating destroyed ones. Some of the reasons were that the country's population was growing while the resource based continues to dwindle. The government got concerned in that the people were going to invade the forests to satisfy their immediate needs. Hence, the government, in collaboration with other stakeholders, embarked on a process that would see forests managed for overall socio-economic development and at the same time ensure environmental conservation. Hence, discussions on the Kenya Forestry Master Plan and on the National Environment Action Plan (1984). This was aimed at coming up with revised natural resource management policies that would empower people and recognize them as the best managers of natural resources.

The Kenya Forestry Master Plan (KFMP, 1994) that lays emphasis on sustainable forestry development and recognized community involvement in forestry management. The Master Plan recommended for the revision of the Forest Policy and legislation to enable communities and other stakeholders participate in the management of Kenyan forests. The recommendation saw the revision of the Forest Act and Forest Policy have been revised in line with the recommendations of the Master Plan. The Revised Forest Bill provided for community involvement in forest management.

Destruction of forests in Kenya is enhanced by socio-economic, socio-political and policy and legislation issues that are translated into uncontrolled logging,

grazing and forest fires; excisions, urban development and human settlement; and increased demand for firewood.

The above situation, coupled with other conflicting policies and legislation, a growing population and dwindling natural resource base; have contributed to the current natural resource based conflicts in relation to ownership, access and use of water, land, pastures and forest resources. However, there is hope in resource management that supports sustainable livelihoods. The Forest Action Network in her activities hopes to take advantage of the newly revised

1. Environmental Management Coordination Act
2. Revised Forest Policy
3. Revised Forest Act (currently a Bill)
4. Revised Water Bill
5. On-going review of the Constitution of Kenya.

The current situation in Kenya is that there is a concerted effort by the government to introduce new legislation that is supportive of community participation in the management of natural resources. The various stakeholders in natural resource management have to adjust to the new legislation by planning and implementing together with local communities. This situation might not be very acceptable to many as it implies a drastic change in the way they view local communities who live adjacent to the natural resources both in their policies and implementation. Thus, in particular, the Kenya Forestry Master Plan (KFMP) and the new draft bill explicitly offer communities a chance to co-manage selected forests.

The New Forest legislation has moved in a radical direction in assigning roles and responsibilities to communities, NGOs and the private sector in the management of Kenya's Forests. This is a major departure from what has been the norm in Kenya for the past 40 or so years. The proposed new legislation offers opportunities as well as threats. Many stakeholders, including the Forest Department are not sure of what the change portends. As a result, the Forest Action Network set out to organize a series of seminars aimed at assisting the

forest stakeholders to learn from the experience of others and to use the opportunities offered by this new legislation. The discussions were to allay the fears of those who may have doubts about the new legislation or fears of doing what they have all along believed is not possible - co-managing forest resources.

The following is a summary of the areas of challenge:

How best Forest Department can change roles from policing to providing technical support, especially to local communities.

The Formation, management and value of forest user groups and capacity building

Once the right policy is in place and the various stakeholders have defined a process that enables them co-manage the natural resource, for whose benefit?

Collaborative forest management: challenges and opportunities. Kenya's forestry policy evolution and the prospects of power sharing in forest resource management.

## **Community Based Natural Resource Management in Kenya**

### **Situation**

Natural resources in Kenya are on a dwindling trend. As a result, those who are aware of the existing, rules and regulations and economically empowered find themselves accessing the resources at the disadvantage of those from local communities characterized by low levels of literacy, less access to timely and relevant information, and with limited economic and political power.

### **Resources at community level**

1. Wildlife
2. Rivers
3. Papyrus swamp
4. Trees/forests

5. Land
6. Pastures
7. Minerals
8. Water

The Forest Action Network believes in participatory processes. To find out natural resources and their management at local level, FAN, through community based organizations set out to understand available natural resources, their management and challenges. This particular project was supported by the Ford Foundation and set out to identify critical issues that determine success CBNRM; appropriate ways of sharing information and experiences, and possible future activities for better management. The CBOs were facilitate to identify natural resources within their locality, the various uses and users, management systems in place, challenges and way forward. To operationalize the project, FAN worked with CBO in various parts of the country i.e. Ugunja Resource Centre in Nyanza province; Dupoto Development Organization and Mau Welfare organization both in the Rift valley province; Roka in Coast Province, Appropriate Rural Development Organization and Mount Elgon Environmental Management Network both in Western province. The objective of the local level workshops was for the local CBOs to generate information on community natural resources, their management systems and challenges. The information was to guide the organization in future natural resource management activities at the local level.

After more than 12 months of intensive interaction with community based organizations and local communities, we singled out a number of factors that determine the status of natural resource management at the local level as:

### **Factors/challenges that determine success of CBNRM**

- Organization of local communities into legally recognized entities to participate in collaborative management with other stakeholders like government and the private sector.
- The identification and management of natural resource based conflicts in relation to ownership, access and use.

- High poverty levels that force people to over-exploit the natural resources so as to provide food to their families.
- Level of awareness creation through the provision of timely and relevant information on existing natural resources, and policy and legislation on the management of the resource. Rights and responsibilities of various stakeholders; and the opportunities and challenges to be dealt with.
- Level of interference from politicians and the few economically powerful at the expense of the majority.
- Harmonization of relevant and applicable indigenous and modern knowledge for the sustainable management of natural resources.
- Participation of stakeholders at the identification of problems, decision-making on resource management and actual participation in the implementation of community generated action plans.

## **Way forward**

After the discussions and documentation of information at the community level, FAN facilitated the various CBOs to come together and share their findings. The generated information was further used by the CBO to identify future activities that will equip them to better manage and benefit from their natural resources.

Hence:

- Training of trainers on stakeholder analysis and natural resource based conflicts and their management. The trained are to move on and train others at the community level.
- Training and awareness creation on benefit sharing at the individual and community levels.
- Define and use audience relevant information and communication channels to share relevant and timely information.
- Definition of modalities to document, recognize and credit indigenous knowledge. At the same time define modalities to recognize and credit indigenous knowledge.
- Research and documentation of traditional and modern resource use, management and challenges to sustainable community based natural resource use.

- Define and operationalize joint conservation efforts on cross community resources such as forests, watersheds, etc.
- Capacity building of local community members as one way of equipping them to better deal with stakeholders such as government and the private sector.

Activities on some of the above issues are on going. Some of the activities are complimented by on-going projects at FAN. These are advocacy for poverty alleviation; institutional strengthening and capacity building; capacity building on the identification and management of natural resource based conflicts; and preparing stakeholders for participation in the implementation of the revised natural resource management policies in Kenya.

[\[Back\]](#)