



# Policy Brief

No. 5, 2025

## Forest Governance in Tanzania: The Case of Pangani District

Pius Yanda, Fascal Chengula,  
Ritha Kalokola and Emanoel Alfred



### Abstract

- Tanzania has expansive areas of forest that are critical for supporting ecosystem stability, protecting biodiversity and sustaining livelihoods. However, due to strong population growth, the country is experiencing rapid deforestation. Using Pangani District in Tanga Region as a case study, this brief explores the status of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) at the local level. Results show that current forest governance fails to achieve a sustainable balance between forest preservation and community welfare due
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

to limited distribution of revenue and benefits derived from local forests and the lack of financial and technical capacity among village institutions. The study underscores the critical need for policy and regulatory frameworks that address the complex political and economic incentives driving the lack of forest law enforcement, high deforestation rates and unsustainable practices to achieve practical and effective schemes of forest governance.



# Introduction

Due to its robust population growth, Tanzania is facing rapid deforestation. Based on an analysis by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the country lost an estimated 7.9 million hectares of forest between 2010 and 2020, largely due to the expansion of agriculture and other livelihood activities, with 469,000 hectares lost in 2020 alone (FAO 2020). The most recent national analysis of the supply and demand for wood products in Tanzania further revealed a substantial deficit of over 19.5 million m<sup>3</sup>, indicating that forests are being depleted much faster than they can regenerate (MNRT 2015).

Participatory Forest Management was introduced in the late 1990s as part of broader efforts to improve rural livelihoods, reduce poverty, protect the environment and promote equitable benefit distribution. PFM operates through two main models: Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) and Joint Forest Management (JFM). In the CBFM approach, developing a Forest Management Plan (FMP) is crucial for transferring management authority to the community, with the core premise

that direct community benefits will incentivize sustainable forest use and protection.

Despite these efforts, natural forests continue to face deforestation and degradation. The continuing unsustainable use of Tanzania’s forest resources raises critical questions on forest governance that prompted this study. First, to what extent do the management and distribution of forest revenue and benefits promised in the forest management decentralization policies balance community livelihoods and forest conservation? Second, what is the extent of power transfer in decentralized decision-making, and are the necessary resources available for local communities to manage forests effectively? Third, how do coordination mechanisms among actors of forest governance affect power dynamics, inclusivity and equity in forest management, and how do they reduce overlapping responsibilities and inefficiencies? This study explored these complex issues, focusing on how decentralization policies are translated into practice regarding forest resource management.

# Key Messages

1. Disparity between policy and practice in tenure arrangements creates loopholes for exploiting village forests.
2. Different entities in the forest sector compete to gain access to village forests to meet revenue collection targets at the expense of forest integrity and community livelihoods. Under current regulations (Government Notice (GN) 417 of 2019 as amended by GN 255 of 2023) of the Forest Act 2002, local government authorities (LGAs) are frequently bypassed in issuing forest permits.
3. Activities of conservation institutions are poorly coordinated, resulting in overlapping and, in some cases, conflicting activities, increasing the cost of operations rather than enhancing synergies.
4. High tariffs and fines for forest degradation are counterproductive, acting to encourage more illegal harvesting to meet daily needs.
5. Inadequate transparency in forest management limits the inclusivity of vulnerable groups in decision-making, thus intensifying their vulnerability.
6. Lack of guidelines and policies on managing transboundary forest resources leads to increased degradation with knock-on effects on community livelihoods.





# Methodology

Adopting a multi-level natural resource governance framework (Nunan 2018), this research explored the governance of forest resources and its implications for forest management in Tanzania. Pangani District in Tanga Region was selected as the study area. Within the district, purposive sampling procedures were used to select four study villages—Mivumoni, Mtango, Kwakibuyu and Kigurusimba—to represent areas possessing forests under different management regimes: CBFM, JFM and traditionally managed forests.

The study applied a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology. Five focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with members of the Village Development Committee (VDC), Village Natural Resources Committee (VNRC) and local community members. One FGD was held in each village, except Mivumoni, which had two sessions. Four key informant interviews were also conducted: three with representatives from LGAs at the village and district level and one from the central government (TFS). In addition, a field survey questionnaire was administered face-to-face with a sample of 190 households in the four study villages to better understand the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different groups in the use and management of forest resources.

# Key findings

## Nexus between community livelihoods and forest management

- The survey found that about 37 percent of households depended on forests for firewood, 25 percent for food (farms, fruits), 8 percent for building materials, 6 percent for charcoal, 6 percent for medicines and 5 percent for beekeeping. However, most households in all surveyed villages reported low benefits from forest resources.
- Existing forest management practices hinder equitable access to forest resources that are essential for supporting the well-being of local communities. Community members in the study villages are permitted to gather honey and extract firewood for domestic (non-commercial) use, but access to forests for firewood for commercial use, charcoal production, logs, building materials and timber are restricted.
- Excessive use of forest products is posing a serious threat to forest integrity in Pangani District. Most forests in the study sites have already been degraded. The distribution of revenues and other

benefits does not offer adequate incentives for the sustainable management of natural resources and the livelihoods of communities.

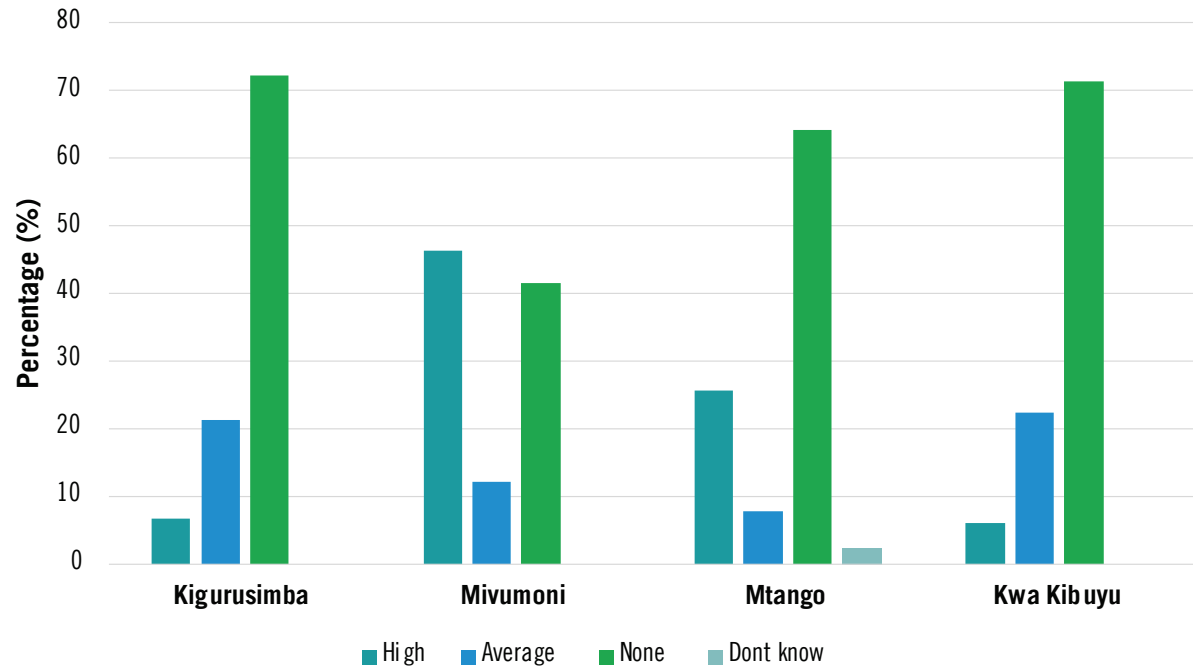
- Contrary to Forest Act regulations, current forest management practice remits 100 percent of formal forest revenues to the central government and district council, leaving nothing for the village. Community members in all study villages expressed dissatisfaction with how the revenues from forest harvesting are accrued and distributed between the community, LGA and the central government through TFS.

## Local-level stakeholder participation in forest management practices

- The majority of focus group respondents perceived a low level of local community participation in decision-making processes regarding forest management (Figure 1). Perceptions of participation were relatively higher in Mivumoni village due to recent carbon trading initiatives by CAN Tanzania. Through these projects, people obtained education on the benefits of forest conservation.



FIGURE 1: PERCEPTION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREST MANAGEMENT (PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS)



Source: Field survey data, 2024





- Marginalized groups are largely excluded from decision-making on forest management, with extremely poor people such as those under the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) social safety net initiatives, women, youth, elderly persons and persons with disabilities within villages disproportionately affected.
- The Tanzania Local Government (District Authorities) Act of 1982 outlines a clear mechanism for the coordination of LGAs with higher authorities, which is crucial for vertical coordination and the effective functioning and development of local governance. However, the Act does not explicitly provide mechanisms for horizontal coordination for entities at village, ward and district levels. This absence of structures, mechanisms, legal requirements and budgets at lower levels—where discussions and deliberations on forest management can occur—means that these actors are not obliged or compelled to collaborate.
- The Village Development Committee has delegated responsibilities for forest management to the VNRC, but the VNRC is not recognized as a village government committee under the Local Government Act and has no voice in village-level (i.e., VDC) decision-making.

- The disparity in power among actors in the forest sector at different levels, namely, VDC, Ward Development Committee (WDC), District Council and central government agencies, including TFS, Tanzania Wildlife Management Authority (TAWA) and Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA), translates into inequitable distribution of forest benefits. Stakeholders at lower levels often receive little to no share of forest revenues.
- There are no holistic approaches for managing transboundary forests. Each village appears to prioritize its interests and is accountable to its own community over neighbouring villages, resulting in division and struggle for control of forest resources.
- High-level actors hardly consider village-level decisions under the law in issuing harvesting permits. Village meetings endorse decisions on forest harvesting rather than make them. Moreover, the study found no community appreciation of the ownership of forests, which leads to poor participation, lack of coordination and disengagement in forest management.

### The link between policy and practice in forest management

- Existing Forest Regulations require that revenue obtained from forest resources benefits the local communities involved. However, in practice, more powerful stakeholders along the line of command act to gain and control access to forest resources to meet revenue collection targets and can conceal revenue information. Communities see CBFM as a breeding ground for struggle instead of power-sharing among key players in local forest management. For example, LGAs are frequently bypassed in endorsing forest harvesting permits despite the fact that Government Notice (GN) 417 of 2019 (as amended by GN 255 of 2023) of the Forest Act provides a mandate to LGAs to approve permits.
- VDC members are commonly unaware of the legal procedures to acquire tenure rights.
- Outdated village land use and forest management plans and inadequate enforcement of forest bylaws influence destructive forest utilization.
- Lack of completion of gazettelement and management plans for CBFM forests obstructs the transfer of tenure rights to local communities, allowing TFS to re-categorize village land forest reserves (VLFR) as unreserved forest land or ‘general land’, contrary to the Village Land Act. As a result, TFS is able to harvest from the unreserved forest land within villages through district councils whereby district councils retain only 5% of revenue while the central government takes 95%, leaving nothing for village. This was found to be the case in all four study villages.
- The absence of coordinated efforts to patrol forests at the district level results in duplication of efforts and conflicting mandates, further complicating efforts to combat illegal forest activities.



## Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study has identified the following recommendations to improve forest governance.

1

Ensure compliance with the Forest Act of 2002 and its subsequent regulations that mandate that village government authorities are to control village forests. Under current regulations, TFS is not supposed to operate on local government forest reserve areas and village forest areas, which include both gazetted and ungazetted areas.

2

Promote carbon trading initiatives for forest-dependent communities. This strategy offers financial incentives for conserving forests, allowing communities to earn income from carbon credits instead of exploiting forest resources.

3

Review the benefit-sharing mechanisms among stakeholders within the forest resources governance framework in CBFM and JFM arrangements.

4

Support villages leaders to actively participate in monitoring and evaluation of forest harvesting permits.

5

Draw members of the VNRC from VDC members and give the VNRC a full mandate to endorse forest produce harvesting permit applications for submission to the relevant ward and/or district-level committees/departments for natural resources.

6

Develop new or review outdated village land use plans.

7

Strengthen coordination, cooperation and collaboration to build trust among key players in forest management, including planning and budgeting for regular meetings.

8

Review the National Forest Policy of 1998 to accommodate new opportunities and emerging issues such as local content, carbon trading and climate change issues.

9

Establish a programme of continuous learning and training on issues related to forest governance and management.

## Conclusion

The findings highlight that forest degradation is intricately linked to the failure of forest management. This failure is not isolated but rather systemic, rooted in many social, economic and political factors. Livelihood pressures prioritize short-term gains from logging and agriculture over long-term sustainability. Ambiguities in land tenure create conflicts that discourage collaborative efforts. Insufficient community involvement in decision-making fosters non-compliance with management plans. Inadequate funding and resources prevent effective monitoring and implementation of sustainable practices. Weak enforcement of forest laws due to limited resources and corruption leads to illegal logging and overharvesting, while fragmented governance among different government levels creates inefficiencies.

At the centre, the lack of clear tenure rights is the root cause of deforestation and forest degradation in the majority of PFM forests, and the lawful transfer of tenure for the establishment of CBFM fails due to a lack of technical expertise, financial resources and

necessary support and facilities for village governments to plan for, manage and monitor forests. The study concludes that for forest management to be both practical and effective, appropriate benefit-sharing mechanisms need to be established that balance forest conservation and the socioeconomic needs of forest-dependent communities.



## References

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2020). Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 Report: United Republic of Tanzania. Rome: FAO. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/480b30fa-dd26-4427-9d68-8a07640946c9/content>

Nunan, F. (2018). Navigating multi-level natural resource governance: An analytical guide. Natural Resources Forum, 42(3), 159-171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-8947.12149>

Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT) (2015). National Forest Resources Monitoring and Assessment of Tanzania Mainland (NAFORMA): Main Results. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS), MNRT. <https://www.tfs.go.tz/index.php/en/%20resources/view/naforma-report-2015>



### **Dodoma**

Kambarage Tower (PSSSF Building), 8th Floor,  
18 Jakaya Kikwete Road  
P.O. Box 1081  
Phone: +255 (0) 26 296 3882/3

### **Dar es Salaam**

Plot No. 100, 1 Magogoni Street, Kivukoni  
P.O. Box 105753  
Phone: +255 (0) 22 211 0372/3

**Email:** [info@uongozi.or.tz](mailto:info@uongozi.or.tz)  
**www.uongozi.go.tz**



UONGOZI



UONGOZI Institute



UONGOZI Institute



uongozi\_institute



UongoziInstitute

SCAN QR CODE  
TO ACCESS THE FULL  
RESEARCH PAPER

