



Community members in a focus discussion.  
February 2018

## Water Towers project

# Preliminary research results on the governance of forests and water in Saboti-Sosio 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 Saboti-Sosio forest

Saboti and Sosio forest block covers 11,158 ha. (Sosio covers 10,035 ha and Saboti 1,122.8 ha). Both forest blocks are state forests and are part of the greater Mt. Elgon forest reserve. Saboti-Sosio CFA has about 2,600 members

(1,800 men and 800 women). CFA user groups access the forest for beekeeping, grazing, water harvesting, fuelwood, tree nurseries, and the PELIS (Plantation Establishment and Livelihood Improvement Scheme). Sosio WRUA has 70 members (38 women and 32 men).



## Research process

We conducted our study in the Sosio side of the forest where there is indigenous forest. The following user groups were selected: grazing, water management, tree nursery, beekeeping, PELIS and fuelwood collection. We conducted 39 focus group discussions with members and non-members of the CFA and WRUA, and six key informant interviews with CFA and WRUA leaders. We talked to 451 men and women of different ages.

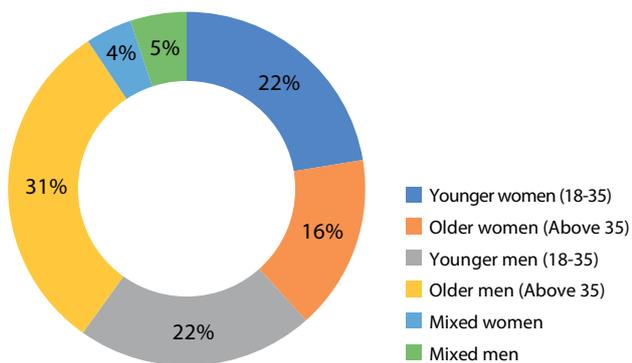


Figure 1. Gender and age of respondents in focus group discussions.

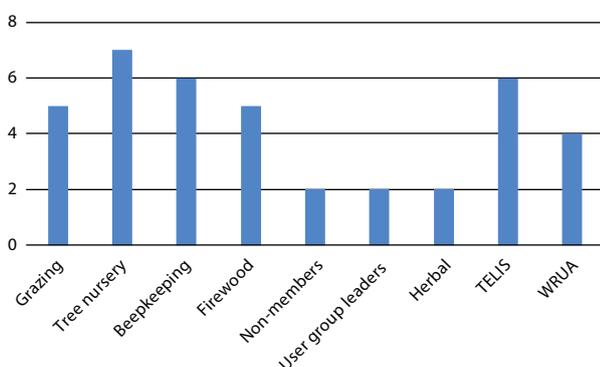


Figure 2. Number of focus group discussions per user group.

## Community perception of forest and water conditions

The community perceived that forest cover had reduced in the last 5-10 years, a change evident from the dramatic reduction in trees and bare forestlands. Increasing population has led to encroachment for grazing land and farming. Indigenous forest cover has reduced, being replaced with the Plantation Establishment and Livelihoods Improvements Scheme (PELIS). Illegal timber logging and charcoal burning were also attributed to forest degradation. Certain indigenous tree species like *armotit*, *mwiri*, *tapaswet*, *Tunguron*, *Sesut* and *Lmaiyywet* had died out and there were reduced numbers of indigenous species like Elgon teak and cedar. It was felt that area occupied by the indigenous Ogiek community was less degraded, as the community practices sustainable use and management.

Water levels in streams such as Mumwo, Nyanja, Karas and Kukul have reduced in the last 5-10 years, as a result of deforestation and the degradation of indigenous forest. This has led to soil erosion and high levels of siltation in the rivers, especially Chepsagat, Tabason, Kipyawyon and Kumriony. This has changed the color of the water to brown, and made it unfit for human consumption. The water levels are decreasing in Sikerker, Sosio and 'Nyanja' rivers. In addition to forests being degraded, prolonged droughts were mentioned to have affected the water quantity in springs such as Kirorei and Chemtei.

All FGD participants mentioned that water levels had decreased in local rivers and streams due to changing forest conditions. WRUA members also saw reduced tree cover as a cause of reduced water levels, siltation and water color change.



## Leadership

The CFA chair and secretary are men, and the treasurer is a woman. The WRUA has two levels of leadership: management and 4 sub-committees focused on procurement, finance and monitoring, each with 5 members (3 men and 2 women). At management level, the vice chair, treasurer and vice secretary are all women. The WRUA was planning to reduce the term of office from five to three years. Their last election was held in June 2018. The CFA has had two elections since it was formed, and has an office term of five years. Women are elected as treasurers as they are seen as approachable, transparent and quick to relay information to group members, unlike male leaders.

Women are seen as trustworthy, transparent in accounting for group resources and finances, and knowledgeable about most group activities and events. Men are elected as chairs as they are seen as hardworking, influential decision makers, tolerant and unlikely to be overwhelmed during activities.

## Joint activities between CFA and WRUA

CFA and WRUA do not conduct joint activities.

- There were no members of the WRUA in the CFA. WRUA members mentioned that it was the first time they had heard of the CFA.
- CFA members lack information about WRUAs in the region because the CFA is adjacent to the forest in the upper watershed, while WRUAs are located in the middle and lower watershed.
- CFA members were not aware of activities undertaken by the WRUA, nor the importance of working together with the WRUA
- CFA members felt that most of the user group leaders were busy managing their groups' activities and had no time to conduct joint activities.

## Suggestions for joint activities

- Learning and exchange of information on conservation. As an example, the CFA could teach WRUA members suitable tree species to plant, while the WRUA could teach the CFA best ways of conserving water, such as protecting springs and riparian land. Both could plant trees in riparian areas.
- Establishing tree nurseries to distribute seedlings and planting trees in bare forestlands, water catchment areas and riparian zones.
- Joint training sessions on sustainable use of forest and water resources.

## Participation of CFA and WRUA members in meetings and activities

There were mixed responses concerning meeting participation. The Ogiek community highlighted low involvement in meetings as they were sidelined by CFA leaders, who are from other ethnicities. Women's participation was low and constrained by lack of time due to household chores and long distances to meeting venues.

CFA leaders who are women also have challenges attending meetings, due to lack of timely communication, distance and feeling sidelined in leadership. Men who don't participate mentioned failure of CFA leaders to address their concerns, for instance on land allocation. In the WRUA, some members who don't participate are more concerned with livelihood activities to meet their most urgent needs, such as food.

To enhance participation, both CFA and WRUA members suggested the need for timely communication from leaders to members, using methods that are accessible by all such as phone messages, posters and public barazas, and enforcing the penalties stipulated in the bylaws on non-attending members.

## Conclusion

Both CFA and WRUA members see the link between forest health and effects on water quality and quantity. They perceive indigenous forest to have reduced, which has resulted in siltation, reduced river water levels and water color change. The Ogiek indigenous community feel their culture is important in contributing to forest and water conservation. There were no joint activities between CFA and WRUA due to a lack of knowledge on the existence and activities of the other organization. Participation of members, especially women is a challenge in both organizations. Some members from the Ogiek indigenous community feel sidelined by CFA leaders. Lack of timely communication from leaders to members, especially women, is a barrier. Enhancing leader capacity to include women and indigenous groups in decision making, forest and water conservation activities, and meetings is essential.

## Recommendations

- Targeted capacity building aimed at men and women, on gender roles and barriers to women's participation
- Identify community champions to disseminate knowledge on gender roles
- Ensure women and men are informed about meeting venues, dates, time and purpose well in advance, so they can plan for their attendance
- Increase awareness of CFA and WRUA on joint forest and water management, so that members from both can participate jointly in forest and water management activities
- Joint capacity building sessions with CFA and WRUA members to enhance coordination between the two associations
- Facilitate joint meetings between the CFA and WRUA leadership as a first step to achieving effective collaboration



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