



Governance: Linchpin of Dryland Natural Resource Management

Edmund Barrow¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Local governance arrangements need to be understood and respected as central to dryland forest management. Appropriate local institutions to support ownership must be in place and should not further marginalise users.
- There must be investment (public or private) in the real value of dryland forests, their management, and the market chains for the goods and services important at the local level, and for marketable products.
- Policy needs to foster sustainable natural resource management, which goes beyond forests. It requires secure rights and responsibilities for forest-dependent communities as well as management and market incentives. Many countries already have good policies in place but they need to be properly implemented.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Drylands cover approximately 12.5 million km² (61%) of the African continent and 60% of Africa's people live in them. Forests and woodlands underpin sustainable land management and livelihoods in dryland regions. They are important for risk management and adaptation, and in emergency and contingency planning. Traditional governance systems demonstrate why dryland forest management is so important and why good governance with legally entrenched rights is necessary for sustainable resource management. Most of Africa's drylands suffer from low investment and low added value on forest products. The economic value of forests is not fully reflected in economic, forestry, and conservation decision making. Although climate change may be the greatest threat to Africa's dryland forests, land use changes and the removal of rights of forest-dependent communities may prove more insidious. Governments need to implement policy incentives for devolving forest management to communities and local stakeholders, supporting different institutions and facilitating the most representative mixes.

INTRODUCTION

Drylands cover 42% of the earth's terrestrial surface and 61% of the African continent, and are spread over 34 countries south of the Sahara.² Worldwide they are home to some two billion people, including 60% of Africa's population. Africa's dryland forests are diverse and include Mopane (560 000 km²) and Miombo (2.5 million km²) woodlands in Southern Africa; Acacia and other dry woodlands (4.5 million km²) in the Horn of Africa; and the Parkia (*Faidherbia*, *Parkia* species) and Acacia systems of the West African Sahel (5 million km²).³ Other areas of 'rich patch' forest vegetation include riparian woodlands and hill-top forests, which have an importance out of proportion to their actual size.

Forests are not, however, generally regarded as bringing significant income into national coffers. Dryland forests are under-valued and often ignored in

favour of other economic sectors, including agriculture. Although many have retained their resilience, others have been degraded through unsustainable use, or converted to other land uses.

A history of exclusion has alienated rural people from their forests and prevented communal institutions managing them. This resulted in increased degradation and encroachment, as centralised management systems were unable to exercise responsibility through enforcement mechanisms alone. Today there is greater emphasis on decentralised management, ranging from collaborative or joint forest management, through re-gazetting forests from national to local forest reserves to devolution of ownership to local communities.

Diverse as African dryland forests are, so are their inhabitants. The range of livelihoods supported by drylands comprises pastoralists in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel; agro-pastoralists in the Sahel, Sudan and Tanzania; hunter-gatherers in Botswana and Namibia; and more sedentary, agriculture-based systems in other areas.

This brief illustrates how improved governance, economic and policy incentives are necessary to ensure that dryland forests are respected for their important role in dryland management and improved livelihoods.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DRYLAND FORESTS

The approximately 12.5 million km² of dryland forests in Africa underpin sustainable land management and are a core element in human livelihood. They form an important factor in risk management, environmental resilience and adaptation in dryland regions, and an aid to emergency and contingency planning in often harsh climatic conditions. For example, in excessively wet or dry periods and even during drought times, dryland forests are a source of materials that can be used or traded. Such forests also provide ecosystem services that other land uses cannot.

As a result, they may be traditionally owned; or subject to traditional institutions – particularly in dry times – or managed as a source of commercially important products. This is especially relevant to livestock management because dry season grazing and browsing is often found where vegetation is richer, such as in woodlands and riparian areas, and on hill tops.

Climate change may be the greatest single challenge

to Africa's dryland forests but land use change (including the expansion of cultivation) and the degradation or removal of rights and responsibilities over land may prove a more insidious threat. The role of government needs to evolve into setting policy incentives for devolved management, supporting different institutions, and facilitating the most representative mixes.

IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Dryland peoples possess complex and detailed temporal and spatial knowledge of biodiversity and ecological management. They have been able to build resilient systems by adapting to the risks inherent in uncertain climates. Although not perfect, their knowledge is the core building block of their livelihoods and well-being.

Traditional governance systems mediated dryland forest management. Good governance is the foundation of management and of benefit capture. Communities need legally entrenched rights if they are to manage these resources responsibly and the boundaries of management need to be clearly defined and legally registered.⁴ Rights should include building and enhancing local knowledge and institutions, and promoting mutually reinforcing links with formal policy mechanisms.

Rights and responsibilities should be devolved to the lowest accountable level. Often, however, responsibilities are devolved with only limited rights. De-concentration of government power to lower levels, while administratively expedient, in practice may replace or downgrade the importance of well-established, time-honoured institutions.⁵ A clear understanding of the value of those institutions will enhance synergies between them and local government by improving representation in decision making, protecting and supporting communal land rights, linking government with existing customary institutions, improving access to equitable markets, and strengthening access to services.

Even then, local governance structures must take into account different interests in the same forest resources. In negotiations on rights to forests, any decision is ultimately determined by whoever it is that decides. Women, for example, are often excluded from decisions about issues on which their livelihood and security may depend.

It is vital to define the appropriate institutions and ensure local ownership so that resource users are not marginalised. If the structures are not thoroughly worked through, the 'real' managers may surrender power to either self-serving administrative structures or outsiders. A challenge for these evolving institutions is to transform existing power relations within communities to promote greater equity and accountability. A strong community and resource-user focus is needed, one which recognises the value of forest management as a livelihood strategy and promotes dryland forest conservation as part of national planning and accounting.

INVESTING IN THE TRUE VALUE OF DRYLAND FORESTS

Only if conserving rather than degrading forests offers communities greater economic benefit, does it make economic sense for them to participate in sustainable forest management.⁶ This must improve both local economic welfare, and generate enough benefits to outweigh opportunity costs. Generally speaking, economic or forest sector decision makers afford little recognition to the economic value of non-timber forest resources, or to the potentially high local costs that may result from sustainable forest management. For these reasons communities find such management economically unattractive and consequently most of Africa's drylands have suffered from under-investment, resulting in land degradation and conversion to other forms of land use.

Dryland forests are the source of diverse products, including timber and various non-timber products (eg, honey, beeswax, mushrooms, fruits, Mopane worms and medicines), many of which are economically important. Studies by the Centre for International Forestry Research and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, covering diverse forest types and countries across the globe, found that approximately 25% of cash and non-cash household income derives from forests.⁷ For example, in Shinyanga, Tanzania more than 300 000 ha of Miombo and Acacia woodland have been restored by Sukuma agro-pastoralists since 1985, when President Julius Nyerere declared the region the 'desert of Tanzania';⁸ at \$14 a person a month for about 2.25 million people its economic value is 1.4 times higher than that of agriculture with a greater diversity of

products, including forage for oxen, fruits, medicines and honey. The gum arabic trade in Sudan, from *Acacia senegal* woodlands, was valued at \$80 million in 2011, and Shea butter ('women's gold' of the Sahel) produces annual revenues of \$90–\$200 million, benefiting more than 3 million people in the Sahel. Tourism generates \$50 billion a year in Africa and accounts for one in 20 jobs and in this, the great wildlife spectacles of the drylands are a core component. Finally, of Africa's livestock (about 190 million cattle, 160 million sheep, 180 million goats, 15 million camels and 13 million donkeys); probably more than half live in the drylands and represent a huge but underestimated value.

Despite this potential, real public or private investment lags, and is usually targeted at cultivation or small area-based works. Market-focused investment and better market access are needed to add value at the production level, and enable dryland forest products to find their way into local, national and international markets. Policies should ensure that the full economic value of forests is reflected in economic and forestry decision making, with particular attention to costs and benefits at the community level: incentives should bring community benefits at least equal to the economic costs. The four kinds of economic measure that enhance the benefit flows for dryland forests are respectively benefit-sharing; development of forest-based markets and enterprises; promotion of local alternatives to forest-based sources of income and subsistence; and direct payments to community members.

ENABLING INCENTIVES FOR DRYLAND FOREST MANAGEMENT

National governments have overall responsibility for dryland forests but often lack the capacity to fulfil such a mandate, and in practice dryland forests end up as 'nobody's responsibility'. A supportive policy structure must be broad and multi-sectoral, to facilitate local management and enhance the ability of land users and forest-dependent communities to access markets.

Ownership of forest land directly influences its status, condition and management and determines the relationship between communities and the forest. The greater the security of local forest tenure, the stronger the interest and will of the community towards maintaining its condition. Well-intentioned development policies have often undermined tenure

and natural resource governance, for example through an undue focus on small-scale agriculture. Secure forest ownership (or at least secure rights and responsibilities, with the community group designated as management authority) may be the most powerful stake a community can hold.⁹ To improve community ownership of forests, closer attention must be paid to evolving policies that improve the way in which forests are sustained over the longer term. In particular such processes should help communities to become identifiable, legally accepted and accountable institutions endowed with real powers of management. Finally, much good policy and law exists which, if fully implemented, would promote sustainable dryland forest management.

Sectoral economic policies tend to overlook dryland forestry concerns and sanction activities that lead to exploitation, clearance and degradation. Sometimes, sectoral economic instruments – unsupportive systems of land and resource tenure, or subsidies to resource or land-degrading activities such as conversion to cultivation – have acted as perverse incentives in this regard.

CHALLENGES FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

Dryland forests and woodlands should be managed and owned if not by communities (de facto or de jure) then by other private interests. Issues pertaining to rights and responsibilities are difficult but central to sustainable dryland forest management. Inevitably, however, there will be different types of land arrangements, such as private or common property, and reaching agreement on which works best in any given situation demands ‘landscape level’ negotiations and trade-offs that are actually supported by policy.

The role of government should be developed to embrace promoting and implementing incentives to community-level management. Governments will need to understand and support different institutions, separately or in combination, and put together the most representative mixes. Policymakers must arrive at an understanding of dryland forests as an important economic contributor to national and regional development that supports the livelihoods of most of Southern Africa’s population as well as providing

life-sustaining environmental services. Lessons learned to date are an important starting point for addressing issues related to management, governance, economic values and market access, as well as the role of government and local institutions in dryland forests in Southern Africa.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Edmund Barrow has worked in more than 20 countries in Africa and elsewhere and is Director of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Global Ecosystem Management Programme with responsibility for work on adaptation and disaster risk reduction, the Red List of Ecosystems, and drylands.
- 2 Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, DRC, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe, <http://www.fao.org/ag/agl/agll/terrastat/>.
- 3 UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), *State of the World’s Forests 2007*. Rome: FAO 2007, p. 140.
- 4 Alden Wily L & S Mbaya, ‘Land, People and Forests in Eastern and Southern Africa at the Beginning of the 21st Century. The Impact of Land Relations on the role of Communities in Forest Future’. Nairobi: IUCN, 2001.
- 5 Barrow E, *et al.*, *Analysis of Stakeholder Power and Responsibilities in Community Involvement in Forest Management in Eastern and Southern Africa*. Nairobi: IUCN: 2002.
- 6 Mogaka H, *et al.*, *Economic Aspects of Community Involvement in Sustainable Forest Management in Eastern and Southern Africa*. Nairobi: IUCN, 2001.
- 7 Shepherd G, ‘Rethinking Forest Reliance: Findings about poverty, livelihood resilience and forests’, in *Livelihood and Landscapes Strategy*. Gland (Switzerland): IUCN: 2012, p. 40.
- 8 Ghazi PE, Barrow EG & G Monela, ‘Regenerating Woodlands: Tanzania’s HASHI project’, in *The Wealth of the Poor – Managing Ecosystems to Fight Poverty*. World Resources Institute with UN Development Programme, New York, 2005, pp. 131–138.
- 9 Alden Wily L & S Mbaya, *op. cit.*

This briefing is an output of a conference on southern Africa’s dryland forests co-hosted by SAIIA and the SADC FANR Directorate funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and GIZ.

© SAIIA 2014 All rights reserved. Opinions expressed are the responsibility of the individual authors and not of SAIIA.