

Summary

Forest tenure insecurity and weak government forest management institutions are two of the key underlying drivers of deforestation in Ethiopia. PFM has been introduced mainly to fill these two critical gaps. PFM organizes local communities into various forms of local institutions that sign Forest Management Agreements (FMA) with government agencies. These agreements highlight the rights and responsibilities of the two parties. However, these agreements are subject to challenges and there is widespread infringement on the 'forest rights' of PFM communities. This is blamed on the lack of formalized title to forestland and the forest. Given the high demand for land from a growing population and from investors, letting PFM communities go without strong tenure security, such as collective registration and certification for the forestland under their management, will seriously undermine the prospects for PFM helping achieve sustainable forest management and maintenance of the forests. This brief presents the perception of PFM communities organized by NTEFP-PFM Project of the South-West Forest and Landscape Grouping (SWFLG) in Gesha Woreda, Kaffa Zone of SNNPRS that recently received collective forestland certificates, a rare experience among PFM communities in Ethiopia. Based on the experience from the Gesha, the policy implication of their experience for the entire PFM process in Ethiopia is presented.

Forest tenure insecurity and deforestation

Forests and woodlands used to cover considerable areas in Ethiopia. However, most of the original cover, particularly the high forests, has been converted to other land uses. The few blocks of forest left today are mainly in the less populated and historically isolated south-western and south-eastern parts of the country. Poorly defined and enforced forest property rights are among the key underlying drivers of deforestation in Ethiopia. Forest property rights are part of a larger set of institutions (constitutions, judicial system, culture, religion, etc.). In Ethiopia, land and natural resources, including most natural forests, are constitutionally the property of the state and the public. The State claims the responsibility for administering and managing most forests. Local communities are formally alienated from owning or participating in management and use of these "state forest" resources. The State, however, has failed to put in place effective institutions (regulatory frameworks plus organizations) to properly administer and manage the forests. This institutional vacuum has created an "open access" situation where the 'tragedy of the commons' has been played out.

While farmers are often harassed, and charged as 'illegal and forest destroyers' by state bodies when extracting essential forest products like firewood and construction materials for home consumption from 'state forest', they are given relatively secure usufruct right over farmland converted illegally from the same forests. This makes individuals, who live nearby the forest, unable to see a future in maintaining the forests and the opportunities for sustainable use.

Deforestation and conversion to farmland provides opportunities for immediate gain from cropping, as well as providing secure land rights, and ample forest products in the short term – due to deforestation, and ownership of the remaining trees on the new farmlands. The uncertainty in forest tenure also means that there is always a danger that outsiders, such as investors, will, sooner or later, come and take the 'unused state land' – which is the way forests are usually described in Ethiopia.



Plate 1: Farmland expansion in south-west Ethiopia, a problem of tenure insecurity and other drivers

PFM as a scheme to address forest tenure problems

PFM has been introduced and promoted in Ethiopia to rectify forest tenure problems, and to eliminate the 'open access situation'. PFM is a forest management system whereby local communities are voluntarily organized into some form of community-based organizations (CBOs) that enters into a Forest Management Agreement (FMA) with the State. This agreement will specify the rights, responsibilities, and benefits for the communities, and the State. It is a system of transferring forest management responsibility from a government body to local communities that have daily contact with the forest. Although the FMA specifies forest use rights for communities, these are often very restricted, and this is due to the restrictive nature of government forest policy. In return for these limited use rights, PFM communities are managing the forest and regulating their own uses from the resource, as well as controlling of the expansion of farming while excluding outsiders. In this way deforestation and forest degradation are slowing down, forest regeneration is increasing, forest conditions are improving, and overall efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of forest governance are emerging.

PFM is proving itself as a potent approach to contribute to improved management of the remaining forest areas in Ethiopia. Since its introduction to Ethiopia in mid 1990s, close to 2.5 million ha of remnant natural forests in the country have been brought under one or other forms of PFM and their management condition improved. Through its two PFM projects (NTFPs-PFM and WCC-PFM), the South-West Forest and Landscape Grouping (SWFLG), the major NGO working on PFM in the southwest, has put close to 100,000 ha moist afro-montane forests (Plate 2) under PFM in three western zones (Kaffa, Sheka and Bench Maji) of SNNPRS. A group of local farmers from Sheka zone described the potential of PFM in forest conservation as follows: 'we have seen at least three different political regimes in Ethiopia over the last 50-60 years: the imperial, Derg and EPRDF. These three powerful governments failed to stop deforestation and ensure sustainable forest management. That is why our forests have shrunk significantly over the past several decades. For us it is very interesting and impressive to observe the success of local communities on things where governments have failed. The power of engaging local communities in forest management, given our experience in Sheka, must not be overlooked anytime or anywhere'



Plate 2: Forest managed through PFM in south-west Ethiopia facilitated by South-West Forests and Landscapes Grouping.

But PFM communities need better tenure security

Despite the success so far, PFM faces critical gaps to fully achieve its potential for sustainable forest management in Ethiopia. PFM CBOs operate under the provisional FMAs signed with government agencies, and these agreements are not only provisional, but are formally known as a 'special contract' under the Civil Code. The problem with this code is that the government has a prerogative to modify or revoke the contract at any time with or without prior consent of the community. In other words the contract is not binding and the PFM communities are liable to dispossession and eviction. Therefore, there have been widespread infringements of the 'forest rights' of PFM communities by law enforcing and justice organs. Forest tenure insecurity is still a problem to be addressed in PFM in Ethiopia. Common threats include the tendency of powerful investors to encroach on PFM managed forest, destruction of PFM forest for road construction without compensation, failure of courts to penalize offenders against FMA regulations etc. Although it has become well recognized that the FMAs are not sufficient to warrant legal entitlement, PFM communities have been encouraged to continue to trust in PFM with the expectation of future improvement in their tenure status. However, if these problems are not addressed soon, the optimism in PFM, as a way to achieve sustainable forest management, will fade.



Plate 3: PFM communities in Sheko briefing a visiting EU delegation (the main sponsor of PFM in Ethiopia) on their forest management practices and the challenges facing their efforts.

Towards a solution

One means to address this situation is to introduce collective forestland registration and certification, as recommended in a recent national PFM gap analysis report (Anonymous, 2011). This is also inline with the government's reform for land tenure security. The success of the reform in spurring better land management and investment in farmland (Deininger et al., 2009) clearly demonstrates the importance of tenure security. However, the exclusion of PFM managed forests from registration makes the programme and government's effort towards sustainable rural development not only incomplete but also forest unfriendly.

For PFM communities having their forests registered and certified is probably the only way to have documentary proof of their rights and so warrant investment of their time and energy in managing it.

This is the only way to prevent land grabbing. It also helps government authorities to know which land is already occupied and which land is available for allocation. Even in the case of legitimate appropriation by government authorities, such as when building new roads or town expansion, the certificate ensures the community a right to compensation. In view of the above, there is no doubt that communal land registration is essential and crucial to sustain PFM processes in Ethiopia and release their potential for sustainable forest management.

Communal forestland certification in Gesha: perception and assessment by PFMA participants

The first practice of collective forestland certification ever in Ethiopia has taken place in GeshaWoreda of KaffaZone, SNNPRS where SWFLG is implementing NTFP-PFM project. This experience can be claimed as a milestone in PFM history of the country. About 7575.6 ha of forest managed by 17 Got level PFM Groups (branches of the Wereda Participatory Forest Management Association) have been certified as communal forest and issued a group certificate. (Plate 4).



Plate 4: Example of forestland certification for PFMA in GeshaWoreda, Kaffa Zone.

AyeneWmekonnen, GeshaWoreda PFM facilitator, says “As far as I know group forestland certification has not occurred before. Institutions such as schools, churches and others receive institutional certificates for lands they are using. We discussed with all concerned government bodies to extend similar certification to the PFM forest as the PFMA and its branchPFMGs had acquired legal status.

I now see that the issuance of the certificate has created a strong ownership feeling among the local communities. It was a big success both for the forest and the communities. I can say it is the anchoring step to sustaining the long standing customary and positive people-forest relationship”.

He said people in Gesha used to have strong customary forest management institutions. However, due to the absence of legal recognition, the long standing positive human-forest relationship was eroding and forest degradation expanding. Now the collective forestland certification will not only preserve the forest but also restore and strengthen the bio-culture of the society.

Mr. KetselawBogale, Gesha PFMA member, says the forestland certificate distinguishes clearly between two types of ownership feeling: ‘our forest’ vs ‘my forest’. “In the past when the forest was open access for everybody used to call it ‘our forest’, but now when part of the forest is demarcated and specified group of households are defined as owners, it becomes ‘my forest’ for those identified in the certificate, while for others it becomes “their forest.” Another PFMA member, MengistuMamo, describes the certification as having two implications: First it avoids ambiguity on who owns the forest, and second it introduces responsibility and accountability. It imparts sense of responsibility to conserve, manage and use the forest properly. Hence, owners should protect it against intrusion from outside and from their own irresponsible and unregulated uses.

Policy implications and recommendations

PFM in Ethiopia has proved to be the best available method today for sustainable forest management. The contribution of PFM in fact is much more than just for forest management but includes the improvement of the financial, social and human capitals; hence broad rural development. Nonetheless, PFM has not fully achieved its potential due mainly to institutional constraints. First of all, most state agencies have little trust in PFM and in local communities, despite the near 20 years of PFM experience. They still favour the traditional ‘conservationist’ approach to maintain the forests. Consequently, they are unwilling to give better forest rights and tenure security to communities. The experience in Gesha clearly shows how to offer better tenure security through collective forestland certification. This will encourage and justify greater investment of time and energy by communities in forest management. However, even with the positive experience from Gesha there are still important gaps tofill in order to realize the true potential of PFM in forest conservation in Ethiopia. These are:

1. more rights, particularly rights over individual indigenous trees in the forest to encourage planting of such trees,
2. better coordination of government agencies and between government and communities through the PFM Associations, and
3. piloting of sustainable forest management with active silvicultural practices by communities.

References

Deininger, K., D.A. Ali, S. Holden, and J. Zevenbergen. Forthcoming 2009. "Rural Land Certification in Ethiopia: Process, Initial Impact, and Implications for Other African Countries," *World Development*.

Anonymous, 2011. Participatory Forest Management (PFM) Experiences in Ethiopia: lessons for up scaling; MoA; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Briefing Notes (produced or in preparation)

1. Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Forest Management in South-West Ethiopia
2. Collective Forest Land Certification: a milestone for tenure security and sustainable PFM in Ethiopia
3. PFM Institutional Development: experiences from the NTFP-PFM Project
4. Bamboo Forest Restoration through PFM: experiences from Masha
5. Economic Assessment of the Costs of Deforestation in South-West Ethiopia
6. Forest Policy Development : engaging PFM with the policy process in SNNPRS
7. Evolving Interpretation of Participatory Forest Management in South-West Ethiopia
8. Forest-Based Enterprise Development: comparative experience of cooperatives and PLCs
9. Land use change in the highlands of south-west Ethiopia, 1973-2012
10. The *Korerima* Value Chain: enhancing the value of forest products
11. Competitive and Sustainable Forests: making forests pay their way in south-west Ethiopia

South-West Forests and Landscapes Grouping

This grouping brings together three partners who have been working in this part of Ethiopia for more than 12 years: University of Huddersfield, Ethio-Wetlands and Natural Resources Association and Sustainable Livelihood Action. They have recognised the need for serious attention to be given to the forests and forested landscapes of the south-west highlands of Ethiopia. At present the grouping has two other projects in this area besides the NTFP-PFM Project. These are:

Wild Coffee Conservation by Participatory Forest Management Project (WCC-PFM) led by the University of Huddersfield with contributions from EWNRA and SLA and funding from the European Union and the Horn of African Regional Environment Centre and Network.

REDD+ Participatory Forest Management in South-West Ethiopia (REPAFMA-SW Ethiopia) led by Ethio-Wetlands and Natural Resources Association in association with the Development Fund of Norway with contributions from SLA and UoH, and funding from NORAD.

NTFP-PFM Project Summary

The "Non-Timber Forest Products – Participatory Forest Management (NTFP-PFM) Research and Development Project in South-west Ethiopia" started in July 2003. Its first phase ran until July 2007 and a second phase, for six years, will continue until mid 2013.

The project has a "research and development" orientation, in which it combines an integrated technical approach to the sustainable use and management of forest resources with a participatory and gender/equity sensitive strategy for improved rural livelihoods.

The project tries to explore and disseminate successful ways of applying Participatory Forest Management in Ethiopia so that forests can pay their way and become viable and competitive land uses which are sustainably managed by rural communities. This involves policy support, PFM institutional development, forest enterprise development and the economically viable marketing of forest products

Through the direct involvement of government institutions and communities in project implementation and the dissemination of project findings, the project aims to ensure the sustainability of its initiatives and their scaling up.

Project Funding Agencies



European Union, Environment Budget



Royal Netherlands Embassy, Ethiopia



Royal Norwegian Embassy, Ethiopia

Project Partners



The University of Huddersfield: With 18 years experience of field research, project management and consultancy / advisory work on natural resources in Ethiopia.



Ethio-Wetlands and Natural Resources Association: The first Ethiopian NGO to focus on forest and wetland issues. It has worked with most of the donors in the country and has run projects in three of the country's eight rural regions.



Sustainable Livelihood Action: A European Economic Interest Grouping which focuses on capacity building to support local NGOs and organisations in developing countries. Its staff have over 25 years of experience in Africa, Asia and Latin America.



Southern Nations, Nationalities & Peoples Regional State

For further details see: www.hud.ac.uk/wetlandsandforests/