

Assessment of experience gained in collaborative management of a protected area: Mount Elgon National Park, Uganda

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SUMMARY

This case study looks at the application of community forestry principles to the management of a protected area, Mount Elgon National Park in Uganda. Collaborative forest management began in Mount Elgon National Park in 1996 with the support of the Mount Elgon Conservation and Development Project and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), which had been working with Mount Elgon National Park and other partner institutions since 1988. The project was started in response to widespread degradation of the (then) Mount Elgon Forest Reserve in the 1970s and 1980s during the period of war and instability in Uganda. Over 25 000 ha of the forest reserve were heavily degraded through encroachment for agriculture and there was widespread uncontrolled use of a wide range of forest resources.

Collaborative management was proposed as an approach for dealing with the management problems of the forest reserve in 1993. When the reserve was converted to a national park in 1993, the new management authority (the Uganda Wildlife Authority) accepted this proposal and supported the piloting of collaborative management in two parishes. Two collaborative management agreements were negotiated during 1994 and 1995 and signed in 1996. Since then, work has continued to review and revise these agreements and to expand them to other areas around the park. This experience has provided a range of lessons about the implementation of collaborative forest management in a protected area. These include lessons about institutional arrangements, investigation and negotiation processes, community structures and administrative arrangements, and training and capacity-building needs of the implementing institutions.



Identification of the case study

The case study is based in and around Mount Elgon National Park in eastern Uganda. It reviews efforts by the Mount Elgon Conservation and Development Project and its partners to develop and implement collaborative management arrangements for involving local communities in the use and management of Mount Elgon National Park and associated natural resources.

Status of the forest resource

The Mount Elgon Conservation and Development Project was developed in response to threats to the Mount Elgon ecosystem through agricultural encroachment and illegal resource exploitation resulting from a wide range of factors including political instability in the 1970s and 1980s, lack of financial resources in the Forestry Department, insecurity of the population due to cattle raiding, population expansion in the area, declining land productivity and various socio-economic factors.

Phase I (1988-1990) of the project was primarily a pilot phase that concentrated on inventory and planning for natural resource management. Phase II (1990-1994) concentrated on a range of strategies to conserve the Mount Elgon ecosystem and promote rural development in the communities dependent on the resources of Mount Elgon. Emphasis was placed on the development of agricultural extension programmes, environmental education, establishment of a planted park boundary and support for law enforcement within the national park. A transition phase (1994-July 1996) following Phase II started to explore ways of involving local communities in sharing the benefits of, and management responsibilities for, Mount Elgon National Park.

Phase III (July 1996-June 2000) of the project aims to build on the earlier phases, but to put greater emphasis on linking the conservation and sustainable development components. The project supports the Uganda Wildlife Authority in developing collaborative management arrangements whereby communities surrounding the park are involved in management decisions concerning



Collaborative management activities around Mount Elgon

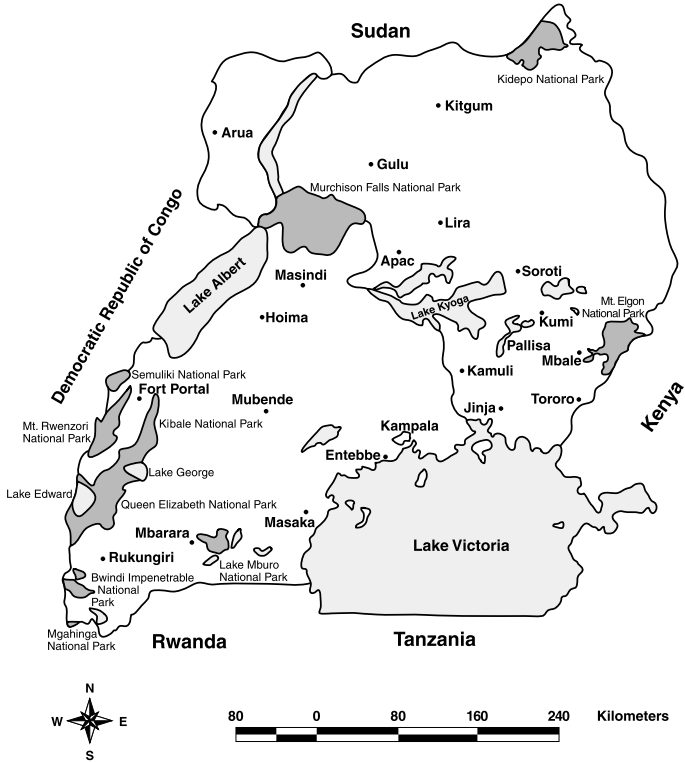
the park and are able to use its resources in an environmentally sustainable way. Emphasis is placed on training local staff and on linking collaborative management arrangements with out-of-park sustainable development extension programmes aimed at providing alternatives for local people to the use of resources from the park.

Pressures leading to the development of collaborative management approaches for Mount Elgon National Park included:

- an ongoing community need for resources supplied by the park and a recognition that the promotion of rural development (e.g. improved agricultural production) would not on its own necessarily reduce pressure on the park's resources;
- a lack of capacity within the Uganda Wildlife Authority for protecting the park through a law enforcement approach; and
- the hope that such approaches might help find common ground in resolving the conflicts between the management authority and local communities over access to forest resources, and would lead to a positive response from local communities to the need for conservation.

Failure to address the problems of unsustainable resource use and conflict between the park and people living around it would have resulted in continuing damage to the Mount Elgon ecosystem and loss or degradation of important community resources.

MAP 1 • Mount Elgon National Park, Uganda (national setting)



The community forestry process

The development of collaborative management ideas and approaches in Mount Elgon National Park has coincided with the gradual development of related approaches in other parks in Uganda and with discussion and evolution of ideas at policy level within the Uganda Wildlife Authority generally. At the time the negotiations leading to the agreements in Mount Elgon National Park began, there was no clear definition of collaborative management or concept of how it would be developed and implemented. A similar situation was evident in the Forestry Department, which was the management authority for Mount Elgon Forest Reserve when the process started (Hoefsloot, 1997).

An external project evaluation in 1993 examined the sustainable agricultural development activities being supported by the project and the protection and conservation activities within the park, and concluded that linkages between the two were poor and needed strengthening. A collaborative management approach was proposed with the aim of exploring opportunities to involve local people in natural resource management and make use of their dependence on the forest as a basis for maintaining their interest in its conservation. At the same time, efforts were instituted to target sustainable development extension programmes more effectively to people using the park's resources.

The process of developing a collaborative management approach started in 1993. Experience with community forestry and joint forest management in Nepal and India, which sought to exchange rights of use for responsibility to manage, was considered an appropriate starting point. However, as there was no clear idea of the appropriate institutional arrangements to allow for that sharing of authority and responsibility for the Mount Elgon situation, a piloting approach was instituted "to define the approach in a process-oriented manner involving all stakeholders at all stages" (Hoefsloot, 1997).

An assessment of forest resource use was undertaken in six parishes adjoining the park in 1993/94 (Scott, 1994). A report was produced outlining the findings for each of the parishes studied together with recommendations for future action. In 1995 two of the parishes studied, Mutushet Parish in Kapchorwa District and Ulukusi Parish in Mbale District, were selected for further devel-

opment of the pilot agreements as being representative examples of the range of resource use and social issues around the park. The process used to discuss and negotiate the agreements in the two pilot parishes was as follows (Hoefsloot, 1997).

- 1 Initial community meetings in villages bordering the park were organized by the park staff together with the local agricultural extension officer and the local parish chairperson. From these meetings it was decided that each village in the parish would elect a few representatives to sit on a forest management committee and negotiate on behalf of the community.
 - 2 After the election of the forest management committees, a negotiation team was formed for each of the pilot parishes, led by the IUCN Technical Adviser and including two agricultural and forestry extension staff, the park ranger responsible for the area and a senior park warden. A series of meetings was held with the forest management committees to negotiate agreed access by local people to forest resources. A second series of meetings was held to discuss roles and responsibilities and control of access to the forest.
- The aim of the negotiation team was first to facilitate agreement on the least sensitive issues. This would be followed by further discussion and negotiation on more controversial issues in later meetings.
- 3 A first draft of the agreement was drawn up by the negotiating team and presented to the Uganda Wildlife Authority (then Uganda National Parks) headquarters for comment. Comments and approval took some time as there was a lack of confidence within the organization about removing direct control of resource use from park staff and about making decisions in such a new area. Some of the issues raised required policy decisions and were referred to the Board of Trustees for approval.
 - 4 A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Executive Director of the Uganda Wildlife Authority and the forest management committee representing the community for each of the agreements in January 1996, one and a half years after the process of negotiations had been initiated.

During the negotiations the Mount Elgon Conservation and Development Project staff acted as intermediaries to facilitate discussion between the park managers and the forest management committee.

The impact of community forestry on the conservation of the area

The pilot agreements were signed between the Uganda Wildlife Authority (represented by the Executive Director) and a forest management committee representing the community at parish level (the second lowest level of local government). Under the terms of the agreement, control over access to resources became the responsibility of the forest management committee and subcommittees set up for each trail leading into the forest. The park ranger's role is to undertake awareness raising on conservation values, assist in monitoring of resource use and take legal action where necessary. Rangers are not to arrest illegal resource users in the first instance, but should refer them to the forest management committee.

The agreement allows unrestricted use of some forest resources (collection of mushrooms, fuelwood, wild vegetables, fodder, circumcison sticks) and the use of others on a restricted or seasonal basis (collection of bamboo shoots, medicinal plants, *matoke* stakes and wild honey, and setting beehives). It was agreed to ban pit-sawing, charcoal burning, hunting, pole harvesting and agriculture.

Reviews since the agreements came into operation have shown that they have resulted in significant improvements in relations between the local communities and the park authorities in the pilot parishes, and improved control of resource use. Examples include a complete halt to grazing in formerly encroached areas, a decline in charcoal burning from the forests near the pilot parishes and no further agricultural encroachment in the pilot parishes. Resource use committees have regular meetings to discuss park issues in relation to people's access, and are undertaking some public awareness activities concerning the rights of local people and responsible use of the park.

However, a number of issues remain unresolved, indicating a need to refine the process of developing collaborative management agreements further. For example:

- the communities are not yet fully aware of their rights and responsibilities concerning the use and management of the park's resources. This appears to relate

to both the process used to negotiate the agreements and to the limited communication between the resource use committee and the community generally about the agreements;

- there is continued debate about use of some of the resources banned under the agreements (e.g. grazing in the grasslands of Kapchorwa, bamboo smoking and collection of building poles);
- the collaborative management arrangements have not provided solutions to the problem of animals from the park destroying crops and gardens of people living nearby;
- the resource use committees feel that the signed agreements have not given them enough power to take disciplinary action against violators of the agreement. They feel demoralized when violators are reported to the local council but no effective action is taken; and
- conflict sometimes arises over the control of resource use by the committees, especially with people from outside the pilot parishes who use resources from the same area of the forest.

These issues are being dealt with in revisions of the agreements currently being undertaken.

In addition to resulting in two pilot agreements, the experience gained at Mount Elgon contributed to the development of collaborative management policy in the Uganda Wildlife Authority. A task force on collaborative management for the Uganda Wildlife Authority, commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities and given technical support by IUCN, visited Mount Elgon to review and evaluate lessons learned from the pilot process. Members of the pilot forest management committees and staff of the project and Mount Elgon National Park contributed to workshops held by the task force.

At a policy and legislative level, the pilot agreements represented a significant step for the Uganda Wildlife Authority. Prior to 1996, national parks in Uganda were managed under the National Parks Act, which barred access by communities to park resources. From 1993, when the Uganda Wildlife Authority was formed, new policies and legislation for protected area management began to be developed. Although collaborative manage-

ment is not mentioned specifically in the new Uganda Wildlife Authority Statute (1996), it is broadly catered for under a number of sections, allowing the Executive Director to enter into collaborative arrangements with any person for "the management of a protected area or a portion of the protected area." The collaborative management task force concluded that collaborative management could fall under this provision until the statute is revised and more specific provision can be included.

Despite considerable ongoing debate within the organization about whether collaborative management approaches are valid for protected area management, the fact that the agreements were negotiated and signed, and are having some positive impacts, has provided an important learning opportunity.

Recommendations for the promotion of community forestry

Mount Elgon National Park is unlikely in the short to medium term to generate sufficient revenue to provide significant revenue-sharing opportunities to compensate local people for restricted access to park resources. The two pilot collaborative management agreements in Ulukusi and Mutushet parishes are primarily resource-sharing agreements, with the terms and conditions largely set by park managers. Although clear benefits for both the park and the community have already been obtained through negotiating these agreements, the problems still existing indicate that work is required to develop the approach further for expansion to other areas.

Similarly, law enforcement or protection approaches have been shown to be inequitable and of limited effectiveness in Mount Elgon National Park, as in many other protected areas around the world that are large, have high levels of resource use by local people, and limited financial and human resources and capacity within the managing authority.

The project and the park authorities are thus now working to develop further a collaborative management approach that attempts to make use of the opportunities for sharing benefits from the park, involving local people

in management decision making and assisting them to develop alternatives to reliance on the park's resources. This approach recognizes that an exploratory or action-learning approach is necessary to develop collaborative management arrangements, and that the experiences to date are part of this process.

The pilot agreements satisfy part of the requirements for collaborative management arrangements in that they provide for mechanisms to compensate local people for the costs of conservation through access and use of resources from the park. They also provide security of access to these resources through a written agreement with the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The agreements are weak, however, in providing "a strong element of local power, expressed as a genuine local involvement in decision making, including planning and ongoing management", suggested by Fisher (1995) to be an important component of successful collaborative management arrangements. Although the negotiation process involved the forest management committee, many resource users were excluded from the discussions and many of the agreement provisions were set by what the Uganda Wildlife Authority would accept, rather than being a result of devolving decision-making authority to the community.

Thus a lesson learned from the pilot agreements to date is that it is critical that the Uganda Wildlife Authority accept and endorse such an approach and provide an enabling environment to support its field staff in developing the details of the approach at park level. Although enabling policy already exists, clear commitment to the development of pilot agreements where park managers are empowered to negotiate agreements based on local needs and management systems, rather than on existing practices, is needed. Through its institutional linkages at local and national levels the project can play a constructive role in supporting the further development of this commitment in cooperation with all stakeholders. However, it has also been agreed that it is important for the park managers to take the lead in negotiating the agreements (rather than the project, as in the initial pilot phase), in order to build a sense of ownership of the process by the park authorities and commitment to it.

Another key lesson is that collaborative management arrangements that focus more closely on the actual forest users are likely to provide more equitable community involvement and more workable agreements. Although

parishes are established local institutions and can contribute to local decision making and control of resource use, parish boundaries are unsuitable for determining who should be party to a collaborative management agreement as they exclude some users and include others who have no real interest in the negotiations. Involving village-level councils and identifying primary resource users and their use areas have been identified as crucial to the next stage of developing collaborative management approaches for Mount Elgon National Park. This process is currently under way in the two original pilot parishes and in an additional eight parishes around the park. Linkages to local council systems at various levels up to district level will remain important for conflict resolution, problem solving and to assist local committees in dealing with people who infringe the agreements.

In addition, it has been realized that there is a need to take advantage of any opportunities where elements of collaborative management approaches can be used to deal with issues of urgent community concern, just as there is a need to respond to pressure to extend collaborative management arrangements immediately to cover all communities around the park. Mount Elgon National Park has a boundary of over 210 km in length and is bordered by 62 parishes, each with between 10 and 20 villages. With the limited resources available it is not possible to enter into negotiations with all these communities at the same time, which leads to problems of raised expectations and differing management approaches between neighbouring communities. To overcome this problem efforts are being made to develop simple agreements quickly and to cover a wider area to enable communities to benefit from at least some easily negotiated resource use, such as the use and management of the planted boundary trees around the park. These can be incorporated into more comprehensive collaborative management agreements as they are developed over time. Efforts are also being made to improve coordination between the law enforcement and collaborative management approaches used by the park, and to train law enforcement rangers to become involved in, and fully understand the negotiation of, collaborative management agreements.

Conclusion

Collaborative management approaches for the management of Mount Elgon National Park are still relatively new. Initial efforts in the two pilot parishes are promising in that relationships and cooperation between the park managers and the community have improved, despite a number of shortcomings in the approaches used to develop the pilot agreements. The lessons learned from the pilot stage are now being incorporated into revised and expanded pilot agreements. These new agreements are expected to solve many of the current problems.

In the context of continuing conflict with communities surrounding the park, and the inability of park managers to solve the problem through law enforcement approaches, a genuine shift towards collaborative management is a necessary and pragmatic means of achieving improved conservation of park resources while satisfying community needs.

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