

A forest adjacent community working at a tree nursery. The community produces seedlings both as an income generating activity and as support for forest conservation and maintenance. (Photo KFWG)



# CFAs as vehicles to a better life

Opportunities for better forest management and improved livelihoods; emerging scenarios

By Musingo Mbuvi

Forestry management in Kenya has gone through two management regimes. The first regime was where forests were owned and managed by communities through tribal authorities. The responsible communities had exclusive rights to set forest management and user regulations. This regime has almost entirely been replaced by government owned and managed systems except in very few forests in the country. These few exceptions are religious forests and inaccessible isolated forests where communities manage and “own” the forests by default, like Mukogodo and Loita forests.

These two management regimes had an exclusive forest product access system and benefits sharing mechanisms. The year 1990 ushered in a third phase of forestry management, with government and community jointly managing

forests while the government retains ownership rights. The process started in earnest with initial piloting in 1997.

Most forest adjacent communities (FACs) have formed organisations in order to participate effectively in this alternative forest management regime. The community structures are legally referred to as Community Forest Associations (CFAs). Through the CFAs, the communities can be invited into joint forest management with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) through a jointly signed agreement, the Forest Management Agreement (FMA). This management regime is now being practised in over 100 forests and five CFAs have signed FMAs with KFS.

In Kenya, this forest management approach is known as Participatory Forest Management (PFM). This refers to the involvement of FACs and other stakeholders in resource management within a

framework that improves their livelihoods. This phase is being introduced on the premise that it would contribute to better forest management and improved livelihoods of FACs and equitably also benefit the other stakeholders. Though this phase is at its infancy in implementation, its institutionalisation would largely depend on how it would contribute to better forest management and improved livelihoods of the FAC. *The success will also depend on political goodwill and devolving of power by the responsible body, the Kenya Forest Service.*

This management regime is bringing change to the way stakeholders collaborate to manage forests for better results and improved livelihoods. The emerging trend is pointing towards a scenario where communities are benefiting with potential for more benefits. The perception by forest adjacent communities in areas where PFM

has been practised is that the forests are well protected and informal access to forest products is hardly possible.

The CFAs are multi-functional organisations with a strong bias towards rural development in addition to forest management. The rural development contribution has been limited to a few activities, with seedlings for sale, woodlots, beekeeping, butterfly farming and eco-tourism being replicated by most CFAs. The other common income generating activities starting to pick up in selected forests include mushroom farming, fishponds and crop farming.

The challenge though is that in most forests, informal benefits still outweigh the PFM related benefits. To draw forest adjacent communities to PFM, investments should be put in place to ensure that informal and existing formal access of forests is outweighed by benefits and values based on PFM. Equally important would be to build capacity of FAC to enable them to manage the resource as expected.

### Level of PFM implementation

Participatory Forest Management in Kenya is at various stages of implementation, with the oldest site being over 10 years and most other sites below five years. In addition, a traditional community-based forest management approach has been practised in Loita (Naimina-Enkiyio Forest) where communities are completely responsible for the management of the forest and the government seems to recognise this.

The perception of PFM by forest adjacent communities and other stakeholders varies from forest to forest. PFM is interpreted as everything from non-residential cultivation in Kereita forest, income-generating activities in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest to community ownership and forest management like in Loita. At the same time, in forests where the government has overall control like Buyangu (Kakamega Forest), PFM is perceived to be pre-determined forest access.

**Government officers view PFM principally as a means for achieving better forest management while civil society views it as a means of reducing poverty for forest adjacent communities.** These different perceptions affect how PFM is implemented. Loita Forest provides a completely different form of PFM, namely traditional community-based forest management, which illustrates that communities are able to manage resources without destroying them. However, it is evident that the system is facing challenges emanating from changing socio-economic situations. In high potential forests, the CFAs control access to forest and allied resources.



*Arabuko Sokoke Forest (a gazetted forest of 41,600ha), at the coast, the site of the first national PFM in Kenya. With assistance from the European Union, the community introduced the first income generating activity on butterfly rearing. (Photo KEFRI)*

### Recent developments in the implementation of PFM

There are emerging implementation trends in the field, which require in-depth analysis. These include:

- In forest stations where more than one CFA existed, they have formed an umbrella CFA to conform to the Act. These CFAs have not been de-registered or remodelled nor their functions re-defined. As a result, the organisations remain independent functionally, but structurally appear as one. There is also need to understand the most appropriate size of a CFA, and subsequently what area of forest it can effectively manage, as has been done in other countries.
- Some CFAs are mega-structures whose management is not feasible, just by the distance to meeting venues and the transport costs borne by CFA officials to attend meetings.
- Communities in most forest stations have formed CFAs and held elections without awareness of what is expected of the community and the CFA officials in the new dispensation. This has led to multifarious outcomes, like having officials who cannot effectively lead the community and adequately participate in negotiations and forest management.
- There is a tendency for retired members of the country's elite to be elected to leadership positions in CFAs, further excluding the rural populace who were the anticipated beneficiaries. Although the elite are necessary, there is need to create a system of integrating them with the rest of the community in CFAs.
- Re-crafting existing community-based organisations into CFAs to meet the legal

requirements for registration to participate in forest management, without adequate training. This has seen the registration of NGOs and other legal entities like trusts into CFAs to conform to the law.

- Most forest sites are leaving out the poor and disadvantaged members of forest adjacent communities, falling short of the key objective of CFAs. This can be changed by insisting on a pro-poor approach being a requirement for partnership,

### Salient PFM values

- Potential to distribute benefits across all social groups.
- Improve forest governance.
- Empower communities and other stakeholders.
- Institutionalise mechanisms to address the needs of the poor and less advantaged in society.

### Factors that may affect PFM implementation

Though the process is gaining momentum, there are management issues that are affecting its implementation. These include:

- The high initial costs of initiating PFM and supporting income generating activities is a de-motivating factor contributing to low PFM benefits and low PFM membership. This is particularly discouraging participation in areas with alternative high economic return activities such as tea growing.
- Forest and forest products access regulations (especially the fees to be paid) may favour the well-off in society, excluding the poor who are a major target of PFM.
- Lost opportunities due to time spent participating in meetings keep the very poor away from their daily survival activities.

- The costly and lengthy process of registering as a CFA under the Societies Act and then the requirement that it forms a subsidiary company in order to do business.
- Lack of a pro-poor clause to facilitate inclusion of the poor and disadvantaged members of society.
- Institutional functional differences with some people having undue influence and power, leading to one stakeholder hijacking the decision-making process.
- Mismatch of PFM institutions with existing ones, like the Oloibon structure in Loita.
- Failure by the facilitating organisation to be flexible and dynamic.
- Failure to match forest type and size to the geographical conditions (forest and farmlands), an area a defined CFA can manage effectively.
- Potential PFM impact can affect the products that a community can access, stakeholders and donor interest that it can arouse, as these have a direct relationship with income generating activities that could be initiated.
- Policy changes are required, mainly on enacting subsidiary legislation; finalising review of PFM guidelines and other related regulations and putting in place mechanisms to institutionalise PFM.
- Failure to identify PFM's success pillars, recognising that in Kenya the success of PFM in a specific forest has to be hinged on one or two key income generating activities (like butterfly farming, beekeeping, eco-tourism and natural products extraction) because timber exploitation is not feasible.
- CFA/KFS/PPM operating boundaries: There is also need to define how the CFA boundaries relate with the KFS administrative structure and general government administration boundaries. In sites where KFS is leading the process, the CFA are following the KFS management structure boundaries whereas in areas where civil society is leading, the CFAs are following the provincial boundaries, placing more emphasis on the village. The latter is placing more emphasis on livelihoods while the former is likely to support better forest management. This situation requires resolving through a consultative process.
- Failing to have an elaborate and systematic capacity building programme as required for successful PFM implementation.



An example of how local initiative has captured donor funding; an eco-tourism project to protect Lake Elementaita. (Photo KFWG)

## Achievements of PFM

Although it is too early in most instances to show what this management phase has achieved, a number of encouraging achievements serve as incentives. These include:

**Grants:** The communities are increasingly fundraising for conservation and development. CFAs have accessed forest conservation and community livelihood improvement grants from the government and multilateral donors.

**Rural development:** CFAs have established rural cottage industries that have provided employment, improved community livelihoods and rural infrastructure. The last three years have witnessed communities start rural honey refineries with marketing outlets in local shopping centres and large retail outlets (supermarkets). Key infrastructure development dotting the country includes elephant fences.

**Capacity building:** This has been done and witnessed members of the community participate in several development forums. CFA officials are members of location development committees, which plan what development is to be undertaken in the area.

**Partnerships:** This has been done with several organisations.

**National forum:** This is a national body formed as a confederation of CFAs. This is modelled within the Nepal set-up where the Federation of User Groups (the equivalent of CFAs in Kenya) has over 15 million members. If each member were to contribute one rupee (Ksh 1), what would be the economic impact?

**Empowering women:** Apart from women retaining their traditional treasurer positions, they have also taken leadership positions in several CFAs even in communities that are socially patriarchal.

**Contributing to social and economic development:** Income generating activities related to PFM have started improving education

standards through providing cash for purchase of books and school uniforms. The surplus cash is being re-invested in rural development through village saving schemes. This is contributing to a better life through purchase of assets like chicken, goats and iron sheets for better roofing and construction of toilets.

## Current and potential PFM benefits

It is hard for the community to earn a direct income from the forests because they are generally managed for biodiversity conservation and as water catchments. In most forests, communities are bearing the highest costs of management.

## PFM's likely benefits include:

- Income generating activities, with beekeeping and sale of seedlings being the major ones.
- Informal access of forest products like timber, poles and grazing grounds.
- Water for irrigation.
- Employment for marginalised groups in society.
- Improved forest condition and biodiversity conservation.
- Improved livelihoods of forest dependent communities.

PFM can contribute to better forest management and improved livelihoods of the community even at the household level. PFM has proved to be popular and is being adopted in most forests in the country. There is need to define forests that can be managed under PFM early enough. In order to enhance these benefits further, there is need to develop a national PFM implementation strategy.

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