



**MAKERERE UNIVERSITY**  
FACULTY OF FORESTRY AND NATURE CONSERVATION  
UGANDA FORESTRY RESOURCES AND INSTITUTIONS CENTER

P.O. Box 7062 Kampala; Tel: 256-41-543204, 543647/8

Mobile: 077-441-993; Email: ufric@starcom.co.ug



**The relationship between rural livelihoods and the condition of forests in Uganda**

**A Policy Brief**

**May 2002**

**Copyright © 2002 by UFRIC. All rights reserved**

Rural livelihood in Uganda has been analyzed in terms of access to land and natural resources in general and forests in particular. Degradation of forests or deforestation may be linked to efforts by members of the rural communities to achieve better or improve on their livelihood. Land is considered by farmers, politicians, developers, and academia, as the key resource for rural development and poverty eradication. If poverty is to be reduced by the year 2015 (FAO 2001), then access to land by the poor must be guaranteed. How this is to be achieved varies from country to country. What is common in all cases is that the rural poor especially women must be empowered to make decisions concerning the resources they use. Yet in most cases the issue of access to land remain unresolved largely due to failure to implement land reforms. There are suggestions that decentralisation could assist in solving the issue of access to land.

Under the decentralisation statute of 1987 and the local government Act of 1997, some forest reserves in Uganda have been privatised while for others their management has been deconcentrated to local communities. Deconcentration of certain forest reserves has not yet worked well because there is evidence to show that most poor rural households who do not have access to sufficient arable land will illegally access forest reserves for food production.

For example, Nabanoga and Gombya-Ssembajjwe, 2001 reported that 20% of households in communities surrounding one of the deconcentrated Buttobuvuma Forest Reserve were encroaching on it for cropping as a result of insufficient arable land holdings and lack of alternative livelihood.

Land combined with other variable inputs and assets provide beneficiary households with a source of income. Although, it is not the only way to eradicate rural poverty, empirical studies from China, Chile, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, India, the Philippines, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe have shown evidence of the positive role access to land contributes to household income (Hoddinott, Haddad and Mukherjee (2001) cited in de Janvry, *et al.* (2001). However, it is important to note that who has access to land in the household also affects welfare outcome. For example, studies by Haddad, Hoddinott, and Alderman (1997); Quisumbing and Maluccio (1999); and Agarwal (1994) as quoted in de Janvry, *et al.* (2001) showed that when access to land is controlled by women, they get empowered within the household, on labour market and in local political life; child welfare in terms of nutrition, health, and education also improves. Access to land serves as a component in an income strategy based on a portfolio of activities that include wage labour and self-employment. Forestry is one of the major land use activities in the country and households with



limited access to arable land but surrounded with forest resources, have to seek alternative sources of income from the forests e.g. timber process, charcoal burning and brick burning.

In Uganda, forests cover an area of about 4.9 million hectares or 24% of the total land area. Open forests or woodlands constitute about 81% and tropical high forests about 19%. The ownership of forests fall under two institutional arrangements, with about 70% of the forested land under private institutional arrangement and about 30% is under government institutional arrangement. Of the government reserves, half is being managed by the Forest Department and the other half by Uganda Wildlife Authority (Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, 2001). Open forest is the dominant forest type on private land. The main commercial value of open forests is charcoal production.

Government-owned forests in Uganda are either nature reserves or productive reserves. The first category of forests is for environment/nature protection and is not officially used for exploitation of timber. The second category is managed for timber production. Communities living in the area surrounding the government forest reserves do not have formal rights of access to harvest forest products from these forests. Planting agricultural crops is strictly prohibited. Harvesting of live wood for charcoal, timber, firewood for commercial sale is restricted. In the forests managed for timber production, the Forest Department decides when it wishes to harvest timber and then contracts with commercial firms or individuals as a means of gaining income for the national government.

Private forests may be communally owned for cultural use, but form a very small percentage (less 5%) of private forests. Their sizes range from a single tree bush to about 10 hectares, but on average they are less than 0.5 of a hectare. Private forests for exploitation may be owned by a single individuals or families, or institutions. They vary in size from about 1 hectare to about 500 hectares, but on average they are 5–10 hectares. The owner may determine whether local

residents may make claims to their traditional rights to use a forest for gathering firewood, crafts making materials and herbs for subsistence. For communal forests, local communities make major decisions concerning the access to a forest that individuals may or may not exercise. They are mainly small-sized forests used for religious/cultural purposes. Extraction of forest products for commercial purposes is often forbidden.

The government of Uganda has put in place a new Land Act of 1998 in order to address the issues of land accessibility and productivity. It includes the terms and conditions under which land resources are owned, accessed, managed and transferred. There is also a provision for the security of occupancy on land for lawful or bonafide<sup>1</sup> occupants of registered land. Such occupants are now statutory tenants of the registered owner(s), and pay a ground rent of Shs.5,000 (approx. \$3) every year, irrespective of the size of the land.

The government has also put in place a new Forest Policy of 2001, with the goal of creating "An integrated forest sector that achieves sustainable increases in economic, social and environmental benefits from forests and trees by all the people of Uganda, especially the poor and vulnerable". The goal sets the stage for three pillars of forest sector development, namely: poverty eradication; economic development; and sustainable forest resource management. For the first time the Forest Policy has not placed the emphasis only on government protected forests but also on forests outside the protected areas.

<sup>1</sup> A bona fide occupant has been defined as having being one of three different categories: a) a person who occupied land which lawfully belonged to another person, but which the occupant occupied and utilised or developed, genuinely believing that no registered owner or agent of the registered owner was available from which the occupant could obtain consent to occupy or utilise or develop the land; b) a person who occupied and utilised or developed the land unchallenged by the registered owner or agent of the registered owner for twelve years or more; and c) a person who has been settled on the land by the government or agent of the government which may include a local authority.



Also, in an effort to bring forestry sector in line with the government policy of decentralization, the Forest Department is encouraging devolution (collaborative forest management) of some central reserves, while completely degraded central forest reserves near urban centres have been privatized (leased to individuals to establish either fuelwood or timber woodlots).

In Uganda poverty is defined in terms of lack of income and material assets; absence of social support; disempowerment and vulnerability. Poverty is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon, the perception of which varies with geographical location, type of settlement, age, gender, and existing levels of service and infrastructure. In the 2001 Forest Policy the following groups of people; the landless, widows, women heads of households, orphans and abandoned children, the chronically sick, the elderly, the unemployed youth, internally displaced persons and refugees, minority ethnic groups and indigenous forest dwellers, small-scale farmers and cattle-keepers in draught prone areas, fishermen and women, the urban poor, and the terminally ill, are identified as the poorest and most vulnerable. The majority of these poor and vulnerable also depend on forests for survival.

To address the issues of natural resource use and management there is a need for systematically collecting and analyzing data about the physical resources themselves and the communities using such resources. In the case of forestry resources, this task is undertaken by the International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI) Research Programme.

Two hypotheses were tested, a) limited access to agriculture land is a major factor to deforestation, and b) households with adequate agricultural land have better livelihood.

When households have enough agricultural land, they are able to feed on own food and the stem count per ha was found to increase ( $r = 0.22$ ). The implication is that the households will be having

adequate food security and so there is no need to secure food security through harvesting of forest products. However, the stems count per ha. appear to decrease as the number of households with enough agricultural land increases ( $r = -0.35$ ). This could be explained by clearing of more private forests for cropping. The state forests could also be encroached on for the same purpose. Also as population size increased stems count per ha. decreased ( $r = -0.33$ ), an indication of more forested land being cleared for cropping or harvesting of woody forest products or both in an effort to improve on their livelihoods.

In Uganda about 90% of the population live in rural areas, with peasant farming on smallholdings as the main economic activity. About 44% of the entire country's population live below poverty line. These figures could be even higher for settlements around forested areas, as previous studies have shown that land is limited, capital is insufficient, and family labour is relatively scarce for such communities. Much of the IFRI data indicates the importance of access to agricultural land on rural livelihoods. For example, as households' access to agricultural land increase, households' incomes increase too ( $r = 0.21$ ) an indication of improved livelihood. But as household income increase more forest products are extracted from the forests ( $r = 0.41$ ) indicating that high income does not reduce harvesting of forest products. This supports the hypothesis that as rural household incomes improve, there is a move from subsistence to commercial harvesting.

Although women are not empowered, female headed households access the forests more ( $r = 0.61$ ) than male headed households ( $r = 0.21$ ), as they have a higher dependency ( $r = 0.53$ ) on forests products than male headed households ( $r = 0.13$ ). Usually women harvest for subsistence livelihood, while men harvest for commercial purpose.

Policy suggestions emerging from the studies indicate that: 1. Agriculture is a major factor causing deforestation. This could have serious consequences for the management of natural private



forests as well as the participatory community forest management strategies proposed in the New Forest Policy. 2. Attempts to improve on households' incomes through agriculture might not lead to a reduced harvesting of forest products, but rather an increase in forest degradation. 3. Women highly depend on harvesting of forest products for their livelihood, and so ought to be empowered in decision making process concerning management of forests.

As a way forward, we are seeking answers to some other policy questions. Such as, how can forestry contribute to poverty eradication in rural areas? How can the monetary value of degraded natural forests be restored?

What contribution do forest foods and medicine make to rural households' food security and health? How much forested land is being lost to agriculture? What is the impact of the privatization of natural forest reserves on the livelihoods of the politically and economically weak members of the settlements?

The authors, W. S. Gombya-Ssembajjwe, A.Y. Banana, S.B. Tumwebaze and J. Bahati.

Interested readers can obtain a full paper from Associate Professor W. S. Gombya-Ssembajjwe, Faculty of Forestry and Nature Conservation, Makerere University, P. O. Box 7062, Kampala Uganda (Email: [ufric@starcom.co.ug](mailto:ufric@starcom.co.ug)).

**About IFRI:** The IFRI Research Programme provides a way for researchers to collect, store and analyze data over time about forests and the settlements using them. It can be used to (a) conduct baseline studies; (b) measure change over time in forest condition in local governance structures and socio-economic status of forest users; and (c) share information with pertinent and interested researchers, resource managers, policy makers, through publication of papers, books and policy briefs.

For more information about IFRI contact the authors or visit <http://www.ufric.co.ug>

### Acknowledgement

The authors are very grateful for the financial support from Ford Foundation, which has enabled them to systematically collect IFRI data in Uganda over the past five years. We are also grateful to the Forest Department, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Private Forest owners and the residents of the settlements around the studied forests for the good working relationship with them. Last but not least our gratitude goes to the entire UFRIC team for the good spirit of team-work.

### Reference:

- A.de Janvry, G. Gordillo, J.P. Platteau, and E. Sadoulet (2001). Access to land, rural poverty and public action. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- FAO (2001) How can Forestry reduce poverty? FAO, Rome.
- Ministry and Water, Land, and Environment (2001). The Forest Policy, Kampala, Uganda.
- G.N. Nabanoga and W.S. Gombya-Ssembajjwe (2001). The effect of household endowments and entitlements on sustainability of natural forests. *The International Forestry Review* 3(1) 34-41.