



▲ Participatory data analysis for PFM in Tanzania. Credit: Lizzie Wilder/FFI

Mpingo, the tree that makes money from music: Participatory Forest Management in Tanzania

This case study is one of a series developed by Fauna & Flora International (FFI) during the course of an Anglo American funded partnership designed to explore ways to integrate livelihoods and governance issues into conservation initiatives.

The studies profile FFI's and partners' experience and the lessons learnt at three project sites.

All studies are available on www.fauna-flora.org, alongside a summary lessons learnt document.

The forests of Kilwa District, south-eastern Tanzania, are a mix of miombo woodland and East African Coastal Forest (EACF). The EACF fragments harbour a number of endemic species, while the miombo is contiguous with the Selous Game Reserve and supports substantial populations of many large mammals, including significant numbers of the endangered African Wild Hunting Dog (*Lycaon pictus*).

The forests are threatened by illegal logging for high value timber species, clearance for agriculture, and charcoal burning to meet burgeoning demand in urban areas. Uncontrolled burning may harm forest regeneration although the exact effects are uncertain.

Livelihood strategies are largely subsistence farming (predominately maize) combined with cash crops (principally sesame and cashews). Bushmeat hunting is largely for household consumption and not therefore considered a serious threat to biodiversity. Logging is an attractive source of income for fit young men but may lead to a boom-and-bust economy, along with degradation of the forests. Up to 96% of the logging is illegal. However, for those controlling the trade it is lucrative, with hardwood timbers fetching high prices on the international market. In contrast, local community members receive less than 0.1% of the export value of wood.

The most remarkable timber species is East African Blackwood (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*), locally known as mpingo. The wood is used to make musical instruments such as clarinets, oboes and bagpipes. At a value of \$15,000+ per cubic metre of instrument blanks, it is one of the most expensive timbers in the world. In Tanzania it is also the medium of choice for wood-carvers.

Integrating conservation, livelihoods and governance

The Mpingo Conservation and Development Initiative (MCDI) seeks to leverage the high value of mpingo for the benefit of local communities, giving them an incentive to care for their forest. Under Tanzanian law communities can take control of forests on their village lands through a process known as Participatory Forest Management (PFM).

Once this process has been completed, communities are exempt from paying government royalties for timber felling and thus can retain such fees as would normally be paid to the government. This is currently equivalent to ~\$106 per cubic metre of roundwood of the most highly prized species such as mpingo.

However, with illegal logging so widespread communities would struggle to find buyers prepared to pay the full price. Hence MCDI has also pursued Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, providing an internationally recognised independent assurance of sustainability and responsibility throughout the chain of custody. Certification to international standards enables villages to obtain higher prices than from unregulated logging.

MCDI's core work is Participatory Forest Management. PFM forms the basis for FSC certification. Revenue from timber sold generates profits which can be spent by the communities according to their own wishes. It is central



▲ Mpingo tree (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*). Credit: MCDI



▲ Community members benefit from sustainable forest management. Credit: Paul Harrison/MCDI



▲ Woodwind instruments made from African blackwood

to the project design that the forest itself, rather than alternative activities, generates the economic returns. Hence working with communities is at the heart of all MCDI's work, not an added extra.

These economic returns, however, must be equitably distributed within communities if PFM is to enjoy strong democratic support. Thus MCDI has invested significantly in building community capacity to manage funds, including training on good governance and basic financial record-keeping. MCDI encourages community leaders to propose at least two different projects, with budgets, to community members to choose from. As increasing revenues start to flow from the forests this will be a critical area for the future.

From the outset, project planning has been flexible and adaptive to local conditions and community needs. Thus while there has been a strong central strategy from day one, activity plans have generally been fluid with the emphasis on achieving quality results rather than ticking boxes. Activities which generate inadequate results are refined and then repeated until a satisfactory outcome is achieved.

All forest monitoring is performed by communities. Initially this yielded poor quality data but that is now gradually improving. MCDI attempted to monitor socio-economic impact at the household level through a questionnaire, but found this did not produce the information needed

to really understand the impact of the project on local people's livelihoods. MCDI has now partnered with the University of East Anglia to improve its socio-economic monitoring and evaluation. In addition to a household questionnaire, it will include a participatory assessment of village governance standards.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation, most successful has been MCDI's use of the Most Significant Change (MSC) monitoring system. This generates very useful qualitative stories of change from the communities in which we work and provides vital context for staff to understand what is happening in the communities. Although the system for recording and managing the stories of change needs improving, and it can sometimes be a struggle to find the time to all sit together to discuss the stories, MSC has proved itself a useful system that MCDI will continue to integrate into its evolving work practices.

Outcomes for biodiversity and livelihoods

As of June 2011, MCDI has facilitated the establishment of six Village Land Forest Reserves in Kilwa District totalling 27,424ha. In early 2009 MCDI obtained the first FSC certificate for community-managed natural forest in Africa, and so far 20,961ha of forest has been certified under



▲ Community member undertakes forest inventory. Credit: MCDI

On the ground, one very concrete livelihoods benefit illustrates the potential for future benefits: women and children in Kikole village now save up to 3 hours per household fetching water from the new borehole in the village that was partially paid for by PFM revenue.

Climate change foresight planning

MCDI has used FFI's climate foresight planning tool to assess risks and likely local outcomes from a changing climate. The excel spreadsheet at the heart of the tool is comprehensive, and took around half a day to complete, but provided an excellent opportunity for reflective discussions within MCDI's team. Key conclusions were that MCDI's basic strategy is unlikely to be significantly undermined by climate change and that the diversification of rural incomes which it promotes could be important in supporting local people through difficult times if, as expected, rains become increasingly variable and unpredictable leading to declining agricultural outputs. We will seek to develop partnerships with other local NGOs with the relevant expertise to help farmers to adapt their agricultural practices to these challenges.

MCDI's group certificate. However, it is still too early to detect significant changes in indicators of forest health and integrity as a result of this improved management.

From late 2009 MCDI facilitated the first two commercial timber harvests from community forests in Tanzania. Communities earned roughly \$9,000 from these two sales. Profits from the first harvest were spent by Kikole village on a new borehole and improvements to the village midwife's house – projects which were chosen by Kikole community members.

In addition, we have identified three major, long term changes achieved to date:

- Greater community interest and investment in forestry, evidenced by increasingly large areas of forest being set aside; community arrests of those with illegal timber; and forest patrolling involving the wider community, not just village natural resource committee members.
- Village governance is now more effective, inclusive, transparent and accountable.
- Changes in national government attitudes towards commercialisation of PFM. For example: the Director of Forests wants all furniture in government offices in future to be made from Tanzanian FSC-certified timber; a senior official recommended MCDI's FSC certification approach to the Suledo community forestry project in central Tanzania; and the District Forest Officer has expressed a desire to use MCDI's participatory timber inventory method in a government forest reserve.

Lessons learnt

MCDI's experience to date suggests that the basic premise of the project is sound. A key factor in the success of the initiative has been the positive policy environment provided by Tanzania's legal framework for Participatory Forest Management and the decentralised governance system that reaches down to community level through village councils.

MCDI did not conduct a thorough socio-economic assessment at the beginning of the project. Instead a slow start allowed us to gain understanding of the local context gradually over time. Despite a lot of the 'assessment' being done informally, it was critical to informing project management.

Our experience suggests that financial benefits are the main incentives for communities to engage in conservation. We estimate that an income of around \$3,000 per year would be the level of income at which communities' efforts to comply with stringent FSC standards becomes worthwhile. Cultural values associated with the forest are not thought to be significant drivers of behaviour in these communities. However, in addition to increased income, the co-benefits of a healthy environment and the empowerment achieved through using a participatory approach are important factors in motivating communities to engage in PFM.

Scale has played an important part in MCDI's development. We started very small with low levels of funding; this allowed us time and space for experimentation without the high expectations from donors and other stakeholders that are often associated with higher levels of funding. We conclude that a low-initial-impact entry has brought significant benefits and helped with project sustainability in the longer-term. MCDI has successfully achieved systemic change with its introduction of FSC certification. Initially this required substantial lobbying of both central and local government to recognise its benefits. Even more important is the change to value chains and market systems now underway in the international blackwood markets. Systemic social change is also beginning to set in: increased participation of women in village government decision-making; village leaders now consult their constituents much more; and fire is used less in forest areas around villages.

MCDI has played a key role linking forest-adjacent communities to the timber market and providing a level playing field for price negotiation with loggers. However, there are fewer buyers in the ethical market, at least in these early days, and that has limited success up to now. The complexity of FSC certification introduces significant entry barriers for both producers and processors.

Participatory processes are central to all MCDI's work. Helping community members develop a clear understanding of roles, rights and responsibilities has been an essential component of the project; these are clearly outlined in each village forest management plan. Another key factor has been that of building trust in relationships with communities, with field staff acting as facilitators rather than leaders. Staying overnight in the villages allows time for informal socialising in the evening and helps break down social barriers. In contrast to government officials, our lack of a law enforcement role has also been important; as has our reliability as a partner – our field staff always answer communities requests for advice.

We recognise that no community is homogeneous, but the ways they differ also varies between communities. For instance, although there is a significant gender divide in all communities, female participation and empowerment appears to be greater in less geographically isolated villages which are also those with which we have worked the longest. Party politics divides many villages, but the quality of local leaders determines how much effect this has on communal affairs, including PFM. Boundary disputes between villages are the most debilitating division, and hard for MCDI to resolve; instead MCDI has withdrawn, at least temporarily, from villages involved in serious land disputes.

In our governance work, issues of responsiveness, inclusion, transparency and accountability are seen as important. However our field team has concentrated on transparency, considering this to be the foundation of the other elements.

The whole community has benefited from improvements in village governance, but it is those who show up most often to village meetings who benefit the most; these tend to be older people with youth, who are working in the fields, comparatively marginalised from the political process.

MCDI has invested in building its own capacity to work with communities, largely through internal and relatively informal training and mentoring. Critical skills needed include community facilitation, adaptability to different community situations, capacity to explain complex issues in simple terms, empathy for the life of rural people, and an ability to understand village politics. Compared to these 'soft skills', technical skills in PFM are relatively unimportant and can be easily learnt. We believe that learning by doing is far more important than attending training courses.

Contextual analysis and adaptive management are central to successfully working with communities. FFI introduced the MSC tool to MCDI to help monitor qualitative social changes and community perceptions. The quarterly feedback which this generates from communities is very useful, especially in terms of providing short term measures of success whilst impact indicators can take a long time to be apparent. To an extent, this is the sort of feedback which we should be seeking from local communities anyway, but MSC provides a useful framework to do so. It has certainly helped to reduce potential sources of friction with villages and MCDI has added a simple community requests system to further facilitate that.

MCDI has worked with a range of partners at local, national and international levels. Some of these partnerships have been critical for fund-raising or local political reasons (e.g. Kilwa District Council). The most important partners, arguably, have been the downstream consumers of blackwood; managing supply chain concerns and promoting sales of ethically-sourced blackwood will continue to be a vital role for us to play.



▲ Loading certified timber for transport to sawmill. Credit: Jasper Makala/MCDI



▲ Playing a blackwood clarinet at a village meeting. Credit: MCDI

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About Fauna & Flora International

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) is a biodiversity conservation organisation working in more than 40 countries around the globe, mostly in the developing world. Our vision is a sustainable future for the planet, where biodiversity is effectively conserved by the people who live closest to it, supported by the global community. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.



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