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## **Making community-based forest management work: A case study of Duru-Haitemba village forest reserve, Babati, Tanzania**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Tanzania, like most other developing countries in Africa, has in recent years been fighting a losing battle in trying to protect vast areas of woodlands and natural forests scattered around the country. Consequently, forest resources in the country have been subjected to increasing pressure of exploitation. The government capacity to protect forests and woodlands has progressively declined with reduction in budgets and retrenchment of workers, making forests and woodlands even more vulnerable and open to degradation than before. A question emerged in recent years as to whether the main model of natural resource management, involving protection by policing, is the appropriate way forward. These and other developments have led to a paradigm shift regarding natural resource management, where local communities living adjacent to woodlands and forests are required to protect and manage those resources. One model that has emerged and gained ground is Community Based Forest Management (CBFM) through which local communities are ultimately empowered to manage natural resources. The guiding principle is that local communities have the right to control and manage natural resources on their land. This builds on the rather unique and favorable situation in Tanzania where decentralized government allows the village to own property in its own right as a corporate entity. Thus communities in Duru-Haitemba adopted CBFM as a result of local discontent regarding the way the 9000 ha forests remaining in Duru-Haitemba was being managed by the government. This forest represents the only remaining tract of non-reserved dry miombo forest of any significance in an otherwise well settled and cultivated Babati District.

The Tanzania government had a long standing idea to gazette the area. Before that, the District Council had put the area under the District Soil and Water

Conservation Bylaw, which meant that any use of the woodland had to be with consent of district officials; a situation which led to restricted local use of the forest. This made local communities lose confidence in their own district administration. Through this discontent, an entirely different process emerged which allowed local communities in Duru-Haitemba to conserve and manage the woodlands adjacent to them. This is the basis of the present situation where eight villages are managing the woodland resources. The forest, which was in a state of acute decline, now has boundaries that are intact, and incursion is limited; flora and fauna are recovering; and the forest is managed and protected effectively at minimum cost. The key factor that has led to the observed success is community participation, in which there has been a marked degree of power sharing to the extent that communities have taken full responsibility and control of the resource. Furthermore, the government, as former manager, has become a technical advisor and watchdog. Ultimately, villages now legally own the forest reserve. Thus there is a clear definition of woodland resource boundaries, village bylaws valid in a court of law have been established, and there is security of tenure and sense of ownership. Empowerment has resulted in full control, access and use rights for the community and obvious benefits have been reaped by local people. A similar model could be adopted in other areas facing related problems.

**Key words:** Local community, sustainable forest management, empowerment, devolution, rules

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In most developing countries, substantial efforts have been directed towards putting natural resources under sustainable use and management. Unfortunately, this aim has been difficult to achieve through conventional approaches to natural resource management. Consequently, an entirely new paradigm emerged in recent years termed Community Based Forest Management (CBFM) where the ultimate goal is to improve forest management, to provide empowerment of local people and to contribute to rural development. Through this, forest management is expected to evolve out of the many difficulties that have often embraced the protection and management of forest resources in most developing countries like Tanzania.

Different actors in Community Based Forest Management have portrayed different perspectives, motives and interests which have led to varying construction of the meaning of CBFM. According to (Jeanrenaud 1997), arguments regarding CBFM can be drawn from several disciplines and regional experiences, such as biology, conservation, anthropology, ethnobotany, indigenous knowledge and human rights. The debate is dynamic and actors have tended to be eclectic in their rationale, hence weaving various arguments in sometimes ambiguous and problematic ways.

Some arguments focus on CBFM as a means to resolving the injustices of protected forest areas where local people were excluded from the land they had traditionally occupied and depended on for their livelihood. Generally, protection of forests through gazetttement has several negative impacts. Communities occupying lands adjacent to protected forests frequently bear substantial costs as a result of loss of access while receiving few benefits in return. People in these communities have been noted to be poor, they lack political influence and they receive few government services (Mvena and Kajembe 1997). Also a large part of costs concerning the protection of biological

diversity are borne by those least able to pay for them, even though the benefits are increasingly being recognized as global (Wells 1992).

In Tanzania, the central tenet of forest management has inevitably come to focus on protection with a key actor being a forester who is expected to protect the forest. However, expecting that low paid forest guards, mostly recruited from rural areas, to effectively protect the forest resource from fellow villagers in need of forest products for basic subsistence is unrealistic (Kajembe and Malimbwi 1996). Furthermore, in the wake of declining budgets and retrenchment of workers, the capacity of government to protect forests based on this model has progressively declined (Wily 1995). More importantly, foresters in recent years have begun to question whether or not the “policing model” of forest management is the right way forward. These and other developments have led into a paradigm shift where the only viable alternative to forest protection is to make the local people living adjacent to forests, the guardians of the forest resource.

Due to this paradigm shift, most foresters have realized that solutions to problems of forest management lie in the very section of society which has traditionally been regarded as the “problem”: the local people who use forest resources. More effective, cheaper and lasting approaches are essential to sustainably managing the forest resources.

Under the right conditions, such as an appropriate legal framework, right motivation, bottom up interventions and clear definitions of property and tenurial rights, the local people have much potential to become the strongest and most cost effective guardians of forest resources. In the process, the government policing function has to cease, in order to allow officials a chance to serve as technical advisors or facilitators. It is fortunate that the government of Tanzania and many other governments have started to change their overall outlook. The purpose of this paper is to highlight what has made CBFM at Duru-Haitemba Forest Reserve a success.

## **2. PROFILE OF DURU-HAITEMBA VILLAGE FOREST RESERVE**

The Duru-Haitemba forest is typical dry miombo woodlands located within the Rift valley, about 20 km South of Babati township. The woodlands, with an area of 9,000 ha or about 90 km<sup>2</sup>, represent the only remaining tract of non-reserved forest of any significance in an otherwise well settled and cultivated Babati District. They consist of a series of small woodland patches named after the adjacent villages.

The woodlands occur along a series of related high ridges of up to 1850 metres above sea level. The ridges undulate, and the peaks along them give an impression of being distinct hills. About 145 species of trees and shrubs including climbers and creepers have been identified in the Duru-Haitemba woodlands. The dominant species include: *Brachystegia microphylla*, *Brachystegia spiciformis*, *Julbernardia globiflora*, *Albizia versicolor*, *Brachystegia boehmii*, *Combretum collinum*, *Acacia nigrescens* and *Tamarindus indica*. There are eight registered villages adjacent to Duru-Haitemba forest (Table 1). All the villages were included in the present study.

**Table 1.** Socio-economic characteristics of the study villages in Duru-Haitemba

No	Village	No of sub-villages	No of households	Population **	Entitled* village area (ha)	% of village area still forested	Village forest reserve (ha)	Forest area per household	No of sub-villages with forest	No of village forest guards
1	Gidas	5	694	3445	4250	21	875	2.6	4	12
2	Bubu	4	355	2430	4690	49	2300	8.8	3	14
3	Ayasanda	5	326	2931	1660	30	500	1.4	5	10
4	Endanachan	4	445	2503	2130	21	400	1.1	3	4
5	Riroda	9	705	4506	4610	38	1800	1.8	8	34
6	Endagwe	6	501	3112	4300	28	1220	2.6	6	12
7	Duru	5	308	2816	3720	35	1500	2.7	5	15
8	Hoshan	3	402	3520	2290	17	400	1.2	3	6
	All villages	41	3726	25253	27450	32	8995	2.4	37	108

\* Entitled village area includes the forest.

\*\* The population is for the year 2000.

Source: Field data and Wily 1996.

### 3. CBFM INITIATIVES IN DURU-HAITEMBA VILLAGE FOREST RESERVE

#### 3.1 Establishment of local control and rules

As one of the few remaining tracts of miombo woodlands in Babati District, Duru-Haitemba forests had been targeted for gazetttement into government forest reserve in 1990/91. In 1992 the Swedish-funded Regional Forestry Programme facilitated implementation of an inventory, survey and boundary demarcation process as a prerequisite for formal gazetttement. However, the programme faced local discontent. Indeed the process and the attempt to withdraw the forest from public domain into the hands of government by gazetttement was the catalyst to find a more acceptable, workable regime of management (Wily 1995). After a long process of dialogue, the decision was made to abandon gazetttement in favour of assisting each of the eight villages to take full rights and responsibility for conservation of the forest. Today, a number of young men, serving as village forest guards are patrolling the forests against breach of the conservation rules each village has developed.

The rules for the forests include the following: First, there are rules banning various activities. Banned activities include:- Charcoal making; setting fire to the forests or grasses; felling any reserved tree species such as *Pterocarpus angolensis*; ring barking of trees for making beehives; house construction within the forest and farming and grazing within the forests. Second, certain activities may only be done with a permit from the village forest committee. These include entering the prohibited zone for any purpose other than passing through; cutting and collecting poles, rafters or withies for house construction; collection of stones for building; collection of herbs, roots or other plant parts for the purpose of producing and selling medicine; felling of unprotected species for the purpose of producing domestic tools or utensils such as hoe

and axe handles, pestles and mortars; and felling and pit sawing of trees for community service such as making school desks. Third, there are rules for freely permitted activities. These include:- collecting dry wood for fuelwood; cutting of sticks for making tooth brushes; collecting wild fruits and vegetables; collecting leaves or other plant parts for home medicine, provided the collection does not lead to mortality of the plant; seasonal grazing; collecting grinding stones; inspecting beehives; and entering the forest for recreational purposes.

These conservation rules were formally approved by the full Babati District Council (BDC) in mid 1995 under the District Authorities Act as village bylaws, thus formally recognizing the role of each village as the sole authority over the use and management of its Village Forest Reserve. This allowed the village to levy fines upon offenders. Each village is the legal authority and manager of that part of Duru-Haitemba forest which is adjacent to its own settled village area (Wily 1996).

### **3.2 Background to the success of CBFM at Duru-Haitemba**

CBFM initiatives at Duru-Haitemba represent an exciting development within the forestry sector in Tanzania and have also served as inspiration for communities both within and beyond Tanzania. The CBFM initiatives at Duru-Haitemba are an example of devolution and democratisation, the desire being to give the local people a say in the governance of their natural resources. CBFM in Duru-Haitemba was prompted by local pressures.

Development experience has clearly indicated that centralized solutions to environment and development have not worked (Agrawal *et al.* 1999). Blueprint development strategies in the shape of standard technical solutions have been ineffective in meeting the needs of the poor, marginalized and less powerful groups. CBFM initiatives in Duru-Haitemba have shown that approaches that take people's aspirations more seriously can enjoy local success.

The observed success of CBFM in Duru-Haitemba can be attributed to the following factors: clearly defined boundaries; congruence between rules and local conditions; good collective choice arrangements; elaborate conflict resolution mechanisms; clearly defined resource property rights; the rights of villagers to devise their own institutions that are not challenged by external government authorities; and villagers' ability to develop a common pool resource institution where the benefits to be gained from collective action are greater than the opportunity costs.

#### **3.2.1 Clearly defined boundaries**

The study showed that all the villages in Duru-Haitemba have secure boundaries which give the villagers powers to take action against anybody who violates their rules. Duru-Haitemba forest had never been gazetted Forest Reserve. However, by the 1980s it was fully intended to be gazetted as forest reserve. To this end it had been surveyed and demarcated and all but the publication of Reservation document was complete. Thus beacons were on the ground. In most cases, boundaries had been marked by natural landmarks such as hills and rivers. In a few villages, boundaries were demarcated artificially. Since the Duru-Haitemba Forest is standing as the only remaining meaningful forest in a heavily depleted land, it has easily identifiable boundaries. Coupled with regular patrols by the village guards and application of strict village by-laws, the people in Duru-Haitemba uphold the boundary system.

Boundaries for common pool resources (CPRs) need to be clearly defined for the benefit of owners and to facilitate collective action. Owners of a CPR will have their confidence and security of tenure enhanced if limits of their jurisdiction are clearly defined. In this way they are not afraid to invest in the CPR due to the fear that their investment can be expropriated by others. Where security of tenure is not secure, outsiders can deplete the resource because they have nothing to lose (Ostrom 1996; Kajembe and Kessy 1999).

### **3.2.2 Congruence between rules and local conditions**

Village governments in Duru-Haitemba have worked out rules that clearly define appropriation and provision and these rules have facilitated improvement in protection and management of the village forest reserve. The establishment of these rules is in accordance with the Village and *Ujamaa* villages Act of 1975 that gives powers to villages in Tanzania to make rules in the form of bylaws recognized in a court of law (Kihyo and Kajembe 2000). Before rules were instituted, the village government organized an inventory of the forest reserve to assess and take stock of the resource. Thereafter rules were put in place to control exploitation. One main principle applied through these rules is that the volumes being harvested annually must not exceed the mean annual increment realized in the forest.

### **3.2.3 Collective choice arrangements**

All eight villages around Duru-Haitemba Forest Reserve maintain strong and effective Forest Committees which are responsible for rule enforcement. The composition of Village Forest Committees has steadily shifted from village leaders to ordinary villagers representing their sub-villages. Most decisions concerning the forest are made through, or with the guidance of these committees. This is democratization at the local level which has arisen from a growing need for accountability as practical management gets underway (Wily 1996). The CBFM approach in most of the eight villages is to adopt a management strategy based upon geographical and political divisions in the village such that, each registered sub-village looks after that part of the forest to which it is adjacent. Also each village manages a part of the forest which had traditionally fallen within its village boundaries. To that effect, demarcation of the village areas has been undertaken, often with disputes resolved by arbitration. The forest has also been zoned in its entirety into sustainable use zones, grazing zones and protection zones all indicating precisely where cattle could be grazed, which areas could not be used at all by the villages, and which areas would be available for sustainable use (Wily 1996). With the exception of grazing, villagers use only the forest of their own village, which indeed is often the area of the forest that falls within their own sub-village.

The village is the obvious active manager of the local forest; it is engaged in preventing activities that have been declared illegal, issuing a limited number of permits for sustainable uses, patrolling and rehabilitating the degraded forest parts. It is crucial therefore that the villages have legal backing to support administrative decisions on collective choice arrangements through which leaders and ordinary villagers have decided to discontinue any uses which are considered damaging. Thus charcoal burning, tree felling and even grazing in some parts of the forest have been banned. Other forest uses are controlled through strict conservation and protection regimes in

order to ensure that individuals follow the rules. Enforcement by village forest guards is practised.

These village forest guards protect the forest against both non-villagers and offenders from within the village. These are duly selected by each sub-village and operate on a patrolling and reporting regime. Offenders who violate operational rules are subjected to graduated sanctions; the levels depending on the seriousness and context of the offence (Ostrom 1996). Offences such as encroachment for agriculture or settlement establishment, pit sawing, charcoal making and a range of destructive activities carry heavy punishment in the form of a heavy fine or confiscation of valuable property. Lesser destructive activities such as unauthorised firewood collection carry lighter punishment. Marrow and Hull (1996) also state that graduated sanctions are common in long enduring common pool resource institutions to allow flexibility in the system. Based on this it is prudent to treat with leniency a person who is normally a rule abider but due to dire need has committed an offence. The contrary applies to a frequent offender who has shown little allegiance to the rule structure of the institution. The planning and implementation of most of these forest-related activities in each of the eight villages is through Village Forest Committees.

These committees comprise men and women, with gender representation differing between villages (Table 2). The presence of village forest committees and patrolmen has led to a significant reduction in the number of offences in each village. The number of patrols conducted at sub-village level ranges from one to four per week. Most of the offences at Duru-Haitemba relate to grazing and encroachment for expansion of farmlands. Respondents also indicated improvement in the relations between forestry staff in the district and local communities as a result of paradigm shift where foresters have changed from *policemen* to facilitators or technical advisors.

CBFM has improved group cohesion and provided a platform for other development activities in the villages. It has also promoted local capacity by forging new social relationships and redefining old ones. Forest management by consent has proved to be effective and can serve as a model for other parts of Babati District and the country

**Table 2.** Membership in village forest committees in Duru-Haitemba villages

No	Village	Total number of members	Male	Female
1	Gidas	13	11	2
2	Bubu	9	6	3
3	Ayasanda	9	6	3
4	Endanachan	16	14	2
5	Riroda	12	8	4
6	Endagwe	8	5	3
7	Duru	8	8	0
8	Hoshan	9	6	3
	Total	84	64	20

Source: Field data.

at large. Indeed, policing the forest reserve by consent was observed in all the eight villages, where it has created better enforcement of rules. An example of management by consent was noted through the system of fines that does not spare both patrolmen and ordinary villagers. Patrol teams are exempted from other village communal activities such as local road maintenance and building local schools. However, failure to participate effectively in patrolling the forest, subjects the patrol staff to a fine just like any other villager who fails to participate in other development activities.

### **3.2.4 Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

It was observed that, at the village level, local conflicts are resolved through reconciliation committees. These are recognized by the formal village bylaw and are constituted at the village level through involvement of village elders who are perceived as the wise persons in the community. The village chairpersons serve as heads to these committees. In the event that traditional laws fall short in addressing certain conflicts, formal by-laws are applied. These bylaws must be approved by the Minister responsible for Local Governments before they can be operational as per Tanzania Local Government Act of 1982 (URT 1982). The resolution of conflicts in the village setting is in accordance with the principle that proprietors and their leaders must have rapid access to low cost local areas to solve conflicts among the proprietors or between proprietors and leaders (Ostrom 1996). In the study area the main conflicts were associated with competition for land use between farmland, grazing land and forest land. This involved villagers alone or with outsiders.

### **3.2.5 Resources users are clearly defined and are able to sustain legal claims as owners of the resource**

Entitlement, the process of a community securing statutory ownership over their local land area, is a fundamental development policy within Tanzania (Wily 1996). The study found that all the eight villages in the vicinity of Duru-Haitemba had applied for ownership of their land that includes the traditional woodland areas. Title deeds have since been granted and therefore both through statutory local government regulation and through statutory entitlement, the eight villages of Duru-Haitemba are legal owners and managers of the Duru-Haitemba Forest Reserve. This has been made possible by the unique advantage Tanzania has over several other developing countries, in that villages in Tanzania possess the capacity to be registered as the grassroots' local level of government within the decentralized system. Consequently they exist as legal corporate entities with ability to sue and be sued and to own business and property as a local community (Wily 1996). Furthermore, a village in Tanzania is usually an integrated socio-spatial unit, with a defined group of households using land and resources only within a bounded, local area. The village has a formally recognized government that is a well-established mechanism of self-management and is a workable size for responsive and accountable decision making in the society.

Therefore villagers in Duru-Haitemba recognize themselves as a bounded local area, have clearly defined property rights over the resource and can exercise legal claims over the resource. Therefore they feel secure in their resource ownership and can protect their land from outsiders. In consequence they have been able to sustain long term objectives on the resource by investment through their labour and deferment

of current consumption in favour of long-term benefits by banning some consumptive uses. This is in accordance with Morrow and Hull (1996), who state that having legal title to the land is obviously a prerequisite for the villagers to define the boundaries of their forests as well as their legal rights to defend those forests. Also, security of tenure is necessary for development and survival of CPR institutions because proprietors have no incentive to invest in an institution to manage their resources if they believe those resources could be invaded by outsiders. If a CPR can be destroyed by the action of others, no matter what local proprietors do, even those who have constrained their harvesting from a CPR for many years will begin to heavily discount future returns (Ostrom 1996).

### **3.2.6 The right of proprietors to devise their own institutions is not challenged by external government authorities**

Discontent began when the SIDA-funded Regional Forestry Programme introduced efforts to work with villages in and around the forest to encourage them to support gazetttement and management of the then proposed forest reserve (Wily 1996). It was clear from the outset that the local people did not support the withdrawal of their forests into the hands of the government. Consequently they adopted a deliberate move to exploit the forests as fast as possible before its gazetttement, such that by 1994 the forest was heavily degraded and encroached in many places.

Government tried to guarantee villagers some use rights but the local response did not suggest that gazetttement would lead to effective conservation of the forest. Exploiting this potentially explosive situation, and with informal local support from the Babati District Council and the local Forest Officer, a consultant working for the SIDA-funded Regional Forestry Programme, started exploring if and how local communities could engage in conservation and management of the forests around them. No one envisaged that villagers would be enthusiastic and government officials were skeptical. The initial positive response from the local people convinced the government of suspending gazetttement, pending assessment of whether villagers would cooperate and halt degradation of the forest. Eventually it was informally agreed that villagers could proceed, taking the responsibility of managing and conserving the forest.

Consequently the villagers became the ‘de facto’ controllers and managers of the Duru- Haitemba Forest Reserve. Based on these tentative and informal arrangements, the villagers launched a highly dynamic process of reviewing each and every aspect the forest management to determine just what was required to restore the forest and to keep it intact for future use. Simple but effective management plans were drawn up by each village, including “rules” for using the forest. Even forest uses that were considered indispensable before now became perceived as damaging and hence were completely banned. Village assemblies were convened in which all villagers debated and refined the plans. It was also agreed by the eight villages that the management strategy was to be based on geographical and political divisions in the village such that each registered sub-village was to look after that part of the forest to which it was adjacent. Demarcation of these areas was undertaken, sometimes with disputes. The forest was also zoned into use zones, defining core protected areas, and areas for controlled use.

Since then each village has maintained village forest guards to protect the forest from non-villagers and offenders from within the village. Today, encroachment, pit

sawing, charcoal burning and a range of less destructive activities have largely ceased and the main role of village forest guards is essentially preventing the forest being used by non-villager's cattle from adjacent villages. In order to run things smoothly, each village maintains a Village Forest Committee. It has motivated most villagers to participate in forest conservation and management. The membership to such committees has steadily shifted from village leaders to ordinary villagers, indicating a high level of democratization at the local level. The active involvement of all villagers in managing forests in the eight villages eventually led to the need for legal backing on the administrative rules.

Thus there was a need to review the management plan and rules and change them into village bylaws. In mid-1995, these plans and rules were formally approved by the full Babati District Council under the District Authorities Act. Today each village is officially the legal authority and manager of that part of the Duru-Haitemba Forest Reserve that is adjacent to its own settled village.

To a large extent, CBFM in Duru-Haitemba was initiated following local discontent. However, external players played a crucial role to kick-start, guide and facilitate the empowerment process. Imposition of rules by government officials was not possible, giving the community level of empowerment.

### **3.2.7 Clear asset structure**

For a long time, villagers in the eight villages around Duru-Haitemba have depended on the forest for some basic subsistence needs. Due to this dependence and the benefits they reap, there are in close ties with the forest which they perceive as their asset. However, before the inception of the current CBFM, there was no meaningful asset structure to elicit community participation. Therefore, only very partial forms of local participation existed. The partial forms of community involvement included permitting local people some use rights to meet some basic needs, sharing revenue earned by the government or involving local people in some practical management activities. These measures did not guarantee sustainable conservation and management of the forest resources in the area because the fundamental matter that forms the core of the problem was not addressed. This relates to resource ownership and not participation. This situation calls for the need to clearly define the resource manager and the user in order to mitigate conflict between state and local community and reduce divergence in perception of rights. It also calls for the need to integrate the vested interests of forest users into responsible conservation by the users.

Thus the introduction of CBFM at Duru-Haitemba Forest Reserve addressed the issue of control and authority on the forest resource and also facilitated restructuring of these to provide the most fundamental of incentives for full and proper responsibility to conserve the forest. Therefore, the local people were empowered and motivated to make decisions and to take responsibility of these decisions as main guardians of the forest resource. It is this restructuring which re-defined the asset structure such that ownership of the forest was now in the hands of the local people and through this transformation the government itself secured a new relationship with the very people it earlier considered to be a threat to forest conservation.

This clearly demonstrates that a group of proprietors can develop a CPR institution if they are confident that the CPR is either theirs or they can exercise clear control

over it. But the benefits to be gained from collective action must be greater than the opportunity cost of organizing it (Marrow and Hull 1996). External agents can promote this process by reducing costs and increase the benefits of self-organization. With less control or clear benefits, the proprietors of the resource have less incentive to invest in communal management regimes (Ostrom 1992).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study leads to the conclusion that it is the devolution, democratization, empowerment and sense of ownership that have induced the local communities surrounding the Duru-Haitemba Forest Reserve to invest their labour and time for sustainable conservation and management activities. This is the basis of the present situation where the villagers are managing the woodland resources such that a degraded forest has changed into one with boundaries that are intact, incursion is limited, flora and fauna are recovering and the forest is managed and protected effectively at minimum cost. The basis for the observed success is community participation and a marked degree of power sharing, to the extent that communities have taken full responsibility and control of the resource. Furthermore the government, as former manager, has become a technical advisor, facilitator and watchdog. Ultimately villagers actually now legally own the forest reserve. Thus there is clear definition of woodland resource boundaries, establishment of village bylaws, security of tenure and sense of ownership. A similar model could be adopted in other areas facing similar conditions.

To a large extent the CBFM approach in Duru-Haitemba represents a fundamental shift in forest management and conservation approaches and is a movement towards a more democratic civil society. It has potential to enhance the process of shifting from centralized to decentralized forest management; from unilateral, top-down decision making to a participatory, bottom-up decision making process; and from externally imposed rules to self-induced regulatory rules.

The study recommends minimal arbitrary intervention by the external agents in local management and tenure systems, while relocating responsibility and accountability of forest and other natural resources to individuals, user groups and local communities who best understand them and are better placed to manage and conserve them sustainably. More specifically, the role of CBFM need to be recognized; government should play the role of facilitator or technical advisor. Local people should be empowered to control resources around them through clear legally recognized rules.

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