Community-based forest management within the context of institutional decentralization: challenges and opportunities in upper Songwe river basin

Kayonko Juma

Master of Science (Natural Resources Assessment and Management

University of Dar es Salaam. College of Natural and Applied Sciences, 2008

This study was undertaken to assess community-based forest management (CBFM) within the context of institutional decentralized: challenges and opportunities in upper Songwe River basin (USRB). The results contribute to the understanding of the needs for sound forest management in USRB where anthropogenic catchment damage has caused severe erosion and downstream siltation into Lake Nyasa/Malawi. Satellite image interpretation was used to establish land use and cover change in USRB. Information on the dynamics of forest management was obtained through interviews and focus group discussions. Satellite usage interpretation revealed substantial degradation and decline of natural forests in the USRB, from 3*564ha in 1991 to 2,252ha in 2004, due to agricultural and settlement expansion. Lack of effective forest management plans, mismatch between ecological and administrative boundaries, and wrecked inheritance of traditional environmental knowledge and practices caused by change in population composition and characteristics poses extended challenges for the establishment of formal CBFM. Opportunities are rather rare but perceived future ecological and socioeconomic benefits revealed a significant relationship (j£=33.913, df=18, a=0.05) with the support of formal CBFM of the remaining natural forests in the USRB. Such findings go in front of the conclusion that the scaling up of CBFM will depend not only on a supportive policy and legislative environment, but also on suitable socioeconomic conditions embedded in the history of forest management of a given community. Sustainable CBFM interventions ought to go with the development of additional income-generating community- based projects so as to improve the socioeconomic well-being of the people while at the same time reducing pressure to allow the recovery of the natural forest ecosystem in the USRB.