Overview of Bududa

Bududa District in the Eastern Region of Uganda had an estimated population of 2,180,173 in 2014. It has a total forest area of 10,937 ha.

Research process

This study worked with forest resource users and water resource users in the Bushihi and Bubita sub-counties of Bududa District. Forest user groups included those working on beekeeping, tree planting, backyard collection, grazing and riverbank restoration. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with Bushihi forest resource users, Namirumba resource users, and five forest user groups (Bushihi central, Bushihi Yetana, Bushihi forest restoration, Ikale farmers, Musoola group). Among the water resource user groups, FGDs were held with two spring committee members and one tap committee member. Key informant interviews were held with leaders (a chairperson and a secretary) from Buneboshe and Namirumba resource user committees. The FGDs were segregated by gender and age. A total of 4 key informant interviews and 37 FGDs were held (Figure 1).

A total of 424 community members participated in the FGDs (201 women and 223 men) differentiated by age and gender. A total of 4 key informant interviews and 17 FGDs were held (Figure 1).

Results

Community perception of the forest and water changes over the past 5–10 years was mixed, with both positive and negative changes reported:

- Those who perceived improved forest changes mentioned:
  - reforestation activities launched by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and community groups (e.g. Musoola Farmer Association in 2009 and Buneboshe in 2014);
  - reduced illegal forest activities such as cutting of trees due to strict rules by the UWA;
  - the return of rare tree species such as Cordia africana and Croton megalocarpus;
  - restrictions on farming in the forest and felling trees, although there were complaints of these rules;
  - improvement in the condition of the forest after the reforestation efforts;
  - those who perceived negative changes mentioned:
    - degradation of the forest resulting from illegal activities such as charcoal burning, bush burning and illegal cutting of trees;
    - decline in several tree species, including Markhamia lucida, Maniltoa esmeri, Ficus natans, and Grevillea robusta due to heavy degradation that occurred before UWA involvement.

Perception of water quality and quantity:

There were mixed opinions about changes in both water quality and quantity:

- In 12 FGDs, participants mentioned that both quantity and quality had improved in the last 5–10 years. They noted improved water cover, citing UWA interventions such as reforestation with communities that led to increased precipitation, reduced erosion and siltation, and hence clean water (e.g. River Maba).
- Other respondents mentioned reduced water levels in Washongwa and Masisi rivers compared to the past due to felling of trees known locally as kamarumba and kimikishiri, as well as from farming along river banks. The Manafwa River turned brown due to soil erosion from cutting trees species such as kimikango, Kimokori, kuvuoro, Aipse and kimikango, all of which help to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion.

Leadership and women's participation

The forest and water resource user groups elect their leaders annually. Leaders are chosen based on traits such as wealth status, regular attendance at group meetings, public speaking skills, and good character. Men occupied the position of chairperson and were perceived to be courageous and more aggressive. Women were mostly elected to the positions of treasurer, secretary or organizing secretary. Women were elected based on dedication to the group’s work and regular attendance at meetings, and because they are perceived to be good at communication and mobilizing people.

The perception in most groups was that electing women, irrespective of the positions occupied, would achieve gender balance in leadership. However, gender balance was not reflected in leadership positions. In men-only FGDs conducted with Bushihi beekeeping group, men felt that women were too busy with household chores to hold leadership positions. In forest-only FGDs with male members of the Bushihi beekeeping group, men felt that women were too busy with household chores to hold leadership positions. For resource user committees, the term of membership is 2 years. The number of members varied. For instance, Namirumba Resource Committee had nine member positions (chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer, informateur, youth representative, secretary, and three other members), of which five were held by women and four by men. Despite this apparent gender balance, the only leadership position held by a woman was that of treasurer.

Objective

To establish whether and how forest resource users and water resource users jointly govern forest and water resources.

Figure 1. Number of FGDs per user group in Bududa.

A total of 424 community members participated in the FGDs (201 women and 223 men) differentiated by age (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percentage of men and women in focus group discussions.

Preliminary research results on the governance of forests and water in Bududa district, Mt. Elgon forest
Governess of forest and forest is not linked

Results from the the interviews and group discussions revealed that forest user groups and water committees did not conduct joint activities. Despite overlapping interests, Water committees activities were limited to maintenance of water points such as cleaning springs. However, some individual members of the forest conservation committees who were also members of forest user groups conducted forest-related activities such as planting shade trees near rivers (such as Maho River) and harvesting fuelwood or charcoal.

Reasons for lack of joint activities include:

• Physical distance: Many members of the water committees were far from the forest and hence could not participate in forest conservation activities. Not all villages had both water and forest user groups. The number varied between one and three of the respondents belonging to both water committees and forest user groups. In such cases, the members in the water committees were elected whereas the members in the forest user groups were elected because they reside near the forest.

Suggested areas for collaboration

The forest user groups suggested the following:

• Protecting the forest from illegal activities such as bush burning and illegal cutting of trees;
• Joint membership of water and forest user groups;
• Planting shade trees along rivers and in the forest;
• Forest user groups could offer land through which water pipes could pass.

The water user committees suggested the following:

• Planting trees along rivers and in the forest;
• Sensitizing communities about the importance of protecting trees and maintaining riparian areas;
• Forest user groups could offer land through which water pipes could pass;
• Joint membership of water and forest user groups;
• Water committees could mobilize people and be active in growing trees.

Participation in meetings and activities

There were no joint meetings undertaken by forest and water user groups. The majority of user groups held their meetings at the parish level needed to consult more with forest user groups. In some villages, the forest user groups were elected because they reside near the forest. However, some individual members of the forest conservation committees who were also members of forest user groups conducted forest-related activities such as planting shade trees and grasses along rivers (such as Maho River) and harvesting fuelwood or charcoal.

Reasons for lack of joint activities include:

• Lack of interaction in meetings: UWA usually organized meetings with members of forest user groups, whereas water committees were organized by sub-county officers.

Joint membership

Some members in water committees were also members in forest user group membership in forest and water committees. In 18 out of 37 FGDs reported that their groups had members who belonged to both water and forest user groups. The number ranged between one and three of the respondents belonging to both water committees and forest user groups. In such cases, the members in the water committees were elected whereas the members in the forest user groups were elected because they reside near the water points.

Suggested areas for collaboration

The forest user groups suggested the following:

• Protection of forests because they are the main source of water;
• Sensitization of forest users by water committees about the importance of forests, to encourage engagement in joint ventures;
• Parrotus to plant trees and clean water bodies.

Community members in a focus group discussion

• Capacity building on gender and leadership
• There is a need for improved participation in joint meetings and meetings to promote awareness of the need to undertake joint forest and water management activities.
• The community could benefit from sensitization about the need to expand the role of water and forest user committees beyond the maintenance of water taps and springs, to include conservation of micro-catchments and forests. There is also an opportunity to expand water committees into micro-catchment management committees to undertake riparian conservation.
• Capacity building on gender and leadership is needed to give more space to women in leadership. Women suggested that men need to understand the actual barriers that prevent women from participating in activities and meetings (and not just say that women are “busy”).
• Finally, leaders need to actively involve youth by assigning them specific roles such as reporting on tree planting activities.