

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO MANAGE NATURAL RESOURCES: WHERE DOES THE NEW POWER LIE? A CASE STUDY OF DURU – HAITEMBA, BABATI, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Recent approaches to community – based natural resource management appear diverse as their varied implementing agencies and natural resource settings; yet they rest on a set of common assumptions about community, natural resources and the relationship between them. This paper focuses on power relations between actors and how these set the framework for resource management in Duru – Haitemba. As one of the few remaining tracts of miombo woodlands, Duru – Haitemba woodlands had been targeted for gazettement. However the exercise faced “local discontent”. The discontent has its origin in the “generalised narrative”. Before the coming of colonial powers the community lived in balanced harmony with nature. But when this harmony was disrupted, it led to disequilibria and hence degradation. A range of factors may be called to account, including: technological change; the breakdown of traditional authority; social change; urban aspirations and the intrusion of inappropriate state policies. What is required is to bring community and environment back into harmony. This requires either the discovery and rebuilding of traditional collective resource management institutions or their replacement by new ones. At the local level there are two factions competing for power: the elites and the traditionalists. The primary concern of traditionalists is “ritual”. Elites tend to hijack community based processes and forcefully occupying the political space opened by decentralization. Besides of the power struggles at the micro level another challenge is on the part of the government leadership at the macro level. Government officials usually have very mixed feelings about community actions. Increasingly though, these officials have come to realize that community action can substitute for the expensive need to put government officials into the field. The paper points out the fact that, community-based natural resource management seems plausible way to cut down public costs of managing resources. However, it remains an arena of power struggle between three actors: Local Communities, Field Agents and Supervisors. This “triangle” of relationships constitute the social arena marking out the actual “locale” of community based natural resource management in Duru – Haitemba.

Keywords: Community; Natural Resource; Actor, Power; Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Recent approaches to Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) appear as diverse as their varied implementing agencies and natural resource settings, yet they rest on a set of common assumptions about community, natural resources and the relationship between them.

One fundamental assumption is that a distinct community exists. While definitions vary, approaches commonly focus on the people of a local administrative unit; of a cultural or ethnic group (IUCN/WWF/UNEP, 1991:57). Such communities are seen as relatively

homogenous, with members' shared characteristics distinguishing them from "outs. Sometimes social difference within communities is acknowledged. Kajembe and Kessy, (1999) commenting on this had this to say "whereas socio-cultural background can aid group cohesion, of more importance is the socio-economic homogeneity or stratification.

The fabric of rural society in Tanzania is undergoing rapid change as indicated by rising crime rates and the breakdown of age-old norms of behaviour. All evidence shows that differentiation is increasing in the country as a result of economic reforms; Normally explicit efforts are made, using participatory rural appraisal methods to understand these changes (Kessy, 1995).

Equally fundamental is the assumption of a distinct, and relatively stable natural resource e.g. forests which may have succumbed to degradation, but has the potential to be restored and managed sustainably. The community is seen as the appropriate body to carry out such restoration and care and is envisaged as being capable of acting collectively towards common pool resource interests (Ostrom, 1996).

The tendency to subscribe to obviously oversimplified assumptions is not confined to CBNRM initiatives. It is now well recognized that most development programmes and projects that succeed in mobilizing funds and other resources rely on sets of simplified assumptions about the problem to be addressed and the approach to be taken which provide what Hoben (1995) calls "a cultural script for action".

Such assumptions are frequently linked together with what Roe (1991) has termed "development narratives": Stories about the world that frame problems in particular solutions. It is partly through narratives or what others have theorised as development discourses (Escobar, 1995; Apthorpe and Gasper, 1996) or received wisdom (Leach and Means, 1996) that assumptions are stabilised and rendered unquestionable, so that they gain power and persistence in policy arenas despite of the frequent absence of empirical data to support them.

This paper focuses on power relations and how these set the framework for resource use in Duru – Haitemba village forest reserve, Babati, Tanzania.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Study Area

Babati district

Babati is one of the ten districts of Arusha region. Rainfall varies from 500 to 1200mm per year. The altitude varies from 950 to 2450 metres above sea level.

Around 300,000 people live in Babati district. Most live mainly by agriculture. Main crops grown are food crops: maize, beans and pigeon peas. Up to 80 percent of the households own some livestock and some households live mainly by livestock keeping. These are mainly the Maasai pastoralists. Other ethnic groups include the Iraqw, Gorowa, Mbugwe and Rangi.

Excluding parks and game reserves and some private large-scale farms the land area of Babati District is around 380,00ha. Most of this is village land. There is only one urban settlement with around 25,000 people. The rest of the population live in 79 villages. There are two kinds of forests in the district: forests in the National Forest Reserves and forests within village lands.

Duru – Haitemba Village Forest Reserve

Duru-Haitemba forests are typical dry miombo woodlands located within the Rift Valley, about 20km South of Babati township. The forests have an area of about 90km² or 9,000ha; and they consist small woodlands which got the names of adjacent villages.

The woodlands occur along a series of related high ridges of up to 1850m. The ridges undulate and the peaks along them give an impression of being distinct hills. There are about sixteen forested ridges and thirty or more hills. The woodlands are under full ownership and protection of eight registered villages. About 145 species of trees and shrubs including climbers and creepers have been identified in Duru-Haitemba forests. The dominant species include: *Brachystegia microphylla*; *Brachystegia spiciformis*; *Julbernardia globiflora* and *Albizia versicolor*.

Socio-economic characteristics of the adjacent villages

There are eight registered villages adjacent to Duru-Haitemba forests (Table 1). All eight villages were included in this study.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the study villages

No	Village	Sub villages	Households	Population	Area (ha)
1	Gidas	4	694	3445	4250
2	Bubu	5	355	2430	4690
3	Ayasanda	5	326	2931	1460
4	Endanachan	4	445	2503	2130
5	Riroda	9	705	4506	4610
6	Endagwe	6	501	3112	4300
7	Duru	5	308	2816	3720
8	Hoshan	3	402	3520	2290
TOTAL		41	3736	25263	27450

Source: Kajembe and Mgoo, 1999

Methods

Data collection

Data were collected mainly by using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques. In each village, participants in PRA exercises were under four categories namely: 5 oldmen, at least two of them were ritual leaders; 5 members from the village government; 5 women and 5 youths (boys and girls). This group of twenty members from each village went through the following exercises: Firstly, resource mapping in relation to village set up. The maps showed

the village boundaries, major infrastructure and perhaps more important the location of Duru-Haitemba forests. The maps were like magnets drawing people into tense disagreements until a compromise was reached in relation to the items on the maps. Secondly, venn diagramming was carried out to indicate the importance of different institutions and how they relate to each other.

Besides of the PRA exercises, semi-structured interviews (SSI) were also conducted. SSI is defined as guided conversation in which only topics of relevance are predetermined and questions or insights arise as a result of the discussion and visualised analyses (FAO, 1989).

Similarly a number of published and unpublished documents were consulted at the Babati District Council and at Sokoine University of Agriculture.

Data analysis

Data collected from the communities through PRA techniques were analysed with the help of the local people and immediate feedback was given. Data collected through SSI were subjected to content analysis. Content analysis is used to analyze in detail the components of discussions in objective and systematic manner (Kajembe, 1994). In this method, the recorded dialogue with the respondents was broken down into smallest meaningful units of attitudes of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Generalized Narrative about the Balanced Harmony between Local Communities and Nature

As one of the few remaining tracts of miombo woodlands in Babati district, Duru – Haitemba woodlands had been targeted for gazettelement in 1990/91 as a government forest reserve. In 1992 the Swedish funded regional forestry programme paid for an expensive inventory, survey and boundary demarcation, process that proceeds formal gazettelement. However, the programme faced “local discontent” (Wily and Haule, 1995). Discussions with local people around Duru-Haitemba forests revealed that the discontent has its origin in the “generalised narrative”.

Before the coming of colonial powers, so the narrative goes, the community lived in balanced harmony with the woodlands. Either population levels were so low that the environment was little disturbed, or “community institutions” including ritual ones such as “haymanda” served to regulate resource use so that society and environment remained in equilibrium. Table 2 shows that “haymanda” ranks second overall, besides the fact that its powers has been eroded by the colonial and post colonial governments.

Under “haymanda” system non-members are not allowed to enter the sacred forests and none is allowed to cut any tree. Violating such norms, one has to offer an oxen as a sacrifice. The narrative argues that when the harmony was disrupted, it led to disequilibrium between people and woodlands and hence degradation. A range of factors may be called to account, including: technological change; the breakdown of traditional authority; commercialization; modernity; social change; new urban aspirations and the intrusion of inappropriate state policies.

What is required, the narrative suggests, is to bring community and environment back into harmony: “policies that bring human numbers and life-styles into balance with nature’s capacity” (IUCN/WWF/UNEP, 1991: 10). This requires either the discovery and rebuilding of traditional, collective resource management institutions (Ostrom, 1996) or their replacement by new ones, such as the village environment committees so often associated with CBNRM strategies.

Power Relations in CBNRM

Kajembe and Kessy (1999) argue that natural resource management initiatives by the colonial government undermined local people institutions for sustainable resource management. Though in Duru-Haitemba there are still remnants of traditional institutions, the “haymandas” but these are not very effective under contemporary socio-economic changes. Thus, CBNRM facilitators in Duru-Haitemba to a large extent are trying to formulate new local institutional structures popularly known as village forest committees (Table 2).

Discussions with key respondents, in the study area revealed that there are two factions competing for power at the village level: the elites and the traditionalists. Power is defined as the ability of actors to exercise their will in a manner that is contradictory to others (Lukes, 1981). Elite groups normally tend to cooperate with higher level state apparatuses such as foresters at the district level, in establishing externally sponsored institutional structures such as “forest committees” whereas the traditionalists (e.g. the custodians of rituals) sought to reconstruct the forest committees as entities performing predominantly ritual functions.

It seems many decisions in Duru-Haitemba villages are usually being taken outside of the formally recognized “loci” for decision making and most important decisions are made by loosely bounded groups of individuals or factions. It is competition for power which establishes a “faction (Kajembe, 1994:128). A faction is not a legitimate agent within an administrative structure. It may be a “Locus” for decision making but the rules if there are any, which govern it are not prescribed by institutional framework in which it operates. Its criteria of membership and decision-making are necessarily informal.

In Duru-Haitemba, the traditionalist faction is fully organized. Its primary concern is “ritual” but also retains an outward form of the state powers. At Ayasanda village the leader of “haymanda” is also the chairman of the forest committee.

The predominant characteristic of traditionalists political practice, however, is a tactful non-compliance with orders of the village government. The end result of which is the insulation of some households from the demands of the state (the village government is an extension of the central government). “Traditional” in one sense refers to what actually existed at some earlier and distant time, while in another sense it refers to modes of “behaviour” or “institutions” which are regarded as such by members of the traditionalist faction. Members of the traditionalist faction certainly regard many of their “institutions” as traditional, that is as things which the people have always been doing (Kajembe, 1994:129).

The elite faction is composed by wealthy and articulate members of the community. As more opportunities become available to citizens for participation, local elites can become dominant. Locally based dominant actors tend to hijack community-based processes and forcefully occupying the political space opened by decentralization (Agrawal, *et al.* 1999).

Under such a situation, local elites strengthen the relations of “domination and control” in which the poor and the marginalized such as “traditionalists” become even much worse off.

Experience from Duru-Haitemba reveals that communities are stratified (Kajembe and Mgoo, 1999). In all stratified communities, interests of some actors are represented only inadequately. Because of hierarchies and problems of representation and accountability in most communities, it is important to create institutional structures of presentation and accountability that can undermine existing asymmetries and prevent new ones from becoming entrenched.

In this sense, decentralization in natural resource management cannot ever be taken as an accomplished fact but only as process in the making (Kajembe and Kessy, 1999).

The study further revealed that in the village government, there are two key positions: that of a chairman and that of the Village Executive Officer (VEO). Unlike the VEO, who is an appointee of the District Council, the village chairman always sees the retention of his rather authoritative position as a result of maintaining electoral support from the villagers. His participation in rituals, asserts his particular claim to the position.

The decision – making practices of the ritual institutions such as “haymanda” seem to be analogous to those of formerly recognized village government committees such as forest committee, so the traditionalists in Duru-Haitemba have succeeded in organizing a parallel administration. The jurisdiction of the traditionalists administration, however is exclusively ritual.

This complex interaction between administrative office and ritual leadership is not unique to Duru-Haitemba. Kajembe (1994) in a study carried out in Dodoma, reports that complex interaction between administrative office and ritual leadership has characterized Dodoma since the first colonial administration was established.

Besides of power struggles at a micro level, another challenge is on part of the government leadership at the macro level. Government officials usually have very mixed feelings about community action in natural resources. Officials tend to be better educated, more worldly, and more exposed to modern ideas than the community members in remote areas. Therefore, many people in the government sincerely believe that they are better prepared and better organized to lead communities in natural resource management activities, or to regulate these activities (Ascher, 1995).

However, increasingly, government officials have come to realize that community action can substitute for the expensive need to put government officials into the field (Wily, 1995). Many government officials have also realized that moving decisions away from national and provincial capitals often leads to better decisions (Ascher, 1995). What local people may lack in education and sophistication is often outweighed by their more intimate knowledge of local conditions (Kajembe and Wiersum, 1998).

Yet, while governments have become increasingly interested in (or resigned to) decentralizing their own authority over natural resources and relying on communities management they cannot simply withdraw completely (Ascher, 1995). The basic lesson from Duru-Haitemba is that the government must steer between withdraw and dominance. This is for four reasons: First, the government is usually the ultimate “arbiter” of user rights when

they are contested beyond the boundaries of single user communities. When a community's claim to natural resource user rights is challenged or ignored by others, the government often has to decide whether and how, to intervene in the dispute. When user rights seem to clash and the possibility of violence arises, government is often obligated to get involved because of its responsibility for keeping public order. Second, the government is sometimes the only institution strong enough to keep outsiders from encroaching on the rights of established resource users. These users are often economically weak and few in number, thus requiring help if powerful outside forces, such as commercial loggers try to gain control over the resources. Thirdly, communities cannot always resolve all their disputes internally even though it is important that they try to do so to whatever degree possible. Some disputes have to do with basic issues of rights that are too crucial for either side to give up without a fight – unless the government intervenes to prevent violence. Some issues involve legal interpretations, examination of historical documents such as title deeds and intercommunity agreements and other judicial functions that only the government can perform. Fourth, in many cases the past neglect of natural resources has left a huge need for investments to restore the resource base. For these initiatives to be successful, the government often must finance the operations.

The Field Agent as a Power Broker

The discussion so far has shown that in CBNRM initiatives there are two camps, namely: the local communities and the government officials. At the local level we have seen that there are power struggles between the “elites” and the “traditionalists” but when it comes to facing government officials the two usually, tend to stand as one group. But again within the government, we need to distinguish between two sub-groups, the decision-makers or supervisors who usually reside at the headquarters and the field agents. As Kajembe (1994), laments, field agents operate at the “social interface” between the local communities and the decision – makers or supervisors. Experience from Duru-Haitemba showed that it is the field agent at the local level, in this case the Divisional Forest Officer, who play a central role in transforming policies from the district level. The most important aspect of an effective field agent is the type of “social relations” that he/she builds with the community. His ability to establish smooth working relations is judged by the community's willingness to accept different interventions. Also the field agent is supposed to be “the closest friend and supporter of the community”. This means, the field agent should be able to explain to the community what is expected from them and the benefits they will get to persuade them to participate accordingly.

In a detailed study on the social interface between bureaucrats and rural people in western Mexico, Arce (1993) position the “field agent” as a manipulator of circumstances rather than a controller of standardized forestry services”. Also as Lekkané dit Deprez and Wiersum (1993), argues “the identification of the forest agent as operating at the interface of the national context and local level interests implies that these persons are operating in a dualistic social environment: the meeting point of local village environment and government institutions”. This is a very different interpretation from seeing the “field agent” merely as a link between the government institution and the local population. He is the primary target when the local people question the legitimacy of certain government interventions.

From the point of view of the rational, knowledgeable farmer the “field agent” is not the “real bridge” to the village, but merely the lowest echelon of the system. As Lekanne dit Deprez and Wiersum (1993) commented in the case of Sahel “He, the field agent, is not seen as

someone who listens to the needs and priorities of the people, but as essentially the implementer of commands from the top, with any possible room for manoeuvre and discretion in implementation being normally used for his personal gain". Consequently, the behaviour of the field agent could be characterized as a strategy to arm oneself against uncertainty, manifesting itself in a variety of coping strategies (Kajembe and Malimbwi, 1996).

After being given work task and monthly salary, it is assumed by the district officials at Babati that the field agent will perform his tasks as expected. However, this process does not happen in practice because the field agent may be committed to conceiving and organizing his field activities according to the demands and problems of the local people and yet, at the same time, also has to perform duties within the existing administrative structure and as a matter of fact he is expected to further the interests of the externally sponsored agent (i.e. the Babati District Council). Thus he faces difficulties in dealing with the wide – ranging and flexible problems and demands of the local people within the rigid district administrative framework in which he is expected to function.

Therefore the field agent performance is influenced by three basic factors: The attitudes and expectations of his supervisors at the district level; his own domestic pressures; and local people's demands and expectations.

The field agent is important "intermediately actor" or "power broker" between local communities and the district authorities and organizes his activities to suit different situations and changing circumstances.

An important internal factor that constrains the effectiveness of a field agent is his own domestic commitments. The socio-economic condition of the field agent, particularly his low salary, leads to financial pressures from the domestic front due to his responsibility towards his kinfolk who are usually dependent on his earnings. Therefore, the economic and social status of the field agent itself is an obstacle to the development of CBNRM initiatives in Duru-Haitemba.

During our discussions with the Divisional Forest officer of Gorowa Division who is incharge of the Duru-Haitemba village forest reserve in terms of facilitation, we came to appreciate his perceptions and explanations on what he called his "internal world".

He is aware that for his own survival, he should avoid the temptation of breaking his links with the local community. He categorically said "my living environment is surrounded by local people, their human and social struggles for survival, as well as by unavoidable moral bonds". This is my "internal world" in which my involvement may even become counter-productive depending on the particular local situation I am confronted with. He specifically said that sometimes it is difficult to report even those people who encroach and graze in the forest. He said "I have to maintain good relationship with the local people". Observations in the field revealed that even when the field agent visits the district headquarters, his self-effacing behaviour follows a set pattern: He remains silent at meetings and tries to avoid communication so that he can keep his "internal world" more or less independent from the links with his supervisors. In his responses to his supervisors' questions, he tries to create confusion about the actual situation at the grassroots level, so that the actual situation remains unknown.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that Community-Based Natural Resource Management is a plausible way to cut down public costs of managing resources, however, it remains an arena of power struggle between three actors: Local communities (including local leaders); Field Agents and Government Officials or supervisors.

This “triangle” of relationships constitute the social arena marking out the actual “locale” of Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Duru-Haitemba. The triangle refers to the totality of social processes within which the three actors attempt to establish “power bases” for negotiations over resources and development discourses.

This study tried to open windows into these social realities and to observe how the strategic actions and interactions of the various actors shape the outcome of the Community – Based Natural Resource Management initiative in Duru-Haitemba. In short, there are often confrontations, bargaining and negotiations between these social actors.

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