



Local government accountability

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ACRONYMS

ADC	Area Development Committee
BERDO	Bwanje Rural Development Organization
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CBO	Community Based Organization
COMPASS	Community Partnership for Sustainable Natural Resource Management
DA	District Assembly
DADO	District Agricultural Development Office
DFID	Department for International Development
DC	District Commissioner
DDF	District Development Fund
DEC	District Executive Committee
DESC	District Environmental Subcommittee
DFO	District Forest Office
FDMF	Forest Development Management Fund
GVH	Group Village Headman
GVDC	Group Village Development Committee
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IGA	Income Generating Activity
IMF	International Monetary Fund
FGLG	Forestry Governance Learning Group
LGA	Local Government Authority
MAFE	Malawi Agroforestry Project
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MEET	Malawi Environmental Endowment Fund
MMCT	Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NFP	National Forestry Programme
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NTFP	Non-timber Forestry Products
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SLF	Sustainable Livelihood Framework
TA	Traditional Authority
VDC	Village Development Committee
VFA	Village Forest Area
VNRMC	Village Natural Resource Management Committee
WESM	Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi
WVI	World vision International

Summary

This power tool describes ways to partner the rural poor to bring local government authorities to account. It is written for change in rural locations. It raises community expectations about the quality of local governance and describes a set of steps to install improvements. It flags the important role that communities can have in improving their own situation. The aim of this power tool is to stimulate the poor to participate in policy formulation and implementation processes. The tool is designed to stimulate supply-side push for improved service delivery together with demand-side pull driven by mobilized communities of the forest dependent poor. The tool is basically a means of raising expectations about the quality of governance that is being provided.

INTRODUCTION

What is the "Local government accountability" tool?

The "Local government accountability" tool is a strategic process of *heating up* local communities - a way of increasing their awareness of and expectations for local government authorities. We have designed this tool from work with forest dependent communities and forest authorities – but its basic steps are more widely applicable. The tool is used in situations of decentralization where new powers have been delegated without adequate thought to the roles, responsibilities and capacities of the authorities at local level. Traditions of centralized power often leave marginalized rural communities without any expectation of influence over the policies and institutions that affect their day-to-day lives. Low expectations can leave communities of the poor disengaged from the policy process. During the decentralization process new opportunities exist for re-engagement. Mobilization of the poor is essential if newly empowered local authorities are to be challenged and held accountable for delivery improved governance. This tool describes two vital ingredients for this mobilization process:

- (i) A set of five expectations about what local governance should involve and
- (ii) A series of demand-driven steps to bring it about.

In our Malawian forestry governance example, the five main sets of expectation include:

Expectation 1 - Greater involvement in local forest governance. Communities need not be passive recipients of centralized thinking. They can play a role as active customers of improved services.

- Use community meetings, participatory resource assessment and the establishment of credible village level structures to build awareness.

Expectation 2 - Strong leadership for forest governance. Key individuals should not be able to avoid their responsibilities to improve community life. Demand clear leaders with agreed roles and responsibilities.

- Call for performance standards, access to reporting and frequent opportunities to express community concerns.

Expectation 3 – Clear strategies for resource use. Don't accept inaccessible or muddled plans.

- Demand transparency and clear links between community concerns and field activities. Ensure that communities have access and can make inputs to local strategies, implementations plans and monitoring processes.

Expectation 4 – Sufficient technical and financial resources. Political promises should count for something – so use them to your advantage.

- Lobby for published local financial information based on stated policies. Fight to reorientation government bodies away from enforcement towards service.

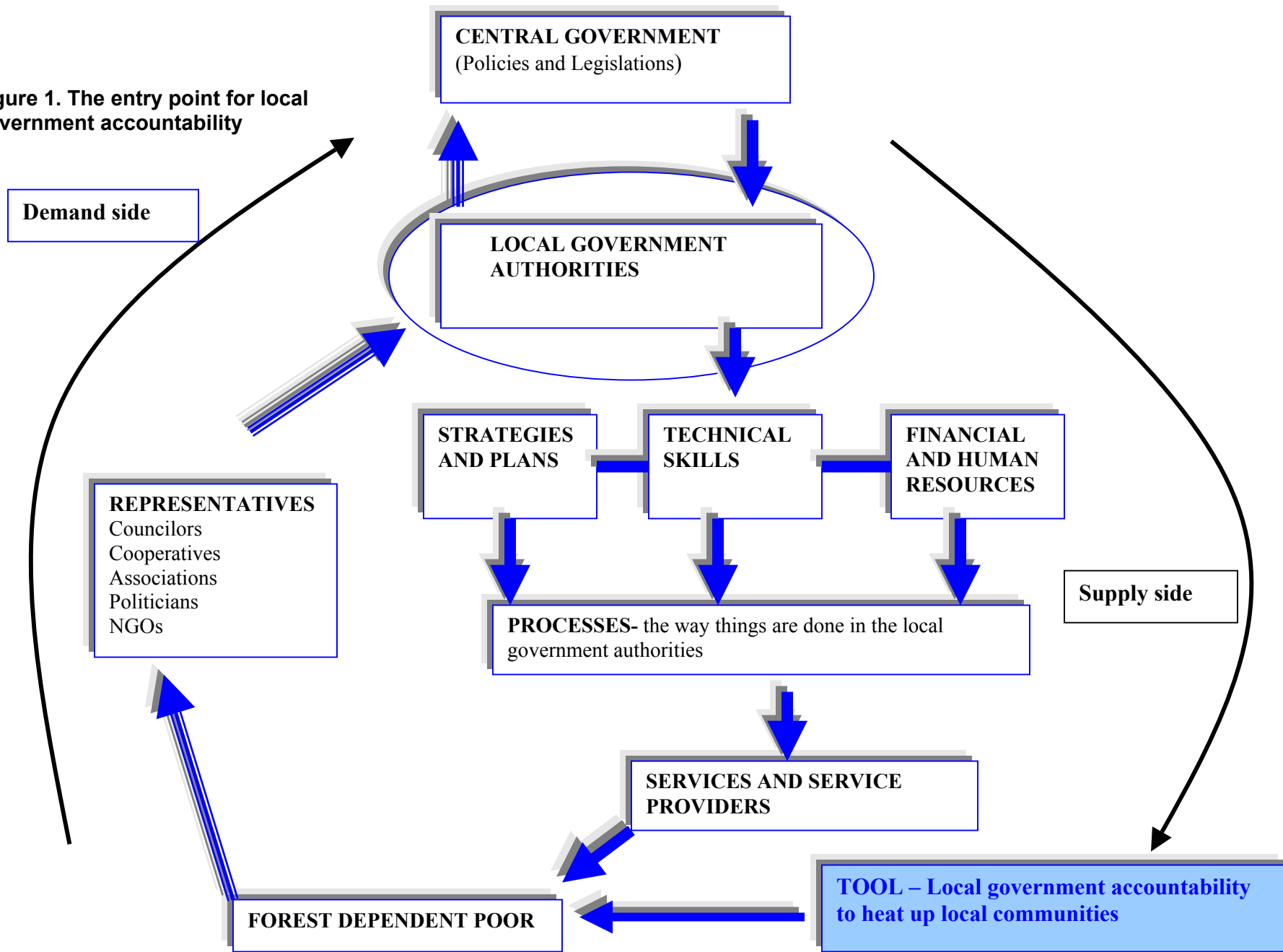
Expectation 5 – High quality service provision. Words should mean something in practice.

- Set up a regular process to check delivery against stated roles and resources.

Forest dependent people require a lot of support and capacity building in order to participate in the policy formulation and decision-making processes. There is a lot of work that the various institutions at local level have to do in order to empower the communities. Empowered people demand quality services from the government and other service providers like NGOs. This power tool provides a clear framework that can be used to raise community expectations and channel their attention towards practical steps that might improve the situation. It constitutes a community hearing process that local representatives, NGOs and government authorities can use to raise performance levels.

It is recognized that this tool is only one (albeit important) approach to making local forest governance work. It finds its place in the interaction between the forest dependent poor and the immediate forest decision makers and practitioners responsible for local forest governance (see Figure 1)

Figure 1. The entry point for local government accountability



Why is “Local government accountability” tool necessary for the marginalized forest dependent poor?

A recent study on forest governance carried out in five districts in Malawi revealed a number of challenges that are affecting forest management in the country during a much publicized decentralization process (Kafakoma et al, 2004). On one hand, the study revealed that the local government authorities have not put in place clear mechanisms for ensuring quality services provisions to the forest dependent people. On the other side the forest dependent people are not satisfied with the services provided by the local government authorities and mechanisms are not clear for allowing forest dependent people to hold accountable or demand service from the local government. It was also not clear who makes which decisions regarding forest governance at local government level.

In view of these findings, the study team is proposing a tool that would assist the local government authorities and forest practitioners to monitor and strengthen forest governance activities in the districts at the same time allow the forest dependent people participate in the policy formulation and implementation process. Figure 1 above presents the whole organization picture for improved forest governance from which the process steps of the tool has been developed.

What stages does the “Local government accountability” tool involve?

Before outlining stages towards accountable governance – it is important to define what good governance is. Macqueen and Bila (2004) define good forest governance as ‘the informed and faithful representation by decision makers (both inside and outside government) of their constituency interests towards the efficient allocation and use of scarce forest resources for both the international, national and local good. The idea of faithful or accountable representation is key.

Sibale and Banda (2004) use an IIED definition to define forest governance to mean decisions and actions that remove barriers and install the policy and institutional systems, which spread local forest success. Sibale and Banda concluded that governance should be understood in broadest context not as actions and decisions of government only but also of other stakeholders such as NGOs, church, civil society organizations and the private sector organizations as well.

We agree with the two definitions but we add that forest governance also means having effective and functional institutions with adequate structures and processes of how the decisions and actions are made and implemented. Ensuring that these institutional structures and processes function accountably is the aim of this tool.

Based on the definitions above, we focus on what will make local government authorities tick to ensure quality service provision to the forest dependent people or poor (supply side). But our tool aims to show primarily how the forest dependent people can demand services as well as influence policy processes at central government level (demand side).

EXPECTATION 1. GREATER COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL FOREST GOVERNANCE

Studies in Malawi by Kafakoma et. al. (2004) and Sibale et.al. (2004) reveal that the awareness on forestry and natural resource management (NRM) policies, acts and other frameworks by the forest dependent people is very limited. It also clearly showed that community are not aware of their rights and mandates, roles and responsibilities over forestry resources policy formulation and management.

A crucial step is therefore to raise awareness and create demand to participate in the policy decision-making process. Communities must demand quality services from various service providers. Our tool must ignite the forest dependent people and motivate them to take action. It must facilitate the community's understanding of their situation, rationales for management of the forestry resources, and their roles and responsibilities over the forestry resources management.

Greater awareness helps to shed light on their situation and the linkage that exist between the forest resources and food security (agriculture, water), socio-cultural issues (gule wamkulu, chinamwali, rituals-nsembe), economic issues-income generating, gender, poverty and HIV/AIDS issues etc. This step also helps the community to understand the Forestry Policy and Acts, how they link with other NRM policies, about their rights, roles and responsibilities over forestry policy and management. It is during this step where communities are informed of how forest resources impact on people's day-to-day life and the importance of working as a group.

What to be done to strengthen community awareness?

Step 1.1. Create awareness about control and use of forest resources

Awareness creation often requires an outsider to wake-up insiders – suggesting that their situation is not inevitable, but can be improved. Service providers available in that community can be approached to coordinate and collaborate in creating awareness and mobilizing the community about sustainable management of forestry resources. This includes Government, NGOs, church organizations, training institutions through outreach programmes, etc. The leading stakeholder may often be some forestry development worker in that community.

From the Kamwamba and BERDO cases studies (See Annex 1), local leaders have an important role to play in any development activities. There are many ways of raising awareness amongst the villagers. Service providers can package the messages in order to captivate attention and interest from the targets or audience. For example, radio or village level meetings are possible ways of introducing new ideas. In other cases, schools, religious occasions, funerals, role-plays, political meetings can also be vehicles that can be used to raise awareness about development issues in the village.

The key point is to identify and assess existing community/village level institutions working on forestry matters who can be used to facilitate the awareness process.

Awareness has to be built in a continuous manner. It takes time for people to be 'converted' or 'prompted' into action. There may be a flux of people who hear each attempt to communicate. There are also bound to be changes in the forestry issues,

policies, approaches, needs and interest. The awareness on forest matters should target everyone in the district or village. Based on experiences from BERDO in Bwanje, the awareness should target the influential people in the village. The rest of the other people will follow if the influential individuals have been converted by the messages.

Step 1.2. Carry out a participatory resource assessment

This step has been well documented in the Social Forestry Training and Extension Project (SFTEP) 2003 field manual number 2. The study by Kafakoma et.al. (2004) Demonstrated that forest dependent people would be interested to participate in managing a forest resource if they know what that particular resource can provide in relation to their needs and demands. Therefore the resources assessments assist to create the demand to sustainably manage the forest resource. It was observed in BERDO and Moyo Mayuni case studies in Ntcheu that the resource assessment assisted the forest dependent people to draw up their management plans, which were approved by the Forestry Department.

Simple steps for carrying out a participatory forest resource assessment process are outlined in eight phases below:

Phase	Process step
1	Preparation and training of field staff
2	Joint forest resource assessment
3	Planning for measurement of forest management units (FMUs)
4	Measurement of forest resources
5	Joint data processing
6	Joint data analysis
7	Feedback to wider community
8	Developing the management plan

1. Preparation for a participatory forest resource assessment (PFRA)

- Mobilize the communities. Local leaders announce the upcoming event and sets dates for that event.
- Assemble, brief and train the facilitators of the process. Equip the facilitators of the process with participatory skills in order to communicate appropriately with different stakeholders.
- Assemble secondary information of the area from villagers, government officers or people who have worked in the target area. These pieces of information can be maps, transects, research data and other pieces of information available.
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis of the area to know the relationships, conflicts and interests in the resource and people.
- Using the stakeholder analysis matrix, invite all the stakeholders to plan for the PFRA exercise.

Ensure that these steps are carried out before moving on to the next phases.

2. Joint resource assessment

- Conduct a forest resource assessment walk with the community members to create forest profiles.
- Facilitate participatory mapping of the forest area
- Develop a forest products/ forest use matrix

- Agree on practical sub-divisions of the forest area
- Provide group feedback on the information collected and discussed.

3. *Planning for measurement of forest management units*

- Develop a survey methodology. Locate sample plots based on the joint investigation walk of the forest area with the community.
- Determine how to measure different parameters such as size distribution of trees or product distribution for non-timber forest products. Devise a method to use to measure natural regeneration.
- Based on the resource person available plan the composition and organization of the survey team.

4. *Measurement of forest resources*

- Prepare the group. Divide the group into smaller groups and number of facilitator. Ask the villagers to form their own groups based on the gender as well as user groups. Distribute necessary materials to each group as prepared. Share roles and responsibilities.
- Set the sample plots. Establish the baseline and layout the first transect. Demonstrate the process of setting out the plots to the groups.
- Measure the sample plots
- Record all the information and secure it properly.

5. *Joint data processing*

- Agree with the groups the number and composition of group to analyze the data. Compile data collected by different groups from various sample plots
- Plot the data
- Facilitate interpretation of the plotted data to give meaning to the plotted graphs

6. *Joint analysis of the data collected*

- Facilitate a forest resource demand/supply discussion with the community. Ask people to confirm the value of species based on use. Then ask them about the availability, use and location in the forest area. Discuss the existence of indigenous or traditional rules and regulations of particular tree species. Investigate conflict resolution mechanisms, setting of by-laws and others.
- Do not rush this process because it forms one of the important steps to the development of community awareness and management planning.

7. *Feedback to the wider community*

- Organize meetings in villages if many villages share the forest resource. Invite all the stakeholders to these meeting to secure and develop consensus, ownership and collective action.
- Select people to present the assessment result to the wider community

8. *Developing the management plan*

- Develop detailed activity plan to implement the participatory forest management plan
- Develop a constitution for the village level institutions to ensure equitable and transparent management of resources
- Assist communities to develop project proposals for funding.

Step 1.3 Set up credible village level structures

It came out clearly from the two studies by Kafakoma et al. (2004) and Sibale et al. (2004) that most village forestry resource institutions are neither legally recognized, nor empowered to make decisions over forestry resources and to contribute to the forestry policy. As such their mandate over the forestry resources management is very limited and undermined by forest resource users. On one hand some villages have no organized structures to systematically plan and manage the forestry resources. On the other hand some villages have the structures - but the governance structures are so weak that they are not capable of systematically performing their duties. Their roles are not clear, they do not have effective leadership skills, and have no rules and procedures lay out to govern their institutions, and are not legally recognized.

After raising awareness within the community and mapping the resources it is important to set up trustworthy committees such Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMCs).

1. Organize village meetings through the local leaders where all the people in a village or area are asked to attend.
2. Assess existing institutions (can be done priori to the meetings).
3. Explain the purpose of the meeting and why it is important to establish or strengthen existing village level institutions responsible for forest management in the village or area.
4. Facilitate selection of people to be in the committee.
5. Ask people in the meeting to nominate the select people into various positions in the committees based on their understanding of the tasks involved and caliber of persons at their disposal.
6. Develop terms of reference and agree on the roles and responsibilities on running their committees and also on forest governance in the area or village.
7. Organize training for the committees, which will focus among others on leadership, communication, conflict resolution and others. (This is a continuous process).
8. Continuously monitor performance of the committees.
9. Assist the committees to develop a management plan of their forest area and simple regulations.
10. Let them agree on the benefit sharing and conflict resolution mechanisms.

This is a participatory process, which can be facilitated by any competent extension worker. The central purpose of establishing these credible community representative bodies is to start to make official demands to government authorities that cannot be easily dismissed.

EXPECTATION 2. STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP FOR FOREST GOVERNANCE

Since the Earth Summit in 1992 and the political transition from one party to multiparty politics in Malawi, there has been an increase in the number of organizations and individuals with stakes in governance – and the forest sector is no exception. Yet at the central level there is consensus that that the Forestry Department is the lead agency at central level on forest matters. Apart from being the lead agency in policy formulation, it

is also the lead agency in policy implementation. Over the years, the central government has revised the forest policy, Forest Act and produced the NFP as well as guidelines for community based forest management.

In contrast, at the local government authority level there are many players who have stakes in the forest sector. The need for a strong leadership to lead forest activities is consequently very important. Yet current decentralization process has limited financial, human and technical capacity to strengthen forest governance. It was noted in the study that the District Forest Offices (DFOs) have inadequate financial resources, have very few extension workers, are most of the times not mobile, they are not in control of their own sector, there are a lot of conflicts and power struggle between the forest staff and forest dependent people resulting into a lot of illegal activities. There are many organizations and individuals who have their interests in forest such as NGOs, private traders, companies, local government authorities, religious groups, community based organizations and other but the capacity of the DFOs to coordinate them is weak.

What to be done to strengthen leadership for forest governance?

Step 2.1 Demand clear leadership for forest governance

It is important to identify the leadership at local government level to lead in the decision-making. It is the role of the newly established village natural resource management committees (VNRMCs) to press for clarity with the help of the service providers who have helped to mobilize forest communities. In forestry, the District Forest Office is at least nominally the lead institution coordinating forestry matters. Under the decentralized local government structure, forestry matters fall under the Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Directorate.

The biggest challenge is how to convince the local government authorities to place forest issues high on their agenda. It is expected that once forest issues are prioritized at the local government level, the voice from the VNRMCs through the Forest Offices would easily be heard at the local as well as central government level. (In this directorate of Agriculture and Natural Resources there are two departments namely Natural resources where forest matter follows and agriculture where agricultural issues are handled).

Step 2.2 Agree roles and responsibilities

After defining the leadership, there is need for the leadership to understand community demands expressed through the VNRMCs alongside other expectations from the forest sector. Therefore the leadership should ground truth and document all organizations and their interests in forest including where they are operating, what they are doing, their target group, resources at their disposal and many other things that will enable the leader to understand the stakeholders. Having a directory of all the stakeholders and types of services they are providing to the forest dependent people would help the leader to coordinate and monitor their activities and even support them with technical advice.

The leadership and the various stakeholders need to meet and level their expectations in terms of service provision to the forest dependent people. If there are already developed performance standards, it is during these meetings that the leadership introduces those

performance standard for each of the stakeholders to follow as well as agree on what to do with none compliance.

This process is also necessary for the other organizations and forest dependent people. Simple process steps are outlined below:

1. As a leader of forest services, assess all the organizations and individuals operating in the forest sector. Understand their needs, expectations, gaps, strengths, weakness as well as areas of synergy or conflicts.
2. Organize a stakeholder meeting where all organizations, individuals, local representatives of the forest dependent people to discuss the assessment results
3. Based on the assessment develop a joint forest strategy for the district
4. Agree on roles and responsibilities as well as set performance indicators
5. Agree on sanction for compliance and noncompliance
6. Select a group of people from the forest dependent people and local level service providers such as NGOs and government department who are going to monitor compliance and non-compliance to set standards and indicators by all stakeholders.
7. Agree on a simple report mechanism to the local government assembly

Box 1. An example of how this has worked at community level:

BERDO (Bwanje Environmental Rural Development Organization (BERDO) started as a community based organization and has grown into a NGO by a public forestry extension worker. Realizing his initiatives and willingness to learn, the government and other NGOs including TSP trained this extension worker and others on various aspects of community mobilization, participation, resource assessment and many others. This extension worker became heated up and initiated a process of mobilizing the villagers in his area by raising awareness on the deforestation problems in the area. The awareness created a demand amongst people to do something about the problems. Villagers started meeting to discuss the problems and agree on alternative and solutions to their problems. Together they develop a strategy and agreed on roles, responsibilities as well as performance standards and indicators. Every month the various village level institutions meet to discuss progress of their work. The CBO has monitors who monitor the work against the agreed standards. Realizing their limitations to solve the various problems they identified, the communities with support from the forest extension workers approach various organizations such as government, NGOs and donors to support them with material, technical and financial resources.

Step 2.3 Demand performance standards

There is need for the VNRMCs to push or collaborate with local government to develop performance standards on the roles and responsibilities. Based on the agreed performance standards each party can hold can be in a position to monitor local forest governance. Based on the agreed performance standards the VNRMCs through their leadership and local leaders should be able to question service provision by the various stakeholders including themselves. Simple process steps to follow in developing standards are as follows:

1. Carry out an organizational assessment including the core-functional analysis of the directorate of Agriculture and Natural Resources as well as that of the local government authority if possible to surface organization issues. Consult various stakeholders and interest groups to get their impression and expectations on the performance of the decentralized forestry services
2. Based on the assessment develop a strategic plan for the directorate. Let the various interest groups and organizations at local level comment on the strategy as much as possible. This will refocus and reposition the directorate in the local government authority
3. The strategy for the directorate would input into the overall strategy for the local government authority.
4. Revise the roles and responsibilities of all workers (forestry staff) in the directorate
5. Develop and agree on the performance bench marks or indicators with staff in the directorate – base these on perceived best practice from existing work
6. Agree on the appraisal system and mechanism for evaluating performance of staff as well sanctions for satisfactory performance and nonperformance

Performance standards can improve transparency about what local government should be doing. Being explicit about what is expected can often also lead to innovative new processes being tried.

Step 2.4 Demand to see reports and information about local governance

Community representatives such as leaders of the VNRMCS have the right to see documentary evidence of decisions that are being taken about their resources. After documenting the various services provided by the various institutions and individuals to the forest dependent people, the leadership should organize stakeholder meetings whether quarterly or biannually to discuss various issues relating to service provision. Encourage all the organizations to document their activities and report during these stakeholder meetings. Stakeholder should be able to discuss the various approaches being used by organizations to provide services to the local people. During these meetings, the leadership should be in a position to present the government policies, legislations, programs or other necessary pieces of information from the central government or donors. The leadership should also make available necessary documentation on legislation and policies. Forest dependent people through their VNRMCS should be able to demand access and contribute to the decision making process and see documentary evidence of the decisions.

Box 2. Coordination and information sharing

When Malawi had over 1.3 million refugees from Mozambique, the government of Malawi and all the international and local NGOs set up what used to be called the JOC (Joint operations committee) to coordinate and oversee the refugee care and management service provision. Malawi Red Cross Society of Malawi was the coordinator of the JOC. Malawi Red Cross ensured that all organizations assisting refugees were invited to monthly meetings where each one of them was asked to report what it has achieved that month and what it is planning to do.

When the refugees were repatriated, CURE (Coordination Unit for Rehabilitation of the Environment) was established to coordinate the rehabilitation of the refugee impacted areas. Most of the rehabilitation involved tree planting, demolishing the huts, tilling the area where the refugee camps were and many other activities related to forest management. At a later stage, CURE's mandate evolved to coordinating all the NGO involved in environment and natural resources management activities in the country. CURE used to invite all organization and government to quarterly meetings where forest and other environmental activities were discussed and debated.

CURE made sure that the meetings are fully covered by the media houses and all the issues discussed were documented and circulated widely. As a coordinating organization, CURE made sure that all the issues agreed are followed up with the particular organizations that were tasked to undertake such a function. Out of these meeting task forces were formed to advocate or lobby government on issues including policies and legislation. Some of these task forces continue to function even today.

How can we ensure that reports and relevant pieces of information are produced and circulated to all stakeholders at local government level?

1. It is assumed here that when stakeholders agree on roles and responsibilities, they also agree to be sharing information on regular basis.
2. VNRMCS should press local forest government to organize stakeholders to monthly or quarterly forest meetings or forums at local government level to discuss various issues relating to service provision.
3. Invite representatives of the forest dependent people to make their presentations on how they see the service provision in their area.
4. Since forest governance issues are many, each meeting should focus on a particular theme for example functioning of VNRMCS.
5. Invite the media to cover the events so that even those who did not turn-up would hear or listen to what transpire during such meetings. This is to encourage other groups or organization to come and make their presentations as well.
6. Agree on the way forward on issues raised including non-performance or compliance to set standards.
7. Set task forces to follow-up on certain issues if need be and report progress during the next meeting.
8. Document and circulate the proceedings to all the stakeholders including the central government.
9. Leadership should follow-up on the issues agreed at each meeting. Visit all those organizations that do attend meetings and encourage them to attend.

Step 2.5 Demand an opportunity to have your concerns presented at local and national forest forums

VNRMCs have local concerns, but they may also wish to speak out for or against centralized issues. There is need for flow of information between the central and the local government and that community interests are included in this flow. Local leadership should ensure that people at the central level, local government authority and village level are fully informed of the events taking place at those levels. With continued flow of information between these levels, it is expected that people will be fully informed and therefore their activities will be based on the recent recommendations or proven experiences. The local level meetings would be meaningless if there is no action or movement. Below are some of the steps that have been used by the civil society organizations to ensure that their voice is heard at both local and central government level.

1. Prioritize issues that have arisen and have wide support at forest meetings and agree not only on what should be changed but who should change it.
2. Agree a strategy on how the message is going to be communicated to the intended groups or individuals.
3. Package the information so that it is well understood and present it
4. Present the information in the form of press release, report, newsletter, newspaper article and many other ways or seek audience with the relevant people like Parliamentarians, Principle Secretaries, or Local chiefs and present the concerns or issues.
5. Report back to the local level stakeholder on the progress made so far. In many cases in Malawi, task forces have been used to present issues to government or local leader in order to influence change.

Box 3. Use of forums to influence policy decisions

In 2000, the Ministry of Land, Physical Planning and surveys embarked on a land policy reform process with very minimal involvement of the civil society organizations. Through CURE (Coordination Unit for Rehabilitation of the Environment) a civil society forum was organized to discuss the land problems in Malawi. Local leaders, chiefs, NGOs, CBOs, parliamentarians, government policy makers and the donor community were invited to this forum. The meeting among other recommendations, agreed to set up a task force to lobby government to consult widely on the land policy reform process. The task force comprised chiefs and civil society organization members. The key targets of the advocacy campaign were the Ministry of Lands itself and the Parliamentary Committee on Environment and Agriculture. The task force used the media to raise their concerns, held round table discussions with the donor and government. CURE continues to organize quarterly meetings where the Land task force always made a presentation of progress of the task assigned to it. This can easily be replicated at district level where such task forces on particular forest governance issues could be organized to influence central and local government authorities.

EXPECTATION 3. CLEAR STRATEGIES FOR FOREST RESOURCE USE

There are many institutions at both village and district level that have interests on forest management. A study by Kafakoma et al. (2004) revealed that there are several government departments, NGOs, private companies as well as individuals who are involved in some activities that have a bearing on forest management. Most of the efforts by these organizations or institutions are not coordinated as a result there is duplication of efforts and conflicting approaches. Such disorganization is a breeding ground for corrupt practice.

Box 4. Pit sawing in Mulanje

*In one village after establishing a VNMRM, one well-to-do pit sawyer bribed a village headman who in turn allowed the pit sawyer to cut down *Khaya nyasica* trees along Ruo River. When the village committee discovered that it was the village headman who sold the trees to the pit sawyer, the VNRM collapsed.*

Local government is responsible for ensuring that complementary organizations have a well thought out, clearly articulated and shared strategy to direct the organization. This means that each local government authority need to define its own vision, mission, values and make sure that these fit with other peoples strategies. Good forest governance at local government level requires careful matching of skills and resources across many groups. The central government has put in place enabling instruments such as the policy, Act, NFP (National Forestry Program) as well as guidelines. These can different groups in similar directions. But there is a need to translate these instruments to suit the local situations at both village and district level

In the Malawi forest sector, at local government level, institutions for coordinating all the development activities have been put in place. The local government authorities have directorates of planning, development, finance, public works, environment, natural resources and agriculture. The District Executive Committee (DEC) is the technical body that reviews and discusses all development projects and makes technical recommendation for approval by the District Assembly. Below the District Assemblies, there are Area development Committees (ADCs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs) that coordinate development activities at area and village level. All the other key players such as NGOs, CBOs, churches and schools are coordinated through this structure. Within the VDCs, the Forest Act established the VNRMCs to coordinate natural resource management activities.

However, many village level structures lack coordination and in many cases are poorly trained. Their relationship with the forest extension staff is one of 'cat and mouse'. The VNRMCs and local leaders look at the forest extension workers as destroyers of forest resources. In many cases, the village level institutions have no say in district planning processes. The village level institutions are in many cases not functional and their linkage with the district and central level structures is not clear.

Conversely, at district level, there is no shared strategy and vision on improved forest governance – it does not have a high profile. Each organization that has stake in the forest sector therefore applies its own approach. The case in point is Malawi Social

Action Fund (MASAF)¹. MASAF's approach of giving out money to communities for planting trees goes against what most NGOs and government agencies are promoting – if they are promoting anything at all. Forest services are poorly funded and have limited quality technical expertise. The forest staff members tend to overemphasize tree-planting activities in their messages. It is a simple message but one that does not necessarily meet community needs. The reason that such approaches persist is that forest issues are usually last on the agenda when the district level structures like DEC are meeting. The various institutions are not coordinated and there are no agreed performance standards for forest service provision.

What can be done to make forest strategies clearer?

Step 3.1 Demand published copies of the district forest vision, mission and strategies

Local government authorities have so many stakeholders that it is impossible to keep an eye on what is going on in every area. VNRMCs need to act to access information on who is doing what in the district or their area. They need to ensure that District Forest Offices are aware of and ground truth the activities of all these stakeholders. In order to influence changes, mobilize the VNRMCs to effectively participate in the development of the Village Environmental Action Plans (VEAP)² and make sure that these plans are cross-referenced with District Environmental Action Plans (DEAP). Ensure that the lead agencies use village plans as a basis for the development of the district strategy.

Step 3.2 Demand to see implementation plans

Once a particular VNRMC has successfully mobilized a local planning effort efforts can be made to join forces across a district. The district strategy is like a master plan that has to be followed by everyone operating in a particular district or local government authority. Encourage all stakeholders to develop their own plans based on the agreed strategy. Each of these plans should be shared with the local government leadership and also with the VNRMC and circulated to all the stakeholders. The plans should include the monitoring plans and indicators, which conforms to the master strategic plan.

Some sectors such as forest has the NFP, which already spelt out the direction in terms of forest management, therefore the leadership should make available this document to all stakeholder and let them base their plans on this document.

Step 3.3 Demand the right to monitor the implementation of the plans

There is nobody better placed to monitor implementation at least of the local bits of these various planning processes than the VNRMC. They can provide constructive feedback to various forest-related organizations. Organize field trips to various

¹ Malawi Social Action Fund is a government of Malawi initiative that is been supported by the World Bank, which is focusing on alleviating poverty of the rural poor through several development activities such as rural infrastructure development and cash for work projects.

² In some districts, the local government facilitated a process of identifying 'hot spots' which are environmentally degraded areas. After these areas were identified, local people were mobilized to develop plans of action based on the problems they identified. This process formed a basis for the development of the district environmental action plans or district development plans.

organizations' project areas to monitor service provision and compliance to the agreed set performance standards. Encourage forest dependent people to provide feedback on how they feel about the various services being provided by a particular institution or individual and whether the services are meeting their expectations. Document the visits and share information to all the stakeholders at district level during the stakeholder meetings. Discipline or coach or stop any organization that is not performing to the expected standards.

EXPECTATION 3. MOBILISED TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Decentralization processes devolve functions to the local government authorities. Devolved units often have limited financial and human resources to support forest management activities. In Malawi, for example, it was noted that forest services are poorly funded and the district forest offices are receiving little technical support. In many cases there are very few forest extension workers to provide the necessary services to the forest dependent people. The revenue sharing mechanisms from forest resources between the central government and local government authorities is not clear.

In Malawi, the central government has devolved some of its functions to the assemblies. At the same time it has upgraded positions of senior officers at district level. In certain cases qualified staff members have been sent to the district from the central government. However, the majority of the positions in the local government authorities are not filled. This means that the quality of plans and decisions is also affected.

The central government has established the local government financing committee through which all money due to the local government authorities is channeled. The central government and donors are channeling financial resources through the district assemblies to support local level development activities. The local government authorities are also engaged in fund raising for their development activities. Some NGO are providing financial support to the communities through the local government authorities.

Unfortunately, the central government has not fully devolved the financial management responsibilities to the local government authorities. The Forestry Department for example still maintains the financial management responsibility. Yet it has devolved some of its functions to the local government authorities. The central government seems not to be ready to devolve the financial management responsibilities to the local government authorities for fear of losing power. Even though positions at local government level have been upgraded, many posts continue to be vacant because the posts are not attractive and people are not willing to move from the center to the local government authorities.

What can be done to mobilize more technical and financial resources?

Step 4.1 Demand published financial information from local government authority

It is amazing how effective it can be to publicize information about how much money is involved in different activities. Citizens of a particular district have a vested interest in knowing what technical and financial resources are flowing into their district. Therefore, in an effort to promote transparency and accountability, the leadership for forest governance should compile reports on money and present or circulate to all

stakeholders including VNRMCS. Service providers should be made to submit reports to the local government authority for circulation. This means that each department, NGO would submit and present financial reports during the stakeholder meetings organized in step 1.2 and 1.3. Compliance to standards by NGOs, government departments or CBOs should be checked against the amount of money utilized for particular activities. This will encourage transparency and accountability amongst the various organizations. The directors of finance at each local level should demand to scrutinize financial reports against the planned activities. (The National Local Government Finance Committee is already working on strengthening the financial flows and funding mechanisms of the local government authorities).

Box 5. Transparency and Accountability

During a forest symposium organized by Mzuzu University in September 2004, chiefs and other local leaders asked the NGOs to account for the money they spent on forest activities in the various districts in the country. This was an indication that people in the villages are suspicious of some organizations in terms of their activities and amount of financial resources spent on the same.

Step 4.2 Demand reorientation and recruitment of technical forestry staff with a service rather than enforcement mentality.

The community hearing process (Fig.2) aims at empowering the communities to be able to demand services from service providers. The new policies such the agriculture (and forest) extension policy in Malawi emphasizes strengthening the capacity of the farmers in order to create demand for services. However, without a professional and experienced forest or agricultural extension system, it is difficult to meet the demand from the farmers or forest dependent people. Local government should therefore reorient its forest staff and employ more workers geared to service delivery to the people. Such staff should be trained in participatory methods, conflict resolution, planning and other necessary areas. The central government should provide the necessary technical backup to the local government authorities.

EXPECTATION 5. HIGH QUALITY SERVICE PROVISION

A good mix of the two steps above would provide a strong drive to effectively improve local forest government accountability. But institutional processes or “how things are done in the institution” play a key role in determining their success. Systems and procedures lead either to success or failure of local government authorities to effectively provide services to the forest dependent communities. Effective implementation of the NFP largely depends on how well the implementation procedures and systems are followed. These systems and procedures could refer to:

- Communication systems
- Reporting procedures
- Conflict resolution procedures
- Values and norms of the organization
- Information management systems
- And many others

All these are referred to as processes that would support successful strengthening of forest governance at the local level.

The central government has elaborate procedures on how things should happen in the civil service. The NGOs too have their own procedures of how their organizations are going to be managed. All the reporting, conflict resolution, information management procedures are clearly laid out. One would say that the machinery is in place and everyone knows how things should be done in the organization in relation to service provision to the forest dependent people.

Box 6. Local level mechanisms

Kafakoma et.al (2004) revealed that in the Kamwamba project in Mwanza district, the local project steering committee established a clear system of running the project in terms of benefit sharing, reporting, conflict resolution and many others. It was observed in this project that the local steering committee plays a very big role in resolving conflicts but if they fail, conflicts are referred to the chiefs. The committee also established a system of rewards all those who are involved in the confiscating charcoal and other forest products at the Road Block. (Local project steering committee is an umbrella local level institution establishes to coordinate the activities of the project in the area. The project area covers many villages with a high number of VNRMS)

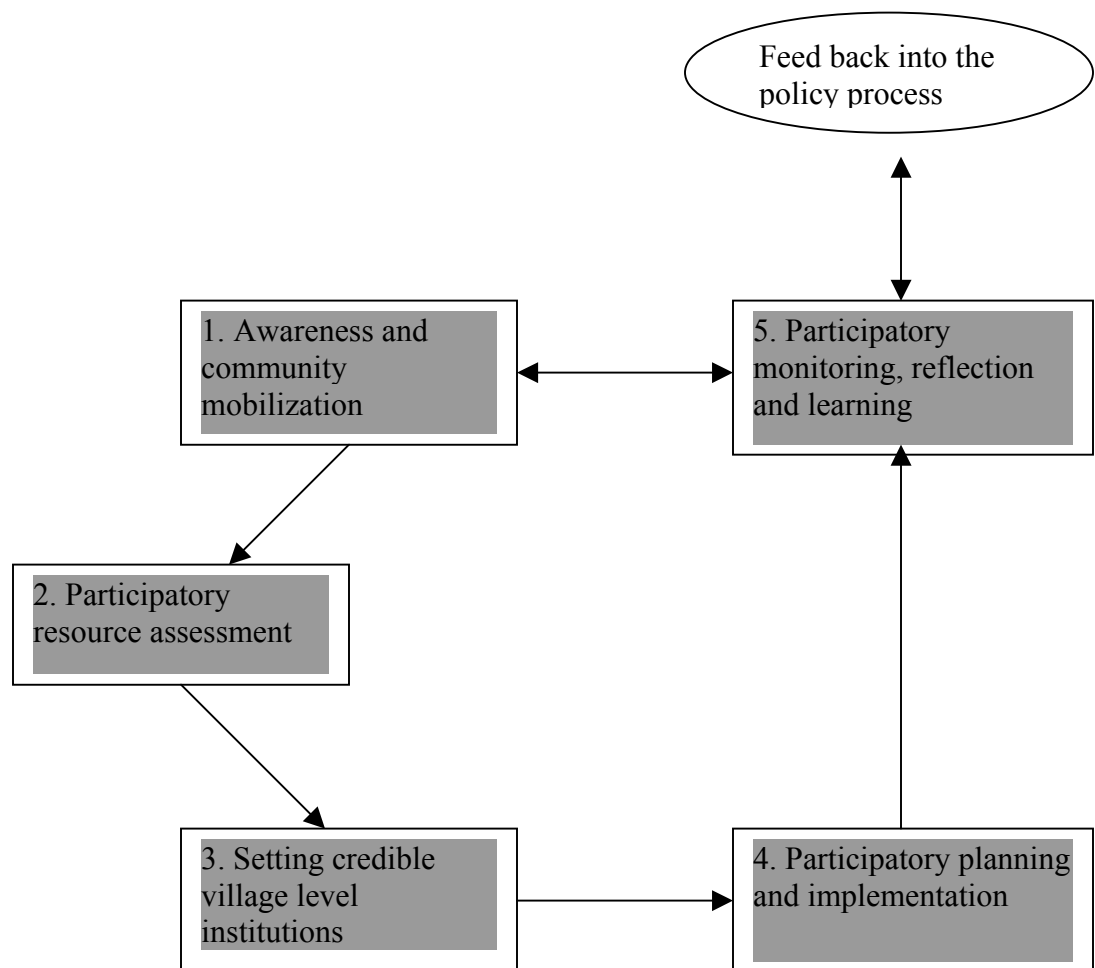
Weak points include the coordination and communication amongst various organizations providing forest services. This results in duplication of efforts. The two studies by Kafakoma et al (2004) and Sibale et al, (2004) reveal that the government extension system is not working effectively and there are a lot of illegal forest activities. The studies also revealed that there are always problems at local governmental level in relation to decision making on forest matters. The two studies also revealed that conflicts between local people and forest staff arose mainly from issues of access to and control of forest resources. For example forest dependent people said that they are not sure where to present their grievances if their forest workers or government worker is not

performing to their expectations or are involved in malpractices such as illegal forest activities.

What can be done to improve quality service provision?

Transparency and accountability are tricky issues to resolve in the forestry sector in the country. Forest dependent people feel that the forest staff members are more corrupt and are not transparent in the way they transact in the various forestry related deals. On the other side forest staff members point fingers at local people as the one that are not open, transparent and accountable as a result there is a lot of deforestation in the country (Kafakoma et.al 2004). A simple stepwise process has been developed to ensure that logical and transparent forest services are provided to the forest dependent people.

Figure 2: COMMUNITY HEATING PROCESS



Step 5.1 Participatory forestry management planning

Since the Forest Policy and Act were approved in 1996 and 1997 respectively, little progress has been achieved in assisting forest dependent people to develop plans for their forest areas. Without plans, people utilise their resources unstainably by liquidating most of the forest resources to meet the household basic needs. Absence of a clear plan, unclear defined roles and responsibilities as well as unclear benefit sharing mechanism between the local government authorities have contributed to the high rate of deforestation. In order to affirm commitment, accountability and transparency amongst the various stakeholders there is need to follow the simple steps outlined below.

Make sure all community members surrounding the targeted forest resources area like; local leaders-village heads, Traditional Authorities, Councilors, Politicians as well as service providers and other stakeholders participate in the planning so as to define and agree on roles, responsibilities, identify linkages, agree on modalities of operations and resources and benefit sharing mechanisms.

How to do participatory planning

Poster no. 7 of the Social Forestry Training and Extension Programme (SFTEP) has outlined detailed steps on how to develop a participatory forestry management plan based on the field experiences more especially from Ntcheu district. The steps are outlined below:

- 1 Develop objectives and plans for management. Ask the stakeholders together with the forest dependent people to analyze the forest data and compare with what is needed. Prioritize the needs and strategies. Decide how you will get what you need from the forest. Develop management rules and a constitution for the committee. Develop an action plan and agree on the roles and responsibilities.
- 2 Get wider community approval of the management plan. Present the plan to the whole community and ensure that the local leaders such as chiefs are aware of the process or invite him or her to the meeting. Let him or her participate fully in the discussions. Work with the other service providers or extension workers to draft the management plan on behalf of the community. Involve some individual from the community who can write if it is possible. Ensure that the benefit sharing mechanism and responsibilities are clearly understood by all the people involved. At this particular step, the roles of the local government and other stakeholders should be clearly defined.
- 3 Implement the management plan. Develop a work schedule for the management plan. Identify resources and capacities existing in the village. Much the activities with the resources and capacity existing in the village before asking for help. Part of the heating process is to assist forest dependent people to develop simple proposal for funding with support from service providers such extension workers

Step 5.2 Participatory monitoring, reflection and learning

Monitoring and reflection are essential functions in the self-development of any individual or institution. Properly performed, participatory monitoring help to identify problems, measure progress against objectives, draw lessons and adjust or re-plan for better results. Since one of the aims of this tool-kit is to empower the forest resource dependent people. Empowerment comes through contributing to the policies on forest resource governance. This step will enable them monitor all the activities, processes and dynamics regarding forest resource management by various actors and stakeholders. By reflecting and learning from their experiences, they will be able to demand for better services or advise the local government authorities or central government on policy issues.

Box 7. Participatory monitoring and evaluation of Kamwamba Project.

The local steering committee organizes monthly meetings to review progress of the project. Apart from a report by the monitoring team, the local leaders make their own presentations based on how they have see the progress of the work agreed during the previous review meeting. After each meeting new agreements are made and plans are revised. (Appendix 2)

Why participatory monitoring, reflection and learning is important?

- It helps assess whether the community's activities are on the right track
- It suggests ways of adjusting or changing plans if necessary to improve performance
- It involves members in the planning and implementation of activities as much as possible
- It helps the group to improve its effectiveness by continuously assessing its own progress and periodically evaluating the results. This helps to learn from past mistakes and thus increases its self-reliance and strengths.

How to conduct participatory monitoring, reflection and learning

1. Train the forest dependent communities in participatory monitoring, evaluation and reflection. This step assumes that benchmarks for measuring success or achievement of objectives were already set in step 2.4 above at community level.
2. Setup a monitoring team based in the village. Include women, men and other local leaders in the monitoring team.
3. Organize monthly or quarterly meetings to review progress. Invite various stakeholders and communities to discuss progress towards performance and achievement of the agreed tasks and responsibilities. Ask the monitoring team to present their report and ask each player or stakeholder to present progress according to agreed tasks and let the other stakeholders comment
4. Use lessons learnt to revise plan, influence change within the community as well as local government level. Document the lessons and share with other groups in the district level. Lessons learnt can be presented during the district forest forums and circulated in various forms including newsletters, newspaper articles, radio programmes or television broadcasts.

CONCLUSION

The tool described above provides practical steps towards assisting forest dependent people and practitioners towards improving forest governance. Experience has shown that in some instances the government and NGOs have done more work in heating the community to participate effectively in forest management activities as demonstrated in the three cases studies. However, more work needs to be done on linking the forest dependent people's demands and their influence on the policy formulation processes. Therefore effective use of the tool would help forest dependent people and practitioners achieve that.

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APPENDIX 1. BEST BET PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR FORESTRY GOVERNANCE IN MALAWI

1.0 Introduction

This section outlines three selected community based natural resource management best practices in the country. The examples were selected based on what has been achieved and their impacts on forest management in the area where such initiatives are taking place. Lessons learnt during the study and in the initiatives (best bet practices) would lead into the development of tool kits that the forest dependent people and LGA would use to improve forest governance in their areas.

Considering the focus of the study, the team has analyzed the CBNRM best bet practices in relation to the SLF (sustainable livelihood framework). The analyses follow the livelihood pentagon where issues of social, human, physical, natural and financial assets have been looked into.

1.1 Kamwamba Community Intergrated Natural Resources Management Project.

This project begun in 1996 under the Sustainable Management of Indigenous Forest Project, which is implemented by the Wildlife Society of Malawi (WSM) and funded by the Germany Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

The project community initially comprised five villages of Kamwamba, George, Gobede, Manyenje and Chilimbwe, all in Traditional Authority Saimoni in Mwanza district. The project was to expand to cover more villages.

The project area covers an area of about 3000 hectares of indigenous forest. Over time the area suffered great depletion of the forest resource. The aim of the project was therefore to seek ways of conserving the forest resource in the area.

Social Capital Analysis.

Box 1. Institutional linkage

During the project evaluation, it was found out that the linkage between VNRMCS and Local Steering Committee and WESM is stronger than the linkage between the VNRMCS and forestry extension workers in the project area Kafakoma, 2003.

Each of the five villages in the project area has a Village Natural Resources Management Committee (VNRM) to coordinate natural resources activities at village level. Two members from each of the VNRMCS form the area's Local Steering Committee that coordinates the communities' interests towards reaching the project goal. The project span of activities covers such areas as bee keeping, tree nursery establishment, guinea

fowl production, bamboo furniture making, making briquettes using waste paper, and indigenous fruit processing. These activities are largely conducted through clubs in the areas of interest. There are more than 30 clubs covering these various activities.

The traditional leadership in the project has played its rightful role by being instrumental in community mobilization. All the committees are largely mobilize through the village headmen when they want to hold meetings. WESM as a key facilitator of this project works through the village based community workers whose role include community

mobilisation, training and acting as a link between the people and the project management. Extension workers from other departments and NGOs use the same village level structures to facilitate their activities. This approach has provided a lot of support to the village level institutions in strengthening forest governance activities. The VNRMCs in the project are have been able to enforce their by-laws by way of mounting roadblocks because they are legally recognized. The roles of the forest extension workers and those of the VNRMCs in relation to law enforcement are clear even though the government workers tend to undermine their participation of the villagers in law enforcement. With support from the extension workers villagers are able to demand the type of service they would want from the NGO and government jointly.

Natural Capital

It has been mentioned earlier that the project area in Kamwamba covers more than 3000 hectares of indigenous forest. This land has suffered depletion of the natural forest cover. This depletion was as a result of the community converting the natural capital to financial capital by selling firewood and charcoal. The opening up of the area through the tarmac road provides easy access to people into the areas who provided the needed market for the said products. The project was therefore largely designed and implemented to protect the resource by providing alternative sources of income among other strategies.

The community agreed on strengthening the natural resource asset by agreeing on rules and regulations for accessing the forest resource. For example they agreed that no one in the community would be harvesting the resource for firewood and charcoal for sale other than for domestic use. Charcoal production and marketing is also not allowed in the community. Any one involved is penalized. This has promoted better sharing and equitable management of the 'common' forest resources at community level.

A number of the project activities such as bee keeping, fruit juice extraction from mlambe and bwemba trees, and bamboo furniture in Kamwamba are linked to the availability of natural capital. This has necessitated the community appreciation on the need to conserve and manage the natural capital for their own good. For example the community understands that bee keeping requires vegetative environment, they therefore make sure that they control bush fires thereby allowing coppices, young plants and animals to survive. More and more villagers in the area are planting their own trees. There is increasing interest in the project area fro people to raise, plant and even sell tree seedlings.

When one visits the project area, there is visible evidence of the regeneration of the natural forest on customary land because of the initiatives that the people are implementing.

Financial Capital

As indicated earlier the project was funded by GTZ and implemented through WESM. Part of the success of the project is contributed by this financial injection, which allowed some of the activities to be initiated with this seed funds.

The project had put in place an arrangement where the Local Steering Committee saves 40% of revenue into its account for village development activities; the next 40% is

banked to sustain production processes, and the remaining 20% is paid to communities who process the juice. All communities benefit from the proceeds through the 40% that is used to fund development activities, including provision of loans for small businesses.

Community members who are involved in the various income generating activities like beekeeping, guinea fowl rearing, bamboo chair making are also making profits that earn them substantial income. Members witnessed, that through guinea fowl rearing they are able to build good houses and to send children to school as a result of the income they generate from selling the fowl.

These stated sources of income have provided an alternative source of income to the community away from selling firewood and burning charcoal, which destroy the environment. This was actually the core strategy that the project employed to protect and manage the environment.

Human Capital

The most important human capital available to the project are the community members themselves who have been equipped with skills and mechanisms in the management of their own resources. This has been possible with the facilitation of WESM. Several courses in leadership and management have been conducted resulting in increased community capacity to organize and manage their own activities. With the assistance from WESM they have developed instruments such as the by-laws, which govern management of their resources. This has enabled the community to build a sense of ownership over the resources they are managing.

The other various skills that the community has acquired add to the pool of knowledge available for use in the community. The skill includes processing juice from natural fruits as mentioned earlier, raising guinea fowl, making briquettes and the many others.

The availability of field level staff deployed by WESM has enhanced the level of human capital necessary to support the village level efforts. This has been an important element in improving social organization of the community.

Physical Capital

Individual to improve their housing structures as narrated by beneficiaries used some of the funds generated from the project activities. Project funds were also used to repair boreholes for the benefit of the community. The project had also put up the fruit juice processing plant, which has employed a lot of people who would have been engaged in firewood and charcoal making activities.

1.2 Bwanje Environmental Rural Development Organization (BERDO)

Concerned with the serious environmental degradation and deforestation in the Bwanje area in Ntcheu, one Forestry Assistant decided to mobilise people in his work area to start doing something on the problem. After being exposed to various participatory approaches, the FA felt equipped to raise awareness and mobilize forest dependent people in his area of work. With the participatory skills, the FA set up the CBO now registered as an NGO as a way of promoting and encouraging to people to take

responsibility of the management of their forest resources. The NGO is currently working in over 300 villages. What is interesting about this NGO is its holistic approach to strengthening sustainable forest management by the forest dependent people.

Social Capital

Using a village natural resource management committee as a starting point the CBO turned NGO has spread its wings to include many other village level institutions that are focusing on the livelihood of people. There are many other committees such as water point committees, healthy committees, farmer clubs and others who are involved in various aspects of the project activities of the NGO. It has a local steering committee, which monitors the work in the villages, and local board, which comprise committed retired officers, and politicians who play an important role in encouraging and promoting community participation in the project. Realizing that forest benefits take time to be realized, the project has several other components that people can derive short-term benefits to meet their basic needs. Apart from developing strong networks within the impact area, BERDO has also strong relationships with local leaders, politicians, other national NGOs, donors and the government. Many other villages outside the BERDO target area have also started adopting what other villages are doing in the BERDO's project area.

Natural Capital

Bwanje area has a large number of tobacco estates that contributed to the depletion of indigenous trees. The establishment of BERDO as an NGO in the area has assisted to strengthen the capacity of the people to take part in enforcing the Forest Law. This has assisted in regenerating the area at the same time many people have their woodlots in their homesteads. The forest dependent people have developed rules and regulation that are followed in terms of forest resource utilization. For example they agreed that estate owners should never come in the area to cut down trees for tobacco curing. Only communities within the area are allowed access into the forest areas to collect firewood and other non-timber forest products. This has improved the management of the forest resources in the area.

A number of the project activities in Bwanje are linked to improving the sustainable management of the natural resources. Activities like food security enhancement, IGAs, woodlot establishment have increased the community appreciation of the need to conserve and manage the natural capital for their own good.

Financial Capital

The community based approach and self-help spirit of the community members, is enough to motivate donors such as Oxfam, COMPASS, American Embassy, EU Social Forestry Programme and MAFE to support BERDO. Over the years since 1994, there has been a steady flow of technical and financial resources to the project activities of the organization. Effectively utilization of the financial resources obtained from the various donors has attracted more other donors' support it. It is also evident that the outcomes of the project activities are benefiting the majority of the people in the area. This has improved the motivation and commitment of the people to participate in the project activities.

Human Capital

BERDO has managed to achieve more because of the technical support it has received from NGOs, donors and government. The forest dependent people have undergone various types of training course relating to sustainable natural resource management including the following, natural resources management, leadership, HIV/AIDS, gender, income generating activities and many other. Village forest areas in the impact area of the organization have management plans, which the communities developed themselves. The project activities benefit a lot from the use of indigenous knowledge and local materials. It was noted that tree-planting activities are being carried out using locally collected seed materials.

Physical Capital

The project activities include provision of social amenities such as water points in the form of boreholes, improved road infrastructure through MASAF support. Income generated from the IGAs has assisted the local people to procure basic needs including constructing permanent houses. Provision of social amenities such as boreholes are linked to sustainable management of natural resources. Apart from drawing water for drinking the water points constructed or rehabilitated under this organization are used for watering tree nurseries and vegetable gardens.

1.3 Majiashawa Village Forest Area (Shaba Village-Mzimba)

The community's interest and commitment to natural resources management started sometime back. The people said that they learnt to manage and protect the VFA from their fore fathers. The villagers wanted to continue their forefathers work but professionally hence they approached the District Forestry Office for technical support In 1994, the community mobilized themselves and formed the VNRMC to manage the Majiatuwa village forest area with technical assistance from the forestry assistant. The VFA has by-laws (not approved by the government) that empower them to confiscate illegally collected forest produce and punish offenders in the village regardless of their status. More interesting is the fact that they have managed to attract a lot of organizations that are supporting the community with other projects that are addressing their basic needs thereby letting the village forest area to regenerate.

Social Capital

The village has apart from the VNRMC other committees responsible for health, school, community policing, physical development (roads bridges), agriculture, land management and Income Generating Activities. These institutions network strongly through meetings where they plan, monitor and evaluate or reflect on their livelihood activities at least once a month. Strong linkage also exists between the VNRMC and the local leadership like the village head, group village head and ward councilor. Women are holding decision-making positions in the VNRMC.

There are clear roles and responsibilities amongst the actors in the NRM in this village. For example, the village head's role in VFA management is specifically that of mobilizing the community for action and resolving conflicts on forestry issues. The village has a committee on community policing, which among other tasks guard and arrest those that

encroach the VFA. Institutional linkages and information flow between the various institutions in the village and between the VFA and the local government authority is systematic and clear. The strong respect for their Ngoni cultural beliefs have strengthened teamwork and bound them together in managing the VFA. Mzuzu University is assisting them to compile their management plans as well as by-laws and constitution.

Natural Capital

The VNMRC members indicated that their VFA still exists today as a result of the efforts by their forefathers who took care of the forest area. What they are doing is to continue with the work that was done by their forefather. The only difference is that the forefather had no written management plans and by-laws. The village produces a lot of Northern dark fired tobacco, which requires a lot of firewood for curing. No one is allowed to cut down trees for tobacco curing or sale in the VFA. Most of their firewood requirements for cooking and other household requirements are sourced from their individual family land. The VNRMC did soil assessment for planning purposes of the types of trees and land use. The VNRMC established forest boundaries, which are also serving as firebreaks to minimize damages to the forestry resources. The committee encourages individual households to establish individual woodlots where they harvest their fuel wood for domestic use and tobacco curing. It should be noted that the area still has considerable amount of indigenous trees on customary land upon which many households depended and therefore the pressure for forest products from the VFA is low. This has allowed the VFA to regenerate.

Financial Capital

The VNRMC has clearly defined and designed conditions to use and share benefits from the VFA. For instance, community members from within the village are allowed to harvest dead trees for domestic use as well as the non-timber forest products. It came out clearly that individuals from the community generate income from selling NTFP and from their individual homestead woodlots in order to supplement their household basic needs. No one is allowed to harvest or cut down tree for sell as firewood or charcoal from the VFA.

On contrary, community members from other villages are allowed permission to harvest non-timber forestry products only. If they want trees, they buy and the money is used for other village development activities. Their commitment and teamwork has attracted several institutions to provide technical and financial support to the VNRMC for projects that are addressing the community members basic needs thereby relieving the forestry resources from being converted into cash for such basic needs. Such organizations that have supported this community include: Malawi Social Action Fund, World Vision International, and Sustainable Forestry Management Project. Introduction of bee keeping within the VFA has motivated the community to appreciate the need to conserve and manage the forestry resources since they appreciate that bees require trees to produce honey and tree too provide a good habit for bees.

Human Capital

Forestry Extension workers, NGOs and other projects have continuously trained the VNRMC in forestry governance and other related technical areas and issues. This has

strengthened the capacity of VNRMC to ably lead others in this intervention. The committee was also trained in proposal writing which has helped or assisted them to seek funding from other institutions on behalf of the community for example from MASAF.

The indigenous knowledge that existed within the community facilitated the interest and commitment to forestry resources management.

Physical Capital

There is a good road into the village, which makes access easy thereby attracting more institutions to support on other basic needs as mentioned above.

1.4 General lessons from the above three best-bet practices

- The commitment of the forest assistant has a big impact on the mobilizing and motivating people to participate in the natural resource management activities.
- The trust that the local people have placed on the forest extension worker has played a big role to encourage donors, politicians, NGOs and more importantly the forest dependent people.
- It can be concluded that participation is enhanced when benefits and incentives for participation are clearly known for all community members.
- The heating process at community level has enabled the people to priorities their problems and needs. This has made it possible for them to demand the type of services that they want from the NGOs and government in order to meet their needs and solve their problems.

Securing greater livelihood security through ensuring access to forest products in a sustainable manner is possible.