



CFA and WRUA members
during transect in the Tisi river.
June 2018

Water Towers project

Preliminary research results on the governance of forests and water in Cheptais Forest, Mt. Elgon

Objective

To establish whether and how Community Forest Associations and Water Resource User Associations work to jointly govern forest and water resources

Overview of Cheptais forest

Cheptais is located in Mt. Elgon along the border of Kenya and Uganda. The forest station covers about 25,540 ha. Cheptais Community Forest Association (CFA) has about 1,200 members, (about 800 women and 400 men). CFA user groups access the forest for grazing, tree nurseries,

beekeeping, fuelwood, the Tree Establishment and Livelihood Improvement Scheme (TELIS), herb collection and water. Chembombai Water Resource User Association (WRUA) is within Chembombai sub-catchment area and covers (200 km²) with about 334 members (160 women and 174 men).



Research process

18 forest user groups were selected in three locations around the forest, Cheptais, Sasuri and Emia. User groups were involved in grazing, Tree Establishment and Livelihood Improvement (TELIS), the tree nursery, beekeeping, fuelwood and herb collection. 43 focus group discussions and 6 key informant interviews were conducted with CFA and WRUA members and leaders. We talked to a total of 463 people (256 women and 207 men), differentiated by age as indicated in Figure 1.

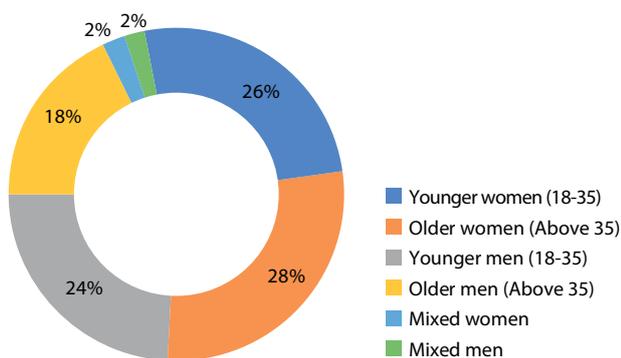


Figure 1. Gender and age of respondents in focus group discussions.

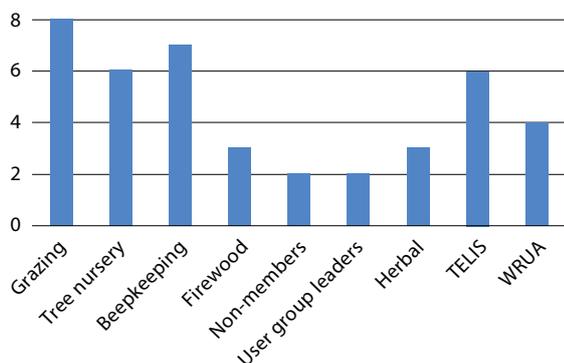


Figure 2. Number of focus group discussions per user group.

Community perceptions of forest and water conditions

The community members perceived a reduction in forest size over the last 5-10 years. Human settlement, TELIS, the cutting down of trees for firewood, timber and charcoal production, and forest fires were among the causes of forest loss. This reduction in forest has led to a reduction in indigenous tree species including cedar, croton, Elgon teak, mahogany, markhamia lutea, *Prunus africanus*, sanandet, mugerenget, mvule and tapaswet. Indigenous vegetables like the African nightshade no longer thrive well due to changing conditions inside the forest.

Water quality and quantity have reduced in the last 5-10 years. Increases in human population, deforestation, and the spraying of harmful pesticides and herbicides while farming near the riverbanks leads to water pollution. Lwakhakha, Tisi and Namatoto rivers are among the most affected main rivers.

Community perceptions on the link between forest and water

Community members understand the link between the forest and water resources. Reduction in water levels is linked to change in forest cover and degradation of the catchment, especially through the TELIS system, leading to reduced water quality and quantity, the main rivers affected being Lwakhakha, Tisi and Namatoto.

Leadership

The CFA leadership consists of five positions: the chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer, secretary and vice secretary. Out of these, two are women (secretary and treasurer). The WRUA has two women (treasurer and assistant secretary) and three men (chairman, vice-chairman and secretary) in executive positions. There are five committees each comprising of five members – three men and two women.



In both the CFA and WRUA, members elect leaders through secret ballot. CFA elections are conducted after three years and WRUA elections are after five years. At the time of this study, the last CFA election was held in 2013. The next election was due in 2017 however, it was actually held in April 2018. Out of the 30 CFA user groups, there were 120 women in user group positions compared to 150 men. Women's groups have more women in leadership positions than men.

During the study, the last election for Chebombai WRUA was held in 2012. However, elections were recently held, after the study, in April 2018. Three out of the five WRUA sub-committees (finance, climate change and livelihoods) are chaired by women. In total there are 20 men and 10 women in the 5 sub-committees.

Men are elected as chairpersons because they are perceived to implement group projects on time; are open to challenging opinions from either gender; and are believed to make difficult decisions on issues of the conservation of water and forest resources. Women are elected mainly as treasurers because they are transparent, trustworthy, accountable and disseminate information to members on time. They are also approachable and share opportunities.

The main challenges mentioned by leaders were conflicts during the allocation of TELIS land; gender biases in the allocation of TELIS lands; and the fact that most community members do not recognize women as owners of land.

Overlap in membership of CFA and WRUA

The CFA coordinator is the chairperson of Upper Malakisi WRUA, and the CFA chair is a member of Upper Malakisi WRUA, which extends from Cheptais forest station. Two WRUA leaders are members of the CFA, and 20 Chebombai WRUA members are in the CFA. These members reside where the WRUA undertakes its activities.

Joint activities between the CFA and WRUA

Despite overlap in membership, there were no joint activities. The reasons for this include: some members of both associations not being aware of the activities conducted by the other, due to their geographical locations; a sense of superiority, i.e. each association feeling better than the other; and mistrust between CFA and WRUA members. Both saw the importance of working together and provided suggestions.

Suggested areas for collaboration

- Rehabilitation of degraded forest and riparian areas
- The WRUA sourcing tree seedlings from the CFA
- Establishing tree nurseries and planting trees along riparian zones and degraded forestlands
- Planting Napier grass along the contour bands, gabions and terraces
- Sensitization and training programs for locals living along the riparian areas

Participation in CFA and WRUA activities and meetings

CFA and WRUA members participate in activities such as the formulation of group bylaws. CFA members participate in determining where boundaries should reach in land under TELIS. Women's participation is low; reasons for this included chores and home commitments; leaders only contact fellow men who prefer to keep women uninformed so that they stay at home to attend to domestic chores. Women members of CFA user groups feel isolated as they rarely participating in decision making. Younger members of the CFA also rarely participate, as most are pursuing their studies and livelihood activities. Participation in the CFA is high when issues of TELIS are the subject of discussion, and in user groups which have merry-go-round (a saving scheme) and Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLAs). Participation is similarly high in the WRUA when there are expected benefits, such as opportunities to share tree seedlings.

Suggested areas to increase participation include sharing progress reports on meetings; increasing participation of women and young people through timely communication via SMS and calls, and having meetings in accessible places. WRUA leaders should also include all age groups and genders during training and capacity building workshops, when these are held.

Conclusion

CFA and WRUA members in Cheptais are aware that activities affecting forest cover also affect water quality and quantity. They mentioned the reduction in forest cover and reduced water quantity and quality due to eroded soils from forest degradation; the use of pesticides by farmers cultivating along the riverbanks also reduced water quality.

There were no joint activities conducted between the CFA and WRUA, despite overlaps in some members. Barriers include the geographical boundaries of the two associations, lack of awareness on activities conducted by either the CFA or the WRUA, and even the existence of the other association, among some members. There is the perception that the CFA is responsible for forest management, and the WRUA for riparian management. Despite this, both members agree it is important to implement joint activities and provided suggestions on ways to collaborate.

In both the CFA and WRUA, participation is high when there are expected material benefits from participation, such as TELIS and savings. The participation of women and young people is low.

Recommendations

- Capacity development of both CFA and WRUA members to promote the purpose and function of WRUAs and CFAs as community institutions for advancing conservation, rather than only as avenues for obtaining material benefits.
- Facilitate joint meetings between the CFA and WRUA to enhance coordination and joint planning
- Build capacity of CFA and WRUA leaders and members on gender roles and responsibilities, as well as communication skills, to enhance the participation of women and young people in decision making
- Enhance the capacity of both CFA and WRUA members to broaden their scope of activities, so that the CFA can participate in water conservation activities and WRUA members can also participate in forest conservation 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.

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.

