

# EfDT research to help protect Tanzania's forests

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RESEARCHERS at Environment for Development Tanzania (EfDT), have identified a number of critical areas that will help both to protect Tanzania's forests and the livelihoods of those villagers living close to the forests.

Reacting to a call by the Deputy Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, Ezekiel Maige, to empower people living around forest reserves with forest management skills, researchers from EfDT, an initiative based at the Department of Economics at the University of Dar es Salaam, have suggested that there are three critical and interlinked issues:

The coordinator of EfDT,

Dr Razack Lokina and Associate Fellow Dr Elizabeth Robinson, told THISDAY yesterday that the critical and interlinked issues include how to fully realize the benefits of Tanzania's forests; how to share those benefits equitably among the nearby and countryside residents; and how to enforce rules and regulations to protect the forest resources.

"Managing Tanzania's forests is complex. Many of Tanzania's forests are biodiversity hot spots, valued by the international community; other forests provide critical ecosystem services such as the provision of water supplies for distant cities", said Dr Lokina.

Yet, the coordinator said villagers living near these forests often realize few of the benefits but bear most of the

costs, but the introduction of improved forest management approaches such as participatory forest management has left many nearby villagers feeling worse off. He stated that although they understand the importance of protecting the forests, better forest management has sometimes resulted in villagers having reduced access to important forest resources such as fuel wood, and forest fruits, vegetables, and medicine.

Dr Lokina and Dr Robinson suggested that villagers living near the forests are more likely to observe the rules and regulations governing forest management in Tanzania if forest protection is directly linked to household benefits.

Bee-keeping and butterfly

farming, which have already been introduced into a small number of protected forests, provide an incentive for villagers to protect the forest, but typically only benefit a smaller number of households.

"Taking a landscape approach rather than considering forests individually, and allowing households to continue to collect important forest resources, even from protected forests, would provide benefits to many villagers, particularly the poorest households, and reduce the likelihood that villagers simply switch from more to less protected forests", Dr Robinson said. One approach is to introduce buffer zones where regulated collection of forest products is permitted, often with little ecological cost. International and regional

mechanisms such as the 'Clean Development Mechanism' (CDM) and 'Payment for Environmental Services' (PES) offer considerable scope for realizing significant income from forests.

But even if these benefits are realized, just as important is how the benefits are shared. For example, to what extent should nearby villagers be compensated for reduced access to forests; how will benefits be distributed among village households; and what proportion of the funds should be used for enforcement activities.

"Appropriately funded enforcement activities are critical. Community involvement in forest management does not automatically ensure that forests will be protected through voluntary restrictions.