



Preliminary research results on the governance of forests and water in Bududa 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 Bududa

Bududa District in the Eastern Region of Uganda had an estimated population of 210,173 in 2014. It has a total forest area of 10,957 ha.

Research process

This study worked with forest user groups and water resource user groups in the Bushihi and Bubiita sub-counties of Bududa District. Forest user groups included those working on beekeeping, tree planting, fuelwood collection, grazing and riverbank restoration. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with Buneboshe resource users, Bushihi community development representatives, Namirumba resource users, and five forest user groups (Bushihi central, Bushihi Yetana, Bushihi forest restoration, lbale farmers, Musoola group). Among the water resource user groups, FGDs were held with two spring committee members and one tap committee member. Key informant interviews were held with leaders (a chairperson and a secretary) from Buneboshe and Namirumba resource user committees. The FGDs were segregated by gender and age. A total of 4 key informant interviews and 37 FGDs were held (Figure 1).

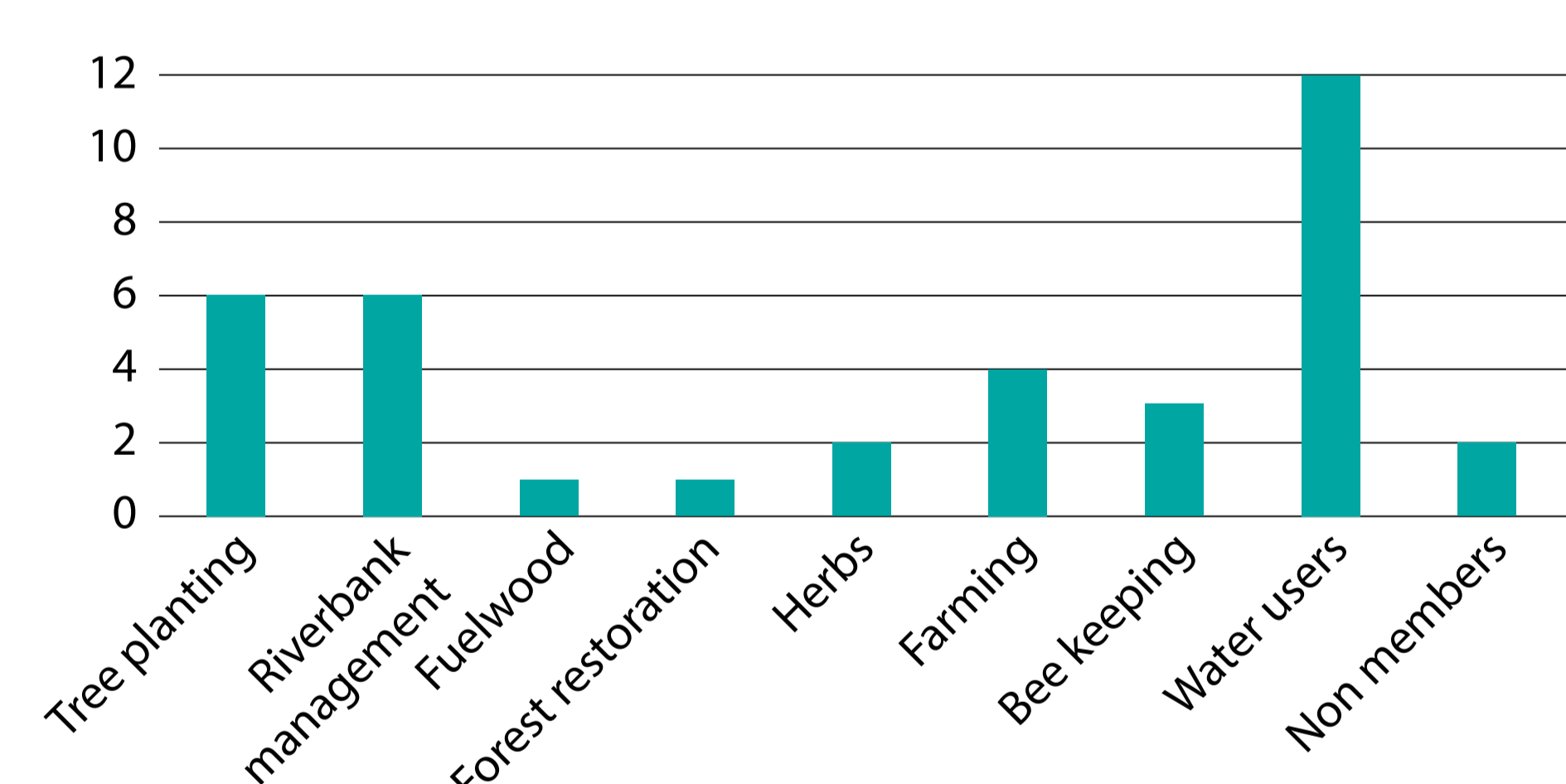


Figure 1. Number of FGDs per user group in Bududa.

A total of 424 community members participated in the FGDs (201 women and 223 men) differentiated by age (Figure 2).

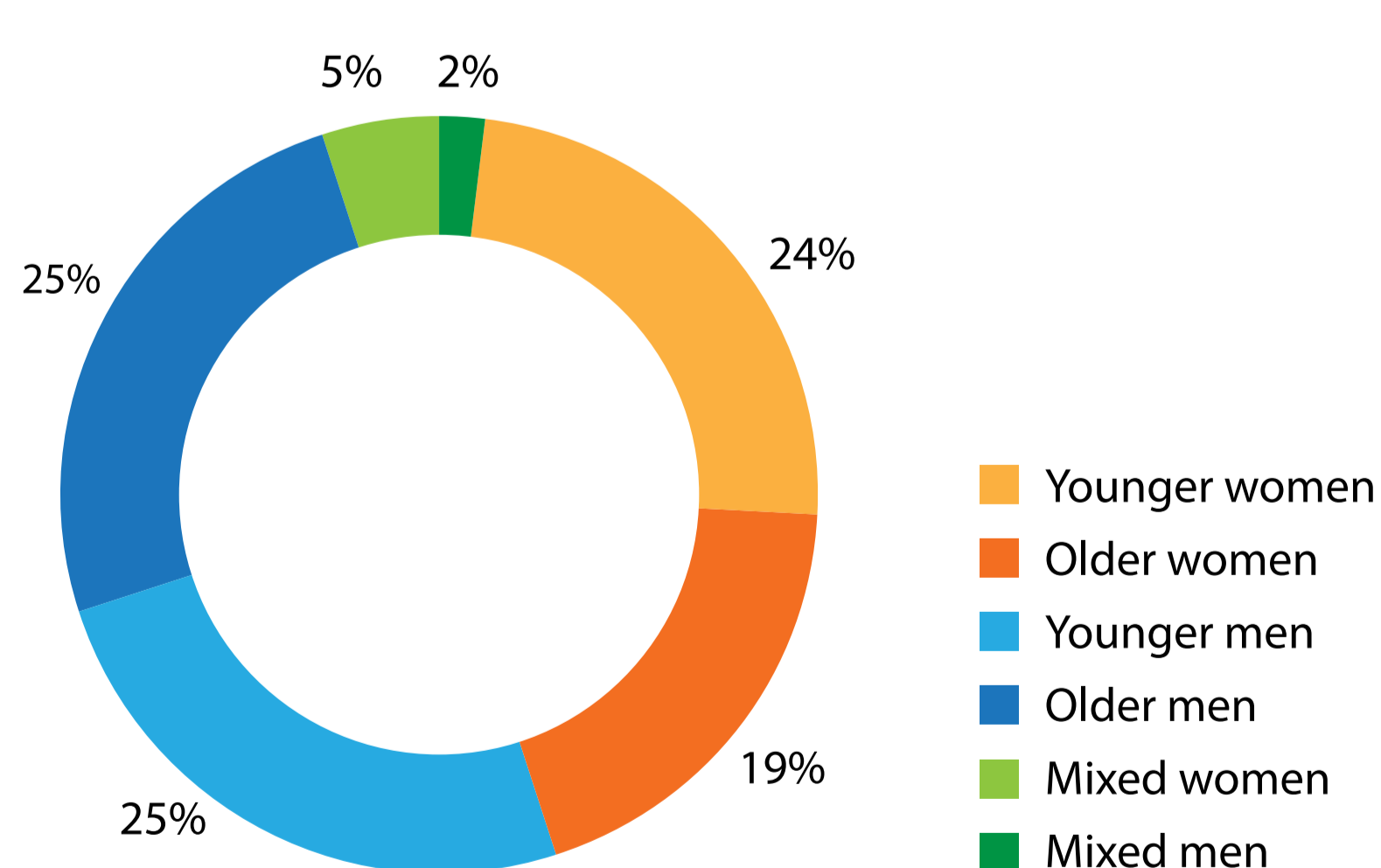


Figure 2. Percentage of men and women in focus group discussions.

Results

Community perception of forest and water condition and changes

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 FGDs conducted with forest user groups, members mentioned that there was positive forest change, while in 9 FGDs, members mentioned that some parts of the forest still experienced deforestation.

- Those who perceived improved forest changes mentioned:
 - » reforestation activities launched by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and community groups (e.g. Musoola Farmers' Association in 2009 and Buneboshe in 2014);
 - » reduced illegal forest activities such as cutting of trees due to strict rules by the UWA;
 - » the return of rare tree species such as *Cordia africana* and *Croton megalocarpus*;
 - » restrictions on farming in the forest and felling trees, among other activities;
 - » improvement in condition of the forest condition after it was handed over to UWA in 1996.
- Those who perceived negative changes mentioned:
 - » degradation of the forest resulting from illegal activities such as charcoal burning, bush burning and illegal cutting of trees;
 - » decline in several tree species, including *Markhamia lutea*, *Maesopsis eminii*, *Ficus natalensis* and *Grevillia robusta* due to heavy degradation that occurred before UWA was involved.

Perception of water quality and quantity:

There were mixed opinions about changes in both water quality and quantity:

- In 12 FGDs, member mentioned that both quantity and quality had improved in the last 5–10 years. They noted improved forest cover, citing UWA interventions such as reforestation with communities that led to increased precipitation, reduced erosion and siltation, and hence clean water (e.g. River Maba).
- Other respondents mentioned reduced water levels in Wanangonyi and Manafwa rivers compared to the past due to felling of trees known locally as *kamarumba* and *kimikikhili*, as well as from farming along river banks. The Manafwa River turned brown due to soil erosion from cutting trees species such as *kimiruba*, *kimikishiri*, *kuhuyi*, *kuyiyi* and *kimikango*, all of which help to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion.

Leadership and women's participation

The forest and water resource user groups elect their leaders annually. Leaders are chosen based on traits such as wealth status, regular attendance at group meetings, public speaking skills, and good character. Men occupied the position of chairperson and were perceived to be courageous and more aggressive. Women were mostly elected to the positions of treasurer, secretary or organizing secretary. Women were elected based on dedication to the group's work and regular attendance at meetings, and because they are perceived to be good at communication and mobilizing people.

The perception in most groups was that electing women, irrespective of the positions occupied, would achieve gender balance in leadership. However, gender balance was not reflected in leadership positions. In men-only FGDs (e.g. male members of the Bushihi beekeeping group), men felt that women were too busy with household chores to hold leadership positions. For resource user committees, the term of membership is 2 years. The number of members varied. For instance, Namirumba Resource Committee had nine member positions (chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer, information, youth representative, secretary, and three other members), of which five were held by women and four by men. Despite this apparent gender balance, the only leadership position held by a woman was that of treasurer.



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

Governance of water and forest is not linked

Results from the interviews and FGDs revealed that forest user groups and water committees did not conduct joint activities, despite overlapping interests. Water committee activities were limited to maintenance of water points such as cleaning spring walls. However, some individual members of the water committees who were also members of forest user groups conducted forest-related activities such as planting shade trees (such as *Albizia* spp.) and Napier grass to control soil erosion and siltation of water sources. Likewise, some members of forest user groups conducted activities aimed at conserving water, such as planting trees and grasses along riverbanks and hill slopes to control soil erosion, fencing water sources, and building terraces on farms.

Reasons for lack of joint activities include:

- Physical distance: Many members of the water committees were far from the forest and hence could not participate in forest conservation activities. Not all villages had both water committees and forest user groups.
- Lack of communication between members and leaders of forest user groups and water committees: In some cases, forest users did not know of the existence of water committees.
- Lack of interaction in meetings: UWA usually organized meetings with members of forest user groups, whereas water committees were organized by sub-county officers.

Joint membership

- Some member in water committees were also members in forest user group membership in forest and water committees.
- In 18 out of 37 FGDs reported that their groups had members who belonged to both water and forest user groups. The number ranged between one and three of the respondents belonging to both water committees and forest resource user groups. In such cases, the members in the water committees were elected because they reside near the water points.

Suggested areas for collaboration

The water user committees suggested the following:

- protecting the water springs through clearing of bushes and building fencing;
- planting trees along rivers and in the forest;
- sensitizing communities about the importance of protecting and managing trees and water resources;
- jointly planting trees and managing riparian areas;
- forest user groups could offer land through which water pipes could pass.

The forest user groups suggested the following:

- protection of forests because they are the main source of water;
- sensitization of forest users by water committees about the importance of forests, to encourage engagement in joint ventures.
- forest patrols to plant trees and clean water bodies.

Participation in meetings and activities

There were no joint meetings undertaken by forest and water user groups. The majority of user groups held their meetings on a weekly basis, while some met bi-weekly and one group reported meeting only once every three months.

While the majority of respondents said they participated in the meetings, young women members reported that they could not participate effectively, citing reasons such as failure by leaders to invite them and an inability to contribute to group savings. They mentioned that they could become more active if they were financially empowered to start income-generating activities. Other forest users felt that the resource user committees at the parish level needed to consult more with forest user groups. To enhance participation in meetings and activities, members suggested introducing fines for lack of compliance and having leaders assign specific roles to members. Others felt that being given incentives such as seedlings would lead them to participate more in conservation activities.



Community members in a focus group discussion

Conclusions

- The community understood the link between the forest and water quality and quantity, and could identify both positive and negative changes in these resources. Positive changes were due to UWA intervention through forest rehabilitation and imposing strict rules on forest use and management, which helped to restore the forest. Those who perceived negative changes thought that illegal activities such as charcoal burning, bush burning and illegal cutting of trees were the cause of forest degradation.
- Those who perceived increased water volumes attributed this to positive changes in the forest cover, while those who perceived lower water quantity and quality (i.e. brown color) attributed this to reduced forest cover and siltation.
- Both men and women were elected to executive positions. However, most men were elected to the position of chairperson, whereas women were elected to the positions of secretary and treasurer. Men were believed to be more courageous and aggressive, and women were seen as more trustworthy and adept at communicating, mobilizing people and being active in group activities, compared to men.
- Communities were aware of both forest and water conservation activities. Despite this, there were no joint activities or meetings organized.
- Although gender balance was mentioned, it was not reflected in the actual leadership positions. Groups felt that by having at least, a woman in leadership, (in position of treasure or secretary) they had considered gender balance. However, inclusion of more women in leadership positions is needed.

Recommendations

- There is a need for improved participation in joint meetings to promote awareness of the need to undertake joint forest and water management activities.
- The community could benefit from sensitization about the need to expand the role of water committees beyond the maintenance of water taps and springs, to include conservation of riverine areas and forests. There is also an opportunity to expand water committees into micro-catchment management committees to undertake riparian conservation.
- Capacity building on gender and leadership is needed to give more space to women in leadership. Women suggested that men need to understand the actual barriers that prevent women from participation in activities and meetings (and not just say that women are “busy”).
- Finally, leaders need to actively involve youth by assigning them specific roles such as reporting on tree planting activities.



The CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) is the world's largest research for development program to enhance the role of forests, trees and agroforestry in sustainable development and food security and to address climate change. CIFOR leads FTA in partnership with Bioversity International, CATIE, CIRAD, ICRAF, INBAR and TBI. FTA's work is supported by the CGIAR Trust Fund.

Project Partners



cifor.org/water-towers

forestsnews.cifor.org



Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

CIFOR advances human well-being, equity and environmental integrity by conducting innovative research, developing partners' capacity and actively engaging in dialogue with all stakeholders to inform policies and practices that affect forests and people. CIFOR is a CGIAR Research Center, and leads the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA). Our headquarters are in Bogor, Indonesia, with offices in Nairobi, Kenya; Yaounde, Cameroon and Lima, Peru.

