

RELATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE TO FOREST CONDITIONS: ACCESS TO LAND AND FOREST RESOURCES

Introduction

Rural livelihood in Uganda has been analyzed in terms of access to land and forest resources in particular. In addition, forest degradation or deforestation may be linked to efforts by the members of the rural communities to achieve better or improved livelihood. In most rural communities in Uganda, access to land and forest resources is considered as the key for rural development and poverty eradication.

Background

The 9 forests were chosen as research sites because of the role they play in the communities as sources for energy, food, medicines timber and other non-timber forest products. These sources may be used for domestic purposes or to earn income. There is increasing population in the communities, exerting increased demand for products, leading to heavy degradation. Due to few forestry staff, regulation-enforcement is poor and the forests are not well protected.

Problems

- The ecosystem is threatened and fragmented by illegal timber harvesting, charcoal burning, clearing for agriculture, medicine, fuelwood and grazing
- Tree species are getting fewer. Sensitive birds and animals are inevitably disturbed, eventually disappearing
- The forest decrease has resulted in many products (e.g. forest foods and medicines) becoming scarce or no longer available
- Regeneration is not effective due to damaged ecosystem

Ecology and Genetic Conservation

AIM: To sustainably protect the genetic resources of forests, particularly targeting the status of the current stock of the forests as a benchmark for future changes. Forests are hosting insular and endemic species, which are getting increasingly fragmented and degraded.

FLOWCHART

Before the research

Village → Forest Department

After the research

Forest community: - Meetings
- Management Plan
- Co-operative action → Conservation Blocks

Methods

To address the issues of forest resource use in Uganda, there was a need to systematically collect and analyze data about the physical resources and the communities, using such resources. Two approaches were employed: (a) community interviews (PRA) and (b) forest inventory.

Forest products

(status based on forest inventory and interviews with villagers)



Plate 1.
Destruction
from corn growing

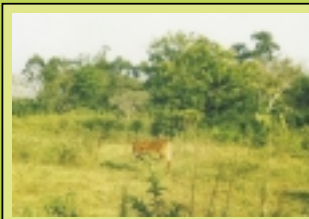


Plate 2.
Destruction
from grazing



Plate 3.
Destruction
from fuelwood

Lessons Learnt

- Conventional conservation approach based on protective and prohibitive regulations has proved unsuccessful
- Conservation of forest resources may not be possible without the awareness and active support / participation of local communities
- Sustained conservation relies on good relations between Forestry staff and local people
- Presence of Foresters is useful to set harvesting and appropriation limits, external attention and interests, and spurs awareness among villagers
- Village ability to control the forest resources must neither be underestimated nor overestimated

Graduated sanctions to offenders

- Conceivable offenders are being warned in the first and second non-compliance of rules
- Subsequent non-compliance leads to a fine or being outlawed by the community

Recommendations and conclusions

A. Recommendations

- Villagers as Foresters should be trained to deal with each other and improve communication
- Limits for forest use should be set clearly. Consequences for trespassing forest regulations must be established
- Information regarding use of the forest should be sufficient and clear

B. Conclusions

- Policy suggestion emerging from this study indicates that attempts to improve on rural livelihood before the communities are aware of their management involvement and regulated harvesting increase forest degradation. In communities where harvesting blocks have been established, there is marked improvement in regeneration and forest re-establishment
- Manuals to guide forest use, extent of participation must be written and translated in local languages
- Villagers should be trained in basic forest inventory and management techniques
- Villagers should be trained in record keeping, resource allocation and harvesting
- Plans and schedule for forest monitoring are essential for sustainable forest ecosystem



Plate 4.
Destruction from
timber cutting



Plate 5.
Destruction
from charcoal



Plate 6.
Destruction
from cane growing



Plate 7.
Truck/vehicle effects
in forests

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