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Forest Management and Democracy in East and Southern Africa: Lessons From Tanzania

Liz Alden Wily
2001

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Executive Summary

In a bid to halt the continuing loss of invaluable natural forest resources, most forestry administrations in Africa are turning to forest-local communities for support. The approaches being pursued vary widely from those that primarily seek the co-operation of forest-local communities to those which look to these people as future managers of forests.

Using developments in eastern and southern Africa as the setting, this paper examines the case of Tanzania. It argues that community-based forest management emerging in that country offers an unusually powerful paradigm, precisely because it is prepared to share authority and even forest ownership, not just benefits, with local people in order to sustain forest resources. This relocates decision-making to the most immediately local, and therefore effective, level and into the hands of those with the greatest vested interest in seeing the forest remain intact. Real costs to government decline sharply, allowing it to refine and focus its role as technical adviser and environmental watchdog. Forest, state and people all gain.

In contrast, offering access rather than custodial rights to communities, commonly the case in many co-management arrangements elsewhere in the region, rarely provides an adequate incentive to communities to manage and sustain the resource, real control over which continues to lie outside their hands. Instead, a tug of war over resources may result and co-operation can decline. Community needs continue to exist in conflict with the needs of the forest and demands of the state.

The main concern of forestry administrations must be to find ways of transferring enough power and security to local communities to make it worth their while to devise and sustain effective management and in ways which make them fully accountable to those objectives themselves. Recognition of this is emerging in the region, evident in the greater attention being paid to developing community-level institutions who can take on such powers. Such devolutionary strategies are gaining ground through wider forces of democratisation. The writer argues that the long-standing existence of legally recognised government agencies at the village level in Tanzania has been an important factor in the greater progress made in that state towards establishing genuinely devolved forest management. She also calls for policy-makers and donors to encourage countries to exchange views and experiences.

FOREST MANAGEMENT AND DEMOCRACY IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA: LESSONS FROM TANZANIA

Liz Alden Wily

All over the African continent today there are new opportunities for forest-local residents to participate in sustaining forests in ways not envisaged a decade ago (FAO, 2000). Concern over the continuing decline of forests has fuelled the search for new strategies to stem the trend and to place remaining forests under secure and effective management. This paper focuses on developments in east and southern Africa.

The main approach to forest management throughout the 20th century was reservation; transferring forest management from the local domain into the supposedly protective hands of the state. The output, government-owned and managed forest reserves, are ubiquitous in the region and include most forests considered valuable for their water catchment, biodiversity or productive functions. Yet this status has rarely guaranteed their preservation or sustainable use (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press).

The greater proportion of forests in the region remain unreserved, and are generally composed of drier and partially open canopy woodlands. As these dwindle in area and as their diverse values are better understood, these too have become a target for reservation, albeit with important emerging differences. The most significant is that in some countries, local people are being encouraged to 'reserve' these forests themselves and to establish working regimes of protection and management.

This development is partly occurring as eastern and southern African states become more inclusive and democratic. This trend is visible in the plethora of new constitutional laws in the region, more liberal strategies for economic growth, greater adoption of people-driven approaches to 'development' and a new wave of commitment to decentralised government (Alden Wily, 2000a).

Of particular importance to forests and communities is land tenure reform in the region, underway in 12 countries (Alden Wily, 2000a). Most reforms aim to involve ordinary citizens more directly in the administration of tenure, make the holding of government lands such as forest reserves more accountable to citizenry, and increase the security of the rural majority who hold their land in informal, unregistered ways. The last is leading towards recognition of customary tenure as a fully legal way to hold property, after a century of being at best tolerated in most state land laws. This in turn is making it legal for communities to hold commons such as forests as private group property (Alden Wily 2000b). Legal provision for such statutory commonhold is already in place in new land laws in Mozambique (1997), Uganda (1998) and Tanzania (1999), and under

policy consideration in five other states (Alden Wily, 2000b). This development on its own will slow the loss of local forests to the central state or to individualisation.

In this paper I outline the direction of changes in forest management in the region and use the case of Tanzania, where the most dramatic reforms are occurring, to illustrate the issues of democratisation confronting the sector.

Forest Reform in East and Southern Africa

A flurry of new forest policy and legislation is replacing the mainly colonial legislation across the region (Alden Wily, 2000c). In the last five years alone, new forestry acts have been promulgated in Zanzibar, South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho and Mozambique. Forest bills are in draft in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Namibia, and a new forest policy is being drafted in Swaziland as preface to new law. Reform is most notably absent in Zimbabwe and Botswana, which have however launched pilot projects which might induce such changes in the future.

Most of this new legislation is democratic; tautly-held central government authority is giving way to semi-autonomous commissions (South Africa, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya) and/or the creation of advisory bodies which integrate public, private and non-government interests for the first time (South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi, Namibia). Privatisation of commercial plantations is everywhere encouraged, as is the creation of private forests out of large estates, with a greater array of incentives offered.

The more radical shift, however, is in the increased rights and responsibilities being given to forest-local communities. New or proposed legislation in South Africa and to a lesser extent Zambia and Tanzania, now makes it possible for local people to re-secure *ownership* of Government Forest Reserves on a case-by-case basis. The main objective of the *Forestry Act of Lesotho* (1999) is to hand back State Reserves to communities or co-operatives. Legal opportunities also exist for groups of citizens to create community reserves out of unreserved forest land, most notably in Malawi, Namibia, Lesotho and Tanzania.

Even greater provision is being made for forest-local communities to participate in the management of the region's expansive forests. Through ubiquitous joint forest management agreements, communities may now co-manage government forest reserves, or in some cases be designated autonomous managers (South Africa, Tanzania, Zanzibar). Most new laws provide for unreserved forests to be managed by communities. However, the management regimes vary and in some cases may operate only with the permission of Forestry Departments (Malawi, Namibia) or through joint management committees more notable for the participation of government agencies than for local representation (Zambia).

Approaches to community participation

In this paper I focus on the different ways communities are involved in forest management in the region. These differences may be identified not only in new policies and laws, but also in field initiatives which arise out of these new strategies or pre-date and guide their formulation.¹

Communities as forest users

There are two main approaches to community involvement in forest management. The first and still more dominant strategy recognises communities as forest users, seeking to secure their co-operation by granting them legal access to certain products or a share in forest-derived benefits. This is the model of most so-called joint forest management initiatives, such as projects in Zimbabwe (Mafungabusi), Mozambique (Tchuma Tchato), Kenya (Golini-Malunganji), Malawi (Chimaliro), Zambia (Muzama), and Uganda (Bwindi). Zimbabwe's wildlife-centred CAMPFIRE programme, begun in the 1980s, has been particularly influential in this paradigm in its objective to share the sometimes substantial returns from private safari and hunting enterprises in woodlands with resident populations (Campbell *et al.*, 1999).

Buffer zone developments, designed to lessen local forest dependence (eg. Arabuko Forest Reserve in Kenya, Mount Elgon in Uganda, Bazaruto in Mozambique), also fall into this broad paradigm, in which local people are more beneficiaries of forest management than management actors, although they may find themselves more frequently consulted (Alden Wily and Mbaya, *in press*).

Communities as forest managers

The second and generally more recent approach is much more directly concerned with how a forest is managed and aims to deliver a cheaper, more effective and more sustainable regime. It looks to forest-local communities as potential managers or co-managers and devises arrangements with them which gives them varying degrees of authority. Whilst this strategy works best where the community is acknowledged as the owner or potential owner of the resource, it is also being applied to government forest reserves.

In general, the principle which underwrites this approach is that the greater the authority devolved to forest-local communities, the greater their incentive to manage the forest sustainably and effectively. Emphasis is placed on helping the community to devise ways to make the forest sustainable over the longer term, and in a context which binds them, and others, to this regime.

Thus whilst the former strategy shares access rights and benefits to advance forest conservation, the latter shares power to achieve this. This is clearly the more transformative of state-people relations in natural resource management, and of the regime of

¹ Alden Wily and Mbaya (*in press*) provide a detailed review of field developments in 12 states.

management itself. It is also, many foresters argue, more risky, releasing powers long held to be the domain of governments. At the same time there is emerging recognition that forests will not be secured without such democratisation.

In eastern and southern Africa there are relatively few projects with this main objective. Notable developments include new pilot forest reserve projects in Uganda, two equally new initiatives in northern Namibia and a range of smaller developments in South Africa, Lesotho and Malawi (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press). However, Tanzania is most advanced in promoting this strategy, as described below.

A Case Study from Tanzania

Forests in Tanzania cover 33 million hectares, and are predominantly of the invaluable *miombo* woodland type (National Forest Policy 1998). Fourteen million hectares are reserved, mainly within 357 National Forest Reserves (NFR) and 141 Local Authority Forest Reserves (LAFR). These are owned and managed respectively by central and local governments (district councils). The remaining 19 million hectares fall outside these reserves in either land now defined as village lands or on land held by government in default of established local ownership.

Community-based management, especially of these unreserved forests, is evolving rapidly in Tanzania. The creation of self-reliant village-based governance in Tanzania since the mid-1970s has been central to this process (Alden Wily, 1997). Most of rural Tanzania is now divided into some 9,250 registered villages, each with its discrete land area ('village area'). This area encompasses not only homesteads and private farms, but also common pastures and woodlands.

Since 1975, each village has been able to elect its own government, or village council, a body which administers the community's affairs. Village councils possess a mix of executive and legislative powers, the latter enabling them to create enforceable village by-laws on virtually any matter affecting the social or economic well-being of the community or the resources within the local village area.

New land laws (the Land and Village Land Acts of 1999) mean that all village communities can now formally register and title their commons as statutorily defined private lands (commonholds). The Acts aim to bring all land in Tanzania under ownership which can be defined and registered, and can arguably enable communities to extend their tenure to include adjacent unoccupied lands. These laws also devolve authority over village lands to village councils, who undertake community-based adjudication, registration and entitlement and record the results in village land registers.

Community-based forest management in Tanzania

In this devolved and village-centred environment, forest-local communities have taken on proactive forest management in recent years, initially through the support of donor-funded projects (Alden Wily, 2000d). Today nearly 600 Village Forest Reserves have been declared out of unreserved village lands, ranging from five to 10,000 ha, each actively managed by its owner-manager community (Alden Wily, 2000d). In addition, more than 20 different communities manage, or co-manage with government, parts of eight National Forest Reserves.

A draft Forest Bill (FBD 2000a) is supporting the process through a framework to devolve responsibility “*for the management of forests to the lowest possible level*”. Technical guidelines for community-based forest management (CBFM) have been drafted to assist foresters to make this real in all 115 districts, irrespective of whether the forest lies within village land or government reserves (FBD 2000b).

Three types of community-based forest management are set out in the new law:

1. Village Land Forest Reserves (VLFR): forest land owned by the village community as a whole
2. Community Forest Reserves (CFR): forests owned and managed by a sub-group of the village community, such as clans, sub-village or society groups. 28 CFR have already been declared (Alden Wily and Monela, 1999).
3. Village Forest Management Areas (VFMA): areas of government reserves placed under community management, but not ownership.

As VLFR will derive mostly from village common lands, the approach makes it less likely that these forests will be lost to uncontrolled encroachment and individualisation, or, as has often been the case, by appropriation as government forest reserves. Even should the Minister seek to create more National or Local Government Reserves, he (like his Namibian counterpart under the proposals of the Namibia Forest Bill 2000), will now be obliged to justify why the forest could not be better managed as a community-owned and managed estate.

The draft new forest law intends that VLFR and CFR be autonomously managed by Village Forest Management Committees in full consultation with the community members who elect them. Management Committees need to draw up and implement simple management plans, to be approved by the whole community, as to how the forest may be used and not used. Permits can be issued, fees collected and fines imposed upon those who break the rules. These community rules may be put into a village by-law to make them more widely enforceable.

Where communities share a boundary with government reserves, their participation in management is made obligatory in the draft law. A community can either autonomously manage, or else co-manage with a government forester, the part of the reserve which adjoins its village area. The area, declared as a VFMA, may eventually be reclassified as a village or community reserve. Communities which manage government reserves may also enact village by-laws to enforce the agreed regime.

Sharing jurisdiction, not access

It will be apparent that the Tanzanian approach is rooted in a process of power-sharing, rather than in allowing communities increased access to the forest resource. This arises from early recognition that when communities are given ownership and control of forests, they have a vested interest in treating the resource well (Alden Wily, 1997). Simply allowing access rights is not enough to promote sustainable management (Box 1).

This same approach as described in Box 1 was applied to a larger and more threatened forest (Mgori, 40,000 ha), also nearing final gazettement as a National Forest Reserve. Today, Mgori is managed as five discrete Village Forest Reserves. With one variation or another, the stratagem has been adopted in 18 districts and has come to form the foundation of policy and now legal proposals as described above (Alden Wily, 2000d).

Learning from the Tanzanian Experience

Enough progress in CBFM in Tanzania has been made to draw at least some early lessons (Iddi, 2000; Berglund, 1997; Kajembe and Mgoo, 1999; NRBZ, 1999; Massawe, 2000a, 2000b; CFMU, 1999; Alden Wily, 2000d; Alden Wily *et al.*, 2000). A common finding is that CBFM invigorates flagging village organisations, challenging village leaders to be more active and accountable, and reviving village meetings. The importance of helping villagers to set up accountable record-keeping is an important lesson, particularly where money is being raised from fines. Many communities soon introduce higher fines for leaders, committee members or patrolmen who break the rules. Whilst protection is normally begun on a voluntary basis and rewarded with a share of fines, this source dries up with the decline in offences and many communities find it necessary to adopt rota regimes or to introduce user fees to sustain protection.

Overall, if there is a single consistent observation, it is that CBFM is a developing process, and one which evolves and matures as each crisis or problem is confronted and dealt with. Village capacity to recognise and deal with problems improves, and more active villages often eventually turn their attention to other resources such as grazing lands, adopting the same regulatory approach.

Some fundamental issues are of relevance to other countries in the region aiming to involve communities in forest management. These are outlined below.

Box 1. Sustainable management through devolving power, not access

Duru-Haitemba Forest is a hilly *miombo* woodland of 9,000 hectares and offers one of the earliest Tanzanian examples of community-based forest management. It was surveyed for gazettelement as a National Forest Reserve in 1991, and two forest guards were deployed to protect the forest. Feeling that their customary tenure had been ignored, villages on the perimeter of the forest proceeded to extract as much as they could from the forest before it was 'lost' to them. Outsiders joined in, arguing that as the forest now belonged to government, it was owned by everyone (or no one). By 1994 the forest was encroached on all sides by new farms, became seriously degraded, and the critical springs it supported had dried up. Even dry fuelwood became difficult to find.

Concerned foresters offered the communities legal access for essential needs as a way forward. However, the communities demanded access for charcoal burning, felling of by then scarce trees for timber, and bark to make grain containers, activities which had been prominent causes of degradation. During heated meetings the community argued that if the forest was returned to them, they would manage it better than government. The communities were challenged to demonstrate this and they responded with alacrity. Each of the eight villages on the boundary formed Forest Management Committees in late 1994/95, appointed volunteer forest guards and drew up simple action plans for that part of the forest which it was agreed (with a good deal of dispute) fell within their respective village spheres.

Access rules formed a central part of these plans, notably banning damaging uses such as charcoal production which these same villagers had claimed, a mere month previously, was indispensable to their livelihood. Leaders explained that "*it is different if it is our forest. We will no longer be able to blame government if it disappears*". Outsiders were banned from entering the forest and village members agreed to limit use to certain zoned areas. Around half of each village forest was closed to all use given its degraded condition. Squatters were forced to return to their original homes.

Impressed, government withdrew the forest guards for a trial period. Within the space of a few months, it was obvious to foresters and villagers alike that at no cost to government, the forest was on the road to recovery. Gazettelement was suspended. Returning to the area five years later, the facilitating forester recorded the return of forest springs, closure of the canopy, a dramatic increase in under-cover and "*an average of six young *Brachystegia* species every square metre, excellent for any forest*" (Haule in Alden Wily et al., 2000). Villagers informed him that swarms were reoccupying beehives in the forest and wildlife returning. Other positive impacts included fewer areas of erosion, more steady stream flow from the hills, and a complete absence of ring-barked trees or evidence of over-grazing (Berglund, 1997; Kajembe and Mgoo, 1999). On-farm tree planting and construction of brick rather than polewood houses had increased, and availability of dry fuelwood in the forest had also increased. There were local losers in this development; larger cattle-keepers who were restricted to seasonal grazing rights and a group of poor women who had sold forest fuelwood in the nearby town.

Cost-effectiveness

Most initiatives in the region are driven initially by donor-funded projects, many of which put in place staffing and support systems which cannot be sustained after the cessation of funds (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press). In Tanzania this has proved less of a problem given that the mainstream approach has been to avoid costly inputs and to focus upon community empowerment to organise and sustain all functions of forest management. There is little doubt that the low cost of community-based management there has facilitated its rapid replication. However, even in Tanzania, frustrations are being experienced as more and more foresters and communities want to be involved. Foresters lack the transport to get to the villages to act as facilitators, and there is little money available for cross-village study tours and training (Massawe, 2000b; Alden Wily *et al.* 2000). Whereas in most countries an outstanding need is still to design projects which reduce rather than increase the costs to government, in Tanzania there may be a need to help villages develop stronger revenue-generating elements to community-based management to enable them to procure the services of foresters.

Making community-based management enforceable

A central lesson of Tanzanian CBFM is the importance of making the forest management regimes devised by communities enforceable. In the case of Duru-Haitemba (Box 1) community rules were challenged in the courts by a group of disgruntled cattle-owners and then a group of outsiders annoyed at the closure of their felling operations (Alden Wily, 1997). Because the management plans and rules lacked the weight of law, the former claim was upheld by the District Magistrate. Villages have since been encouraged to formalise their regimes and rules in village by-laws, which enter statutory law through procedures laid out in the *Local Government (District Councils) Act 1982*. Once promulgated, these are bound to be upheld in the courts and apply to all persons.

Of course, this capacity is only available to rural groups through the type of village governance which only exists in Tanzania. Recognition of the utility of these grassroot democracies for all aspects of development and governance is slowly growing, so far partially realised in new local government law in Uganda (1996) and in the intentions of land and rural development policy in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Rwanda (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press). However, even without this development, which would take years to put in place in most states, there are ways and means to endow local actors with real power to manage resources, and the search for appropriate mechanisms must become a central goal of policy-makers.

The need for effective social institutions

For the above and related reasons, the absence of effective social institutions at the community level in many countries, let alone ones which have legislative powers, is a key constraint for the evolution of genuinely community-based forest management initiatives.

In an attempt to remedy this, new forest laws make provision for bodies such as the Natural Resource Management Committees of Malawi, Forest Associations of Kenya, Management Authorities of Namibia, and Joint Forest Management Committees of Zambia (Alden Wily 2000c). However, on the whole, formation of such bodies is sometimes complicated and their legal personality ambivalent, with powers vague or limited (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press). For example, it has taken three years for a first NRMC in Malawi to secure the right to fine offenders and these are to be paid in kind only (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press; Mauambeta, 2000). Reports from other countries (Zimbabwe: Campbell *et al.* 1999; Vudzijena, 1998; Mozambique: Anstey, 2000; Mushove in Alden Wily & Mbaya, in press; Uganda: Hinchley, 2000, among others) regularly complain of the frustrations created by being 'powerless to enforce rules'. Some Forestry Departments side-step the issue by allowing Honorary Foresters to delegate certain powers (Kenya, Namibia, Zambia).

Lacunae in local level institutional formation is particularly problematic in countries like Mozambique and South Africa, where years of war or policies have resulted in marked population dislocation, with 'communities' often in reality an aggregation of disparate groups, each with their own loyalties and conflicting understanding of their resource rights and claims (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press.). The absence of decentralised government compounds the problem. Traditional leaders who operate in the vacuum may be in contention and shaky in the levels of adherence they command. Even in states like Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, Kenya and Namibia, where varying versions of local government are in place at the district level, the lack of governance machinery below that level impedes community identification, organization and the launch of activities such as community-based management regimes (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press). Thus the long history of village level government in Tanzania is clearly highly advantageous, and a key factor in the relative ease with which CBFM is being established.

Binding community managers to sustainable forest management

Delegating authority and jurisdiction to the village level has implications for the village's freedom to act. The act of passing a by-law binds the community to setting aside or 'reserving' that area for forestry, and prevents it from later using the land for settlement or agriculture. It also binds the community to the management regime expressed in the by-law. Whilst neither central nor local governments have so far taken a community to court for failing to meet these commitments, the possibility that this could occur is very real. Once again, the importance of endowing collaborative or community-based forest management with legal force becomes crucial.

Clarifying the fields of management and forest user

A key lesson is the need to involve forest-local citizens, not as co-operating user groups but as forest custodians and managers. In the cases in Tanzania where citizens are only

seen as user groups, little sustainable change has been achieved (Box 2). This highlights that many so-called joint management initiatives are little more than sophisticated licensing regimes, albeit a good deal more sensitive to local needs than in the past.

A related important lesson is the need to include all members of the local community in establishing management commitments, not just those who may be forests users. In Tanzania, this has led to a logical identification of guardians/managers as (only) those who live in communities which directly share a boundary with the forest – and irrespective of whether they actually use the forest or not. That is, it is their socio-spatial proximity with the forest which determines who should be involved, a proximity which is usually under-laid with the strongest customary rights to the forest, even where it has been designated a government Forest Reserve.

This is not to say that users from communities more distant from the forest are not considered, but rather that these, and the use regime as a whole, are handled separately. Indeed the proposed forest law requires new village forest managers to take account of existing access rights in general in their planning. Experience to date shows that village managers tend to permit those with the longest and most customary foundation to continue to use the forest, although requiring them to seek permission prior to entry, or to seasonal, zone, or quota limitation, or fees (Alden Wily, 2000d; Alden Wily and Monela, 1999; Iddi, 2000; Massawe, 2000a). These limitations may be less than those for members of the forest managing community, which gains this privilege along with its responsibilities and effort.

Nor does drawing this distinction between management and use signal disinterest in the livelihood dependency of local populations, including those who may not live within the forest-managing community. On the contrary, by rooting management in a context of guardianship, it removes management from the kind of tug of wars over resources which may result from use rights being made the centre-ground of the state-people relationship. Instead it opens the way for the community to manage as if it were the owner,

Box 2. Gaining products and losing position

In 1996 the Tanzanian Forestry Division drew up joint management agreements with five villages adjacent to Urumwa Forest Reserve in Tabora Region, and with another more distant village and the district prison, allowing each to harvest demarcated coupes in return for keeping the forest clear of illegal users. By the end of 1998 local enthusiasm had waned (Alden Wily and Monela, 1999). Villagers explained that the coupes only benefited villagers who had the tools and transport to harvest and sell, and second, whilst they were content that certain illegal uses had been legalised, they felt that ultimately they had lost more than they had gained through 'joint management'. They resented the inclusion of the distant village and prison which had no traditional interests in the forest, and felt that their own custodial interests over the forest had been eliminated, or downgraded to mere use rights: *"We gained legal fuelwood collection but lost the forest"*.

or at least the jurisdictional authority, and to address use needs and potentials with a long-term view in mind. It also opens the way for communities to manage forests which are important less for their products than for their existence values and environmental services, or which, for reasons of degradation or unusual biodiversity, cannot sustain significant extractive use.

In short, recognising a community's tenurial or jurisdictional rights over the forest creates a vested interest which is a good deal more lasting and powerful than when only access rights or benefits are on offer. Much more attention needs to be given to this question by strategists and policy-makers in the region.

Moving Forward: From User-centred Collaboration to Authority-centred Devolution

Despite the experiences in Tanzania, most initiatives elsewhere in the region remain user- rather than management-centred. These arrangements become particularly vulnerable when either the administration needed to supervise access or benefit-sharing is too costly to sustain, or where the source of benefit is insecure (such as tourism) or under constant threat of being over-exploited in order to meet the needs of the community to maintain their support (Filimao *et al.*, 2000; White, 1998; Jones, 1999; Vudzijena, 1998).

The fate of the Muzama initiative in North Western Province in Zambia is a case in point. Over a number of years this has helped some 60 local beekeeping and pit-sawing groups operating within a rich one million hectare area of miombo woodland to market their products internationally to considerable local benefit (Uchi Makula Trust, 2000a). In 1999 the Forest Department withdrew the groups' harvesting permits to open the area to commercial logging to raise its own revenue. Had the Muzama initiative been founded upon agreement to manage the woodland rather than agreement only to use it, then the dramatic loss of livelihoods would have been less likely to occur. Had the licensees entered formal agreement with the Forestry Department, then they could have sued the state for breach of contract. Without this, the user groups are now powerless, reduced to pleading publicly with politicians to restore their licences (Uchi Makula Trust 2000b).

Slowly but surely such lessons are being taken on board in the region. After a series of user-centred projects in Mozambique, new initiatives are being launched, not to secure local forest access, but to help these same communities establish local management regimes which are community-driven and sustained, and where possible to root these in recognition of local tenure (Anstey, 2000; Mushove in Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press). A comparable shift is observable in Uganda, where the content of joint forest management agreements has moved sharply since 1998 from division of use rights and responsibilities into arrangements which designate forest-local communities as

managers - an approach which borrows significantly from neighbouring Tanzania (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press). So too, in Namibia, expensive demarcation of four new State Forest Reserves gave way in 1998 to their redesignation as future Community Forests, to be owned and managed at the local level (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press).

In these and other cases, issues of local institutional formation come urgently to the fore. For when communities take on more than user or beneficiary status, and begin to act as managers, definition of their powers to do so becomes central. This in turn raises questions as to who exactly constitutes the community and how it may be located in identifiable and accountable form. It is through such demands that new forest strategies seek urgently for existing or new frameworks as elaborated earlier.

Stronger rights of rural populations to local resources through the land reform programmes touched on earlier, add impetus to such shifts. Once registration of informal rural land rights is made possible, identification of just how common rights may be held becomes a critical concern. South Africa illustrates the link clearly: through restitution claims its new state forests law recognises that many such forests will eventually be returned to community tenure. Finding workable institutional frameworks into which such ownership may be divested, and at the same ensuring that this will allow for the resource to be sustained, has become an increasingly important concern of foresters. So far few available legal regimes have proved ideal, prompting the search for better options (Alden Wily and Mbaya, in press).

At this point, the question confronting forest management strategists is less whether such democratisation will continue to gather pace, but how this transformation can be best directed. One of the outstanding lessons already being learnt in the region is the value of cross-country experiences, learning from each other, as well as learning by doing. If there were a single core recommendation for policy-makers and donors at this time, it is to encourage such experiences and exchanges of views.

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