

Community Forest Management



"FARM-Africa has found that involving the local community in forest management is the best approach to ensuring sustainable use."

Forests in jeopardy

Africa's forests are at risk. Plundered for fuel and building materials, and to make space for road building and agriculture, existing timber reserves are continually degraded – and are disappearing at an incredible pace. In Ethiopia, for example, only about 2% of the original forest cover remains, whilst forest resources in Tanzania have been significantly depleted over the past three decades. This has a serious impact on forest wildlife and threatens water resources, and the situation is ever more serious given that Africa's forests provide livelihoods for millions of poor people across the continent.

Community Forest Management “enhances the livelihoods of forest-users and conserves forests through developing and implementing sustainable forest management plans, thereby demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach and advocating for its incorporation into forest policy.”

FARM-Africa has found that the solution to protect forests effectively lies in working with the local community, linking their interests with the protection of the forest resources. FARM-Africa’s **Participatory Forest Management Programme** in Tanzania and Ethiopia shows that involving the local community in forest management is key to conserving forest resources, both now and for the future. FARM-Africa, the Ethiopian Government, the Government of Tanzania and local communities work together to establish their rights and responsibilities over forest resources. Ultimately, communities, with government support, become custodians of the forest.

FARM-Africa’s Approach — The Participatory Forest Management Programme

Community Forest Management is at the heart of FARM-Africa’s Participatory Forest Management Programme, jointly implemented with Ethiopian non-governmental organisation SOS Sahel. Spanning forest sites in Ethiopia and Tanzania, the programme develops and promotes a community approach to forest management through a range of advocacy, training and networking activities.

Programme Goal

The Participatory Forest Management Programme will:

- Contribute to the long-term conservation of forest ecosystems, through developing and establishing new forest management systems
- Enable government staff and rural communities to manage natural resources in a sustainable and equitable way
- Help farmers to earn income through a diverse range of non-timber forest products and non-forest resources
- Promote the adoption of Community Forest Management within forest policy and practice.

Community Forest Management is a relatively new concept in Ethiopia but is gaining increased support from government and communities through the Programme. In Tanzania the approach has been successfully applied in village forest reserves, but practical experience in a major state reserve does not yet exist.

How we will do this

The Programme works with communities and government staff in Bonga, Chilimo and Negele Forests in Ethiopia and in Nou Forest, Tanzania. Specifically, it will safeguard Ethiopia and Tanzania’s forests through:

- Developing forest management plans – legal frameworks for the management, conservation and use of forest resources – for each forest. These are planned by communities and accepted by regional authorities
- Developing and documenting new models of community planning and forest management
- Ensuring that regional authorities accept the principle of community forest management



- Encouraging the development of a positive policy environment to promote community forest management
- Promoting the community forest management model widely throughout Ethiopia and Tanzania.

FARM-Africa provides the training, technical advice and information needed to support community forest management, working with both government staff and communities. In Ethiopia, where the Government owns all land, the emphasis is on developing appropriate forest policy so that the community management approach is recognised by and integrated into national forest policy. This is done through the Forest Policy Working Group, coordinated by FARM-Africa, which promotes community management of forest resources by engaging with federal level senior government staff.

In Tanzania, where the Government has already accepted the principle of community forest management, the emphasis is on equipping regional government staff with the appropriate skills and knowledge required so they can fulfil their role in supporting communities to take responsibility for the forests.

By sharing the lessons from experiences in both Ethiopia and Tanzania, the Programme not only raises the profile of community management of forests, but more importantly, advocates a central role for forest management in national policy and for it to be much more participatory – communities and governments safeguarding Africa’s forests in partnership. Policy lessons and field experiences are communicated to diverse audiences, including national government, international and local NGOs, and community-based organisations amongst others. This is done through a variety of media including publications, radio and websites, and programme staff participate in international forest networks, such as the Forest Action Network. This outreach ensures that community forest management is better integrated in both national forestry policy and practice.



Mrs Regatu Benga — Chilimo Forest Users Group

Regatu lives on her homestead with her eight children in Chilimo Forest. A poor smallholder farmer, she has very few animals and reaps little returns from her small plot of land. Supporting her family is difficult, but Regatu has always relied on the forest to sustain her livelihood.

As part of FARM-Africa/SOS Sahel’s Participatory Forest Management Programme, forest users are encouraged to become involved in non-timber based activities to conserve the forest. Regatu joined the Chilimo Forest User Group which got involved in poultry rearing. Regatu is happy because she can now supplement her income with sales of eggs and birds and is less dependent on the forest’s timber for her existence.

“In the past, the depletion of forest resources led to famine in two areas. Conserving the forest will help to reduce this in the future. Now we understand the importance of conservation” she says.

“I believe in the project as I have seen the gradual destruction of the forest all my life. Now I am thinking about the forest. I am very glad that we have started to protect it. I would give my children’s life for it – it is that important to us”.



Key issues in Community Forest Management

Community Forest Management addresses the following:

Deforestation – alleviating pressure on forests through better management. This reduces the removal of forest resources by external companies who take the benefits away from the local communities, as well as developing livelihood alternatives for local people – diverting the demand for traditional forest resources such as timber.

Forest users and resource management – looking at how to share forest resources and revenues between different stakeholders and their often-conflicting interests.

Forest Certification – The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certifying forest products that meet criteria guaranteeing sustainable production and marketing. FARM-Africa intends to explore certification options for all forest products and to appeal to the growing market for sustainable, environmentally friendly goods.



Achievements

Many achievements resulting from the Participatory Forest Management Programme can already be seen at both community and policy levels.

Communities Taking Responsibility

In Ethiopia, communities in Chilimo and Bonga have already begun to assume responsibility for their forest areas and are taking pride in looking after these important resources. Activities include posting regular guards and patrols to catch illicit forest resource users who are then brought before the village court.

Communities Demanding their Rights

In Bonga Forest government officials had planned to construct a road through the forest using revenue from harvested timber. Strong opposition from the community eventually overturned the decision.

Policy in Action

In Ethiopia, the work of the Forest Policy Working Group has already born fruit with federal government staff accepting the principle of Community Forest Management. Now the groups are working out the finer details of what this means for actual forest policy.

Linking with Learning

The programme is collaborating with Wondo Genet Forestry College – the only forestry training college in Ethiopia – on future curriculum development and student training in community approaches to forest management.



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Registered Company No. 1926828

Design: Eileen Higgins Email eileenh@mac.com
Print: Waterside Press Tel +44 (0) 1707 275555

Front cover photograph: Mikkel Ostergaard/Panos Pictures. Other photographs: FARM-Africa