What makes Community Forest a success: examining tenure, gender, community entrepreneurship

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The African women’s Network for community management of forests (REFACOF): Securing Women’s Forest and Land Property Rights!

General background:
• Created in May 2009 in Yaoundé, Cameroon
• Composed of 20 West and Central African countries and Madagascar
• An advocacy platform focused on African women’s tenure rights in land and forest reforms

Mission:
• Promote women’s rights in Africa and advocate to shape policies and practices for gender equity in relation to land and forest tenure

Intervention areas:
- Capacity building
- Tenure reforms
- Advocacy and Experience sharing
- Women’s economic empowerment

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Community forestry in Africa: Short Historical background

- Community based forest management is being implemented in Africa since 1980s
- Many countries of the Sub-Sahara Africa are promoting CBFM schemes: Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Congo, DRC, Gabon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, The Gambia, Tanzania, etc.
- Three main objectives:
  - Enhancing community engagement in forest management,
  - Reducing rural poverty, and
  - Promoting forest resources conservation.
Definition of some key concepts

Community forestry:
• RECOFTC (2011): Community forestry is a broad term used to describe models of forest management that give local people the majority say in making decisions.

Community forest:
• An area (forest or other ecosystem) legally attributed to and managed by local communities. The definition varies from one country to another.

Gender:
• We understand Gender as:
  – Issues that focus on women and on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labor, interests and needs.
  – Culturally and socially constructed difference between men and women that varies from place to place and time to time.

Tenure:
• We understand tenure as a bundle of rights (RRI) : from the weakest to strongest
What is a Community Forest?

**Cameroon scheme:**

- According to Cameroon's forest law - n°94/01 of January 20, 1994- a Community Forest is a natural forest of the non-permanent forest domain, subject to a management agreement between a village community and the Administration in charge of forests.

- The area of a CF does not exceed **5000 ha** – attributed for a **renewable** period of **25 years**.

- Management is based on a 5-years **Simple Management Plan** approved by the Forest administration and renewable every 5 years.

- 4 legal entities are recognized for the management of the CF: the Association, the Common Initiative Group (GIC), the Cooperative, the Economic Initiative Group (GIE).

- Objectives:
  - Enhancing community engagement in forest management,
  - Reducing rural poverty,
  - Promoting sustainable management of forests, and
  - Contributing to the fight against climate change (since 2008).
What is a Community Forest? (2)

The DRC scheme:

• A Community Forest is a forest concession allocated free of charge and in perpetuity to a local community by the State on its customary land.

• The FC in the DRC is in its experimental phase 2018 – 2023.

• The area does not exceed 50,000 ha - attributed for life.

• Management is based on a 5-years Simple Management Plan approved by the Forest administration and revised every year.

• Objectives:
  – Satisfy vital needs of the communities
  – Promote sustainable management of forests
What is a Community Forest? (3)

The Gambia scheme:

• A Community Forest is a demarcated forest administered and managed by a forest committee on behalf of one or more communities in accordance with the Preliminary Community Forest Management Agreement (PCFMA) or Community Forest Management Agreement (CFMA) terms and conditions.

• The area has no limit and the FC is attributed for life.

• Management is based on a 5-years Management Plan approved by the Forest administration and revised every year.

• Objectives:
  – Increase the welfare of local communities by applying socially accepted and ecologically adapted natural resource management practices within the confines of good governance.
What do women do in the community forests?

1) Community forest business developers

- **Dead woods business in The Gambia:**
  - In 2013, 23 women from Ndemban and 121 from Somita were involved in dead branch wood marketing for a cash income of **US$1,372/woman/trip**
  - In 2017, 58 women from Ndemban and 160 from Somita (97 permanent traders and 63 occasional traders) for a cash income of **US$2,500/woman/trip**

- **Tree Nursery Enterprises in the Gambia:**
  - Tree seedling productions: the business can generate around **US$1,960.0 annually** for women and the youth involved
What do women do in the community forests? (2)

- **The “Pistaches” business in Cameroon:**
  - In 2018, **20 women** from BOPO Community forest harvested and sold **8 tons** of “pistaches” generating an annual income of **US$10,000**
  - In 2019, they harvested and sold 11,200 tons for an annual income of **US$15,273**
  - In 2020, they harvested and sold 14,400 tons, generating an annual income of **US$19,636**

- **The “Plantain” business in Cameroon:**
  - In 2018, 10 women from LIBOCK Community forest harvested and sold **1200 bunches** of plantains and generated **US$2,182**
  - In 2019 **1420 bunches** were harvested and generated an annual income of **US$2,582**
  - In 2020 the entire production was lost because of Covid-19 lockdown: **1330 bunches** of plantain for an estimated income of **US$2,420**
What do women do in the community forests? (3)

2) Community forest restoration and rehabilitation
• Tree nurseries development, tree planting activities
• Mangroves restoration
• Mainstreaming agroforestry practices into food cultivation, etc.

3) Involvement in the Community Forest Management Committee (CFMC)
• In Cameroon, 30-40% of CFMC members are female
• In The Gambia, 1/3 of the CFMC members should be female by law
• In the DRC, Women participation to the CFMC is encouraged; but the process is still at the early stage!!!
How to scale up: key challenges to address

• **Tenure rights**
  – Need for clarity and security of the rights of local communities and more specifically of women and IP
  – Need to **improve customary rights** and put in place mechanisms that secure rights to lands and forests for women

• **Gender equality**
  – Understanding roles, responsibilities and activities of women and men, as well as the involvement of young people to provide adequate support and access to decision making processes

• **Access to funding, technology and market**
  – Adequate funding mechanisms
  – Technical, technological and financial capacity building of women in entrepreneurship and business development
  – Secure access to productive materials such as lands and forests for women

• Improve women organizational capacities and more flexible rules and regulations of the **informal sector where women mostly operate.**
The success of Community Forests is also based on the five principles of successful CBFM outlined earlier by my previous colleagues. The question is: What does this mean for rural women?

- **Adapative management and learning:**
  - Engaging local and indigenous women and providing adequate support to them – capacity building (Technical, technological, financial, organizational, institutional ...) - building resilience, ...

- **Availability of the resources:**
  - Facilitating access to forest resources for local and indigenous women (timber and non timber) – tenure security, ...

- **Effective governance and participation:**
  - Access to decision-making structures, gender-responsive laws and regulations, building partnership, ...
Keys to success (2)

- **Rights and institutional setting:**
  - Political will, enabling environment (gender-responsive laws and regulations), **secure tenure rights, engagement and commitment to invest on Community Forestry Enterprises**, …

- **Addressing community needs:**
  - Livelihoods development initiatives, building resilience to climate change and other crises, .. Gender equality and intersectionnalities, ... entrepreneurship development, market, technology, ...adaptation actions, poverty reduction, ...
Conclusion and perspective

What makes Community Forest a success?

- Going beyond policy to practice and translating or adapting this to the key forest management actor’s vision, knowledge, needs and expectations: forest small holders and women producers

- Global and collective commitment to invest on Community Forestry schemes
  - Providing adequate financial resources for Community Forestry Enterprises
  - Empowering local communities, women, youth and IP’s

- Political will to create enabling environment (gender-responsive laws and regulations, capacity building schemes, tenure security to women, ... )
Thank you!

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