



Unpacking the impacts of ‘participatory’ forestry policies: Evidence from Kenya



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ABSTRACT

We evaluate the livelihoods of member and non-members of Community Forestry Associations under Kenya's participatory forest management (PFM) programme. We use propensity score matching of households based on recall based data from before implementation of PFM from 286 households and comparison of current incomes (2012), as well as review of records and interviews. Results reveal that members have higher total and forest-related incomes than non-members and indicate that impacts derive from labour and market opportunities supported by donor institutions, more than from differential access to forest products. In terms of governance the Kenya Forest Service largely remains in control of decision-making. Thus, PFM resembles Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP) approaches. We conclude that current forest governance approaches in Kenya appear not to support participation in practice. Further, we conclude that impact evaluations must examine both outcomes and participatory forestry to provide meaningful policy evidence.

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1. Introduction

Ten to twelve percent of the world's natural forests are officially managed with some degree of popular participation, which is also the case in at least 21 sub-Saharan African countries promoting participatory approaches to natural resources management through participatory forest management (Sunderlin et al., 2008).

In some of these cases, the changes in rights to manage forests seem to enable improved forest management (Thoms, 2008; Ribot et al., 2010; Takahashi and Todo, 2012; Lund et al., 2015), whereas the evidence base is more limited and provides a more mixed picture with regards to livelihood impacts (Sikor and Nguyen, 2007; Larson et al., 2007; Maharjan et al., 2009; Ameha et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the existing evidence base on impacts of participatory forestry is geographically biased towards more studies from South Asia, notably Nepal and India (Lund et al., 2009; Bowler et al., 2012). This is problematic, given that the large differences in society and ecology, as well as the models of participatory forestry, between Asia and Africa inhibit the drawing of lessons from one context to the other. In Africa, there is an emerging literature on livelihood impacts from Tanzania (e.g. Shackleton et al., 2002; Kajembe et al., 2002; Lund and Treue, 2008; Vyamana, 2009; Pflieger, 2011; Green and Lund, 2015; Scheba

and Mustalahti, 2015), but the model of participatory forestry there differs from, among others, Kenya, as it is based on the village jurisdiction, as opposed to membership of an association.

Studies on the livelihood impacts of participatory forestry face the same challenges as those confronting attempts at impact evaluation more generally. First, the policy that one seeks to evaluate must be empirically characterized. A number of studies have pointed to the fact that participatory forestry policies have failed to materialize on the ground as substantive changes in rights to resources for people in many of the areas where it has supposedly been implemented (Ribot et al., 2010). Impact evaluations therefore should empirically verify the extent to which forest governance processes on the ground resemble participatory forestry to avoid attributing outcomes to participation where participation does not exist. Second, the outcome must be empirically characterized. Studies of livelihood impacts of participatory forestry have used a great variety of indicators ranging from the share of community population that accesses a forest (Persha et al., 2011) to detailed evidence on incomes and assets (Ameha et al., 2014). Finally, impact evaluations must attend to the issue of attribution of the observed outcome to the policy as opposed to other processes. This has been pointed to as the Achilles' heel for impact evaluations in the context of participatory forestry in reviews (Lund et al., 2009). To attribute the outcome to the policy, impact evaluations must describe what would have happened to the units targeted by the policy in its absence - a situation termed *the counterfactual*. As this situation cannot be observed, impact evaluations seek to estimate what it would have been through various

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research designs ranging from the selection and observation of controls (Jumbe and Angelsen, 2006; Ameha et al., 2014) to the construction of a counterfactual through tracing processes of change in units targeted by the policy from before the policy was implemented (Lund et al., 2015).

This study illustrates an impact evaluation of the livelihoods outcomes of PFM in Kenya. It does so by comparing members and non-members of community forestry associations (CFA) among communities living adjacent to the Eburu and Sururu Forest Reserves. Specifically, we examine the policy of PFM as it unfolds in practice on the ground and seek to evaluate its impacts through matching of CFA and non-CFA member (NCFA) households based on re-call data to generate estimates of impacts on household income. In the following, we first describe the study area and methods used; then outline the key results followed by discussions and conclusions.

2. Study area

PFM was introduced in Kenya following pressure mostly from civil society organizations as an approach to ensure sustainable forest management (Mugo et al., 2010). The first PFM site was at Arabuko-Sokoke Forest established in 1997 and today more than 100 CFAs exist around the major water towers of Kenya (Thenya et al., 2007).

CFA membership is drawn from residents of forest adjacent communities and is, in practice, mostly formed from pre-existing community based organizations. Elected and vetted executive committees run the day to day activities of the CFA and set subsidiary bylaws that guide its activities and penalties in case of infringement by members or outsiders.

The study was undertaken among forest adjacent communities to Sururu and Eburu forest of Eastern Mau Forest Reserve. The Eburu and Sururu forests are among nine forest blocks of Eastern Mau Forest Reserve and are found in Nakuru District, Rift Valley Province. The two blocks were selected purposively as they were the oldest of the nine forest blocks, i.e. we would expect livelihood impacts to have materialized.

Sururu forest lies at 2400–2900 m above sea level. The forest covers an area of 20,461 hectares (ha) (UNEP and KFWG, 2006). The forest is divided into five smaller administrative units (beats) namely Gatimu, Station, Kanorero, Leporos and Mau Narok. The main tree species in the forest are *Dombeya gotezeni*, *Pondo carpus*, *Olea Africana*, *Prunus africana* and *Juniperas procera*. The forest is the upper catchment for Nderit River that supports the livelihoods of the forest adjacent communities and people in the Rift-Valley and Western Province.

Community sensitization was initiated by KFS after enactment of the Forests Act, 2005. As a result, three CFAs, focusing on different parts of Sururu Forest, were formed in 2008. These include Mugameli, Masufa and Sururu-Nderit which brought together the various community based organizations and individual community members from villages adjacent to Sururu forest. Through the guidance of KFS, the three CFAs formed the umbrella Sururu CFA¹ in 2008. At the time of the study, Sururu CFA had a forest management plan but no management agreement.

Villages in Mau Narok, Sururu, Mpatipat and Leporos locations form membership to Sururu CFA. All households rely on the forest for fuel wood, building materials, fodder, beekeeping, seedling collection, medicinal herbs, water and organic fertilizer. Households accrue non-use values that include circumcission, spiritual, religious and aesthetic sites. Besides, households derive regulating services e.g. erosion, local climate, water, frost and diseases regulations important economic resilience and factors of production for agriculture.

The Eburu Forest is located at the border of Narok District and Naivasha sub-district at an altitude range of 2400 to 2900 m above sea level. The forest covers an area of 8715 ha (KFS, 2008) and borders Ol Jorai and Ndabibi Agricultural Development Corporation farms in the North and South, respectively, and Loldia farm to the East (KFS, 2008).

There are six beats within the forest namely Kiruya, Ngobobo, Songoloi, Morop, Jerusalem and Ole Sirwa. Based on impressions from forests walks during the study, the forest appears heavily utilized, and comprises mainly *Acacia abyssinica* trees and shrub vegetation, *Dovyalis* spp. The forest forms part of the catchment for Lakes Naivasha and Elementaita with several ground springs. The forest is source of Ndabibi River and other small streams that support the livelihoods of the surrounding communities.

Starting in the early 2000s the communities worked together with Kenya Forest Working Group to set up a committee involving a number of stakeholders to oversee the management of the forest. This marked the beginning of a participatory approach to manage Eburu forest and eventually of Eburu CFA² in 2006. The CFA has elected officials and a KFS approved management plan and agreement.

Villages in Kiambogo, Ndunyu Buru, Ndabibi, Malewa and Eburu locations form membership to Eburu CFA. The households rely on the forest for wood fuel, beekeeping, medicinal herbs, building material, fodder, hunting and water from the natural steams for domestic use and geothermal power generation by Kenya Electricity Generating Company (KenGen) The forest is home to the endangered wild bongo and endemic for birds e.g. *tangaza sun bird*, *Hartilup turraco*.

3. Theoretical and empirical approach

To unpack how the policy of PFM unfolds in practice, we draw on the 'Actors, Powers, Accountability' framework (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). The underlying assumption of this framework is that decentralization policies must be assessed on the degree to which they result in transfers of meaningful powers to downwardly accountable bodies at the lower level in a jurisdictional hierarchy. Policies are therefore assessed by looking at who (actors) wield what powers over the resources targeted by the policy and the rules regulating how such actors can be held to account for their wielding of powers. In the context of PFM, we are particularly interested in the degree to which powers have been devolved to bodies that are accountable to forest adjacent communities, as these are typically the ostensible target group of such policies (Ribot et al., 2010). In this framework, powers refer to authority to make rules and decisions regarding forest management, as well as to implement, enforce and adjudicate said rules. In practice, this implies an attention to the degree to which the CFA can decide about the uses of the forest, including decisions that affect the benefits that forest use give rise to, such as marketing of commercially valuable forest products. This way of assessing what powers have been conferred on forest adjacent communities is in line with the general bodies of theory upon which participatory forestry policies are based, i.e. participation theory (e.g. Arnstein, 1969) and common pool resource theory (Ostrom, 1990). Accountability implies that the body receiving such powers can be held to account by people living in the forest adjacent communities. This assumes a form of governance where management responsibility is vested in an executive body at the community level that is kept to account through procedures of information sharing and elections, whereas participation and common pool resource theory often assumes a more direct participatory form of governance. Yet, as we will see, our case fits well with this framework. To examine these aspects of the policy empirically, we reviewed the Forests Act 2005 and CFA management plans and agreements and did in-depth interviews with key informants. These included: 4 KFS officials, 5 CFA officials, 4 CFA scouts, and 15 villagers, including 6 households engaged in firewood extraction, 5 households undertaking grazing and 4 households involved in charcoal production. The informants were purposely selected for their ability to inform the study objectives. The interviews were guided by interview guides specific for each main stakeholder group prepared in advance of the interviews.

¹ The CFA is called Mau Sururu Likia CFA (MASULICOFA).

² The CFA ECOFA.

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