

Collaborative Forest Management in Uganda

Recommendations for CSOs



Summary

- In Uganda, communities can enter into Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) agreements with the government, to use and manage the state's forest reserve. The CFM model requires communities to formally organise in CFM groups. A CFM group commits to regulate forest use, through patrolling the forest, and is allowed to benefit from activities within the forest reserve, such as beekeeping, collecting non-timber forest products, and developing tree plantations in degraded areas. Moreover, the organisation into CFM groups increases opportunities to access external support from the government and CSOs.
- We interviewed representatives of CFM groups, CSOs and the government, and asked them about the outcomes of the CFM model and the factors that influence its success. After that, we organised a workshop with 23 stakeholder representatives to discuss ways in which CSOs can help to improve the outcomes.
- Although stakeholders' views on the conservation and development outcomes of CFM are generally positive, numerous challenges remain. Many CFM groups feel that the livelihood benefits do not weigh up to the time and energy spent on conservation measures. CFM members who go on patrols are not compensated, which may affect their morale. And, despite monitoring and patrolling by CFM groups, encroachment and illegal logging persist. Also, enforcement is hindered by unclear boundaries of the area that falls under the agreement.
- CSOs need to support the capacity of the CFM groups, their organisation at the national level, and the responsible government agencies. At the same time, CSOs will need to engage in lobby and advocacy to influence the ongoing review of the national forestry policy, focussing on, among others, simplifying formalisation procedures, and providing clearer stipulations for benefit sharing between the responsible government agency and the communities.

Introduction

Uganda developed collective rights over forest lands and resources for local communities and indigenous peoples in different forms, one of which is the Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) model. It has been in existence for over 20 years. Its major objectives have been the conservation of forests, improvement of livelihoods and

social justice. Under a CFM agreement, local communities and government agencies (known as 'responsible bodies') co-manage a part of the country's forest reserves. CFM Agreements can in theory be implemented in Central Forest Reserves (under the National Forestry Authority) and in Local Forest Reserves (under District Local

Governments). So far, all CFM agreements have been for the Central Forest Reserves.

Through an agreement, CFM beneficiaries are granted rights to use and manage certain forest products as specified in the CFM management plan, which is part of a Memorandum of Understanding between the community and the responsible body. The CFM agreement does not grant a community with the right to sell or lease the land. The agreement is signed for a limited period (often ten years), with the possibility of extension.

The CFM agreement provides a formal arrangement for collaboration in forest protection, sustainable harvesting of forest products, and the development of alternative sources of income to reduce pressure on the forest. The agreement also specifies obligations and responsibilities, such as conducting joint patrols, fighting wildfires, and monitoring forest resources. The National Forestry Authority commits to participate in implementing community livelihood improvement activities, and supervising resource extraction, among others.

CFM agreements are between the government and a CFM group. A CFM group needs to be registered as a legal entity at sub-county level or district level. The governance structure includes an Executive Committee, Steering Committee, and an Annual General meeting. Each CFM group has its own constitution, which distributes roles and responsibilities. The constitution also contains principles to guide self-governance, including equal opportunities for all members to participate in decision-making. The CFM groups should have representation of men, women, and people with disabilities, as well as of indigenous forest dependent communities, if applicable. The groups are expected to change leadership every two years through elections.

As of yet, 67 CFM agreements have been signed with the National Forestry Authority, covering around 85,000 hectares, some of which are now due for renewal. Some additional 20,000 hectares are already planned, and there are 262 groups that have lodged CFM applications. The National Forestry Authority is in the process of identifying credible applications. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have played a key role as mediators between the National Forestry Authority and the CFM groups. They have negotiated, lobbied and advocated for conducive CFM mechanisms and helped with resolving conflicts (within the CFM groups, as well as between CFM groups and the National Forestry Authority).

Approach

As part of a multi-country review of community forest rights, we set out to: assess the outcomes of the CFM model in Uganda; identify factors that influence its success; and discuss strategies that can be undertaken by CSOs to improve the outcomes of CFM. The review process

had three phases. First, we conducted an extensive literature review. Second, we conducted interviews with respondents from ten CFM groups, five CSOs that support CFM processes, and the National Forestry Authority. Finally, we organised a national level workshop with 23 representatives of different organisations with a stake in CFM. The objective of the workshop was to help CSOs and other stakeholders to discuss strategies to improve the outcomes of the CFM model. In this policy brief we summarise some of the main outcomes of the review, and the consequent recommendations for CSOs.

Results

Formalisation process

The formalisation process is informed by guidelines devised by the government, providing a step-by-step approach towards developing a CFM plan and signing an agreement. These documents define the roles and responsibilities, as well as the benefits for each party. However, stakeholders have voiced concerns that the process takes a long time, costs a lot of money, and is complex. It makes communities dependent on external support to implement the steps. Moreover, delays in the process are common, due to: a high rate of staff turnover at the National Forestry Authority; resistance from government foresters who prefer centralised forest management; and resistance from local leaders and village elites who may have selfish interests. Stakeholders see an urgent need for the simplification of the process, for example by issuing basic templates for technical requirements, such as the forest management plans.

Tenure security

According to the respondents, CFM agreements effectively contribute to tenure security, because they are well-defined, and enforceable in a formal court of law or existing grievance mechanisms, as defined in memoranda of understanding and plans. Moreover, workshop participants stressed that CFM has greatly improved the relationship between government agencies and local communities, and reduced conflicts. Before CFM, communities and government agencies would look at each other with suspicion and mistrust when it came to forest use and management. The CFM model has greatly improved trust between the two parties, which has benefitted communities' perception of tenure security. However, the agreements signed are not permanent. Moreover, they have to be reviewed and revised after 3-5 years. In many cases, the agreements are not renewed on time, and some agreements have taken more than 5 years without renewal. Within this period, the community has no legal document granting them any form of rights, making their forest management practices formally illegal. Another factor inhibiting tenure security is that the boundaries of CFM zones are not always clearly defined, which can create conflicts with neighbouring communities.

External support

During the interviews and the final workshop, it was often stressed that CFM agreements improve opportunities for, and access to, funding and assistance from external sources. The CFM model requires communities to form CFM groups as legal entities, and these become entry points for government and CSO projects and programmes. For example, established CFM groups have become vehicles for programmes related to REDD+ and forest restoration, as well as for development programmes of the central government, such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), and the Youth Livelihood Programme. Importantly, organisation into CFM groups also improves opportunities to apply for financial credit, and increases communities' political power, as CFM groups are invited to participate in local government planning processes and sub-county and district government council meetings.

Conservation outcomes

To control deforestation by outsiders, CFM groups undertake regular monitoring and routine patrols, and some groups have established a network of informers, who report illegalities to the National Forestry Authority. CFM groups can also take disciplinary actions themselves, such as the expulsion of group members, should they be found to have connections with illegal forest users. There are also joint forest patrols which involve the CFM group, local governments and the National Forest Authority. In addition to controlling deforestation by outsiders, CFM agreements intend to create incentives for the community to invest in sustainable practices, such as beekeeping, ecotourism and the collection of non-timber forest products. For the degraded patches of the forest, CFM plans usually involve restoration through enrichment planting and/or natural regeneration.

Although respondents indicated that CFM helps to reduce pressure on the forest, it has not been able to stop deforestation and forest degradation. A specific challenge is that the government does not compensate CFM groups for their routine patrols. Across the board, encroachment and illegal extraction of forest products by

non-members of CFM groups seems to be increasing, and this further affects the spirit of CFM members. According to respondents and workshop participants, there is a need to consider better terms of employment, especially for patrollers, to ensure that they are motivated to undertake their roles.

Livelihood outcomes

Some CFM agreements are primarily for the sustainable management of standing natural forests (outside strict nature reserves), while others are for the rehabilitation of severely degraded areas. In the first case, the focus is on income-generating activities, such as beekeeping and the sale of non-timber forest products (bamboo, fuelwood, etc). In the second case, the focus is on tree planting and timber harvesting for both subsistence and commercial purposes. The revenues are usually used for collective investments by the group, or invested into local Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs), where members can then borrow money, usually with very low interest rates.

Respondents and workshop participants highlighted several ways in which CFM agreements benefit livelihoods, either directly or indirectly:

- A CFM agreement allows communities to engage in income-generating activities within the forest reserve, such as beekeeping, ecotourism, and the marketing of forest products.
- CFM groups are often able to access additional support for livelihood development from CSOs and the government, such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), the Microfinance Support Centre, and HIV/AIDS support.
- When the CFM group has developed a saving and credit scheme, it provides members with the opportunity to access soft loans and seed money that can be used for diversification and scaling up of enterprises.
- Many CFM group members have been able to improve their skills, for example on tree planting and beekeeping, which will benefit them in the future.



Notwithstanding the above, the overall livelihood outcomes from CFM are generally considered low. According to representatives of CFM groups, the livelihood benefits do not weigh up to the time and energy spent on conservation (e.g., monitoring and patrols). They stress the need for a fairer division of revenues. As of yet, there is no legal framework for benefit sharing, and responsible bodies do not share the revenues they generate from the forest reserve (e.g., through gate fees, research and tourism fees, and sale of forest products).

Recommendations for csos

Lobby and advocacy

The government has recently started a process to review the forestry policy and law. CSOs will need to participate in the review, and advocate and lobby for:

- Including rules and mechanisms for benefit sharing, to improve the livelihood benefits of CFM.
- Simplifying both the formalisation process itself, and the requirements for mapping and Forest Management Plans.
- Extending implementation of CFM to District Forest reserves, community forests and private forests.
- Increasing resources of the National Forestry Authority dedicated to CFM, not least to manage the current backlog of applications.
- Increasing the duration of CFM agreements, so communities have long-term tenure security.

Monitor and document CFM performance

CSOs need to develop a comprehensive database for CFM groups and interventions. The database should keep track of progress and failures, and should prevent duplication of efforts. Next to that, CSOs need to document CFM success stories, as this will entice other actors to support CFM processes.

Mobilise resources

CSOs need to mobilise resources (locally and internationally) to leverage current interventions (including those to improve livelihood options) and scale up promising CFM models.

Strengthening national-level organisation of CFM groups

CSOs need to strengthen the organisation of CFM groups at the national level, especially by supporting the Uganda Network of Community Forest Associations (UNETCOFA), so it can be more effective in lobbying and advocacy on behalf of CFM groups. Eventually, the UNETCOFA could become a central, legally registered entity to assess and coordinate options for CFM financing.

Building capacity at community level

Considering the limited capacity of CFM groups, CSOs have various roles to play at the community level, including, but not limited to:

- Promoting peer-to-peer learning through exchange visits of CFM groups.
- Developing technical and financial management skills of CFM groups.
- Organising dialogue meetings to resolve outstanding conflicts within CFM groups, between CFM members and non-members, and between CFM groups and responsible bodies.
- Building capacity of the leadership in CFM groups.
- Support CFM groups with developing inclusive decision-making processes, with special attention to women and marginal groups.
- Promoting alternative livelihood options within, as well as outside of forest reserves.

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