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Solid cooperation key in forest reserve protection

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VILLAGERS and forest managers are key players for protecting forest reserves in Tanzania, and they should therefore work closely. These remarks were among the highlights of a speech that the Deputy Minister for natural Resources and Tourism, Mr Japhet Hasunga, delivered to the residents living around forest reserves in Kisarawe District, Coast Region recently.

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The event was part of a series of initiatives to ensure that boundaries are respected, in order to avert unnecessary conflicts that may arise between villagers and the government. The deputy minister showed his concern over how forests were being quickly degraded by villagers in the neighbourhood, as well as people from various faraway areas, including Dar es Salaam.

He called for strict measures to be taken to rescue Tanzania's forests. In connection to that, a recent study conducted in Ruvu south- Kibaha's forests in Tanzania by a team of researchers and associate researchers of Environment for Development Tanzania (EfDT) in the Department of Economics, University of Dar es Salaam, Prof Razack Lokina, Elizabeth J.Z. Robinson, Heidi J. Albers, and Guyslain Ngeleza revealed that both villagers (insiders) and distant people (outsiders) extract products from protected forests even though the activities are illegal.

The study noted that, depending on the relative ecological damage caused by each group, budget-constrained forest managers may be able to reduce total forest degradation by legalizing nearby villagers (insider) extraction in return for local villagers' involvement in enforcement activities.

Other studies show that during the last 30 years, the number of protected areas worldwide established to protect natural systems has grown dramatically. Coinciding with that expansion, many government agencies and conservation NGOs are advocating for combinations of development/ livelihood policies and conservation policies that attempt to address rural poverty and welfare while conserving forests.

For example, WWF's policy on forest and poverty states that national and international forest policies and the conservation movement should address both the sustainable management of natural forests and rural poverty alleviation; one should never be addressed at the other's expense.

The literature discussing policies aimed at conservation and poverty, such as Community-based Forest Management (CBFM), Joint Forest Management (JFM), and their predecessor Integrated Conservation- Development Projects (ICDPs), emphasizes their failure to create incentives for conservation by rural communities. However, a number of key positive lessons have been learned.

The EfDT study and other literature finds that the involvement of local communities in monitoring and enforcing access and extraction rules tends to result in more favourable outcomes in terms of forest quality and reduced conflict. The issue to consider is complexity, depending in part on the extraction pressures on the particular forest, including whether people collect primarily for subsistence or commercial motives.

Many studies show that most forests, even those under strict protection designations, are traditionally inhabited and managed by local people who extract various forest products; and in these situations forest cover is often better maintained than when there is solely a protection objective. EfDT researchers try to provide a new perspective on local level community enforcement.

Following the situation found in forests in Kibaha, in Coast Region, where forests are under pressure both from nearby villagers, who rely on the forests for charcoal, firewood and other non-timber forest products (medicine, vegetables, honey etc.) and from distant people who illegally extract timber and produce charcoal typically for sale in nearby Dar es Salaam; and where forest managers struggle with limited budgets to protect the forests.

Furthermore, the researchers try to explain the situation in Ruvu south-Kibaha district, Coast Region as they conducted a series of interviews with forest managers and patrollers in Kibaha Forest Reserve. They interviewed villagers, and got views of the forest reserve manager and the decisions of the villagers around the forest who enter the forest with the intention of collecting non timber products, and distant people who fell trees to make and sell charcoal.

In Ruvu South-Kibaha, researchers observed forest that conservation programs involve a combination of patrols and projects that involve nearby villagers where by the reserve management introduces tree planting, efficient stoves (majiko banifu), and beekeeping projects.

These programs were reported to be effective despite the fact that villagers are always frustrated with people from far who produce charcoal. The villagers do not report the culprits, since they are themselves offenders as they engage in some illegal activities, alongside legal ones like checking on their beehives.

The villagers said that if their collection of forest resources was not illegal, then they would have an unofficial mandate to report the charcoal producers to the forest manager, thereby improving the forest manager's ability to detect and punish charcoal production, given the constraints of a small enforcement budget.

In addition, illegal extraction of logs for sale in nearby Dar es Salaam causes serious forest degradation and also creates conflicts with local people and forest guards. The study shows that many forests face two types of illegal extraction: for home use typically by locals; and for sale in towns, often by outsiders.

The forest manager's tools to influence this resource collection by locals and outsiders include

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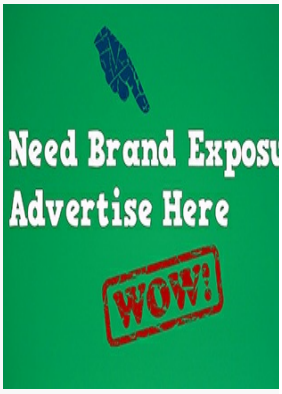

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enforcement, incomegenerating activities, and access rights for villagers, but enforcement can be used to curb the illegal activities, while livelihood projects provide incentives for households that live within project areas.

Moreover, if villagers collecting non timber forest products (NTFPs) face the same enforcement as outsiders producing charcoal, any goodwill generated through livelihood projects may well be lost. When forest managers sought the views of villagers, their response was that they were willing to cooperate, by enforcing restrictions against outsider charcoal producers, but expressed disappointment at the lack of such cooperation.

EfDT researchers have explored a situation that is common for forest managers in low income countries, but that is rarely addressed explicitly in either the literature or policy. In almost all participatory forest management initiatives such as community-based forest management or joint forest management, nearby villagers usually use nearby forests to get forest products although illegally.

They benefit by virtual of living adjacent to or close to the forest , and are counted to be an integral part of new participatory forest management regimes. Whereas distant people have also habitually used the forests, such as to collect charcoal or timber, they are not residents, and typically have no rights or responsibilities when a new forest management regime is introduced.

For that matter then, nearby villagers may be given privileged rights to use the forest in some modified form after a change in the forest management organization, but whether this occurs is often a function of the official designation of the forest and does not take into account how these new rights might influence the effectiveness of the new regime.

Along with that, EfDT researchers found that in Kibaha's reserve forests, officially no-one is allowed to collect resources from the forest. But when the reality is incomplete enforcement, allowing insider villagers to collect some forest resources might reduce the total ecological damage because the nearby villagers in turn have an incentive to engage in enforcement against the distant people who burn charcoal illegally.

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