

Enhancing Women's Participation in Forestry Management Using Adaptive Collaborative Management

The Case of Mbazzi Farmers Association, Mpigi District Uganda

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Key Messages

- ▶ Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) is a collective problem-solving and management approach in which everyone can participate, contribute knowledge and learn how to solve important challenges together. Here, women's leadership capacity is demonstrated using this method to achieve the shared vision of a forest user group.
- ▶ Mixed groups of men and women offer pathways for women's empowerment in forest management, as deliberate support from men boosts the confidence of women and minimizes domestic conflict.
- ▶ Men are important actors in strengthening women's rights and overall empowerment by supporting them, boosting their morale and allocating them land to plant their own trees.
- ▶ The ACM approach gave local communities ownership, empowering them to restore degraded forestlands and improve their livelihoods by setting up alternative income-generating projects.
- ▶ Strong linkages and networking with supporting institutions, such as the National Forest Authority, are essential to successful forest landscape restoration.

Introduction

Increasing evidence suggests that women, who are among the poorest of the poor, and who depend on forest resources for subsistence and income, continue to be marginalised in policy- and decision-making, and in the distribution of tree or forest resources benefits (Mai et. al., 2011). Across the globe, both women and men have different access to, control over and use of trees and land (IUCN, 2013, WEDO 2013). Forests and the sale of forest products are largely owned and controlled by men; women's needs and concerns are neglected, as they have little power in determining development activities (WEDO, 2012). Uganda has ratified several global conventions that promote gender

equality. However, although there is progress in gender mainstreaming, implementation has been slow at all levels (Banana et al. 2012). The Forestry Policy(2001), National Forestry and Tree Planting Act(2003) and National Forest Plan (2013) address gender, but are not backed by relevant regulations and strategies that ensure compliance (Banana et.al 2012). The Gender Policy (2007) does not recognize the role of women in forestry. Hence, a gender imbalance still looms large in the forest sector at all levels, even though a few high positions are occupied by women (Mukasa et.al. 2012). Despite legal prescriptions for gender equity, in practice, customary norms still prevail and these largely confer access to forest and tree resources on women, while ownership is reserved for men.

In 2011, the Association of Uganda Professional Women in Agriculture and Environment (AUPWAE), in partnership with CIFOR, implemented a Gender, Tenure and Community Forestry project in Mpigi, Butambala, Masaka and Rakai districts, in the central region of Uganda. The goal of the project was to improve women's tenure rights to forests by increasing their participation in community forest user groups. Women were encouraged and given space to participate meaningfully in decision-making and benefit-sharing to improve their livelihoods.

Lwamunda Central Forest Reserve (CFR) in Mpigi district was chosen as one of the study sites. It had been completely degraded prior to the project. Mbazzi Farmers Association (MBAFA), a local community-based organization with 40 members (21 women and 19 men), planned to restore this forest, according to a 5-year action plan. By the end of the project in 2016, the degraded part of Lwamunda Forest reserve that had been allocated to the group was flourishing.

Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM)

Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) is a collective problem-solving and management approach in which everyone can participate, contribute their knowledge and learn to solve important challenges. Using the ACM approach, all the Lwamunda CFR stakeholders undertook a visioning process in which challenges to restoration of the forest and factors that hinder women's participation were identified. Some of the challenges that women expressed during the visioning process were the lack of information on development opportunities, low participation in meetings, and exclusion from leadership positions for managing forests and trees. It was also observed that women lacked the confidence to speak up and held onto traditional beliefs that hindered them from planting certain tree species, such as figs (*Ficus natalensis*) because it would signify their ownership of the land. In order to mitigate and resolve these gender-related challenges and others identified

during the visioning exercise, an action plan was developed with the main components being reforestation of Lwamunda CFR and improvement of livelihoods. Women and youths were actively involved in all of the proposed actions. The actions were monitored and evaluated, and reflection meetings with group members were held once every month to review the outcomes and propose new actions (see Figure 1). The stakeholders comprised politicians, local technical staff from Muduma subcounty, local non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, private forest owners, school representatives, and youths, women and men of Mbazzi village, including MBAFA members.

End of project results

Through participation in the Gender, Tenure and Community forestry project, MBAFA officially registered as a CBO in 2011. It then gained recognition at local government level and benefitted from opportunities offered, such as the Community Driven Development grant, as well as partnerships with agencies, such as the National Forest Authority (NFA). The NFA allocated 22 ha of land to the group for replanting with indigenous tree species and eucalyptus under the Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) arrangement. By 2014, women had planted 3080 and men 5964 trees of various species. Land for eucalyptus was distributed equally among men and women. The fast-growing eucalyptus trees gave quick returns in terms of income, firewood and poles.

The MBAFA group used an ACM approach to promote gender equity; this has helped the group to achieve the objectives of forest landscape restoration programs. Currently, MBAFA is an agro-tourism model community, showcasing reforestation using indigenous tree species. ACM has enabled the provision of a safe platform and facilitated in allowing women's voices to be heard in the presence of men without intimidation or retribution. Both men and women have been trained in gender, leadership and income-generating activities, such as beekeeping, fish farming and tree nursery

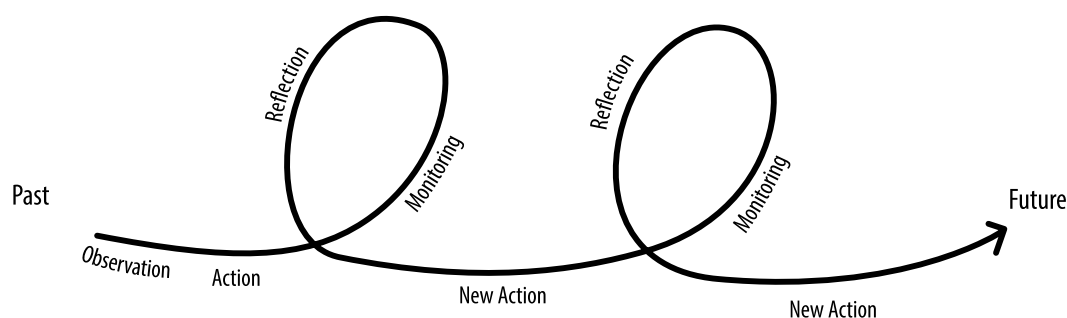


Figure 1. Participatory action research process Source: Komarudin et al. 2008.



The Chairperson of Mbazzi Farmers Group addresses members at their tree nursery site (Photo by AUPWAE/CIFOR)

management. Gender training improved relations between husbands and wives; husbands are now allocating land to their wives to grow trees, such as *Eucalyptus*, *Grevillea*, *Ficus* and *Maesopsis eminii* to generate income or use as collateral to access credit from banks.

The ACM methodology encouraged mixed gender groups allowing women to work alongside their husbands and other men. This boosted the women's confidence and minimized domestic conflicts. After visiting other groups, MBAFA adopted a village banking scheme to provide independent income sources to women, allowing them to start alternative income projects, such as selling snacks, raising tree seedlings, pig farming and retail shops, among others. The village banking scheme also enabled the women to practice their organizational and leadership skills, as a number of them were given key roles, which they ably carried out. ACM methodology helped to build the leadership skills of both women and men, enabling them to manage and mitigate conflicts both within the group and with non group members, landlords and some government officials and think through gendered implications of actions. ACM methodology encouraged members to be self-reliant and to seek out linkages to achieve this. The women leader confidently guided the group to build beneficial linkages with the following organizations: National Forest Authority, which offered land and tree seedlings; Rubaga Rotary Club, which set up an internet center to allow them to share information; and VI Agroforestry which helped them build agroforestry and other skills to improve their livelihoods. The leadership of women in the executive lobbied for equitable sharing, of benefits between men and women in the allocation of land in the central forest reserve and in access to tree seedlings.

Challenges

The ACM activities required regular meetings and group activities. This meant that the dropout rate was high for women, who were often overburdened with household chores. Women were encouraged to attend meetings with their babies, meeting times were negotiated and venues were established closer to households to try to overcome this. Involvement in tree planting requires ownership of land, but most MBAFA households only own 0.5–2 ha of land, which cannot be spared by the men to allow their wives to plant trees. Men have become very aggressive in competing for leadership posts because of the accrued benefits from the natural forest. Worse still, women's low literacy levels reduce the overall pool from which to draw leadership candidates. The prevalence of customary rules and norms continues to undermine women's rights to land and trees, increasing uncertainty on the sharing of benefits from the trees that have been planted.

Lessons learnt

MBAFA has proved that a community forest user group, if well organized, can achieve the objectives of forest landscape restoration programs by using an approach that promotes gender equity. Lessons drawn from the project include the importance of:

- providing a safe platform and good facilitation to help women speak up and share opinions in the presence of men without intimidation or retribution;
- continuous capacity-building for women to equip them with knowledge, skills and confidence;
- mixed gender groups to allow women to work alongside their husbands and other men, which boosts their confidence and minimizes domestic conflicts;
- schemes such as village banking to provide independent income sources for women and alternative domains for women to practice their organizational and leadership skills;
- registering the groups with government structures to promote legal recognition status, opening up opportunities for external support.

ACM helps community members to identify and mitigate problems, and think through gendered implications of actions. It enables communities to suggest and support horizontal e.g. MBAFA with other Community groups and vertical linkages MBAFA and higher government and non government institutions local authorities and officials to be responsive to local community needs.

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Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) aims to achieve ecological integrity and enhance human well-being in deforested or degraded landscapes. Evidence shows that addressing gender equality and women's rights is critical for addressing this dual objective. Against this backdrop, CIFOR and a number of partners hosted a Global Landscapes Forum workshop on FLR and gender equality in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2017. The objective of the workshop was to identify and discuss experiences, opportunities and challenges to advancing gender-responsive FLR in East African countries, as well as to join together various stakeholders working at the interface of gender and FLR as a community of practice. This brief set is a tangible outcome of this collaboration, featuring a number of useful lessons and recommendations rooted in the experience and expertise of partners in civil society, multilateral organizations, research community and private sector – all working in different ways to enhance the gender-responsiveness of restoration efforts.

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