

The Role of the Community in the Management of Forests in Kenya: A Case of Elgeyo/Marakwet County

Limo Robert Kipkoech

Student, Department of Governance and Ethics, Mount Kenya University, Eldoret Campus

Email: limorobertk@yahoo.com

Kipkoech Lydia Cheruto(Ph.D)

Lecturer, Department of Education Planning, Administration and Curriculum Development,
Karatina University College

Email: cherulk@yahoo.com

Abstract

The sustainability of life on earth is closely linked to better legal mechanism that spells out ways and means to manage forests in a sustainable way. Good management of forests in Kenya, ensures that the present and future generations' livelihood is secured. This study investigated the role of the community in the management of forests. The study was guided by the theory of "network governance" advanced by Miles and Snow (1986). The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population was Forest officers, members of youth groups, the provincial administration the local community and other stakeholders. The data was collected using both questionnaire and interview schedules. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the target population from the youth groups and the local community while convenience sampling technique and purposive sampling was used to select the members of provincial administration, forest officers and other civil servants. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study established that local participation is imperative hence, there is need for more institutional capacity building, transparent, effectiveness and efficiency management of forests.

Keywords: Community, Environment, Forest, Involvement, Management

Introduction

Management of forests in principle refers to sustainable management of forests that fosters the replacement of the forest resources at the rate at which it is utilized. This is the definition that was adopted at the United Nations conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and it captured the general international understanding of sustainable management of forests.

In the world today, whether one is living in Europe, America, Africa or Asia for that matter, environmental problems threaten not only natural ecological qualities but also the humanities very existence. The quality of life is affected by the way natural resources are managed. Forests

are a global, regional, and national treasure to be safeguarded and sustained. Giuseppe et al (2009) in their extensive study on rainforests in Cameroon came up with strong convictions based on fundamental principle that, when forests are properly managed they will sustain national economies, improve the welfare of poorest citizens and protect the environment and biodiversity into the future.

A number of researchers and scholars have come up with discussion on how to attain this equilibrium between the use of forest resources on one hand and reforestation process. Evans and Cronkleton (2008) states that for forest managers, sustainability and managing a particular forest means determining, in a tangible way, how to use it today to ensure similar benefits health and productivity tomorrow and in future. The issue of use and management of resources is central to creating sustainable societies. Today, there are various difficulties facing mankind. Adisa and Alan (2003) point out that “Although we all realize that we are consuming too much of the earth’s resources, we are not prepared to compromise our life styles now for a more sustainable living in a distant future”.

The involvement of youth groups and other stakeholders in the management of forests have been and continue to be integral to progress in many countries. In Bolivia, Kaimowitz (2003) gives examples of devolved forest management to municipalities in which has recorded some success. Other examples of success stories owing to effectiveness of decentralized management are Tanzania (Massawe, 2001 and Wiley 1997), Indonesia (Wollenberg and Kartodihardjo 2002), India (Saxena 1996), Nepal (Kafle 2001), U. S. A, and Canada (Poffenbarger, 1995). Central governments in the above examples have granted authority for forest management to local non-governmental and community – based organizations. The examples cited demonstrate the effectiveness of devolution approach in management of forests and other natural resources. The state and the local governments were given more say to manage environmental concerns within their areas of jurisdictions. This brought success and that is why the U.S.A today in formulating any regulatory, legal or policy frameworks takes into account various views from stakeholders. This shows that success in result based reforms or management are based on participatory approach in decision making.

Studies carried out in China by David and Wollenberg (2003), revealed that the poor are poor mainly because they have no assets such as land, livestock, fish ponds or special skills. This also showed that the same people survive on uncertain daily wages carrying out unskilled jobs. The same people have come to associate their source of daily bread with destructive activities in the forests carried out by unscrupulous companies out to make short term gains. The study came with potential remedies which included decentralization of forest management.

In addressing poverty in Asia, Edmond and Wollernberg (2003) contend that International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have addressed structural causes for the lack of agency for the poor. This includes their inadequacy in access to natural resources and its utility. Changes in access to resources and finance land reform were undertaken to give the poor more access rights to land. In forest areas, Edmond illustrates the importance of securing property rights

over the forests. The poor and the marginalized are made to benefit to some extent on the forest resources in somewhat controlled and sustainable way.

In Kenya the involvement of the local communities in the management of forests has been institutional and legalized. The Forest Act No. 7 of 2005 which repeal the Forest Act Cap 385 was enacted by parliament of forests and also to comply with the new trends of decentralization of forests management system that had succeeded in other countries as enumerated above. Under the Act, the customary rights of the local communities to the forests and defined resources are protected. The customary rights are however, limited to cultural activities only and any commercial activity is prohibited except in accordance with the Act. The Act also allows religious, educational and or scientific utility of the forests with the approval of the forest management Board. However, the creation of this board is still centralized and is under the direct control of the central government. Therefore, this is an area that requires reforms.

The issue of centralized system of management is perhaps a colonial relic in Kenya just like in many parts of Africa and Asia. Independent Kenyan government also adopted the same as is the case in the legal and institutional framework of the management of forest in Elgeyo/Marakwet County and the entire country as a whole.

However, it is clear that other governments have found it increasingly difficult to exercise authority effectively in view of the fact that these were few remaining forests and were remote popular protests at the shortcomings of centralized policies, such as the rubber tappers “embate” movement in Accra, Ghana (Fisher, et al 1999).

The success in devolved system in management of forests in other parts of the world is a clear pointer to us a country to where we should be headed. This is why the Forest Act No. 7 of 2007 introduced a new concept in management of forests by encouraging community participation through formation of community forest association (sections 46 (1) of the Act). The association is bigger roles in conservatory activities and to some extent utility of the forest resources through sustainable arrangement with the Director of Forests. This was perhaps an attempt by Kenyan parliament to factor in participatory approach to forest management after the realization of success in other countries where a remarkable forest cover have been achieved through community participation.

Forests in Elgeyo/Marakwet County and its environs face a lot of pressure because of the demand of the resources is directly linked with the increasing population and the need for the utility of the same resources for shelter and other uses. It is important to explore the historical or traditional setting in the management of our forests to see whether there is a relation between the changes in management of forests in Elgeyo/Marakwet County and the unsustainable management of forests. This is due to realization that as a result deforestation, rivers are drying up and volumes of water in the largest river in Elgeyo/Marakwet County, the Kerio River which feeds the Turkwel Dam which is [Kenya's](#) 3rd largest [hydro](#) power plant.

The example of empowering the local communities in China, India and Philippines through devolution and other strategic policies to conserve forests have contributed to tremendous success in management of forests in those countries. This is something that can be applied here in Africa, or Kenya and Elgeyo/Marakwet County in particular. As a country Kenya is now going into devolution system courtesy of the new constitutional dispensation. This study sought to understanding the role and impact, if any of decentralization and empowering of local communities in the management of forests.

Objective of the Study

1. To establish the role of the community in the management of forests.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted the theory of “network governance”. This theory is relevant to this study and was originally initiated by Miles and Snow (1986) who first described it as “network organization”. Later, Powel (1990) and Uzzi,(1996) developed and described it as ‘organization network’ or a form of coordination by agencies or bodies that is characterized by organic or informal system in contrast to bureaucratic structures within firms or public service and formal contractual relationships between them. Governance network distinguishes themselves from the hierarchical control of the state to the competitive regulations of the market forces. This theory as a concept explains increased efficiency enhanced through distributed knowledge acquisition and decentralized problem solving. Scharpf (1997) connects the efficiency connected with concepts of privatization, public private partnership and out contracting with this theory.

The theory is relevant to this study as the significance of networking in the management of forest resources in Elgeyo/Marakwet County may prove key to the problem under study. The theoretical concern is how the stakeholders or different actors both public and private and agencies come to form networks or partnerships that hold them together to influence policy and political decisions that may ultimately alter the legal framework that deals with management of forests resources in a way that is more sensitive and responsive to the challenges facing it.

Research Design And Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Kothari (2004), such designs are efficient methods of collecting descriptive data regarding the characteristics of populations, current practices and conditions or needs. In this study, descriptive research design was adopted purposely to capture descriptive data from selected samples and generalized the findings to the populations from, which the sample was selected.

This study was conducted in Elgeyo/Marakwet County, which is one of the forty seven counties in of Kenya. The participants who were selected in the study included the forest officers from the various divisional offices, members of the Provincial administration and the members of the youth groups working in collaboration with the forest department in Elgeyo/Marakwet County.

Sampling Procedure

Simple random sampling technique was used to identify and select the participants from the various youth a group working with the forest department .Purposive sampling was used to select the district forester and the divisional forest officers.

Research Tools and Instruments of Data Collection

The researcher developed and used questionnaires, interview schedule, document analysis and observation as the main tools for data collection. The selection of these tools was guided by the nature of the data to be collected as well as the objectives of the study, the scope and time limits. A questionnaire is instrument used gather information from respondents by writing on a piece of paper their responses (Kothari, 2004). The main advantage of questionnaire is that it helps to gather information faster and limits on the amount of time for interviewing the respondents. The questionnaires contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions and was formulated both in a structured way where the respondents were required to just tick the answer suggested and in unstructured way where the respondents were required to give their personal views and feelings. In this study, interview were used because they are more flexible hence it yields higher response rates and in depth information with regard to the management of forests in Elgeyo/Marakwet County.

Discussion Of Findings

The Role Of Public In The Management Of Forest In Elgeyo/ Marakwet County

The study sought to establish the role of public in the management of forest in Elgeyo/Marakwet County. The response showed that 41, (83.7%) of the respondents prefer that the most appropriate role that the public could play is serving on advisory boards that review and comment on management roles whereas the remaining numbers, eight individuals, (16.3%) would prefer full partnership with the professional setting goals.

It is evident that the local community would not want to directly involve themselves in the management of the forest and to them an appropriate way to be part of the management is in the formation of an advisory role where an elected number of individuals will work with the forestry agency. Also 30, (61.2%) viewed the government agencies as the most appropriate source of information on the forestry issues whereas respondents, 19, (38.8%) preferred the newspapers as can be seen from Table 1 below. There seems to be a divergent view on the most appropriate source of information on management of the forest however the preference

of the government agency managing the forest illustrates the trust that the administration has on the KFS.

Table 1. The role of Public the Management of Forests

Role of the public * Sources of information				Sources of information		Total
				Newspapers	Government agencies	
Role of the public	Advisory	Count	17	24	41	
		%	89.5%	80.0%	83.7%	
	Partnership	Count	2	6	8	
		%	10.5%	20.0%	100.0%	
Total		Count	19	30	49	
		% within	38.8%	61.2%	100.0%	
		%	100.0%	100.0%		

Source: Field data, (2012)

Involvement of the Public in the Management of Forests

The study sought to find out the public participation in the management of forests in Elgeiyo/marakwet county. The likert scale used in the study was drawn from the values used during the data collection which ranged from one to five with one representing strongly disagree with five representing strongly agreeing. The researcher drew the mid points of 0.5 and 1.4 to representing strongly disagree, 1.5 to 2.4 representing disagree, 2.5 to 3.4 representing indecision, 3.5 to 4.4 representing agreement with the issue and over 4.5 standing for those who strongly agree with the issues, the researcher was able to generate a scale on which the descriptive statistics will be based on.

The descriptive statistics on Table 2 illustrated the views of the respondents on the issue touching on forest officers' opinions on public participation in the management of the forest. The statistic for skewness shows how the population is skewed as compared to the normally distributed population. Eight of the nine response shows that the views were skewed towards left as can be seen from the statistic of between -0.558 and -3.317, whereas one component had the skewness statistic skewed towards right with a statistic of 1.074.

As can be seen from Table 2, a mean statistic of 3.91 with a standard deviation of 1.375 indicates that there is transparency in commercial timber products allocations. In this way, the forests are efficiently managed. Also, the forest regulation, laws and policies affect the community surrounding the forest on an individual level according to the forest officers. The mean statistic of 3.73 with a standard deviation of 0.647 illustrates the point. Probably this is

due to the fact that the laws and policies are not structured towards improvement of the community but towards the sustainable forest management.

On the same note, the forest officers affirmed that the people who are directly affected by the regulation have a mechanism in which they can channel their input towards the improvement of the laws and regulations governing the management of the forest. This aspect is illustrated so by the mean statistic of 4.27 with a standard deviation of 1.272.

On the issue touching on community involvement in forest planning and management, the forest officers affirmed that the local community is involved in management and planning of the forest. This is deduced from the mean statistic of 4.09 with a standard deviation of 0.831. The forest officers asserted that they themselves are accountable for the failures, errors, omissions and commissions in their performance of their duties. This is deduced from the mean statistic of 3.91 with a standard deviation of 1.300.

There is community consultation in the issues touching on the management of the forest as can be deduced from the mean statistic of 3.91 and a standard deviation of 1.3000. The forest officers in their mandate with their discretion consult the surrounding community on issues affecting the forest and the community. The mean statistic of 4.27 with a standard deviation 1.272, shows that the forest officers affirmed that they took take into consideration, the stakeholder views about ongoing and proposed action and feedback. The approach attempts to bring on board the stakeholders who are directly or indirectly related to the management of the forest.

The forest officers affirmed that there are sanctions that may be used to protect forest in the country. This is deduced from the mean statistic of 4.00 with a standard deviation of 1.095. The officers were indifferent on the issues touching on the concession that the officers may make in their duties. As can be seen the mean statistic of 2.09 with a standard deviation of 1.044 shows that there is divided opinion touching on the issue.

Transparency, Accountability and Public Participation in the Management of Forest

The study sought to establish whether or not there is transparency and accountability in public participation in the management of forests in Elgeiyo/Marakwet County. The descriptive statistics on Table 2 illustrated the views of the respondents on the issue touching on forest officers' opinions on the accountability and transparency in the forest management. The statistic for skewness shows how the population is skewed as compared to the normally distributed population. Three of the six response shows that the views were skewed towards left as can be seen from the statistic of between -0.086 and -1.505, whereas the remaining three issues were skewed towards right with a statistic of between 0.0 and 1.834.

Furthermore, the mean statistic of 1.82 with a standard deviation of 0.603 shows that the information touching on inventory, management plans, budgets are not accessible to the

public. The documents that are available are user friendly as can be deduced from the mean statistic of 4.00 with a standard deviation of 0.447.

Whereas the forestry information is user friendly, the same information not easily accessible the public do not come for the information. This is inferred from the mean statistic of 1.64 with a standard deviation of 0.924. The forest officers affirmed that there is regular compilation of the forest reports regularly as it is it illustrated by the mean statistic of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.831 in table 4.5.0.

The forest officers were indifferent on the issue of public access to forestry income reports and such the public are not able to access the information. This is inferred from the mean statistic of 2.91 and a standard deviation of 1.375. The forest officers use public notices on the proposed policies, programs, laws and projects to the public as can be deduced from the mean statistic of 4.09 and a standard 1.640 found in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Responses of Participants on Transparency and Accountability in the Management of Forests

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean		Std.	Skewness
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Deviation	Statistic
Ease of access of forestry information	213	1.82	.182	.603	.028
User friendliness of the forestry documents	213	4.00	.135	.447	.000
Public information	213	1.64	.279	.924	1.834
Total of forestry reports	213	4.09	.251	.831	-1.467
Public access of forestry income reports	213	2.91	.415	1.375	-.086
Public notices on policies, programs, laws and projects	213	4.09	.495	1.640	-1.505
Valid N (listwise)	32				

Source: Field data, (2012)

Conclusions And Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The study summarises the findings of this study based on the objectives and questions as follows:

The role of the community in the management of forests in Elgeyo/Marakwet County

On objective one which sought to find the role of the community in the forest management, the study found out that the local community has neither direct nor indirect role in the management of the forest. The forest in the county fall under the forestry agency (KFS) tasked by the state and the laws of the land to manage the forest. On the same note, it is noteworthy to affirm that it is not the agency's undertaking that community is not involved but it is as a result of the legal and regulatory framework in operation that prohibits direct roles for the community. The agency in its mandate tries to engage the local community indirectly however through suggestions and inputs but the community is not aware of such provisions and as such ignore the opportunity.

Conclusion

The laws and regulations in place concerning the management of forests in Kenya are in tandem with the new constitution in Kenya which gives more strength to the legislation that is already in place. As already reviewed, under Article 69 (i) (d) of the Kenyan constitution the participation of the local people in the management of their environment and natural resources is enshrined.

It is also important that as local participation is imperative, building capacity and governance structure like seen in the formation of CFAs in the current legal framework will promote success in the management of forests. There is need for more institutional capacity building by ensuring that that formation of CFAs is better structured and transparent for effectiveness and efficiency. Participation of the local people in the management of forests will not only make management a success but will also help in poverty alievation as a result of mutual sharing of forest resources and benefits.

This research noted an important resource in the forest that is yet to be fully explored and utilized in the Elgeyo/Marakwet County Forests Act as a carbon sink that is they absorb carbon dioxide as observed by Betts (2008). It is as a result of this that United Nations came up with the issue of carbon credit where forest nations like Kenya can stake claim for payment for preserving forests that would then act as carbon sink for the entire world and be paid for doing so. This compensation should be structured in a such a way that it trickles down to the local community for them to realize the benefit of preserving the forests and the environment. In

this way social and environmental goals will be achieved especially through transparent management of carbon credit.

It is apparent that the destruction of forests that has taken place over time within Elgeyo/Marakwet County has resulted in erratic climatic conditions for example too much rains at times has led to soil erosion and landslides along the escarpment. Local communities are well aware of this and that is why it is important that the government use them as environmental stewards and reward them for positive contributions they make.

Recommendation

The study recommends the following;

- 1) The local community should engage the forestry agency on matters that influencing the community through a structure manner such as through representative body. Through such a body, there will exist a transfer of information to the community (fiscal reports and budgets) while at the same time transfer of information to the KFS (complaints, suggestions and feedback). With such a way the community will feel part and parcel of the forest management in their locality.

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