
Tanzania: Conservation should be with the people

According to a paper produced by the Tanzanian Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, Forestry and Beekeeping Division, the Forest Policy in Tanzania identifies deforestation as the major problem in forest management, which is believed to proceed at the rate from 130,000 to 500,000 hectares per year. The main areas affected are unreserved lands belonging to the government. The reasons for deforestation are clearing for agriculture, overgrazing and wildfires, charcoal burning and over exploitation of wood resources.

However, there may be also other factors preventing an effective forest conservation. Interviews in the rural areas showed that people around forest lands understand that those lands belong to the government but that they have so far had no say on forest management. A 1957 Ordinance governs the conservation and management of forests and forest products, imposing restrictions over the use and/or occupation of such areas which belong to the government. One of the conclusions regarding the policy is that forest resources are regarded as alien resources to common villagers.

The establishment of conservation areas have come mainly as a command for the communities. Studies made by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Land Matters revealed that most of the present conservation areas have not taken into account the interests of the population around forest resources.

The case of the Mikumi National Park is an example of that. The park was established from a game controlled area and the decision was taken without any participatory planning and management. The community around was given 90 days to submit their claims of compensation and 30 days were given for appeals against the assessment of their rights, although they had traditional or customary rights in the area.

The Commission visited villages of Kigoma region around Moyowosi and Mukuti forest reserves where villagers complained that their village land has exhausted its natural fertility. The villagers requested part of the Moyowosi and Mukuti forest reserves to be carved back for villagers to get land for cultivation. In Kigoma region there are other places where arable land for agriculture is available, the only problem is lack of integrated planning to save the forestlands especially in public lands.

Evidences reveal that full participation of the people in planning and implementing conservation is indispensable. Consequently, in order to be successful conservation should be with the people, not without them.

Article based on information from: "National Forest Program Forestland Tenure Systems in Tanzania", by the Forestry and Beekeeping Division of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism of Tanzania. The full document can be accessed at:
<http://www.tzonline.org/pdf/taskforceonforestland.pdf>

