

Centre for

Applied

Social

Sciences



Proceedings of the
Regional Conference on Gender Issues in
Community-Based Natural Resource Management

C B N R M

(Cresta Lodge, Harare : 24 – 27 August 1998)

Compiled by

Nontokozi Nabane

September 1998

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Gender Issues In Community-Based Natural Resource Management In Zimbabwe

A Case Study of Mafungabusi Forest

Faith Chikandiwa

1. Summary

This paper looks at gender issues in the forest management of Mafungabusi Forest, which is one of the 21 gazetted forests in the country. The role of both men and women are highlighted and their contribution to the sustainable management of the forest is assessed.

2. Project Background

The Mafungabusi Forest is located in Gokwe South, in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. The forest area comprises 82000 hectares of Miombo woodland. Beside the protection of indigenous timber species of commercial value, Mafungabusi also conserves the watershed from which flow the Sengwa, Mbumbusi, Lutope and Ngondoma rivers.

Mafungabusi was gazetted as a Forest Reserve in 1954 after it was discovered that increasing population was threatening the forest. Some communities had settled in the forest, and in 1972 part of the original forest (22,900 ha) was put aside by the Forestry Commission and handed over to the settlers who had encroached into the forest. This was done in order to solve the problem of people who were squatting in the forest. Prior to gazettement, the communities surrounding Mafungabusi had free access to the forest. The marked human activities were grass cutting, collection of minor Forest products (mushrooms, caterpillars), collection of dead or dry phalloid, cutting of trees for construction purposes, wildlife hunting and grazing.

A policy for monitoring human activities in the forest was introduced. However this policy did not prevent the communities from using the forest illegally. Cutting of grass required a permit and livestock was routinely let loose into the forest to graze and was collected at the end of the day. A Forestry Protection Unit was instituted whose functions were to patrol the forest. The unit had conflicts with the communities since wildlife hunters were prosecuted, being considered poachers. The frustrated communities continued exploiting the resources and intentional fires were a common site. After encountering these problems the Forestry Commission concluded that the best way to conserve and manage the forest resources was to involve the communities surrounding the Forest. Hence, the introduction of the Resource Sharing Project. There are 8 wards surrounding the forest area which are participating in the Resource Sharing Project. These are Njelele1, 2, 3, Ndhlalambi 1 and 2, Ngomeni, Chirima and Muyambi.

Several meetings and workshops have been organised by the Forestry Commission to mobilise and empower the communities surrounding Mafungabusi in resource sharing activities. To date eight Resource Management Committees (RMC) have been formed at village level. For the project it is planned to establish 16 committees. The responsibilities of these committees would be to administer the forest area and activities in the forest area adjacent to their villages. A steering committee consisting of the chairpersons of each RMC and the Forestry Commission will serve as the management board of the entire forest. Before the introduction of the co-management concept, Forestry Commission as a state institution had the authority to control the use and management of Mafungabusi without involving the Local communities. It was with the participatory approach in mind that FC set out to identify all the institutions operating in various wards in order to achieve success in the management of the Mafungabusi Forest resources. The Institutions identified were stated institutions, traditional institutions, donor funded institutions and religious institutions.

3. Community Benefits and Involvement in the Project

3.1 Bee-keeping Programme

Not many people are in honey production, of the few involved majority are men. Their management systems range from using traditional hives made from tree barks to a few commercial hives. Forestry Commission assisted some of the participants with these commercial hives after they had attended a bee-keeping course. Harvesting of honey is common from the forest and this is evidenced by a large group of women and young children mainly girls selling honey along the highway.

To enhance sustainable resource management in Mafungabusi, communities have been trained in bee keeping as mentioned earlier and they were provided with working materials like hives and protective clothing used when harvesting honey. It has been argued that the methods that are used by these honey collectors are very destructive and most of the fires recorded in the forest are thought to have been caused by them.

3.2 Mushroom Collection

There is a wide range of products derived from Mafungabusi, with mushrooms of various species recorded. At present there is no regulatory measure or legislation in terms of collecting these products. People mainly women collect mushroom at free will. Women are seen active in the preservation of these mushroom, that is by either drying them or preparing them whilst fresh. Men involved in this activity are seen with loads of mushroom in scotch-carts, with these products collected mainly for selling and a few for household consumption. In some homesteads, this mushroom collection activity is undertaken jointly by husbands and wives since the benefit would be for the livelihood of their families.

3.3 Grass Cutting

This activity is administered from the month of May to early August, where both men and women are fully involved. The vleis where grass is collected are further away from the communities' homesteads and women said that they are scared of covering these

long distances on their own, so they go in the forest in company of the husbands or male counterparts. Usually this grass is collected for both household use and for retailing.

This grass cutting activity follows a formalised system, where permits are granted to the harvesters by the Resource Management Committees (RMC) established in the villages adjacent to Mafungabusi. For every 5 bundles of thatching grass cut, 2 are surrendered to the RMC, who would then sell the grass and raise some development funds for the community.

3.4 Broom Grass Collection

Women are the ones who are mainly concerned with the cleanliness of their homes and they are the ones who collect broom grass. Women collect broom grass during the same period they cut thatch grass. Both these activities require permits. The sweeping brooms made are for both household use and for sale.

In the last season the women were not satisfied with the new harvesting method of broom grass, which required them to cut grass using sickles, instead of using their traditional method of pulling out the grass with its roots which is said to produce long lasting sweeping brooms.

3.5 Fuelwood Collection

Since the forest is further from the communal settlements, people usually use scotch-carts to collect fuelwood and it is usually found that both men and women are involved. Fuelwood is collected once a month on a Thursday, being the community's sacred day and they are encouraged to collect dead wood only.

4. Roles of Men and Women

Women are mainly involved in household chores and, where things are done by both men and women (like selling products), it would be worthwhile to investigate how the money is administered, that is who has control and how the money is used. Usually when men are involved in products collection, like honey, thatch grass and fuelwood their objective would be to sell the products and generate income for the family and their own use and entertainment.

5. Conclusion

Mafungabusi resource sharing project has been in operation for one year and reviews are periodically undertaken. A gender analysis is yet to be conducted. Already some gender gaps have been identified in the composition of the existing RMCs. From the recent workshops women felt that they were not fully represented and that they did not have adequate feedback on the activities and the workings of RMCs. These sentiments are yet to be considered, since there are 8 more RMCs to be formed. However in other activities the communities are involved in they have shown appreciation of why they have to manage the forest sustainably because of the benefits accruing from the forest.



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