

Social Forestry Stakeholders in the Sudan: Case from Gedaref State

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Abstract: During previous years, numerous efforts had been adopted for stakeholders' involvement in forest resources management in the Gedaref State and elsewhere. However, these initiatives were not evaluated. With this background, this study investigates the stakeholders concerning forest resources management in Gedaref State. The overall objective of this study is to look into the various stakeholders, their rights, perceptions and attitudes in order to look into possibilities of enhancing their participation in development and management of forest resources. For data collection, a combination of methodological instruments such as reconnaissance survey, structured and semi-structured interviews, snowball sampling techniques, group discussion, observation, literature, archive were used. The study revealed that the multiple benefits and services provided by forest resources had attracted a variety of stakeholders' categories. However, local people groups and Forest National Corporation were identified as the principal stakeholders. Moreover, stakeholders' involvement initiatives motivated them to develop positive perceptions and attitudes towards forest resources and tree planting. Furthermore, the study revealed that the stakeholders practiced the right to grazing, fuelwood and building materials.

Key words: Attitudes, community forestry, participation, perceptions, user groups

INTRODUCTION

A special feature of forestry activities lies in the long term nature of their investment. Moreover, in many cases one of the main forest resource management objectives is the provision of some "public goods" (Hurditch, 1992). Hence pure economic calculations can hardly present enough motivation, especially for individuals to manage forest resources on a sustainable basis or to be involved in tree planting activities. Hence, in many parts of the world, governments thought that forest resources should be managed based on central policy and with an authoritative and hierarchical forest service (Wiersum, 1991).

Over millennia, local people "use-managed" forest resources in their surroundings. The concept of use-management is defined as management by individuals or groups who use the resource within certain cultural and social norms that are not enforced by any formal authority (Somlai, 2008). Nonetheless, government interventions resulted in the differentiation of forest resource management into formal and informal. According to Wiersum (1992) the formal one involves the formulation of an official management plan and contractual arrangements for utilization of specific forest products by selected forest user groups, whereas informal management does not entail existence of official contracts

between the forest users and the official authority. Normally, the latter type is related to products which are considered as unprofitable or too difficult to manage by the official institution. However, in reality management systems might not be mutually exclusive, but overlap with each other. Hence, in this paper the term forest resource management is used to denote any situation where stakeholders are organizing the creation, maintenance and/or utilization of forest/tree resources.

Stakeholder is a term, which has come into common usage by most donor organizations; it was first used in business management theory and has since then been widely adopted as a further refinement of the user concept. It is defined as "all the people and organizations who have a stake in and may be affected by an activity, a development programme or a situation or who may have an impact or influence on it" (Grimble *et al.*, 1994). Further, Grimble in Hobley (1996) classified stakeholders to primary and secondary stakeholders. The former describes people and organizations that are wholly dependent on the resource for their survival. The latter describes people and organizations that have interest in the resources including industrial and governmental organizations.

The importance of the concept stems from the fact that each stakeholder might have different perceptions and interests concerning the use and management of the

resource, and these differences may possibly be fundamental. Hence, understanding stakeholders' perceptions of trees/forest land-use and management systems helps in framing the relevant land-use strategy and the best way of involving them in such strategy (Dahai and Kenel, 2008).

Nevertheless, understanding stakeholders' behaviour requires more than just looking into their perceptions. In reality, perceptions are interwoven with other factors. Hence, Barrow *et al.* (2002) and Ajzen and Fishbein (2010) argued that to understand people's behaviour we should be aware of their motivations. Motivation is described by Alsharan *et al.* (2003) as a person's tendency to organize his behaviour, giving both direction and energy to what he does in response to changes within his environment in his continuous effort to meet his needs.

In many areas, the people who live in or near the forest have little power in the forest management decisions compared to other stakeholders. Where local people's power deficit does exist, it may adversely affect

the forest, since the people will not have the means with which to protect their resources (Colfer *et al.*, 1995; Barber *et al.*, 1994).

Research problem and questions: The multiple benefits and services provided by forest resources had attracted a variety of stakeholders' categories. During previous years, numerous efforts had been adopted for stakeholders' involvement in forest resources management in the Gedaref State and elsewhere. However, these initiatives were not evaluated. With this background, the study looks into the following research questions:

- Who are the stakeholders involved in management of forest resources?
- What is the perception of the stakeholders as concerns forests? And what are the implications of such perceptions?
- Why and when do stakeholders plant, protect and manage forest resources i.e. how are they motivated?

Research objectives: This study investigates the stakeholders concerning forest resources management in Gedaref State. The overall objective of this study is to look into the various stakeholders, their rights, perceptions and attitudes in order look into possibilities of enhancing their participation in development and management of forest resources.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Gedaref State of Sudan. Considering variations in nature of forests, ethnic composition, and land use systems; the following three villages were selected: Rawashda (from Rawashda area),

Table 1: Respondents' perception as to the main stakeholders

Stakeholder category	Rawashda	Tawareet	Kambo khamsa
FNC	1 ¹	5	1
Farmers	2	1	2
Nomads	3	3	3
Popular committee	5	2	4
Guards	8	9	6
Forest committee	0	4	5
Contracted farmers	4	0	0
Gum collectors	6	0	0
Fuelwood merchants	7	0	0
Woman union	0	6	0
Youth union	0	7	0
Carpenters	0	8	0

¹: Numbers show the stakeholders' preference

Table 2: Respondents' perceptions of forests and forest management

Stakeholders' perceptions	Rawashda	Tawareet	Kambo khamsa
Forests are valuable and useful resources	1	1	1
Forest management systems are good	2	3	2
Forest policies and laws are effective	3	2	3

Table 3: Respondents' attitudes toward forest management activities

Stakeholders' attitudes	Rawashda	Tawareet	Kambo khamsa
Tree planting is one of the 1 activities that makes our future more secure		1	1
Trees needed for personal requirements	2	2	2
Tree growing conserve soil and reduce wind and water erosion	3	4	6
Villages need more trees	4	3	3
Interested in growing trees in farms	5	6	4
Tree planting is a source of income	6	5	5
Trees do not compete with crops	7	7	7
Agreed to plant trees even if they attract birds, pests and rodents	8	8	8

Tawareet (from Doka area) and Kambo Khamsa (from Gadambalyia area).

Data was collected from two main categories of informants: the officials and the villagers. The selection of the officials was based on 'purposive sampling' technique whereas, selection of the villagers' category was based on the snowball technique and theoretical saturation point theory (Suleiman, 1996). In which any group of people from a stakeholder category was randomly selected. Then, using the snowball technique the group members were asked to list out other members (key informants) concerning the forest resources as they perceived. Those lists constituted the sampling frame from which a random sample of 20% of each category was selected, with a total number of 137 villagers.

A variety of methods and techniques were used during the data collection process. These included:

- Literature and archive reviews for collection of secondary data
- Unstructured interviews: using flexible checklist and open discussions with the key informants. The aim was to collect baseline information
- Structured interview: using a questionnaire that was designed to collect information at the village level
- Observation: together with other tools, it constituted a main instrument that facilitated the data reliability judgment

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stakeholder categories: The study revealed that the nature of multiple benefits provided by forests had attracted several social groups. As shown in Table 1, government and some local groups have found interest in the study area due to the socio-economic and environmental benefits. Local people groups' strong relationship with forests and their complete dependence on these resources in their daily life had led them to be recognized as the principal stakeholders. However, among institutions the Forests National Corporation (FNC) was particularly recognized by most of the respondents, whereas other government institutions were not recognized as stakeholders in the study area. Moreover, respondents subdivided the local people's category as being composed of the following groups: traditional farmers, nomads, the popular committees, the forest committees, contract farmers and gum collectors, youth union, fuel-wood merchants, women's union, guards and carpenters.

Stakeholders' perceptions of forests and forest management: Table 2 indicated that rural people in the study area perceived forests as valuable and useful resources as they provide a range of goods and services. This positive perception is consistent with Abu sin and El Sammani (1986), who reported a growing awareness as concerns the role of forest resources as sources of grazing, domestic needs and income.

Forest management systems were also perceived as good tools which contributed to conservation of the forests resources. Moreover, respondents believed that forest polices and laws were effective.

Results in Table 3 revealed that respondents in the study area are developing positive attitudes towards tree planting. They are of the opinion that tree growing will contribute to meeting their basic needs, soil conservation and erosion control. Hence, villagers expressed the need for more trees. Moreover, villagers were well aware of the importance of trees for protection of the environment and increasing of crops' productivity. Likewise, they believe tree growing could be a sound income generating activity.

Table 4: Respondents' perceptions concerning their rights from forests

Stakeholders' rights	Rawashda	Tawareet	Kambo Khamsa
Grazing	3	1	1
Dry wood collection	1	2	0
Building materials collection	2	3	0
Crops & gum production	4	0	0

Table 5: Respondents' opinions concerning appropriate institutional arrangement for sustainable forest management

Stakeholders' opinions	Rawashda	Tawareet	Kambo khamsa
FNC alone	2	4	2
FNC + local people	1	2	1
FNC + local people + local institutions	5	3	0
All stakeholders	3	0	0
Local people alone	4	1	0

Consequently villagers highly appreciated the idea of planting trees in their farms. Furthermore and despite the notion that trees attract birds, pests and rodents and compete with crops, respondents opted for their introduction.

Stakeholders' rights as concerns forest resources: As indicated in Table 4, the right to grazing was mentioned at the top, followed by fuel wood and building materials. Moreover, some people practiced rights to cropping and gum collection. In general, villagers perform these rights through both free and controlled access.

It is evident from the results that, there is a clear recognition of rights of the local communities. However, more efforts should be made to increase forest-dependent villagers' access to forest products through sustainable forest management. Official arrangement providing access encourages villagers to plant trees and use forest in sustainable manner and giving villagers legal rights of access might improve their autonomy and decision-making power. Otherwise, the neighboring forests would be attacked and could be seriously damaged.

Stakeholders' perception as concerns appropriate institutional arrangement for sustainable forests management:

The study showed that the responsibility of managing forest resources should be shared between the Forest National Corporation (FNC) and the local people. It was clear from Table 5 that respondents from the three locations would prefer to include FNC as a partner, thus clarifying a notable change in villagers' attitudes towards the FNC. Moreover, it was clear that the suspicious attitude that FNC will take their land and produce was over. The incorporation of FNC was perceived by some people as a measure of sustainability rather than to be left to local people alone.

This new conviction of positive attitudes should receive higher attention from forestry extension and build upon it for further development of new programmes that address local people's needs, perceptions and attitudes related to sustainable management of forest resources.

Table 6: Respondents' suggestions to improve forest management

Stakeholders' suggestions	Rawashda	Tawareet	Kambo khamsa
Prevent illicit felling of trees	1	1	3
Protection	3	2	2
A void illegal grazing	5	3	1
Tree planting	2	4	4
fires control	4	0	0
People involvement in management	0	0	5

Nonetheless, augmenting villagers and officials' positive attitudes through training, education and provision of appropriate institutional and organizational structure is of prime importance for fostering stakeholders' participation and promotion of community forestry (FAO, 1987; Adawi, 1992; Kobbail, 1996).

Stakeholders' suggestions to improve forests management: Several suggestions to improve forests management practices in the study area were contemplated by the respondents. The following were among the more frequently mentioned suggestions as indicated in Table 6:

- Prevention of illicit felling of trees
- Avoidance of illegal grazing
- Planting more trees
- Involvement of local people in forest management

In addition, the officials' categories portrayed further suggestions that included: provision of funds, training, allocation of land for social forestry activities and simplification of social forests' registration process.

Discussions during the fieldwork revealed that the long-term interaction with forests has enabled the local people to acquire valuable traditional knowledge and accumulate precious experiences. Such experiences have helped greatly in the provision of advice and solutions to forest management problems encountered elsewhere (Colfer *et al.*, 1995; Elhassan, 2000).

CONCLUSION

- The character of the benefits and services availed by forests attracted a variety of stakeholder categories. However, local people groups and FNC were identified as the principal stakeholders.
- The initiatives of involving local people in forestry programmes in the study area motivated stakeholders to develop positive perceptions and attitudes towards forest resources and forestry authorities. This was evident from the way they perceived existing management systems and forests legislations.
- It is evident that there is a clear recognition of rights of the local communities. However, official arrangement that gives forest-dependent villagers legal rights of access might improve their autonomy.

Otherwise, the neighboring forests would be attacked and could be seriously damaged.

- The study showed that the responsibility of managing forest resources should be shared between the FNC and the local people. The incorporation of FNC was perceived by some people as a measure of sustainability rather than to be left to local people alone.

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