



CFA members in a discussion in Kimothon.
February 2018

Water Towers project

Preliminary research results on the governance of forests and water in Kimothon Forest Reserve, 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 Kimothon forest reserve

Kimothon Forest Reserve is part of the larger Mt. Elgon Forest and borders Kenya and Uganda. The forest is under the management of the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and Kimothon Community Forest Association (CFA), which has about 1,000 members.

User groups access the forest for grazing, fuelwood, tree nurseries, the Plantation Establishment and Livelihood Improvement Scheme (PELIS) and bee keeping. There is no Water Resource User Association (WRUA) in Kimothon.



Research process

We selected four CFA user groups, with the following focuses: grazing, firewood, tree nursery and PELIS. We held 16 focus group discussions with members, user group leaders and non-members of CFA, as well as three key informant interviews with CFA leaders. Overall, we talked to 149 participants (87 men and 62 women) differentiated by age as indicated in Figure 1.

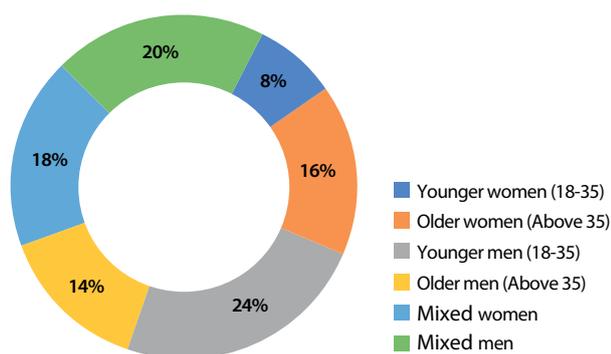
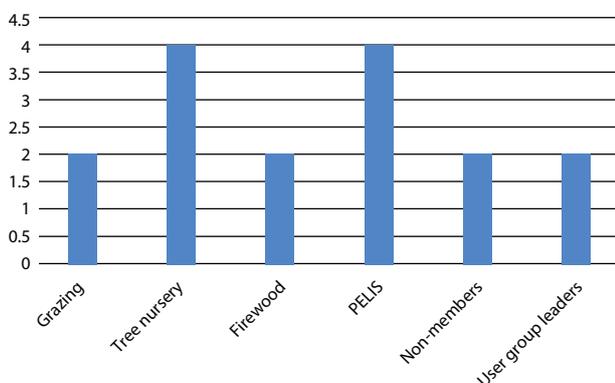


Figure 1. Gender and age of respondents in focus group discussions.



Distribution of FGD conducted in Kimothon per user group

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

Community perception of forest and water condition

CFA members perceived a reduction in forest size and tree species composition (e.g. indigenous species such as Tapaswet, Koroshonde, Podo and Armotit are dying out). Human activities responsible for this change include: charcoal burning, illegal logging, pole harvesting, and encroachment of forestland for farming and settlement. Unemployment among young people, pressure from population growth and timber harvesting without replanting are the underlying drivers of these activities. Elderly men also felt that the introduction of PELIS resulted in the cutting down of the trees to create more space for farming.

The water volume and quality in Muber, Kaibei and Sabwani rivers, the main water sources in Kimothon, have reduced. This is linked to reduced tree cover, water diversion for irrigation, farming along riverbanks, washing and bathing in the river and watering livestock. The community linked siltation and reduced water levels in the rivers to erosion, caused by deforestation and overgrazing in riparian areas.

Leadership

CFA management is composed of five positions: the chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, vice secretary, and treasurer. There is only one woman (treasurer). Out of the 4 groups involved, there was 1 woman as a chairlady, 1 assistant chairlady, 2 as treasurers, and 1 as a secretary.

Women tend to participate in all group activities, unlike male leaders, who are selective on the activities in which they participate. They disseminate information faster and are perceived as more humble than men, who can come across as bold and aggressive. Women are able to discuss issues affecting both men and women.



Due to socio-cultural norms that promote ownership of land, men are perceived to be more authoritative, so are often listened to. It is therefore easier for them to formulate and enforce regulations. Women are elected as treasurers because they are regarded as accountable and transparent, hence trustworthy.

Elections of CFA leaders are conducted every three years. Kimothon CFA has conducted two elections since its formation. Specific user groups, such as the PELIS groups, have less women in leadership roles due to social and cultural norms, whereby only men can own land.

Joint activities between CFA and WRUA

There are no joint activities between the CFA and WRUA because there is no WRUA in Kimothon. None of the members were aware of any WRUA in Kimothon.

Suggested areas for collaboration between CFA and WRUA

Despite the absence of a WRUA in the area, CFA members felt that it was important to have a WRUA in the area and suggested activities they could implement together. Suggested activities included:

- Protecting water catchment areas, riparian zones and springs and ensuring that riparian land owners observe the 30 m protection zone from the river bank
- Establishing tree nurseries and planting trees, including water friendly trees, such as bamboo, Msemwa, Sosiondet and Lamaiywet
- Constructing terraces for soil erosion control
- Training and sensitization of locals on forest and water conservation

Participation in CFA meetings and activities

There is no WRUA in the area, therefore no joint meetings are held. On average, the CFA holds around 3-5 meetings annually, including one Annual

General Meeting (AGM) at the end of every year, quarterly meetings (occasionally), and impromptu meetings when senior government officials or other visitors visit the area.

Kimothon CFA members actively participate in CFA meetings with about 70% of members always present at these meetings. During meetings members express their opinions on issues such as accessing farmland for all members, and participate in decision making, such as developing bylaws and electing leaders. Members gave various reasons for not participating in the meetings. Most do not participate because they were not informed in time about the meetings, but others are dissatisfied with the leaders, have family commitments or feel that the CFA discriminates against the poor and less fortunate.

Members suggested that better, more timely communication about meetings would improve attendance, as well as penalizing members who are absent without apology, or those who do not participate.

Conclusion

CFA members indicate that the indigenous forest has reduced in size over the past decade due to the expansion of farming and settlement. They also linked lower water levels in rivers, siltation and erosion to this reduction in forest cover. Barriers to participation in meetings and activities include not getting timely information. Representation of women in leadership positions is low, with only 1 out of 5 CFA management positions being held by a woman. In the user groups, only one woman acted as chair; women tend to be treasurers in the user groups. There is no WRUA in Kimothon. This presents a major opportunity for CFA to be involved in the formation of the WRUA, to enhance joint management of forests and water.

Recommendations

- Sensitization of CFA members to enhance their understanding of their role in participating in forest and water conservation
- Sensitization of CFA members on gender roles and the importance of involving more women in leadership, both in CFA and user groups

Community sensitization on the formation of the WRUA, in particular to promote the value of joint forest and water governance as central to enhancing water quantity and quality CFA members in a discussion in Kimothon. February 2018



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