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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Forest Dependent People’s Participation in Participatory Forest Management (PFM) Programmes in Kenya

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Abstract

Over the last two decades community participation in the management of state-owned forests has become a theme of policy and academic work in attempts to enhance sustainable forest management in many developing countries. In Kenya, the Forest Act 2005 entrenched Participatory Forest Management (PFM) through enabling the creation of Community Forest Associations (CFAs), authorised to co-manage the forests with Kenya Forest Service (KFS), the statutory forest agency to improve forest cover and their livelihoods. However, the degree to which these goals are met depends, in part, on accessibility and desirability of programmes targeting forest dependent people. Empirical research on factors motivating or dissuading forest dependent peoples’ participation in CFA activities remains limited and a more complete understanding of these factors is critical to improving social equity outcomes. This paper investigates two issues that have received little research attention to date: the level of forest dependent people’s participation at different stages of a participatory forest management (PFM) programme and factors that influence their level of participation. Data were collected from three CFAs in the Mt Elgon forest reserves, western Kenya through household surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. A participation index (PI) and binary logistic regression model were used to analyse the data. The results showed that slightly over a half of the respondents (51 %) were members of forest user groups (n=924). The results further revealed that the level of the forest users’ PI was 40.7 %, 49 %, and 42.9 % at the planning, implementation, and monitoring stages, respectively suggesting low levels of participation. The logistic regression model showed that gender, household size, education level, land size, income from the forest, proximity to forest edge, household asset value and engagement in alternative livelihoods were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) predictors for the level of participation. Thus, our results suggest that the broader context of land tenure security and alternative livelihood strategy development may be critical in improving participation of forest dependent communities in CFA activities.

Keywords: Community forest associations, forest dependent people, Kenya, participation