

1.1 Forest Types and Community-Based Forest Management

Natural forests in Africa range in type from sparse vegetation of desert steppes in the Sahara desert to moist humid tropical rain forests in the heart of the Congo basin. The forests can be classified into several categories including tropical rain forests, tropical moist forests, tropical dry forests, tropical shrubs, tropical mountain forest, sub-tropical humid forests, sub-tropical dry forests, sub-tropical mountain forests and plantations. All of these forest types are vital to the socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual needs of rural African communities whose survival depends on long term existence of these forests. Some classifications insist that a 'forest' requires trees occupying a minimum percentage of total area, to be classified as forest. Although trees may be the largest and most impressive permanent elements of a forest, other products and uses (livestock grazing, wildlife, tourism) may be, in some cases, more important and valuable, or at least must be integral parts of forest management plans. In this regard many forest lands in which Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) is being applied do not necessarily fit into the strict biophysical definition of a forest. In the lexicon of CBFM, any patch of natural vegetation or tree plantation that is of interest to sedentary or seasonal forest users is considered a 'forest'.

Apart from their classification according to vegetation type, forests in Africa are also categorized by their legal status. The highest level of protection is accorded to protected forest areas, where little or no use is allowed to local people. National Forests (*forêts classées* or gazetted forests) are demarcated forests under government control. The degree to which local communities are allowed to use these forest areas varies according to country and the desired management objectives. The remainder of forest areas, which account for the bulk of the continent's forests are generally referred to as state forests, but in reality are loosely controlled by customary arrangements that have no legal status.



Natural forest in Guinea (Photo: FAO)

Legal statutory ownership of forests

According to the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FAO 2010 a), the main forest categories by ownership at global level are;

- Public
- Private
- Community
- Other

Community managed public forests (under management agreements or under joint or collaborative forest management) cover approximately 5% of the public forests whilst forest concessions allowing private companies to exploit forest resources take up 17% of the total.

Public/State forests

According to classification of forests by ownership, nearly 95% of forests in Africa are public-owned forests (83% by governments) whilst nearly 4% are privately owned (FAO, 2010). This is partly because, since colonial times, forests have been viewed as being of national economic and/or environmental importance. Forest ownership at sub-regional level is as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Forest ownership by sub-region

Sub-region	Public	Community	Private
Eastern and Southern Africa	90%	4%	6%
West and Central Africa	98%	1%	1%
North Africa	90%	0%	10%

Source: FAO, 2010

Central governments retain exclusive control over 16% of public forests (FAO, 2010), 61 % are used by various actors predominantly communities who are granted user rights that limit them to low value products and to meeting subsistence needs e.g. firewood collection and non-wood forest products (NWFP) collection.

Private forests

Privately owned forests only account for about 4% of Africa's forests. These are owned by individuals, corporate and communities. At sub-regional level, privately owned forests constitute about 10% of forests in North Africa, 6% in Eastern and Southern Africa and 1% in West and Central Africa (FAO, 2010).

Community-owned forests

Community-owned forests often include those forests that exist on land that are legally owned by the community or forest that have been legally assigned to the community by the Government. Although communities own some areas of forests in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), these forests make up only 1% of the total forest area. This explains why the majority of community-based forest management initiatives have been in state forests. This situation has influenced the types of forest management regimes and CBFM models that have emerged in the region.

Forests classification by value

The forests can also be classified by value into:

- i. High value** especially in terms of timber and less so in terms of other products e.g. (biodiversity)
- ii. Low value** especially degraded forests or forests with products that do not have high market values

The value of forests has a big influence on the type of management regimes adopted especially for public forests. In general, governments in SSA have retained the management of high value forests or granted concessions to private companies for

their management. High value forests have rarely been given to local communities even under forest management concessions. Most of the CBFM initiatives have tended to be in low value degraded forests that need restoration or rehabilitation. The management costs of such forests tend to be higher than the benefits, which usually take long to be realised.

1.2 Evolution of Community-Based Forest Management

During the last two decades many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa began to change their natural resources management approaches from centralised management under the state, to community-based natural resources management. This change has been driven by a number of factors including “democratization” of natural resources management that was ushered in by the adoption of democratic governance principles in general, and the realization, by states, of the futility of the conventional system of managing natural resources without local people's engagement. The decentralization of authority and responsibility for natural resources management has become a global trend in the pursuit of sustainable natural resources management and biodiversity conservation. In many parts of Africa this is reflected by the adoption of (CBNRM) approaches during the 1980s. CBNRM is an approach to conservation and development that focuses on people's needs and recognizes the rights of local people to manage and benefit from the management and use of their natural resources (Murphree, 2003). CBNRM also involves devolving control and management responsibility to local people through appropriate natural resource management policies and legislation. At the community level, it necessitates building the technical, organizational and institutional capacity of local communities and their institutions to enable them to assume these responsibilities.

Box 1: Decentralisation

Decentralization is defined as any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Ribot *et al.*, 2006). The term **decentralised forest management** is used to refer to forest management regimes where forest management responsibility has been devolved from central government to local government or community institutions. The change to a decentralized forest management regime involves change in institutions such as legislation, and also change of organizations or actors (Alden Wily and Mbaya, 2001; Gautam *et al.*, 2004; Kumar, 2002; Ribot, *et al.*, 2006; Thanh and Sikor, 2006).

In the forest sector decentralized forest management has led to the emergence of community-based forest management as an alternative to the “fortress conservation” approach that was associated with management of forest reserves by central governments. In sub-Saharan Africa where the rural population are highly dependent on forests and their resources for their social and economic needs, it is essential to integrate existing livelihood systems into any new model for forest management and to ensure the full participation of local people in decision-making about forests. One approach that allows for this is community-based forest management.

Community-based forest management has the dual objective of achieving the conservation of forests on one hand and contributing to the general economic development and livelihoods improvement of local communities on the other. In most countries that adopted CBFM approaches, many communities have embarked on a wide range of small-scale forest-based enterprises that have contributed to improving their social and economic conditions. Studies of small-scale and medium-sized forest based enterprises from around the world, of which an increasing number are community-based, show that they help to accrue wealth locally, encourage local entrepreneurship, engender greater local environmental accountability and can maintain cultural practices (FAO, Macqueen, 2008). This has led, in some countries, to the integration of CBFM into national economic development plans including poverty reduction and national conservation strategies (Camara, 2009; Gondo, 2004). Examples of this are small-scale forest enterprises based on timber harvesting and harvesting of non-timber forest products that have obtained Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification.

The development of CBFM has also been influenced by broader forest policy developments within the international arena (for example the forest principles under Agenda 21, Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) proposals for action), filtering down to the regional and national levels, with the main thrust being decentralization and democratization of forest resources management. The development has been characterized by states giving back authority to manage natural resources to communities, having been convinced that their close involvement and participation in the management of the resources is an absolute necessity if sustainability would be achieved.

The evolution of CBFM has followed different pathways in various parts of Africa based on different socio-political and biophysical contexts. In eastern and southern Africa, the relative abundance of wildlife and high returns from ecotourism and trophy hunting has seen the development of CBNRM approaches that are heavily influenced by the development of community based wildlife management programmes. Over time, and taking advantage of favourable policy and legislative

provisions providing a conducive environment for CBNRM, the programmes have diversified the range of resources and products targeted. In less densely populated and more heavily forested central Africa, interest in natural forests is largely limited to conservation groups' concerns for biodiversity and protected areas management on one hand, and logging and wood processing enterprises on the other. West Africa is experiencing an increasing interest in CBFM, driven by scarcities in fuelwood and other forestry products. In recent years some of these efforts have been integrated into community-based land use planning and other participatory programmes.

Why community-based forest management

The need to address climate change and the emergence of markets for ecosystem services including watershed protection, biodiversity and carbon have provided new opportunities for community-based forest management. In particular, the opportunity to conserve forests and at the same time generate additional incomes through trading in and/or compensation for environmental services increases the value of forests to the local communities and provides additional incentives for them to protect the forests and to utilize the forests sustainably. Although the implementation of payment for ecosystem services (PES) is still in its infancy in Africa, with payments for recreational services and biodiversity conservation being the most developed, there are already enough examples that have demonstrated that PES has the potential to increase forest values and returns to communities under CBFM.

Arguments justifying the institutionalization and implementation of CBFM in Africa include:

- **Recognition of the inherent rights of forest-dependent communities:** Social justice demands that local communities and forest-dependent people, who have suffered the injustices related to displacement, inequitable access to forest resources and benefits, as a result of centralised forest governance be granted back their rights and access to benefits and forest management responsibilities.
- **Giving value and ensuring forests benefit their owners (the local communities) and managers:** If forest resources that people live with do not benefit or have a value to them, they are likely to be replaced by other economically valuable land uses such as agriculture. CBFM enables local communities that live in or around forests to meet their social, economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual needs. In other words, forest dependent communities have a larger stake in sustainable forest management.
- **Local communities have the knowledge and potential capacity to manage:** Forest dependent communities have developed, over several

generations, the indigenous knowledge systems and local institutions that enable them to regulate forest use and manage the forests to ensure their continued existence. CBFM provides the space for communities to exercise their rights and build on their traditional knowledge and institutions in forest management by guaranteeing the retention of benefits from their efforts.

- **Local forest governance:** Forest management is more responsive to community needs when communities who live with and in the forest are empowered to participate in making decisions and developing forest management plans.
- **Better integration with other sectors:** Forests have multiple functions and therefore multiple stakeholders. Even at community level there are multiple interests that are not only dynamic but sometimes conflicting. The participatory and collective decision making nature of CBFM provides a platform for linking with and taking into account interests from other sectors. Some of the key sectors include agriculture (including livestock), water, energy, tourism, health and local government.
- **Democracy and devolved governance:** By its very nature CBFM provides citizens with practical experience in local control of a vital local resource and collective decision making and action, which gives the local communities capacity to participate in general democratic and devolved governance systems. The experience gained in holding their own local institutions accountable and the skills and capacity they develop in self management can be applied in other spheres of governance at local and national government levels.
- **Income generation:** African farmers depend on the forests and woodlands to supplement their incomes. Thus CBFM provides a strong and sustainable basis for community-based forest enterprises that include timber logging, charcoal production, beekeeping, fishing, hunting, and sale of firewood. The forest based enterprises do not only help in supplementing household incomes but also contribute to the growth of local economies. In addition to opportunities created by forest-based micro-enterprises, some members of the community benefit directly from carrying out forest management activities either as contractors or workers. These include road construction and maintenance, forest inventories, guarding, seedling production, silvicultural activities, sawmilling and plantation maintenance. All these help to increase forest value and the economic incentives to the local communities to invest in the management and protection of their forest resources.
- **Gender mainstreaming:** Women, children and the youth are important forest users who are often ignored in development of forest management plans. CBFM provides platforms for the participation of all forest user and

interest groups in all aspects of forest management right from the planning and design of forest management plans through to implementation and monitoring and evaluation. In particular women get the opportunity to articulate their own needs, priorities and possibilities for action.

- **Maintenance of environmental services:** The use of the ecosystem approach is an integral part of CBFM in order to generate the multiple forest products and services that are necessary to meet the people's needs. With careful planning and linkages with markets CBFM has been demonstrated to have the potential to contribute to the enhancement of various ecosystem services such as biodiversity conservation, watershed protection and carbon sequestration.



Community forest tree nursery in Guinea (Photo: FAO)