

Series 2 – Social Pillar: Environment, Water, Sanitation and Regional Development

Replenish Millions of Kenyan Household's Granaries Through Forest Restoration

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Key Messages

Involve Community Forest Association (CFA) members in decision making over forest resources.

Invest in capacity building of CFA members on leadership, accountability and transparency.

Invest in alternative nature-based income-generating activities to ease financial constraints and enhance forest restoration.

Operationalize the CFA user groups to incentivize community participation in forest conservation.

Context

Deforestation is estimated to have deprived Kenya's economy of Kshs. 5.8 billion (US\$68 million) in 2010 and Kshs. 6.6 billion in 2009, far outstripping the roughly Kshs. 1.3 billion earned from forestry and logging each year (UNEP, 2012). Kenya has a forest cover of 7.4 per cent of its land area, compared to around 12 per cent 50 years ago. The Kenya Forestry Working Group has estimated that Kenya will lose US\$300 million each year through deforestation. Deforestation and Forest Degradation (DFD) results in loss of livelihoods and climate change. In Kenya, about 15 million tons of carbon dioxide is lost annually through DFD and poor forest governance and management.

In Kenya, agriculture feeds both rural and urban populations. The forest ecosystems are core to both the agricultural and food system. Forests provide various ecosystem services which include water, climate regulation, soil erosion control, pest, diseases and frost regulation, key ingredients to foods security of the 47 million Kenyans. Between 2000 and 2010, an estimated 28,427 hectares of forest were lost in key water towers leading to reduced water availability and increased carbon emissions. For instance, low volumes of water and frequent drying of Mara River occasioned by the destruction of the Mau

forest complex has exacerbated the vulnerability of the Mara ecosystem. The degradation of the Mau forest complex has a direct impact on the reduction the tourism, an industry which contributes about 3.7 per cent of GDP (2017). Besides, pastoralists based in the Mara River Basin lost 35 per cent of their livestock due to drought.

Forest degradation has also triggered the scarcity of resources and resulted in conflicts between government and Community Forest Associations (CFAs). Recent conflicts have been witnessed at the Maasai Mau, Cheregani and Mt. Elgon forests. Further, forest destruction precariously exposes women and girls as they walk long distances to fetch fuelwood. About 82 per cent of households use fuelwood for cooking and 1.2 per cent for lighting (KIHBS, 2017). However, Kenya is only able to meet about 70 per cent of this demand through sustainable domestic supply. The annual deficit of 12 million cubic meters is met by formal and informal imports plus unsustainable extraction from natural forests (KIHBS, 2017). The situation can be reversed through forest restoration and meaningful involvement of the CFAs in forest co-management.

Approach and Results

The Forest Conservation and Management Act (2016) provides the basis for a new perspective on forest ecosystems

Image: Mt. Kenya Forest (Magical Kenya)



management for improved forest conditions and livelihoods. Community participation in forest management is paramount in addressing climate change challenges, rehabilitation and restoration of forest resources. Participation of CFA members needs incentives and technical support mostly from the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and external programs. Currently, the CFA members are mostly involved by KFS in providing labour in forest-related activities like shamba system, aftercare of tree seedlings and scouting which are paramount for forest conservation but have minimal tangible benefits to communities and without a clear benefit-sharing mechanism.

Usually, CFAs have lamented exclusion by KFS from decision making over forest resources. Yet the involvement of CFAs in decision making and gainful nature-based income-generating activities, for example, farm forestry, beekeeping, ecotourism are useful means through which CFAs can increase their livelihoods while enhancing the capacity of forest ecosystems to produce goods and services. For instance, meaningful involvement of CFA members can restore key water towers like the Mau Forest Complex whose total economic value (TEV) is Kshs. 110 billion (GoK, 2009). Its TEV can fund the 120 km of the Nairobi- Naivasha SGR line whose total construction cost is estimated at Sh153 billion.

When CFA members are given complete autonomy and devolution of power, CFAs can become viable local institutions for sustaining forests. When managed sustainably forests have the potential to absorb about one-tenth of global carbon emissions. If we halt deforestation and forest degradation and forest restored then we could reduce emissions by 9 gigatons of carbon dioxide per year by 2030 (Miles and Sonwa, 2015)

Moreover, the widely accepted principles of good governance such as accountability, transparency and rule of law, which have been lacking in centralized

forest management regime could be largely present, effective and having a strong influence on CFAs functioning for sustainable management of forest resources.

Therefore, there is a need for stronger efforts to ensure better functioning of the CFAs. That is, for the CFAs to become responsive in forest conservation, further decentralization of decision making and autonomy are believed to be an important step forward here as part of the current problems, especially lack of interest in the CFAs, relates to lack of real decision-making power. This may involve efforts to ensure capacity building of CFAs members and tangible benefits through value addition on forest products.

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term

- There should be a clear benefit-sharing mechanism between the KFS and CFAs, giving communities incentives to participate in forest management and enhance ownership for sustainability
- There is need for capacity building on leadership and good governance among CFAs.
- The Community Forest Association Members should be actively involved in decision making related to forest management and governance.

Medium-Term

- The community forest user groups should be operationalized.
- The KFS and CFAs should restore the degraded forests and water towers, as a pathway to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.
- The government should undertake a total economic valuation of water towers which is currently not known.

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