

Public participation on review of Taita Taveta Forest Policy: Consolidated report with community views to guide the technical committee in developing the draft policy.

Tuesday 30th January 2024 – Dawida County Hotel, Mwatate.

Wednesday 31st January 2024 – Lavender Hotel, Wundanyi.

Thursday 1st February 2024 – The Avid Hotel, Voi.

Friday 2nd February 2024 – Green Park Hotel, Taveta.



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Cover image: Taita Taveta County

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Background Information

Forests offer numerous ecosystem services, many of which have the potential for economic exploitation by humans. However, this exploitation often leads to significant threats, including deforestation and biodiversity loss and thus the need to have clear laws and regulations to guide on their conservation. It is against this backdrop that the World Agroforestry (ICRAF), African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and FAO-Kenya are Co-implementing a UK PACT funded project, “Delivering nature-based solution outcomes through strengthened policy implementation, institutional capacity, and enhanced monitoring and reporting of forest and landscape restoration in Kenya”.

A series of four workshops, one per subcounty were organized to get engage the public with an aim to collect community views and consolidate the recommendations on the County Forest Conservation and Management Policy for Taita Taveta County.

Objectives of the workshops:

1. Create awareness of forest issues and the devolved function
2. Gather information and enhance knowledge on current forest uses and users.
3. Facilitate an interactive platform to exchange current experiences in Community Forestry, County Forest Management, and shared lessons.
4. Strengthen acceptance and promote active participation in decision-making and/or implementation processes.

Output: A consolidated report with community views to guide the technical committee in developing a draft policy.

Introduction

The workshops were conducted at the sub-county level, with one session held in each sub-county, commencing with Mwatate, Wundanyi, Voi, and concluding with Taveta sub-counties respectively. Representation was drawn from communities and groups bordering the forests, relevant business stakeholders, and Community Forest Association (CFA) member leadership including local administration and County Government officials from the department of Environment. Participation was as follows: Wundanyi 31 (16 male, 5 female); Mwatate 35 (23 male, 12 female); Voi 46 (30 male, 16 female); Taveta 40 (26 male, 14 female).

The County Chief Officer in charge of the Environment department gave the opening remarks highlighting the importance of communities embracing conservation efforts and fostering a sense of ownership, particularly concerning the forests in their vicinity.

The County Forester provided an overview of the findings of the Transition Implementation Plan and the current policy, then invited the group to share their reactions. Following this, the attendees were divided into groups to provide input on identified thematic areas.

Responses from the Communities.

- Regarding the issuance of operations licenses, the community proposed a multi-sectoral approach, advocating for the involvement of CFAs in the licensing process.
- CFAs suggested to benefit from carbon credit markets once the Climate Change Act Amendment is enacted.
- There is a call for increased intercounty and intergovernmental engagements in forest conservation, particularly for counties like Kwale, which are significant consumers of charcoal.
- It is recommended to activate platforms for sharing forest-related ideas and issues, such as the Jumuiya ya Pwani, especially concerning charcoal production regulation, given its prevalence as the primary cooking method in many communities.
- There is a need for the policy to identify gaps in sharing information among stakeholders, particularly regarding activities in Tsavo West and East National Parks related to forests and carbon credits, which are often unknown.
- The county or department lacks personnel or staff dedicated to dealing with carbon credits, leading to private entities exploiting communities.
- Mapping out all forests and their boundaries is crucial to prevent encroachment.
- CFAs should collaborate with Water Resource Users Association (WRUAs) to conserve riparian areas and lands.
- Forest enforcement officers are needed to assist CFAs in controlling illegal logging, charcoal production, and human-wildlife conflicts.
- Encouraging farmers to promote and develop forests would recognize them as champions of forests and provide incentives.
- The county should allocate funds for tree planting drives in communities.
- Communities living near riparian areas should be cautioned against cultivating too close to these areas and encouraged to plant bamboo along riverbanks to conserve water sources.
- Hiring extension officers and scouts from communities can promote and assist in forest conservation efforts.
- Introducing insurance for farmers can provide compensation during wildfires, theft, and other calamities.
- Creating awareness campaigns for forest products is essential.

Key Recommendations on the Thematic areas

Indigenous forests

- Identification of all indigenous forest and tree species is essential to control the presence of exotic trees, some of which negatively impact water sources.
- Promoting the planting of indigenous trees on small-scale farms will aid in their preservation.

- Constructing check dams to minimize siltation in forests prone to flooding, such as Kitobo forest in Taveta Subcounty, is crucial.
- Collaboration among the County government, stakeholders, and communities is vital for effective conservation of indigenous forests.
- The County government should diligently implement all guidelines outlined in its policy.
- Planting, protecting, and conserving indigenous trees and shrubs, particularly those of medicinal, ecotourism, spiritual, and cultural significance, is imperative.
- Conducting intensive research to enhance biodiversity and adhere to natural laws is necessary.
- All individual and private lands or farms must be registered and monitored by the County Government.
- Implementing guidelines and regulations should be compulsory.
- Avoid intensive clearing for small- or large-scale farming without informing relevant authorities.
- Providing periodic status reports to the community using simple language is essential.
- Empowering landowners through capacity building is crucial.
- Specifying the sources of land acquisition is necessary.
- Preserved areas like "mitengo" should be protected and made publicly known to prevent encroachment.
- "Fighis" should be recognized as indigenous forests.
- Establishing herbariums and protecting areas with herbal trees is important.
- Implementing policies to protect indigenous forests from interference by exotic trees and harvesting existing exotic trees is necessary.
- During restoration efforts, sourcing local seedlings from the areas being rehabilitated, rather than from other areas, is important.
- Deploying personnel to enforce policies on riparian land distances and finding ways to compensate those affected is crucial.
- Managing forests together with communities and establishing a revenue-sharing mechanism is recommended.
- Allocating funds for the promotion of tree planting is essential.
- Promoting nature-based enterprises in both indigenous forests and plantations is encouraged.
- The County Government SHALL not WILL: Act decisively rather than merely expressing intentions.

Plantation forests

- Farmers should be compensated by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) for damages caused by wild animals to their trees.
- Expedite the issuance of title deeds to farmers engaged in forest planting activities.
- Provide guidance to farmers on appropriate planting methods for steep lands.
- Identify and utilize all unused lands within communities, including reclaiming abandoned urban plots, for tree planting initiatives.
- Promote agroforestry practices among communities.

- Enforce a law mandating the planting of two trees for every one tree cut down as compensation.
- Encourage widespread tree planting across the county to enhance tree survival rates.

Dryland forests.

- Provide adequate economic incentives and create a conducive environment for the development of forest-based enterprises.
- Collaborate with KWS to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts in dryland forests.
- Collaborate with communities to develop a comprehensive database of existing tree species.
- Recruit scouts or rangers to enforce forest policies effectively.
- Identify groups or individuals responsible for nurturing trees to maturity.
- Assist communities in establishing tree nurseries tailored to local climate conditions.
- Facilitate state and non-state actors in acquiring seedlings from nearby communities engaged in forest restoration efforts.
- Establish infrastructure for water provision and harvesting, such as check dams, boreholes, and water pans.
- Hire additional staff for enforcement purposes, who will also collaborate with Community Forests.
- Introduce carbon credits as a value chain to benefit the community.

Urban forests & roadside trees

- The communities emphasized on reclaiming of all public lands which were meant to be recreational centers, but they have been grabbed in Voi e.g. land near Two oceans (Sedin), gemstones center, near kaloleni-where a tree nursey was to be put in place.
- Sensitize and encourage more groups in urban centers on the importance of having forest and roadside trees as it will help them generate income through nature-based solutions and also beautify urban towns.
- The county should compel investors on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) specifically roadside tree planting and urban forestry.
- Improve collaboration with relevant stakeholders such as Kenya National Highways Authority (KENHA), Kenya Rural Roads Authority (KERRA), Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), Tavevo, farmers adjacent to roads to achieve the same.
- Hire staff specifically for monitoring and management of the urban and roadside trees.

Farm forestry

- Increase the number of personnel and staff up to the ward level to enhance forest management and conservation efforts.
- Foster coordination across all departments to promote forestry, creating synergies between Agriculture, Land, and Water.

- Conduct awareness campaigns targeting farmers to link forestry with agriculture to achieve a 10% Forest Cover.
- Support research initiatives to identify tree species suitable for drylands.
- Provide incentives, grants, and subsidies to encourage tree planting and sustainable forestry practices.
- Offer technical assistance and training programs to farmers on sustainable forestry practices.
- Develop legal frameworks that recognize and protect farmers' rights to engage in agroforestry and farm forestry.
- Facilitate market access for timber and non-timber forest products.
- Introduce insurance schemes to protect farmers against risks associated with tree planting, such as natural disasters and diseases.
- Promote agroforestry on steep slopes to mitigate soil erosion.
- Encourage participation in carbon credits/trading schemes for farm forest holders.
- Implement soil conservation measures like digging trenches on steep slopes (Fanya Juu/Fanya chini) to provide water for agroforestry.
- Develop rainwater harvesting plans for tree irrigation during the dry season. All public infrastructure which was constructed be maintained and developed to promote tourism.

Wood products & industries.

- The policy should formulate the adoption of using e-system such as tablets and laptops in workshops and forums by sharing the data in soft copy to minimize the usage of notebooks and control of timber.
- Identify clean cooking methods such as the pressure cookers to minimize the usage of firewood in public and private institutions.
- Rely with other departments like education, health to share information on the amount of firewood they use when cooking.
- Minimizing usage of timber for building by coming with other methods of constructing roofs
- Assist communities in identifying markets to sell their timber.
- Control overharvesting of timber - Establish seedbanks and manage an updated database for local and indigenous knowledge all the sawmillers and registration of power saws.
- Industry standard and quality control
- Consumer education and awareness

Non wood forests products

- The policy to emphasize on the value addition of herbal medicinal products.
- Fund youth groups doing nature-based enterprises such as bee hives to increase more revenues.
- Promote value addition of other products.
- Provision of incentives to enhance sustainable utilization of the non-wood products.
- Patent non-wood forest products.

Ecotourism

- Community involvement approach to benefit local residents by providing economic opportunities
- Support youth undertake certification on forest management and ecotourism packages/training as guides.
- Maintaining public infrastructure such as cultural sites/artifacts.
- Budget allocation toward the development of ecotourism sites/facilities including making bylaws.
- Develop a framework on tourism charges to avoid overexploitation of both the tourists and locals.
- Provide a framework for waste management emanating from tourism activities/reduce plastic consumerism.
- Marketing of ecotourism sites be promoted outside the county and other places to generate more income to the communities.

Forestry education & training

- Due to the decrease of indigenous forests in the County the community suggested more research to be done to improve the species by injecting more resources to promote and develop of the indigenous species and document the information to the locals.
- The county to have a good coordination on sharing information to all involved stakeholders in forests such as all development partners dealing with forests, communities, conservancies, bordering counties to establish a good network within the county.
- Learning institutions to be involved full in promoting and develop of forests, the education should start from Early Childhood Development Education (ECD) to the upper level (universities)
- Promote awareness and forest education in barazas, social media and other avenues.

Forestry research & Development

- Conduct thorough research to determine the suitability of tree species for both highland and lowland areas.
- Integrate indigenous knowledge with scientific research to achieve optimal results in tree planting and management.
- Collaborate with institutions like Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) to conduct research on market trends, medicinal trees, and high-value tree species.
- Allocate adequate funds towards research activities related to forestry and conservation.
- Involve communities at all levels in the research process and ensure that research findings are shared with all stakeholders and Community Forest Associations (CFAs).
- Ensure that Participatory Forest Management Plans (PFMPs) include components that benefit local communities based on research findings.
- Enhance coordination between national and county governments, as well as other stakeholders involved in forestry and conservation efforts.

Forest sector legal reforms

- A policy be formulated to encourage people living up on the hills come on the lowland area to allow growth and development of forests on the hills which most of the water sources within the county are.
- Strengthen forest law enforcement and compliance measures to reduce corruption within the sector.
- Develop and enhance mechanisms for resolving and managing conflicts related to natural resources.
- Implement licensing and registration processes for both wood and non-wood forest products.
- Build capacity to support the enforcement of laws and regulations, utilizing both modern techniques and indigenous knowledge.
- Reclaim unclaimed lands for the establishment of new forests and conservation areas.
- Strictly enforce regulations regarding tree cutting permits to prevent illegal logging and deforestation.
- Provide guidelines for the acquisition of additional land by the County government for forestry purposes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the community's active participation and valuable feedback will significantly contribute to the formulation of the Taita Taveta Forest Conservation and Management Policy. Their representation and input are instrumental in shaping the direction and priorities of the policy, ensuring that it reflects the needs and aspirations of the local population.

Appendix 1

Photos of the events



Ms. Elizabeth Mbinga (CCO) giving Opening Remarks



Mr. Silvester Mwang'ombe engaging participants in Mwatate



Engagement in Voi



Engagement in Wundanyi



Groupwork in Taveta



Group Discussion in Wundanyi