Preliminary research results on the governance of forests and water in Kapchorwa district, Mt. Elgon forest

Objective

To establish whether and how forest resource users and water resource users jointly govern forest and water resources

Overview of Kapchorwa

Kapchorwa District in the Eastern Region of Uganda had an estimated population of 104,580 in 2014 (UBS, 2014). The total forest area covered in Bududa district is about 12,574 ha.

Research process

The target population was forest user groups and water resource user groups in the Chema and Kapchesombe sub-counties of Kapchorwa District, selected because of their proximity to the forest. The following user groups were involved in the research: beekeeping, fuelwood collection, herbalists, grazing , tree nursery, land management and riverbank/watershed protection.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with 11 forest user groups, 2 water committees, user group leaders and non-members, and were segregated by age and gender. Four key informant interviews were held with leaders from Tegeres and Kapkwai Resource user committees, the chairperson of the Chema watershed group and the chairperson of the gravity flow scheme. A total of 32 FGDs and 4 interviews were done. The distribution of the FGDs is shown in Figure 1.

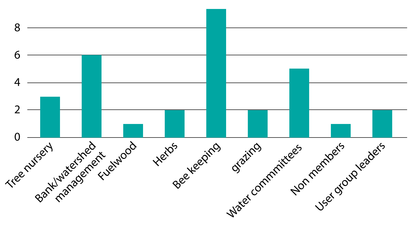

Figure 1. Number of FGDs per user group in Kapchorwa.

A total of 278 community members participated in the FGDs (165 women and 113 men). Figure 2 shows the age and gender distribution in the groups.

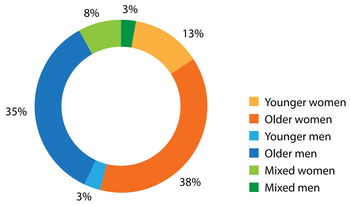

Figure 2. Percentage of men and women respondents in focus group discussions.

Results

Community perception of changes in forest and water conditions

The community perception of the forest and water changes over the past 5–10 years was mixed, with both positive and negative changes reported:

- In 15 out of 23 FGDs among forest user groups, respondents reported a positive forest change. The changes were thought to be due to management by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and rehabilitation of degraded areas in the mid-1990s, leading to increased forest cover and increased water quality. Tree species such as *Prunus africana*, *Aningeria-adolfi-friedericii*, *Syzygium guineense* and *Albizia coriaria* increased in number. Apart from UWA restrictions, community initiatives such as tree planting activities involved forest user groups.
- However, members in four FGDs perceived the forest condition to have declined. These were older men and women from beekeeping groups (older men from Kwoti, older women from Kwono integrated, Kwoti beekeepers, and older men from the Elgon mixed farmers group). They attributed the decline to the cutting of tree species such as *Podocarpus latifolius*, *Syzygium guineense*, *Spathodea campanulata*, *Allophylus abyssinicus* and *Prunus africana* for timber, poles and firewood.

Perception of water quality and quantity

In 24 FGDs, members perceived an improvement in water quality, such as cleaner water and greater volumes (e.g. in Cheptais River). They attributed this to improved forest cover as a result of: tree planting and reduced farming activities in the forest, the prohibition of grazing of livestock in the park, the requirement to farm at least 10 meters away from river banks, and the planting of trees such as *Grevillea robusta, Cordia africana* and *Prunus africana* along river banks. However, they also perceived reduced volumes during the dry seasons.

In two FGDs (older men of Chepsum Tap stand and older women of Kwoti bee keeping group) members perceived reduced water quality and quantity in rivers Kaptokwoi and Atari and attributed this change to forest degradation, siltation and overgrazing. The brown color in water resulted from siltation due to erosion because of cutting down indigenous trees e.g. *Podocarpus latifolius*, *Syzygium guineense*, *Allophylus abyssinicus* and *Prunus africana* for timber, poles and firewood. Also, there was increased erosion in the wet season and water was muddy.

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Leadership

All FGDs reported to having women in positions of leadership.
Most respondents reported that women were equal men and thus deserved equal opportunities in leadership. Women were also perceived to be more trustworthy than men. However, the position of chairperson was occupied by men in most study groups. The balance of women and men in leadership positions varied in the user groups and resource committees. Table 1 shows the positions held by men and women in selected groups.

Table 1. Distribution of women in membership and positions in selected groups.

Resource user	Positions	Positions held by women
Kapkwai parish resource committee	10 (5 women, 5 men) 5 leadership positions (chair, vice chair, secretary, publicity secretary, security officer and 5 other members)	Publicity secretary and 4 as other members
Tegeres Parish resource group	7 members 4 positions (chair, secretary, treasurer) and 3 other members	Treasurer 2 women as other members
Chema water committee	9 members Chair, vice chair, secretary, publicity secretary, and 5 other members	Publicity secretary
Kwoti watershed group	9 members Chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer, and 5 other positions (referred to as secretaries)	2 women as secretaries of production and environment

Linked governance of water and forest

There were no joint activities between the water committees and forest user groups. In some groups, such as Kwoti and Cheptui watershed user groups , members mentioned having activities with other forest user groups, but these were undertaken by individuals with membership in both groups, not the entire user group. These activities were limited to maintenance of springs and water taps, and on-farm activities for soil conservation such as digging trenches. Only the watershed groups had multiple activities such as riverbank protection, on-farm tree planting, tree nurseries, and planting of Napier grass on farms to reduce grazing in the forest. One reason given for the lack of joint activities is that members of forest user groups were not aware that water committees existed in their areas.

Suggested areas for collaboration

The water user groups made the following recommendations to enhance joint forest and water management:

- planting of trees along rivers such as Kaptakwoi and Atar, digging trenches and ditches on farms, planting Napier grass on farms to reduce grazing in the forest, participating in forest patrols, and tree planting in the forest;
- tree nursery management, such as potting and watering seedlings
- planting of trees on farms along the Cheptui River;
- Forest user group members could volunteer land through which water pipes could pass to supply water from the gravity flow scheme.

The forest users suggested the following areas for collaboration to promote joint forest and water conservation:

- planting trees along water sources and springs;
- riverbank protection, including erosion control, planting Napier grass and trees along the riverbanks (in the Cheptui and Cheseber watersheds);
- holding joint meetings to sensitize both water and forest groups on their roles and areas of collaboration;
- conducting joint patrols in the forest.

Community members in a focus group discussion

Conclusions

- The communities understood the link between the forest and water quality and quantity, how forest degradation led to reduced water quality, and how the rehabilitation of the forest led to increased forest cover resulting in increased water volumes. However, water volumes change with seasons.
- There is a gender gap in resource user committees; there are few women members and they are not equally represented in leadership positions.
- Although joint activities were mentioned in some cases, these were done by individuals with dual membership, not the entire user group or water committee. These activities were also limited to the maintenance of springs and water taps and on-farm activities for soil conservation such as digging trenches.
- Only the watershed groups expanded their activities to include both water and forests, such as riverbank protection, on-farm tree planting and tree nurseries. Both forest and water committees are aware of the need to undertake some activities together and provided suggestions for collaboration.

Recommendations

- The roles of forest user groups should be expanded to include involvement in forest rehabilitation activities, not only to access forest resources.
- Gender-sensitive capacity building is needed, to enhance the involvement of women in leadership positions on resource user committees.
- The role of water committees should be expanded by forming micro-catchment committees that can engage in forest and water conservation at the landscape level, without being limited to the tap or spring level.
- Joint meetings are needed between forest user groups and water committees to sensitize members about roles and possible areas of collaboration.
- There is a need to expand forest and water conservation activities beyond the farm level to include activities in the forest, such as rehabilitation of degraded areas.

RESEARCH PROGRAM ON Forests, Trees and Agroforestry

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