

Malawi Forest Governance Learning Group

# Locally controlled forestry

Key factors affecting the effectiveness of community based forest management (CBFM) within and outside village natural resource management committees – study report



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## Contents

<b>Acronyms.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Background.....	6
1.2 Study objectives.....	7
<b>2.0 Approach and methodology .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Literature review .....	8
2.2 Study tools and techniques .....	8
2.3 Study limitations .....	8
<b>3.0 Areas, actors and processes leading to CBFM.....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Mawira Forest Area.....	9
3.2 Kamwamba Forest Areas.....	11
3.3 Mangwiro village forest area .....	12
3.4 Ntanda Village Forest Area .....	14
3.5 Chimaliro Forestry Reserve.....	15
3.6 Majiasawa Village Forest Area .....	17
<b>4.0 Drivers of successful CBFM .....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1 Conducive policy environment for community involvement .....	19
4.2 Clearly defined tenure arrangements and usufruct rights .....	19
4.3 Linking livelihoods to community based forest management.....	19
4.4 Clearly defined and congruence of rules and local conditions.....	20
4.5 An agreed benefit-sharing mechanism .....	20
4.6 Capacitated and functional village natural resource management committees .....	20
4.7 Strong traditional leadership.....	21
4.8 Adequate technical, financial and moral support.....	22
4.9 Commitment of the change agents.....	23
4.10 Strong forest extension system .....	23
4.11 Communities to define their own institutions arrangements.....	24
4.12 Clarity and recognition of interests.....	24
<b>5.0 Conclusions and recommendations.....</b>	<b>26</b>
5.1 Conclusions.....	26
5.2 Recommendations .....	26
<b>References.....</b>	<b>28</b>

## Acronyms

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
BERDO	Bwanje Environmental and Rural Development Organization
CBFM	Community Based Forest Management
CBO	Community Based Organisation
COMPASS	Community Partnership for Sustainable Natural Resource Management
EU	European Union
FRIM	Forestry Research Institute of Malawi
FGLG	Forest Governance Learning Group
GVH	Group Village Headperson
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MDGS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
M1	Main Road 1
NFP	National Forestry Programme
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policies
SADC	Southern Africa development Community
TSP	Training Support for Partners
UNHCR	United National High Commission for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
VFA	Village Forestry Area
VNRMC	Village Natural Resource Management Committee
WESM	Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi

## Executive summary

For many years, the Government of Malawi tried to solve forest management problems alone, leaving out local communities, who were regarded as destroyers of forests. But this approach has not worked. Realising that the situation is getting out of control, a new paradigm is emerging: Community Based Forest Management (CBFM). This new paradigm is founded on strong partnerships between local communities and the government, that aim to promote sustainable management of forest resources whilst also delivering just commercial returns and improved well-being to local communities. The guiding principle of CBFM is to give local communities rights to both manage and commercially benefit from the natural resources on their land.

Local communities have embraced CBFM because it gives them both rights and responsibilities, and they believe that the mistrust that previously existed between them and forestry officers will now end. However, some people still question whether CBFM will really deliver poverty reduction and a sustainable forest resource all at once, and are unsure of the ingredients required for successful CBFM in Malawi. In an effort to answer these questions, the Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG) Malawi commissioned a study to capture and spread information about the ingredients for successful CBFM.

The study revealed both successful and unsuccessful examples of CBFM – with several transitions from success to failure or the reverse on the same site. It also identified some of the many drivers for successful CBFM which include:

- a conducive policy environment which supports local community efforts to manage forest resources;
- security of tenure and usufruct rights over the forest resources;
- a clear contribution of the forest resources to their livelihoods;
- rules and local conditions that allow them to make decisions over their forest resources;
- strong and functional village-level institutions and traditional leadership;
- adequate and continued technical, financial and moral support for community efforts;
- strong support mechanism such as extension systems and commitment of change agents.

In Malawi, these drivers have encouraged and motivated local communities to manage their forest resources. Without support from other players, CBFM will be difficult to pursue. But over the years there has been increased support for CBFM activities in the country from civil society organisations, private organisations and academic institutions.

From the findings of the study, a few recommendations have been made, including the following to the Government of Malawi:

- Find and allocate more financial and technical resources for the implementation of the forestry policy, strengthening the forestry extension systems by making sure that there are more forestry extension staff members that have the capacity to facilitate CBFM.
- Avoid interfering with community decision-making processes through which they define their own CBFM institutional and management arrangements best suited to their customs, desires and situations. The role of the external players should only be limited to guiding

and advising the rural communities – not predefining one single blueprint about how they should work. The government should allow great flexibility in interpreting the roles of the VNRMC in relation to the overall natural resource management at community level, which is often linked to other village-level institutions such as village development committees.

- Realising that the majority of the rural people are poor, there is need to promote commercial / enterprise interventions that produce short term and long-term benefits, not just management responsibilities. That is to say, planting or managing forest regeneration is all very well, but communities need cash income while they wait for these resources to mature to harvestable age.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In Malawi, as elsewhere, substantial efforts have been made to improve the management of natural resources. However, these efforts have failed to achieve sustainable forest management. The conventional approach to natural resource management where the government is sole manager and controller of the natural resources simply does not work. Realising that the conventional approach was failing, an entirely new paradigm emerged called Community Based Forest Management (CBFM). CBFM's ultimate goals are to promote sustainable management of forest resources; social justice and improved well-being of local communities; and strong partnerships between local communities and the government (especially the Department of Forestry - [www.forestry.denr.gov.ph](http://www.forestry.denr.gov.ph)). With the introduction of CBFM, the hope is that the problems engulfing forest management in Malawi can be turned around.

The government recognises that many stakeholders are involved in forest management and cannot therefore be ignored. The involvement of local communities in the management of forest resources has long been recognised as critical, both for sustainable use of the forest and sustainable development of local communities (Posey, 1995). To show commitment to the new forest management approach, the government has reviewed various policies and legal frameworks to embrace community-based management of natural resources. The Forestry Policy (1996) and Forestry Act (1997), for example, emphasises and recognises the participation of rural communities and other stakeholders in the management of forests and trees. The Forestry Act recognises the establishment of the village-level institutions, such as village natural resource management committees (VNRMC), and block committees at local-level community structures, for coordinating community participation in forest resource management in the country.

The many groups involved in CBFM, each with their own intentions, motives, and interests, has resulted in varying definitions of CBFM. Some players define CBFM in terms of "people first and sustainable forestry will follow". This means that by addressing the needs of the local communities they themselves will join hands to protect and manage the very resource of their livelihood. Others put the forest first but believe the way to protect it is to ensure it meets local needs. For example, the World Rainforest Movement, (WRM, 2002) defines CBFM to mean environmentally sustainable use of forest resources while benefiting local communities. Others, such as Kajembe, *et.al* (2003), looks at CBFM through a justice lens – for example, CBFM resolves injustices in protected forest areas where local people were excluded from the land they had traditionally occupied and depended on for their livelihood. The common ground is that all these definitions of CBFM seek to promote sustainable management of forests and trees by the local communities who live next to it and use it on a daily basis for their benefits.

The paradigm shift to CBFM has made the foresters realise that the answers to the problems of forest management lie within the communities that have traditionally been regarded as a problem. Communities who live close to a particular forest resource have the potential to sustainably manage forest resource if there are conducive policies and legal frameworks, motivation, and clear usufruct and tenure arrangements which are supportive of their efforts. The new Malawi forester recognises that he or she has to play a facilitatory and advisory role in forest

management, not an authoritarian or dictatorial role, if CBFM is to take root. This study tries to explore the ingredients for improved CBFM in Malawi.

## 1.2 Study objectives

The Government of Malawi, through the Forestry Department, is implementing an EU funded Improved Forest Management for Sustainable Development Programme (IFMSLP) which focuses on improved forest governance, strengthening capacity of forest depended people and improving their livelihood security. As part of its contribution to the process of improved forest governance and implementation of the programme, the Malawi Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG) commissioned a study to “capture and spread information about the ingredients required for successful Community Based Forest Management.” Specifically, the study was commissioned to:

- Define ‘effective CBFM’ and identify a representative set of at least six cases spread across North, Central and Southern regions that can shed light on successful CBFM – including both where statutory VNRMCs are operational and where traditional structures are involved in management of forests.
- Visit and interview key community members (with a roughly equal gender balance) about the history and processes that led up towards ‘effective’ CBFM; collecting and recording qualitative information for each case relating to four distinct areas: (i) the main actors involved, (ii) details of the process they went through, (iii) the drivers that motivated communities to invest their effort in CBFM and (iv) the support they received
- Analyse the data and offer some conclusions about the key ingredients that make for successful CBFM, who should be involved (with specific reference to Traditional Authorities and gender), what type of support (technical, financial, social facilitation), and how VNRMCs or alternative arrangements might best be advanced in Malawi to spread success.



## 2.0 Approach and methodology

### 2.1 Literature review

The study team reviewed a number of documents related to the study and community based forest management in general, as well as policies, legal frameworks and study reports. Some of the policy documents that have been reviewed for the study include, National Forest Policy 2006, Forestry Act, 2007, Local Government Act, 1998, MDGS, 2006, NFP, Land Policy, Standards and Guidelines for Participatory Forestry Management in Malawi, Forestry Tactics and others. The literature review guided the development of data tools for carrying out the study.

### 2.2 Study tools and techniques

A number of study tools and techniques were developed and used during the study including:

- **Field study visits** - Six case studies were sampled for the study, namely, Mawira and Ntanda in Ntcheu district, Kamwamba in Neno district, Mangwilo in Blantyre district, Nsamo in Chikwawa district, Chimaliro and in Mzimba district.
- **Key informant interviews** - Using a specially design checklist, key informant interviews were carried out at central government level with heads of departments; local government level with forestry and agriculture officers; and community level with local leaders, such as VNRMC members and traditional leaders.
- **Focus group discussions** – These were held in all the sampled case study areas with community members and VNRMC committee members. In selected case study areas, the study team held focus group discussions with people outside the case study areas and timber and non-timber forest products sellers along the mains roads.
- **Data analysis and report writing** - The information collected was systematically analysed and a draft report was circulated to the FGLG members for comments and inputs. After their inputs a final report was produced.

### 2.3 Study limitations

Due to time and resource constraints, the study team could only visit six case study areas, which is a small, albeit significant sample from which to draw conclusions. However, the visited case study areas provided the much needed information in relation to the key objectives of the study. It was difficult to meet some of the district level officers in some districts because the study coincided with voter registration and farm input distribution, and most of the officers were engaged in such activities. The findings of the study were not significantly affected by the obscene of their input, however.



### 3.0 Areas, actors and processes leading to CBFM

The study revealed that there are many players who are facilitating CBFM in the various cases study area as summarised in table 1. The role played by each institution in a particular cases study area depends on the level of engagement and intentions of the particular player in the area. For example, Majiasawa Forest Area was a research site for Mzuzu University at one point, and the University engagement was mainly on the research point of view. In order to ensure that the research activities progressed well, the University provided a lot of technical support and advice to the people in the VFA and the VNRMC in terms of training, through the District Forestry Office. Below is a summary of players and types of support that each case study area received over the years to promote CBFM.

#### 3.1 Mawira Forest Area

The Mawira Village Forest Area (VFA) is in Traditional Authority Ganya, east of Ntcheu District. The village forest area covers approximately 30 hectares of land and comprises mainly *Brachystegia* tree species, which is a characteristic of Miombo woodlands. About five hectares of the VFA is planted with exotic tree species, comprising mainly *Eucalyptus* tree species. The forest area was established in 1998, with support from a local community based organisation (CBO) called Bwanje Environmental and Rural Development Organization (BERDO). People of the area rely on substance farming and grow crops such as maize, groundnuts, cotton, tobacco, cassava and rice.

Between 1980s and 1990s, Bwanje area saw a rapid increase in the number of estates, which resulted in many forest areas being opened for tobacco growing. Within the same period, the population of the area almost doubled, due to the arrival of 50,000 Mozambican refugees who fled the civil war. The increased number of tobacco estates and the increased population that relied on the woodlands around the area for firewood and poles for tobacco curing and household use, exerted more pressure on the forest resources in the area. The increased number of estates in the area and resultant increase in the demand for wood resulted in heavy deforestation. Due to the heavy deforestation, fish resources from the rivers declined; streams, rivers and swamps dried up; the area faced enormous soil erosion of more than 25 metric tonnes per year, which in turn affected crop and livestock production. People from the area derived most of their forest resources from Mawira forest area but the high deforestation rates in the surrounding forest areas including Mawira Forest Area threatened the supply of forest resources. This prompted Bwanje Environmental and Rural Development Organization (BERDO), a community based organisation, to mobilise people from 30 villages to plant trees around the homesteads and manage the remaining forests and trees on customary land. The enthusiasm of BERDO and the rural community attracted many other organisations, development partners and the government to support the efforts of the people in the management of natural resources in the case study area. Local forest management activities in the area are coordinated through the village natural resource management committees which are supported mainly by the government forest extension workers and BERDO.

An initiative by a forestry extension worker and traditional leaders (village headmen and traditional authority) resulted in the establishment of Mawira Village Forestry Area in Bwanje valley, in Ntcheu district. The forestry extension worker mobilised villagers and local leaders to

solve the problems of deforestation, drying of streams, and increased levels of soil erosion by promoting tree planting and natural resource management activities in the village and around Mawira hill. In an effort to cover more villages, the local leaders, with the help of the forestry extension worker, identified village-based volunteers who worked as change agents at village level. The efforts by the forestry extension worker and local leaders were supported by the Department of Forestry, through its EU funded Social Forestry Programme, which provided technical and material support to the people in the area to plant more trees and manage the indigenous forest and trees on customary land in the area. The CBO mobilised retired civil servants based in the area to volunteer in the natural resource management activities. It also involved the police, schools, churches and mosques to plant more trees and manage the remaining forest resources.

The community organisation in the area attracted a lot of support from other government departments, such as the Land Resources Department, which provided training of extension workers and communities on agroforestry technologies and soil and water conservation techniques. Other NGOs and international organisations were also attracted to provide technical and financial support to the people in the area. With the support from the various organisations, a local community based organisation was strengthened to increase its area of coverage as well as introduced a broad range of development initiatives including food security, income generating activities, irrigation, soil and water conservation.

Realising the importance of the Forest Area to the village, the CBO facilitated a participatory resource assessment in Mawira Forestry Area following the standards and guidelines for participatory forestry Management (Ministry of Mines, Natural Resources and Environment, Department of Forestry, 2005). Currently, Mawira VFA has an approved management plan, benefit sharing mechanism and a management agreement with the Forestry Department. The VFA has a strong VNRMC that is responsible for coordinating the activities of the VFA. Committee members of the VNRMC revealed that they have undergone various types of training, visited many other VFA in the country and have received lots of visitors from both within the country and outside who provided moral support to committees and the people responsible for the VFA. As a result of the performance of the Mawira VNRMC, over 39 VFAs have been established in the case study area.

Organisations like Oxfam, USAID through COMPASS, EU Social Forestry Program, Training Support Program, FRIM, and other government departments played a big role in providing financial and technical support to the CBO to effectively implement its environmental and natural resource management activities in addition to the facilitation of the Mawira Village Forest Area establishment.

From the Mawira case study, a few lessons can be drawn including the following:

- committed and competent change agents are important to the successful implementation of the CBFM;
- community based forest management requires strong technical and financial support from various players to make it work;
- local communities will get involved in CBFM activities if benefits from their efforts are clear;
- without strong traditional leaders, CBFM will not easily work.

### 3.2 Kamwamba Forest Areas

Kamwamba is in Traditional Authority Simon in Neno district and lies 65 kilometers from Blantyre, along the Blantyre Lilongwe M1 road. The study area covers 14 villages with a population of about 15,000 people. Community management of the natural forest resources in the area is through village natural resource management committees (VNRMC), which exist in all fourteen villages. Most of the VNRMCs in the area were formed by a local NGO called Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM), with support from the Department of Forestry, local assembly and various development partners and international organisations such as GTZ, USAID and Oxfam. Apart from farming, the people in the area are also involved in forest based enterprises, such as beekeeping, guinea fowl rearing, cane manufacturing and juice production from indigenous fruits.

The formation of the VNRMC in the area was a response to the heavy deforestation, which resulted from a number of forces, including:

- The opening of the main road, which passes through the area and provided easy access routes for charcoal and firewood, which are key sources of energy in urban centers such as Blantyre. The area provided a cheap source of firewood and charcoal for the urban centers, which in turn influenced the high rates of deforestation in the area.
- The weak law enforcement by the Department of Forestry further aggravated the problem of deforestation in the area. The capacity of the department was weakened during the implementation process of the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) which saw many government departments downsizing to be in line with the SAPs. The department most affected by the SAP implementation process was the Forestry Department, which lost most of its law enforcement members of staff.

The political transition from a one-party state to multiparty state as part of the democratisation process in the country further contributed to the high levels of deforestation. The democratic dispensation was construed to mean deregulation of government control over forest resources (Kayambazinthu, 2003). This resulted in wanton cutting down of trees for firewood and charcoal, as well as the opening of farm lands in protected areas such as Namatunu, Matandwe, Malosa, Dzonzi/ Mvai forest reserves, just to mention a few examples.

Wildlife Environmental and Wildlife Society of Malawi (WESM), with technical and financial support from the SADC/GTZ Natural Resource Management Project, implemented a natural resource management programme in Neno District in the Southern Region. This focused on improved forest management and the promotion of natural resource based enterprises, such as beekeeping, guinea fowl rearing, cane manufacturing, fruit juice making and others. The project facilitated a participatory process to establish village-level institutions to manage the project, including the VNRMCs and VFAs in each of the villages where the project was being implemented. WESM and the Forestry Department facilitated a forestry resource assessment exercise in the case study area, which in 1999 led to the development of the first approved VFA management plan and forest agreement since the Forestry Policy was approved in 1996.

The project was being implemented in collaboration with the Local Government (District Assembly) and the Department of Forestry. The local assembly provided guidance to the project in relation to the overall district development plan and implementation process, while the

Forestry Department provided the policy guidance and technical support to the project. The implementation process of the project and the project focus attracted a lot of attention at national and regional levels, as many organisations and individuals visited the project area. Committee members from the various VNRMCs visited other projects within and outside the country. Some research organisations like FRIM and other international research organisations carried out research work in the project. Other organisations such as Oxfam, and USAID through COMPASS, provided financial support to extend the project intervention to cover more villages. Other countries like Botswana, Namibia and Mozambique bought guinea fowl from the project area. The exchange visits and the income people were accruing from the sale of fruit juice, guinea fowl, honey, seedlings and other products, motivated people to participate in the CBFM activities in the project.

By the end of the project in 2006, many people had established individual or family forest areas and each of the 15 villages involved in the project had village forest areas and VNRMCs. During the time of the assessment, 85 per cent of the individual or family VFA, and 65 per cent of the VFA were still well managed. The VNRMC are still functional but those VNRMCs that have strong traditional leaders were more functional than those with weak traditional (village) leaders. It was noted that the village leaders being the custodians of customary land where the VFA were established had more powers to punish any intruders in the VFA than the VNRMCs themselves.

From the case study, it can be concluded that:

- CBFM will work if there are clearly defined benefits accruing to people involved;
- CBFM will work where people and individuals have capacity and know-how;
- people are motivated and encouraged to participate in the CBFM activities if they realise that other people or organisations value their efforts;
- tenure security over forest resources influences many people to participate in CBFM activities;
- there is a lot of strength in encouraging exchange visits between rural communities because they share knowledge and experiences;
- individuals and communities get involved in CBFM as one way of claiming ownership over the forest resources, which for many years have been in the hands of the government. In Kamwamba, individual families felt secure if they had their own forest area, in addition to the VFAs which are communally owned and managed.

### **3.3 Mangwiro village forest area**

Mangwiro forest area is in Jamali village, Traditional Authority Lundu, northeast of Blantyre. The forest area was set up by local people with support from the Forestry Department. The local leaders in the area, especially Village headman Jamali, influenced their subjects to manage Mangwiro hill into a village forest area. Realising the people's efforts through their village headman, the people formed a VNRMC, which formed the local management structure for the forest area. Due to lack of continued support from the government and other stakeholders, Mangwiro forest area has been heavily encroached and the VNRMC is not functional at the moment. A number of reasons were mentioned during focus group discussion on the underlying causes of the non-functioning of the VNRMC, which lead to the deforestation of the once beautiful VFA including the following:

- villagers felt that the committee members were benefiting more than all the people from the village because they were the only ones attending workshops, meetings and training workshops;
- some villagers felt that the committee members were receiving benefits like money to motivate them to participate in the VFA activities;
- the VNRMC operated like a club of village elites who, instead of coordinating the activities of the VFA, were doing everything and benefiting at the expense of the other villagers and village development activities;
- people felt that the Forestry Department favoured the VNRMC more than the villagers;
- the role of the village headman was not fully recognised as the custodian of the land upon which the VFA was established.

With the help of the Forestry Department, the local communities around Mangwiro hill established the forest area to solve the problems of deforestation and limited access to forest products in the area. The Blantyre District Office facilitated the formation of the VFA and formed a VNRMC which was responsible for coordinating forestry development activities in the VFA and the villages around the forest area. Apart from establishing the VFA and setting up the VNRMC, the Forestry Department provided technical support in the form of training and exchange visits; material support in the form of seedlings and nursery equipment; and guidance on the management of the forestry area. In some instances, the Forestry Department supported the communities in patrolling the forestry area by providing patrol personnel. FRIM also used the VFA to conduct various research activities. The Local Assembly and Forestry Department used Mangwiro village forest area as a good example where community based forestry management was working. A number of visitors both from within the country and outside the country visited the VFA and provided moral support to the VNRMC and the people around the VFA.

Being near to one of the largest urban centers (Blantyre City) in Malawi, the VFA was exposed to enormous pressure since it was one of the few remaining forest areas in the district. The mounting pressure on the VFA, coupled with the limited support from the forestry office and the weak performance of the VNRMC, resulted in the VFA being encroached. One respondent said that the former village headman Jamali was very strong and the VNRMC worked very well. However, when the traditional leadership changed, the committee weakened and charcoal burners invaded the hill with support from other local leaders. The VFA is now wiped out and the VNRMC exists only on paper.

Many conclusions can be drawn from the Mangwiro case study:

- VNRMCs require continued support for them to continue functioning. The committee members and villagers need to fully embrace the ideas and principles of community management before tapering the technical and financial support;
- even though the VFA was for the village, many people opined that the management of the VFA was the responsibility of the VNRMC because they were the one benefiting from the various government initiatives, such as trainings and visits, and even keeping some of the pieces of equipment supplied by the Forestry Department for the management of the VFA;
- increased external pressure for forest resources can be a nightmare for community based forest management. Charcoal burners from Blantyre had the money, and could easily tempt the committee members and some local leaders to allow them into the forest area to



- cut a few trees for firewood and charcoal production;
- project-based support for CBFM promotion is not sustainable, considering the long-term nature of the endeavor. It seems that the Blantyre District Forestry Office was implementing a project which supported the establishment of Mangwiro VFA. Once the project phased out, the support to the VFA also phased out.

### 3.4 Ntanda Village Forest Area

Ntanda Forest Area is situated along the Blantyre Lilongwe M1 road about 135 kilometers from Lilongwe, in Traditional Authority Njolomole. The forest area is along the Malawi-Mozambique border and some of the beneficiaries of the forest resources are from Mozambique. Before the 1980s, the forest area was fully covered with indigenous tree species. The surrounding communities, through the village natural resource management committees supported by the government forestry staff, used to manage the forest area very well.

When the area hosted Mozambican refugees between 1982 and 1994, however, the forest area provided the ready resource needs of the refugees and the people from the ten villages. The increased pressure on the forest area for forest resources resulted in the whole forest area being wiped out. After the repatriation of the refugees, the Department of Forestry, with support from UNCHR, replanted the forest area with pine and Eucalyptus tree species. In the new forestry policy, the Department of Forestry established a village natural resource management committee, which took over the overall management of the village forest area for the benefit of all the people from the ten villages. According to the local people, the Forestry Department handed over the management responsibility of the forest area to the VNRMC and selected local leaders who did not engage and involve all the people. The VNRMC started harvesting the trees from the forest area and proceeds were shared amongst themselves as committee members. Villagers became angry with the situation and an open access situation arose, to the extent that the whole VFA was wiped out again.

The hardships of limited access to forests and forest products by people, most especially women, forced local leaders to call for a meeting to rethink the ways of rehabilitating the VFA. During their meetings, the local leaders and people from the ten villages agreed to replant the VFA and also defined the management arrangement they felt was more sustainable for them. All the people agreed to use a traditionally based management system which vested the responsibility of managing the VFA on the clan leaders who are able to control local forest management activities in the areas. The local leaders agreed to partition the VFA into clans<sup>1</sup>. Each clan, through its clan committee, is answerable to the clan leader (family head), who is traditionally answerable to the head of the village. Traditionally, the clan structure is more powerful than the VNRMC because it is also responsible for handling all the cultural, social and economic issues in the family, such as settling family conflicts, allocating land to new families in the clan, organising marriages, and making burials arrangement upon the death of a family member. These are respected functions of clan leaders at village level. The clan leaders are also the traditional advisers to the village head. People felt that this system was more sustainable in community based forest management than setting up a VNRMC again, which had failed before.

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1 A clan comprises several families born from one family.

Mtanda VFA was established by the Forestry Department during the early 1970s under the former national forestry policy. The VFA used to have full-time patrol men and women, as well as forestry guards, who used to guard it against encroachers. The arrival of Mozambican refugees into the area weakened the control of the patrolmen and forest guards. The UNCHR provided support to the Forestry Department to rehabilitate the village forest area with *Pinus patula* and *Eucalyptus* trees species. As a way of implementing the new forestry policy, the Forestry Department established a VNRMC which took over the control of the VFA. Once the VFA was handed over to the VNRMC, the Forestry Department minimized its support to such an extent that the VNRMC was operating without any guidance or technical support. The end result was that the VNRMC operated independently of the local people and traditional leaders. Many conflicts between local leaders and the VNRMC arose and there was no one to resolve them. There was no one to patrol or guard the VFA, and as a result the whole VFA was heavily encroached and clear harvested.

The Malawi Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG) felt that something could be done about the VFA to improve its forestry management, by strengthening the institutional structures. Through the District Forestry Office, FGLG mobilised the people around the VFA and carried out an institutional assessment to understand the problems that led to the poor functioning of the VNRMC.

Currently, FGLG, through Training Support for Partners (TSP), is providing both financial and technical support for promoting improved forest governance through strengthening the capacity of the traditional management structures, as defined by the people in the area. Many other civil society organisations and government programmes are now supporting the efforts started by FGLG. Such organisations include ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), Concern Universal, MASAF, EU Micro-projects and others who are providing technical and financial support to the communities to manage the VFA and other development activities in the area.

A number of issues can be picked from the case study, including the following:

- rural communities have their own traditional ways of managing natural resources which need to be respected and promoted;
- the traditional systems of forestry management continue to exist, even though it is heavily subdued by the modern systems of forest management;
- people have more respect for their traditional and cultural systems which govern their traditional way of life in the village;
- organisations are encouraged to support local-level initiatives if they see that it is working and improving the livelihoods of the poor people.

### 3.5 Chimaliro Forestry Reserve

Chimaliro forest reserve lies 60 km north of Kasungu Town and borders Kasungu and Mzimba districts, with some parts of the forest reserve covering Zambia as well. As a forest reserve, the management responsibility rests in the hands of the government, in particular the Forestry Department. Currently, part of the forest reserve is managed through a collaborative management agreement between the people from Boni Chakuchanya village. The forest reserve has been partitioned into blocks, which are managed by the Block Committees. The block committees receive their technical support and advice from the Forestry Department. There are also a number of research activities that have been carried out in the forest reserve by Mzuzu University



and the University of Malawi, as well as the Forest Research Institute of Malawi. For example, Kayambazithu, *et.al* (2000), carried out an assessment of the forest reserve, in which they provide a lot of details about the forest reserve.

Despite entering into the co-management agreement with the Forestry Department, villagers revealed that each of the three Boni Chakuchanya villages have their own VFAs, which are managed by the VNRMCs. Some members of the block committees are also members of the VNRMC. Plan Malawi is one of the NGOs operating in the area focusing on education, food security, health and child protection but no NGO is directly working with the people focusing on forest resource management.

As a way of implementing the National Forestry Policy (1996), the Forestry Department piloted co-management in selected forestry reserves in the country, including Chimaliro Forestry Reserve. Several sites were selected for co-management and blocks were demarcated. Boni Chakuchanya village is divided into three villages (1, 2 and 3) and each has a block which is managed by block committees. Each of the three villages has VNRMC committees, which coordinate activities related to forest management on customary land. Some of the block committee members are also VNRMC committee members.

The Forestry Department provided technical and financial support to the block committees. For example, the department trained the local people in participatory forestry resource assessment, development and implementation of management plans, as well as development of management agreements which were signed by the Director of Forestry. The department provided financial support for the training session that local people went to for the technical support, as well as for the equipment used in the establishment of the blocks. The department also facilitated the process of establishing and training block committees, and defined the benefit sharing mechanism for the forestry resources from the blocks. Other institutions, such as FRIM, which is part of the forestry department, Mzuzu University and Bunda College played a big role in supporting community efforts through their various research activities in the blocks.

Local people interviewed indicated that they are able to enter the forestry reserve and collect the various forestry products, as defined in the management plans and agreement. This was not the case before the agreement, since the Forestry Department considered the surrounding communities to be encroachers and destroyers of the forest reserve. Currently, they work together with the forestry staff based in the forestry reserve on issues of fire fighting and for patrolling the forestry reserve. They have the power to apprehend intruders. They also said that villagers are aware of what to cut and what not to cut from the forestry reserve and the relationship with the forestry personnel is good. People are aware of the benefits they get from the forestry reserve and the implications of unsustainable management. Various organisations who have been working in the forestry reserve have also assisted the rural people in understanding the implications of sustainable management of the forestry reserve and role of the block committees.

It was noted, however, that there is weak linkage between the block committees and VNRMC on one hand, and between VNRMC and VDCs on the other hand. It was not clear how the block committees and VNRMC relate as regards forestry management, even though there are some members who belong to both the block committee and VNRMC.

From the study it is clear that:

- once people are clear of the benefits they can derive from a forest resource, they will be ready to effectively participate in its management;
- improved relationship strengthens trust and reduces conflicts between forest staff and people surrounding the forest reserve;
- linkages between CBFM institutions and local level development structures can influence the impact of CBFM on local development.

### 3.6 Majiasawa Village Forest Area

Majiasawa village forest area is in Mzimba district, about ten kilometres south of the district headquarters. The VFA was established with support from the Forestry Department through the District Forestry Office. The district forestry office mobilised the villagers to establish the VFA, which acts as a catchment area for some streams flowing into Mzimba River. The VFA covered about ten hectares of land and comprise mainly the *branchstegia* tree species. The DFO facilitated the formation of a VNRMC to coordinate the local forest management activities in the area. The VNRMC went through capacity building processes, such as training in group dynamics, conflict management, natural resource management, nursery establishment and management. The department also provided some pieces of forestry equipment to assist the local communities in the management of the forestry area and planting more trees around the VFA and people's homesteads. Some members of the VNRMC participated in exchange visits within and outside the districts. The VNRMC developed bylaws which govern the management, access and control of the VFA. People are aware of the bylaws and various punishments offenders receive when they break the law.

Just like Mangwi VFA, Majiasawa was established by the District Forestry Office to provide a ready source of timber and non-timber forest products to people around the VFA. The role of the Forestry Office was to mobilise the people in the area to form a VNRMC to oversee the management of the VFA. The forestry office provided, amongst other things: training, equipment, nursery equipment, advice and guidance on the management of the VFA. The forestry office also used to assign patrol men and forestry guards to support the communities' policing efforts of the VFA. Currently, the forestry office only provides the technical support to the VNRMC in terms of extension service support. Other institutions, such as Mzuzu University, have been working with the communities in the area through their research activities. In collaboration with the District Forestry Office, Mzuzu University facilitated a forestry resource assessment which led to the development of a management plan for the VFA. The Ministry of Agriculture has also been working in the villages, and VNRMC more especially, in the areas of soil and water conservation and agroforestry. According the chairperson of the VFA, the visits made by various organisations to the VFA also help to boost their morale in the management of the VFA.

The case study reveals that:

- CBFM will work well if community efforts are recognised and supported;
- VNRMCs tend to work very hard to improve management of their VFA if they realise that more people from other areas or districts are interested in their efforts and visit their VFA;
- people tend to be encouraged to manage a particular forest resource if they know what they are managing and how they are going to harvest and benefit from the resource.

**Table 1. Roles of key players**

Key player	Summary of roles played in CBFM
Local leaders	Mobilising people to participate in forest management activities, resolving conflicts, land allocation
Local people	Participatory forestry resource assessment, developing management plans, patrolling, tree planting, weeding
Schools, churches, mosques, VNRMC	Community mobilisation, tree planting, Coordinate forest development activities in the villages, facilitating forest management activities, defining benefit sharing frameworks, policing the VFA, facilitating tree planting activities, implementing the management plans, facilitating development of bylaws and constitutions
Community based organizations	Community mobilisation, awareness campaigns, establishment of VNRMCs, training of local leaders and VNRMCs, facilitating forest resource assessment and development of management plans, resource mobilisation
NGOs	Training of extension staff, local communities, local leaders
Local assemblies Department of Forestry	Local development planning and implementation guidance Training of local people and extension staff, provision of seedlings and other technical advice, provision of policy guidance to the local people and organizations on forestry matters
Forestry Research Institute of Malawi	Conducting research in the case study areas, mobilising local leaders and communities for research activities, facilitating participatory forestry resource assessment processes
Academic Institutions (Mzuzu University, Bunda College of Agriculture) Department of Land Resources	Conducting research, training ground for their students Provision of technical support on soil and water conservation, training of local people and extension workers on agroforestry technologies
Other government departments International Organizations (Oxfam, USAID), Politicians	Provision of technical advice and policy guidance in the areas of their mandate Provision of financial support and technical advice Organising meetings, participating in natural resource management activities, sometimes mobilising people to encroach forest areas

1.1.1

## 4.0 Drivers of successful CBFM

### 4.1 Conducive policy environment for community involvement

The Malawi Constitution and all the natural resource related policies support community based management and recognise users of the resource as controllers and managers. For over 80 years, communities or resources users were not considered to be part of the solution to the forestry sector's problems. The transition from one-party state rule to multiparty politics, coupled with the revision of various natural resource management related policies and legal frameworks has provided an enabling framework to motivate people to participate in the management of forest resources. The paradigm shift from centrally controlled forestry management to people-centered management has motivated many people to participate in the management of forest resources in the country.

### 4.2 Clearly defined tenure arrangements and usufruct rights

People's commitment to effectively manage natural resource would be strong if they are assured of resource ownership and usufruct rights. In all the case studies, people, most especially the VNRMC, believe that the VFAs are theirs and the proceeds accruing from them belong to the community, for community development activities. The communities in all the case studies indicated that they are able to guard their VFA against intruders and they make their own decisions over the forestry resources and the incomes derived from sale of proceeds from the VFA. People around Mtanda Hill in Ntcheu believe that by partitioning the VFA into pieces of blocks managed by the clans would help to clearly define the ownership arrangements and user rights which had previously been a problem. Each clan knows its boundary and the resource it has control over.

What is also critical in the Mtanda case study and other case studies is the issue of land ownership versus forest resource management. The impact of the past government forestry policy is also having an effect on the management of the VFA. For example, people are encouraged to participate in CBFM because the land and tree tenure is clear and there is an assurance that they own the land, trees and other natural resources on the land. The old forestry policy only recognised ownership by the traditional leaders of customary land, but not the trees.

It was apparent in the case studies that individual or family forestry areas were more cared for than community or village forestry area because individuals felt more secure to manage their own forestry area. Individual families with their own forestry areas have more authority over the management and utilisation of their forestry resource compared to communally own forestry areas, which require group decision-making processes. The Magwiro VFA collapsed because people felt that they were no longer benefiting from the VFA and therefore needed to focus on strengthening the individual supply of forestry resource by establishing their own woodlots and forestry areas, rather than managing a community forestry resource.

### 4.3 Linking livelihoods to community based forest management

Over 64 per cent of people live below poverty line in Malawi and therefore natural resources

management activities, which incorporate aspects of income generating activities that are simple and cheap, are likely to have a high rate of adoption (Mauambata, *et.al*, 2008). Pure forest conservation activities such as reforestation or soil conservation are long-term activities. While these activities may be appealing to the people, their thoughts always focus on how they can earn an income for basic households needs. Therefore some components of income-generation must be included to facilitate local participation, like the case of Kamwamba in Neno district, where a number of forestry-based enterprises were promoted. The case studies revealed that people are motivated to participate in forest management activities because they believe that they are going to satisfy their livelihood needs both in the short and long term.

#### **4.4 Clearly defined and congruence of rules and local conditions**

In all the case studies, rural communities supported by the various organisations have rules that clearly define the management process, harvesting arrangements, resource utilisation and benefit sharing. The clear definition of rules governing the management of the VFA has helped and facilitated improvement in the protection and management of the VFAs. At Mawira VFA, the VNRMC said that the rules they developed are in line with the Forestry Act and do not conflict with traditional rules. People at Mtanda VFA believe that their clan system will assist in improving management of the VFA, and that government has to accept that traditional rules have coexisted with modern rules for many years. Therefore, there is a need to recognise and accept them in community based forestry management. The traditional systems are normally used for conflict resolution in the villages and their application in forest management is expected to improve forest management in the VFA.

#### **4.5 An agreed benefit-sharing mechanism**

In all the VFAs, the communities agreed that the proceeds from sale of trees, firewood, and other non-timber forest products will be used for community development. Since benefits from the VFA are meant for community development, this is a driver for individual families to establish own woodlots and forest areas in order to satisfy individual household forest resource needs. It was noted, however, that the safe keeping of the proceeds from the community efforts is an issue that is also affecting the participation of many in CBFM activities. For example, in Kamwamba, it was said that a Forestry Management Fund account was opened with one of the banks to keep all the proceeds from fines and sales of forest products before they were distributed for community development projects. They indicated that this fund only operated during the period of the project but later collapsed due to political influence and the desire by the committee members to benefit first, before the other community members. In the case of the Chimaliro forest reserve, a benefit-sharing mechanism framework is understood by all the people and everyone is aware of what type of products they can get from their blocks and harvesting regimes. With a clear benefit-sharing mechanism, the people are encouraged to participate in CBFM activities.

#### **4.6 Functional village natural resource management committees**

CBFM in Malawi is centered on the functioning of the village level committees responsible for forestry matters, such as the VNRMCs. The study revealed that where the VNRMCs are functional,



the VFA are well managed, and the opposite is true where the VNRMC are not functional. It was noted in Mangwiro that the moment the VNRMC slacked in its functioning, people encroached the VFA for charcoal and firewood without considering the management plan.

At Mtanda, the VNRMC was considered as a club of village elites who “owned” the VFA. All the accrued benefits from the VFA belonged to individual committee members not the community at large as expected by the Forestry Department when the VFA was being handed over.

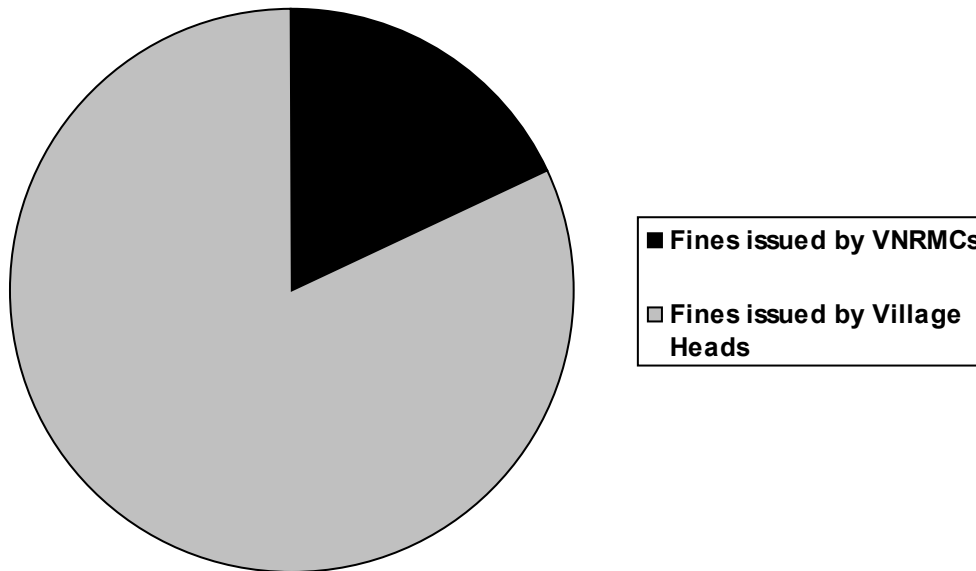
Where the VNRMC has been well trained and coached, the VFAs are well managed. For example, the VNRMC at Mawira VFA is very strong; each of the committee members understands his or her roles and responsibilities. The committee members work very closely with their village leaders and the decision-making process is very participatory. The benefit-sharing mechanism is very clear to all the villagers, not only the committee. The committee guides the villagers to follow the implementation of their management plan and abide by the agreed bylaws. Offenders are treated according to the laid down bylaws, following the agreed conflict resolution mechanism. The individual committee members at Mawira have their own woodlots and do not rely on the VFA. This motivates the villagers to establish their own woodlots and forest areas.

#### **4.7 Strong traditional leadership**

Traditional leaders such as village head persons, are custodians of customary land in Malawi. Therefore any community based forestry management activities that bypasses them or undermines their authority are a recipe for failure. The Mtanda case study is a typical example where the traditional leaders were bypassed in its management. At Kamwamba, it was noted that where the traditional leadership is strong, community based forestry management activities were progressing well and villages had well management VFA. For example, Group Village Headman Chikapa at Kamwamba has over 20 hectares of individual forestry area attached to another 20 hectares of a VFA, which the villagers established with support from WESM. Because the traditional leader values forestry management, CBFM activities in her village are well implemented. There are more forestry based enterprises in GVH Chikapa than other villages in Kamwamba because the local leaders serve as a role model to other villages and local leaders in other villages.

At Majiasawa in Mzimba, the traditional leaders and the chairperson of the VNRMC coordinate and collaborate well in facilitating CBFM activities in the villages around the VFA. A committee that does not relate very well with its traditional leaders does not perform well on VNRMC interventions, since local leaders play a very important role in mobilising people and resolving conflicts in the village. It was noted that through the VNRMC, with support from the village leaders, people are able to protect the VFA against both non-villagers and offenders from within the village. At Kamwamba, GVH Chikapa said that offenses such as encroachment for agriculture, pit sawing, charcoal burning and unauthorized tree cutting for poles carried heavy punishment and this deters people, and it is usually the traditional leader who nets such offenses. Usually, punishments from the VNRMCs are not taken seriously by the offenders. At Kamwamba, it was noted that the traditional leaders issued more fines than VNRMCs, as summarised in Fig 1.

**Fig 1: Comparison of fines issued by VNRMCs and those issues by Village Heads (source: WESM. 2006)**



The finding at Kamwamba is also similar to 95 per cent of the VFAs visited during the assessment. According to the local government decentralisation framework, village head persons are not members of the VNRMCs but play a role in advising and resolving conflicts arising within the committees. All forestry related cases are supposed to be handled by the VNRMCs but the situation is different on the ground because most offenders do not respect the punishments netted by the VNRMCs.

However, in the case of Mtanda hill, it is the clan leaders who are part of the traditional leadership that nets the punishment to the offenders, both from within the village and outside, and many offenders fear the consequences if they do not abide by the punishment given to them. It is therefore proper to conclude that CFBM will work well if there is strong traditional leadership at community level.

**4.8 Adequate technical, financial and moral support**

Since the Forestry Policy was approved in 1996, its implementation process has been affected by poor or limited financial resources and the weak capacity of the extension workers. One District Forestry Officer said that between 1999 and 2003, the maximum funding his office received for running the district office, including policy implementation, was USD 300 per month to provide for the office operations, paying leave grants, funerals, fuel for motorbikes and two vehicles, as well as for policy implementation. It was noted in all the case study areas that various organisations provided support in terms technical, financial and moral support. The VNMRCs and local communities have been trained in various aspects of natural resource management, such as forest resource assessment, bylaw development and constitution development, amongst others,



and how to manage their committees. In addition to the training, organisations have provided material support such as nursery equipment, tree seedlings, and wheelbarrows. In all the case study areas, people have gone on study tours outside their VFAs, and some people have visited the VFAs. The visits boosted the morale of the committee members and some of the local leaders who participated in such tours.

The performance of the VNRMCs varies with the amount of technical, financial and moral support that they received. For example, the VNRMC at Mtanda VFA did not receive adequate technical and moral support, failed to function, and could not meet the expectation of the villagers. The Chimaliro block committees received support from various organisations and the government for a long period, and as a result they continue to function and perform. It has been noted that the project-based VNRMCs rarely function after the project period because they lack continued technical support in the form of coaching and mentoring. There are some people who feel that CBFM provides some good answers to reducing government expenditure. CBFM require continued financial, technical and moral support if it has to work in Malawi, considering that it takes a lot of time for benefits to accrue to people.

#### **4.9 Commitment of the change agents**

Despite the resource limitation at district level to support CBFM activities, some extension workers are committed and willing to work extra hard to implement the forestry policy. For example, the Mawira case study reveals a number of issues in relation to the commitment of the extension workers. Realising that the Forestry Department does not have adequate financial resources to support CBFM activities in Bwanje, the forestry extension worker stationed in the area decided to mobilise villagers, form VNRMCs, train the committees and introduce a system of village-based volunteers who were trained and empowered to facilitate CBFM and other development activities in the area. The extension worker was convinced that CBFM is the solution for improved governance of forestry resources in the area as promulgated by the Forestry Policy 1996. Apart from mobilising volunteers, the extension worker convinced the people in the area to contribute some money for the management of their natural resource management activities. People welcomed the idea and contributed on monthly basis to ensure that their natural resources are properly managed. These efforts bore fruit when other national and international organisations, recognising the effort of the extension worker, started providing financial and technical support for CBFM in the area. Many areas have failed to achieve what have been achieved in Bwanje, because the change agents based in those areas were not resourceful and committed to making things work for the benefit of the rural people.

#### **4.10 Strong forest extension system**

Community management of forest resources assumes that the government has a strong and efficient extension support mechanism to support the community efforts. Due to limited financial resources, the government has been allocating few resources for promotion of CBFM in the country. The government has tended to rely on projects to facilitate CBFM, and usually the community empowerment process is hashed to conform to the project period and very few resources are allocated for continued support to the CBFM initiatives. CBFM will work if the

government takes full control and coordinates the support from the various other organisations, such as international and local civil society organisations.

With a vibrant forestry extension system, advisory support to the rural communities will be strong. For many years, the government has been in control of forestry management activities and the policy was changed recently to allow community management. However, many villagers are still skeptical about the whole process because they still think that one day the government will revert back to its original style of forest resource management. There is a need to have a strong forestry extension system to support the community efforts, and at the same time provide continued technical support for the communities to understand and implement CBFM initiatives. One-off interventions or support through projects will deter people from believing in CBFM in the country. In order for government to increase financial and materials resource for forestry extension in the country, there is a need for the forestry sector to justify its contribution to the national economy.

#### **4.11 Communities to define their own institutions arrangements**

Forest dependent people have been discontented with the way forests and trees are being managed by the government for many years. Part of the discontentment came from the background of the Forestry Department looking at boundary people as destroyers of forests and trees. At Majiasawa, the local leaders said that before CBFM, people were not happy that forestry management responsibilities were only in the hands of the Forestry Department after people were resettled from the forests, which were either gazetted to forestry reserves or demarcated into VFA. In response, people encroached on the remaining forests and trees before they were gazetted or demarcated.

The situation changed after the approval of the 1996 Forestry Policy, 1997 Forestry Act, 1998 Local Government Act, 2002 Land Policy and other related policies, where the community management of natural resources has been outlined as the thrust of the government's intentions. In turn, this has motivated many people to define their own institutions for the management of natural resources, such as clan committees and VNRMCS, which consequently allowed villagers to become de facto controllers and managers of the forests and trees under their jurisdiction. Realising that they are now controllers and managers of the forests and trees, villagers have been motivated to define their own rules and bylaws, as well as management regimes for their forest resources.

The discontentment with the former forestry management regime as advocated in the previous government policies, motivates many villagers now to participate in CBFM. The external players have, however, played a very important role in kick-starting the CBFM; guiding and facilitating the community empowerment process for communities to effectively participate in CBFM.

#### **4.12 Clarity and recognition of interests**

WESM indicated that communities were able to reach consensus on how they are going to manage natural resources in Kamwamba after each of the stakeholders and their interests were identified. Just as in all the other case study areas, different stakeholders have varying interests on the forest resource. For example, women have different interests than men, while curio makers

have different interests from firewood collectors. On the other hand, research institutions have totally different interests from implementing organisations like WESM. What is emerging from the case studies is that people are motivated to manage a particular forest area if all their interests are recognised and a clear mechanism of deriving those interests is agreed upon. One charcoal burner said that the problem with CBFM efforts, is that they look at charcoal burners as destroyers of trees and forests instead of making them part of the equation in the management of the forest areas.

## 5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

The study has revealed that supportive policies, clear tenure and usufruct rights, benefit sharing mechanisms, continued support of village-level institutions responsible for forestry management, strong traditional leadership and committed change agents are some of the key drivers for people's participation in CBFM.

People in the case study areas revealed that despite the many problems they have been facing related to limited access to and control of forestry resources, it was very difficult for many of them to participate in forest management activities because it was the responsibility of the government. However, the paradigm shift to allow villagers to become de facto managers of the forestry resource has motivated them to participate in CBFM. There are still some villagers who are skeptical about the whole paradigm shift but they need a lot of support from the change agents to make them accept change.

The policy change has necessitated the role shift from managers to facilitators and advisors on the side of the Forestry Department. However, this change in role does not mean reduction in financial and human resource allocation to CBFM activities as is the case now. The government needs to allocate more technical and financial resources to ensure that the villagers and their village-level committees are capacitated fully.

The external players play a big role in providing technical and financial support for CBFM activities. For example, in all the case study areas, the interventions and support from external organisations have influenced the participation of villagers in CBFM. However, continued support to the various village-level institutions, such as VNRMC and clan committees, will make CBFM work in the country.

The study reveals that VNRMC management committees are instrumental for forestry development activities at village level. However, VNRMCs alone, without the support of traditional leaders such as village headpersons, have a problem in handling such issues as encroachment cases. Where local leaders are weak, VNRMCs have tended to be weak, and the opposite is true. Some of the villagers doubt the capacity and inclusiveness of the VNRMCs, like in the case of Mtanda VFA, where they have opted for clan committees to coordinate forestry activities around the VFA. In certain cases, the linkages between the VNRMCs and block committees and with the Village Development Committees (VDC) lack strength and complexity. At village level, the VNRMC is expected to be responsible for coordinating all natural management related activities, not only forestry activities, as is the case under the present arrangement.

### 5.2 Recommendations

- Find and allocate more financial and technical resources for the implementation of the forestry policy, strengthening the forestry extension systems by making sure that there are more forestry extension staff members that have the capacity to facilitate CBFM.

- Avoid interfering with community decision-making processes, through which they define their own CBFM institutional and management arrangements best suited to their customs, desires and situations. The role of the external players should be limited to guiding and advising the rural communities – not predefining one single blueprint about how they should work. The government should allow for great flexibility in interpreting the roles of the VNRMCs in relation to the overall natural resource management at community level, which is often linked to other village-level institutions, such as village development committees.
- Realising that the majority of the rural people are poor, there is need to promote commercial / enterprise interventions that produce short-term and long-term benefits, not just management responsibilities (that is, planting or managing forest regeneration is all very well, but communities need cash income while they wait for these resources to mature to harvestable age).

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