Barriers to community based management of miombo woodlands in Southern Africa

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1. The setting: woodlands and people

Miombo woodland is the most widespread of the savannas of tropical Africa where most of the continent's population lives. It is an extensive tropical seasonal woodland and dry forest formation, covering an estimated 2.7 million km^2 of the continent, in regions receiving more than 700 mm mean annual rainfall on nutrient-poor soils (Frost 1996). The eco-region covers substantial portions of east, central and southern Africa (Fig 1). Rough estimates, a decade ago, suggested that 40 million people inhabited areas covered, or formerly covered by miombo woodland, with an additional 15 million urban dwellers relying on miombo wood or charcoal as an energy source (Campbell *et al*. 1996). Thus, development agendas of countries within the region invariably recognize the importance of linkages between people and their woodlands, and the welfare of both. The dominant strategy for delivering on such a goal revolves around giving local communities greater control over the management of resources in, or close to, areas in which they live. Despite its widespread acceptance, to what extent is the strategy actually delivering on such goals?

2. The problems: poverty and environmental degradation

Whilst acknowledging the existence of "some good stories from the field' a forthcoming review article decries the paucity of success stories that it describes as "few and far between" – with the grim assessment applying for both the woodland and people sides of the equation (Angelsen *et al.* in prep). On one hand, figures on deforestation are reported as "sobering", whilst a similarly distressful picture emerges on the other hand, where poverty alleviation is seen as largely stunted. Elsewhere, statistics portray poverty as a widely prevalent phenomenon, with poverty levels being most acute in rural areas where the majority of the people live (Farrington and Gill, 2002). Most of these people, particularly the poor, secure or improve their welfare by depending on the woodland resource base for their livelihood needs and for income. Though woodland products may often not be the main source of income for poor households they play important palliative roles during times of crises, besides ordinarily complementing other sources of income (Cavendish 2000). Thus, if the widely recommended pro-people strategy is to be effective it should be as much about addressing resource degradation as it should be about reducing poverty. In other words, this policy's promise lies in resolving the 'crises' on both sides of the woodlands and welfare equation.

3. How can the policy's promise be delivered on?

The moral significance of the policy of bringing woodland management closer to the people constitutes an unconditional end in itself - local communities should assume a

leading role in shaping their own destiny as well as that of their woodland environments - period! Although this value statement is open to discussion the more intricate details of such debate largely lie outside the scope of this brief. The main focus of the brief is the material significance of the policy, which largely sees such policy not as an end in itself, but as a (conditional) means to other higher ends, including poverty alleviation and sustainable natural resource management. But how can these ends be attained?

Appraisals from the literature suggest that poverty could be alleviated in two main ways (Angelsen and Wunder 2003). The first involves ensuring that woodland resources continue to play crucial safety net functions to prevent more people from sinking further into poverty. The second concerns giving the resources focused and added value so as to provide higher incomes to allow more people to escape from poverty. But if cases of success are cited as "few and far between" when the moral and material ideals of the guiding policy appear patently clear, then a few questions are in order. What are the barriers preventing local communities from assuming greater control over the management of their woodlands? What are the barriers preventing more people from realizing greater economic value from their woodlands? And what barriers currently detract from the sustainable management of the resources?

4. Barriers to the devolution of control to local communities

4.1 A relic of the past and its enduring legacy

Community management of resources is evolving behind a backdrop of a colonial culture of states exerting overbearing control over the management of natural resources. In an insightful formulation, Mayers and Bass (2004) liken the colonial state's far reaching roles in resource management as being at once that of player, manager, owner, referee and coach. Ideally, effective community resource management revolves around vesting most of the above roles on the community, with the state's role restricted to playing a mediating role as referee and coach. But evidence largely indicates that, in practice, states appear reluctant to let go of most of these roles - hence most appraisals show that the major barriers to community based management of woodlands are institutional in nature (Murombedzi 1992, Scoones and Matose 1993, Murphree 1999, Anstey and de Souza 2001, Shackleton and Campbell 2001).

4.2 It takes two to tango: assertive communities and a responsive state

Although states have invariably been on the receiving end of the evaluative stick, experiences reported to be emerging from Tanzania by Wily and Dewees (2001) render the adage that it takes two to tango particularly poignant! The main lesson is that, for it to work, the devolution dance has as much to do with active and assertive communities as it has to do with possessive states that are finicky to change. Successes scored in surmounting institutional barriers to community management of woodlands in that country were the culmination of disciplined if arduous engagement between ordinary citizens and their government, resulting in iterative phases of empowerment to the community, and these were elicited through a rather unlikely entry point. Under *ujamaa*,

the Tanzanian 'village' was to be the officially recognized lowest recess of the local government system that provided the basic institutional infrastructure on which villagers have become increasingly empowered – its socialist origin in that now discredited villagization programme of the 1970s notwithstanding. These villages comprise clearly marked and registered areas, with a registered membership that is presided over by elected village councils – with such councils recognized as bodies corporate. Meanwhile, land laws and policies have over the 1980s and 1990s evolved to recognize village land as one among the country's *de jure* land management categories. Additionally, the prevailing laws designate the village council as the manager and registry of the village land, which is vested with powers to - if mutually deemed necessary - issue title deeds to groups, clans, households and spouses (Wily and Dewees 2001:5).

Such was the basis on which local people in three of the eight villages surrounding the much renowned Duru Haitemba woodland resisted the official annexation of the woodland into a state forest reserve in 1984. In similar fashion the remaining five other villages followed suit resulting in the entire 9000 hectare woodland being ceded to community management and control by 1995, with the communities almost single-handedly crafting and implementing more intensive and effective management regimes. The conservation impact of such a move on the hitherto degraded woodland was reported as "immediate and obvious" (Wily and Dewees 2001: 10). Meanwhile, experiences from Duru Haitemba are portrayed as "catalytic", signifying the rapid pace at which communities elsewhere in Tanzania have become assertive in negotiating effective involvement in the management of the woodlands and forests close to their homes. Although the outcomes do not necessarily always equate with outright custodianship, the pressure engendered by foregoing experiences aims at securing more than just cosmetic use rights for the communities. Thus, with the support of substantive policy reforms, to date more than 500 villages now directly own and manage 'forest reserves' in five of the country's twenty regions. The main ingredients underlying Tanzania's qualified 'success' story is that there is good fit between policies and laws defining villages as the legal units vested with local government, land management and natural resource management authority – and these units are located as close to the ordinary people as possible.

4.3. Of strayed and poorly fitting governance instruments

Experiences from elsewhere generally show that the major institutional impediments to community based management of woodlands include lack of one or both of the above ingredients. For instance, in a forthcoming review article, Salomao and Matose argue that although Mozambique's land laws that guarantee land rights to poor communities whilst presenting incentives for private sector investment are hailed as progressive, they are not adequately complemented by that country's forestry and wildlife laws. Although the latter laws essentially leave the subsistence use of resources to the designs of local communities, they bestow disproportionate discretionary powers over the commercial use of such resources in state agencies that lack proximity to the resource use setting. Community benefits from the ensuing technical arrangements are restricted to a statutory 20% royalty. Additional benefits are fundamentally of a fuzzy and indirect nature, including employment and other purported development opportunities that largely lie

outside the scope of mandatory scrutiny. And, as demonstrated through the case of a private timber concession operating in a communal setting in the Pindanyanga area – the company masks its extractive inclinations under the guise of corporate social responsibility. A similarly perverse institutional scenario occurs in Zimbabwe where local government, land, and resource management authorities have largely remained officially lodged at the district level, and not any closer to the people. The sum result is the capture of a substantial proportion of the accruing rents by district level bureaucracies (Murombedzi 1992). The Tanzanian experience is instructive with regards to overcoming problems of poor fit and poor location of the governance instruments: such problems are potentially best addressed when there is assertive and responsive action on both the community and state sides of the governance continuum, respectively.

5. Barriers to accessing greater economic value from miombo resources

Even when control over resources eventually gets vested in local communities, miombo woodlands - in part because of their association with the poorest soils in Africa (Frost 1996) - remain 'economically inferior production environments'. This is not least because the majority of its resources exhibit production, extraction, processing and marketing characteristics that generally present poor prospects for 'market or price growth' (*sensu*, Angelsen and Wunder 2003). Biologically, the miombos are of low inherent productivity holding only limited prospective returns to management. Although economic returns from the commercially valuable timber species like *Pterocarpus angolensis* are potentially higher, such species are amongst those associated with the longest growing cycles. Additionally, most of the commercial timber species are of sparse occurrence, often in remote rural enclaves that are weakly integrated into markets because of poor infrastructure.

The extraction and processing of commercial timber therefore requires heavy capital and technological investments – features placing the commercial value of the resources beyond the reach of the poor. The marginalization of poor communities is presumably less acute for non-timber forest products (NTFPs) that are usually freely accessed from the woodlands at low cost, although most of these turn out to be mostly economically inferior products. Pro-poor credit markets could potentially provide the capital and technology required to add value to such resources through processing, but such markets are currently largely missing. Even if such credit was to be availed - with significant value being added to NTFPs - there is no guarantee that the attendant benefits will end up in the pockets of the poor: experiences from the region indicate a high incidence of rent capture by elites, especially in situations of increasing resource value, as in the Pindanyanga case. By and large, value chains for NTFPs remain fragmented, with poor communities largely restricted to the less lucrative production and extraction sides of the value chains, and left out of the processing and marketing sides where much of the value is realized (Angelsen and Wunder 2003). Meanwhile, prospects for enhanced marketing through e-commerce, though holding promise, remain largely suppressed because of the digital divide (Angelsen *et al.* in prep). In sum, given the generally prevailing high population/resource ratios, the per capita benefits of most miombo resources, including even the high value wildlife resources, remain of a miniscule nature of as low as less than

10% of gross agricultural production in Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE programme (Bond 2001). Moreover, the figures usually touted as per capita benefits are often over-estimated because they usually exclude the high transaction costs associated with involving large numbers of people in the operation of such schemes (Emerton 2001).

6. Barriers to sustainable management of miombo woodlands: a synopsis

This brief has demonstrated that community based woodland management is curtailed by several institutional and economic barriers, which may act independently or interactively. The flip sides of most of these barriers represent opportunities for sustainable natural resource management, the major ones of which are considered next. Firstly, overcoming the institutional inertia against devolution of natural resource management has as much to do with active and assertive *communities* as it has to do with possessive *states* that are finicky to change. The above set of actors provides the major cornerstones in any *bona fide* national agenda towards sustainable natural resource management. Attempts to substitute these actors with other institutional forms, particularly donors and well-funded NGOs, though often initially showing much promise, generally tend to flounder as evidenced by the now waning fortunes of Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE (Mapedza and Bond 2006) and Mozambique's Chipange Chetu and Chuma Chato projects (Salomao and Matose, *forthcoming*). Although it is probably to early to judge, the Tanzanian 'success story' was premised on 'local ownership' of the process with active and dynamic linkages organically evolving between communities and the state, with other actors presumably playing a facilitative role. Additional ingredients of success include the existence of good fit between policies and laws defining villages, or similar such units at the lowest level, as the legal units vested with local government, land management and natural resource management authority.

Secondly, good models of community woodland management should present credible incentives to motivate people to sustainably manage their resources. Some, though not all, of the crucial roles the models should fulfil include ensuring that woodland resources continue to play crucial safety net functions whilst giving the resources added value so as to provide higher incomes to allow more people to escape from poverty. Such objectives are often easier said than done because of barriers arising from the complex and uncertain relationships between people and woodlands, but some of the tactical ways in which such barriers could be addressed include:

- Addressing institutional, technical and financial impediments to the entry of local communities into the lucrative precious timber market
- Generating value through processing and other mechanisms, including certification, to enable more people to economically benefit from the entry of inferior NTFPs into formal markets
- Promoting the emergence of transparent and mutually beneficial platforms for sharing of benefits to prevent the dissipation and leakage of values to rent seekers
- Integrating communities into value chains for them to partake of the superior values associated with downstream processing
- Ensuring equitable distribution of accruing community benefits at the local level.

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