

THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATORY FOREST MANAGEMENT ON A FOREST-MARGIN COMMUNITY IN THE SOUTHERN CAPE FORESTS: A CASE STUDY OF COVIE

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Abstract

South Africa has sufficient policy instruments that institutionalize participatory management of natural resources. Forestry-specific policy, strategy and legislation require the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) to implement participatory forest management (PFM) in state forests. Consequently, we conducted a 100% survey of the Covie Community that lives at the margin of the protected Tsitsikamma Indigenous Forest to assess the effects of PFM on the community. It was found that the vast majority of the households in Covie are aware of DWAF and the ownership of the indigenous forest, but are unaware of DWAF's people-centred PFM. The majority of the households have not seen tangible outputs that could be attributed to PFM as well as improvements in the management of the forest. Many stated that the management of the indigenous forest in their neighbourhood has become more restrictive now than during apartheid.

There is generally a poor communication between DWAF and the Covie Community due to lack of an accountable community representative on the PFM forum in Tsitsikamma. This has led many households to resent forest regulations, including the issuance of permits for the use of forest products and services. Nevertheless, some of the permits for forest resources use by local communities are provided for free. There is evidence that the Covie people mainly depend on the indigenous forest for fuel and to a lesser extent on natural remedy. However, they do not consider these as benefits because they illegally harvest these products. There is no discernable disturbance of the indigenous forest by the local people. We recommend multilateral and participatory approaches to indigenous forest resources management and also suggest a comprehensive review of PFM to overcome the problems identified by the study.

1. Introduction

The South African constitution promotes interactive participation of stakeholders in the conservation of environmental resources. This constitutional directive was informed by many multilateral environmental agreements to which South Africa is a signatory. Consequently, South Africa has promulgated a number of conservation laws for participatory governance of the various components of the environment. This includes the National Forests Act No 84 of 1998 that promotes sustainable forest management in South Africa in collaboration with rural communities that inhabit the margins of protected areas. This study aimed to assess whether such collaboration exists on the ground by determining the effects of participatory forest management (PFM) on the Covie people. The Covies live at the margin of the Tsitsikamma Indigenous Forest which is a subset of the Southern Cape Forests. This is the single largest block of indigenous forest in South Africa that stretches along the Garden Route from Farleigh in the Western Cape Province to the Tsitsikamma in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

Covie is the nearest community to the indigenous forest in Tsitsikamma among other communities. It is relatively small and homogenous, making it an ideal community for assessing the implementation of PFM and its influence on rural people in the Southern Cape Forest. This primary objective was met by first assessing the concept of participatory management of natural resources and the legal framework that facilitates the practice of the management style in South Africa. Second, we administered semi-structured questionnaires to 21 households in Covie to determine the effects of PFM, their views of the management practice and their needs. Third, we observed the presence of timber and non-timber forest products in the community to sift appropriate information that was supplied by the community from the misleading ones. This information was compared with the responses of the local forestry officials who are based at the Tsitsikamma Forestry Station, approximately 25 km away. The discussions were conducted under six themes: (1) knowledge of forest ownership, DWAF and PFM; (2) constraints on active community participation; (3) changes in the management of the forest; (4) livelihood strategies; (5) community needs; and (6) the role of gender in information giving during the data gathering sessions. The paper concludes

with a set of recommendations for overturning the drawbacks identified in the implementation of PFM in South Africa.

2. Concepts of participatory forest management (PFM)

PFM means the sharing of products, responsibilities, control and decision-making authority over forest resources between state forestry departments and local communities, as user groups (Grundy & Michell, 2004). Similarly, Everson and Underwood (2004) reiterate that PFM involves the establishment of partnership arrangements between state forestry agencies and local communities concerning access to and use of natural forest and woodland resources. Richards *et al.* (2003) consider PFM as a forest management process that has direct involvement of local people. It refers to the active involvement of local people in designing forestry programs as well as their implementation and evaluation, in addition to benefit sharing (Gumbi, 2001). Joshi (1999) considers PFM as the establishment of formal partnerships between forest villagers and government forestry departments through the development of forest protection committees. Participation refers to “stakeholders working together to set criteria for sustainable management, identify priority constraints, evaluate possible solutions, recommend technologies and policies, and monitor and evaluate impacts” (Johnson *et al.*, 2001). Accordingly, participation means involvement of user groups in setting priorities, evaluating decisions and techniques that affect natural resources. It entails the monitoring of outcomes of resource management strategies. Horn (2002) maintains that the PFM program is established to ensure sustainable forest management and socio-economic development. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) defines PFM as a new approach and process to promote sustainable forest management. It is conceptualised to enhance synergies among stakeholders to ensure social sustainability and to empower local communities (DWAF, 2002). Social sustainability refers to finding ways for optimal interaction and improvement of relationships among stakeholders to realise sustainable forest management. It involves improving the quality of life for all stakeholders involved in the use and management of natural forests. Consequently, McKenzie (2005) defines social sustainability as “the discourse of a better society and how it might be achieved”.

Thus, PFM may be summarised as the practice of active involvement of local stakeholders to influence the direction of natural resources management with a view to enhancing their well-being. However, the term local stakeholder is too broad as it bundles together the poorer and the wealthier that inhabit forest margins. Consequently, the department's mission statement on PFM refers specifically to poor rural communities as a target group and primary stakeholder that should benefit from the management of indigenous forests (DWAF, 2003). The operations of all DWAF's regional offices and forestry stations should reflect this national mission statement. Ironically, it is only the KwaZulu-Natal regional office that identifies poor rural communities as a target group. Other regions refer only to sustainable forest management functions, without the social development component (DWAF, 2003).

The lack of consensus on identifying poor rural people as key beneficiaries in PFM demonstrates disharmony on the understanding and implementation of the concept. This lack of focus on primary stakeholders has caused the benefits of PFM to accrue mainly to the politically-connected and wealthier individuals in the Southern Cape Forests. Discussions with local community leaders in Tsitsikamma during November 2002 and June and December 2003, revealed that non-native businesspersons in the area derive more benefits from the surrounding indigenous forest than the native people. Community leaders stated further that business people are not regular PFM forum members; they attend forum meetings only when they seek approval for their forest-based enterprises.

3. Legal framework for participatory management in South Africa

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is the supreme law in the land, covering all economic decisions and activities, including access to environmental resources. The Bill of Rights in the second chapter of the constitution provides rights to equality, healthy and well-protected environment, property and protects against unfair discrimination, amongst other things. For example, section 24 of the Constitution grants rights to environmental security for every person, including people's wellbeing and rights to participate and enjoy the benefits of a healthy and well-protected environment. This section also requires the protection of the environment through reasonable legislation and other measures (Government of South Africa, 1996a). This constitutional directive has been enhanced into the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) of 1998. This law covers the different aspects of the environment and provides mechanisms for people to participate in decisions and activities that safeguard a healthy environment upon which the economy depends (Government of South Africa, 1998a).

Section 2 of NEMA outlines the principles of environmental management and strongly provides the legal basis for community involvement in conservation (Government of South Africa, 1998a). The White Paper for Sustainable Forestry Development in South Africa emphasises the participation of forest and woodland-dependent communities in the management of state forests and woodlands. The need for inclusion of local communities is explicitly articulated in the National Forestry Action Program (NFAP) and the National Forests Act (NFA) No 84 of 1998. The act requires forests to be developed and managed in ways that conserve biodiversity, ecosystems and habitats while simultaneously sustaining the supply of socio-economic and environmental benefits. These benefits should be realised through collaborative management between the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) and local people (Government of South Africa, 1998b). Thus, it is explicit that the National Forests Act authorises active community participation in the management of forests, more so by people who live within or at the margins of natural forests. Moreover, it is unlikely that fair distribution of benefits with local people can occur if they do not influence the institutions that distribute benefits among stakeholders. Similarly, marginalised people cannot emerge from the vicious cycle of poverty when they do not actively partake in negotiating for their rights and benefits with other stakeholders, especially the state forestry department.

The concerns expressed in the White Paper for Sustainable Forestry Development, NFAP and NFA for active involvement of local people in forest and woodland management caused DWAF to develop a participatory forest management strategy. This further resulted in the development of principles for participatory forest management (PFM) in state forests. These principles require that indigenous forest management should, among other things, be people-centred; participatory and holistic; transparent; and should result in equitable allocation of benefits, capacity-building and utilisation of indigenous knowledge. The principles also emphasise the need for the establishment of interdependent partnerships among forest user groups and reiterate participatory management as a management style in state forests (Watts, 2003).

The National Water Act No 36 of 1998 promotes participatory management of South Africa's water resources. The seventh chapter of the act provides for the establishment of catchment management agencies. For example, section 80(e) promotes active community participation in the management and conservation of water resources in catchments (Government of South Africa, 1998c). It is worth noting that forests play an important role in the hydrological cycle and catchment management. Implicitly, the Water Act promotes community participation in sustainable forest management.

The Communal Property Associations Act No 28 of 1996 was specifically developed to enable communities to form juristic persons for holding and managing properties on a basis agreed to by members of a community (Government of South Africa, 1996b). The property could be a protected land or any environmental asset. This is exemplified by the Makuleke Communal Property Associations in the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area where the participation of the Makuleke Community led to tangible socio-economic and biodiversity benefits (Erasmus, 2003). The Makuleke Community lodged a notable land claim case in 1996 against the northern part of the Kruger National Park (De villiers, 1999). The Makuleke now own the land known as the Pafuri Triangle within the Kruger National Park (Erasmus, 2003). They want the land to remain part of the Kruger National Park on condition that joint management takes place between them and South African National Parks (SANParks) (De villiers, 1999). The Lekgopong Community took the same approach and the community now owns a part of the Madikwe Game Reserve (Erasmus, 2003).

The recent Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act No 53 of 2003 defines broad-based black economic empowerment as increasing the number of black people that manage, own and control enterprises and productive assets, *inter alia*. This act also covers the control, management and ownership of natural resources which are productive economic assets (Government of South Africa, 2003). Certain local government laws also consolidate PFM, especially as the municipal governments are potentially strong candidates for managing state forests now that DWAF is delegating the hands-on management of indigenous forests to other state agencies. In fact, Toni (2003) indicates that municipal governments in Brazil have long been managing state forests effectively. Latin America is emerging as an excellent theatre for municipal forest management (Ferroukhi, 2003). Relevant South African municipal acts that have implications for PFM include mainly the Development Facilitation Act No 67 of 1995, Municipal Structures Act No 117 of 1998 and the Municipal Systems Act No 32 of 2000.

4. Study site

The study was conducted in the Covie Village that is situated in the north-eastern tip of the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Figure 1 illustrates the location of the village between the sea (which is a part of the Tsitsikamma National Park) and the Tsitsikamma Indigenous Forest. The ownership, administration and the day-to-day management of the indigenous forest at the time of this research was vested in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF). However, today, DWAF maintains only regulatory

functions over this forest, but SANParks conducts hands-on management of the entire Southern Cape Indigenous Forests. The village is less than a kilometre from the regional road R102 and about three kilometres from the tollgate where R102 joins the national road N2 which runs parallel to South Africa's south-eastern coastline. These two road networks constitute part of the renowned Garden Route. Delius (2002) noted that Covie had been a mixed community of black and white people until 1976 when it was declared a coloured group area under the Group Areas Act No 41 of 1950. Today, the village consists of 21 households, comprising about 120 individuals. The population of Covie constantly fluctuates because the old and unemployed people in towns return back to the village, while the young go to towns in search of education and employment.

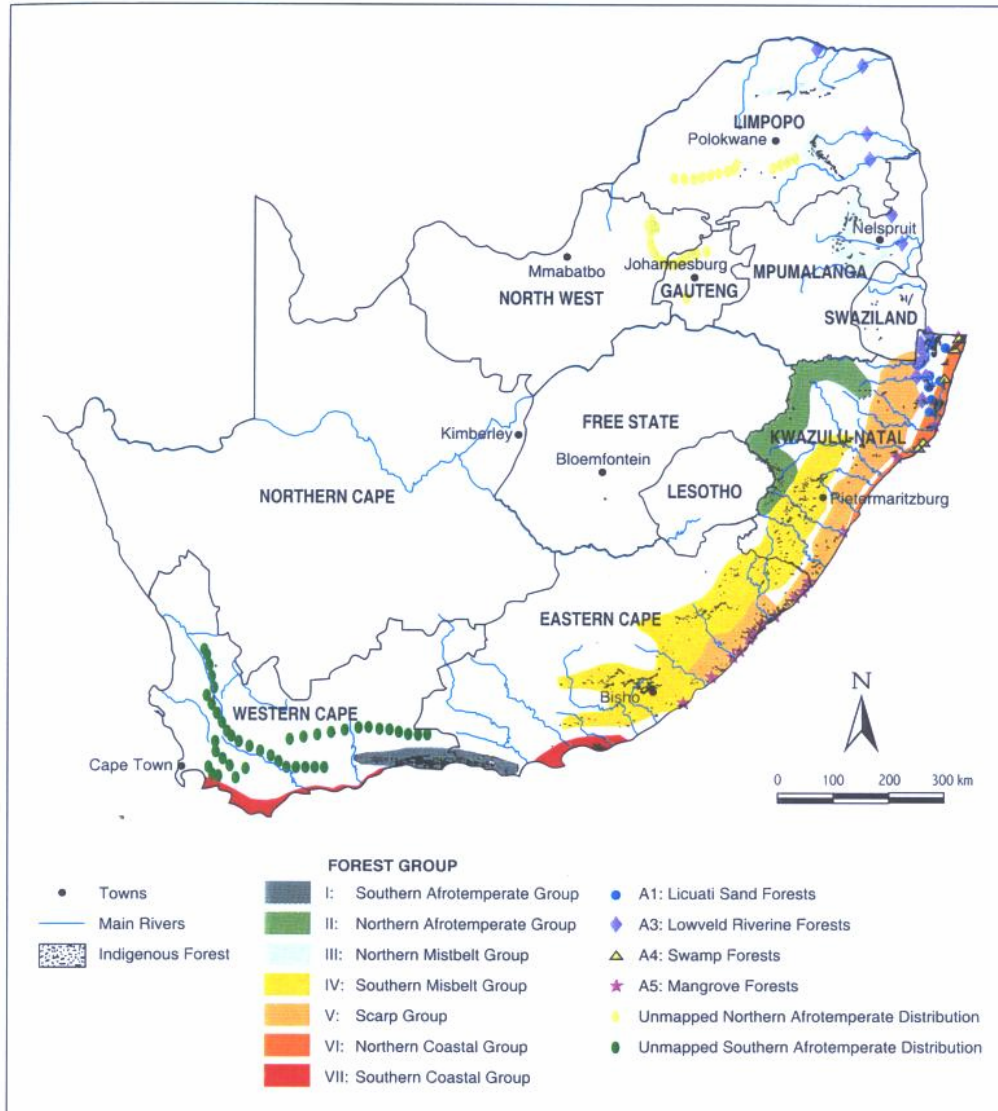


Figure 1. Map of South Africa showing the distribution of indigenous forests and the Covie Community.

The Covies live in informal houses that range from mud walls and tinned roofs to concrete walls and corrugated iron roofs. There are two conventional houses in the community. These houses belong to DWAF and are inhabited by two employees of the department. These houses are electrified and equipped with piped water whereas all the rest do not have these services. Ironically, there are poles carrying live electrical cables overhead and many houses had been connected to these cables. There is a telephone line in the area, but there is no school and clinic in Covie. The community leader who has been a traditional mid-wife doubles as a nurse and uses an old cargo container for treating the sick. The elderly travel approximately 40 km to Plettenberg every month for medical checkups and to collect their chronic medications. There is no public transport to and from Covie. Consequently, travellers from the village walk about three kilometres to the tollgate where they hitchhike to their destinations. There is a gravel road that leads into the village and it is passable by a motorcar throughout the year.

5. Method

The resident forestry officials at the Tsitsikamma Forestry Station were interviewed to determine the commencement of PFM in the forests under their jurisdiction. Their knowledge of the PFM process and outputs were queried. They were asked about the success of the management initiative to determine whether their views agree with the statements from their head office in Pretoria that portrayed PFM as a success story in the Southern Cape Forests. These responses were captured on tape as well as on semi-structured questionnaires. The community members in Covie were also asked, among other things, about the ownership of the indigenous forest in their vicinity, their knowledge of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) and its people-centred PFM initiative, the benefits of PFM, and the changes that they had noted in the management of the indigenous forest from 2000 and onwards. We followed Strydom and Venter (2002) in conducting 100% survey of the community because there were only 21 households at the time. The data were gathered in December 2003 and June 2004; they were verified in 2006.

The interview was conducted in a participatory manner, focusing on both the household head and all other members of the household. Each question was thoroughly discussed to get every knowledgeable person's views in each household and to gain comprehensive understanding of the issues under consideration through their eyes. Teenage children often responsible for gathering fuelwood were asked alongside their parents to determine their involvement in forest use. Visual observations were also used during these discussions. Visual observations helped where householders denied having benefited from the indigenous forest, but there were telltales in their house or backyard of having used indigenous forest products. We used the "who matters most" criteria developed by Colfer (1995) to select the Covie Community for this study. The Covie people live within two protected areas and they are hardly 20 metres away from the resource. Consequently, they were expected to derive more benefits from the PFM initiative.

6. Results

The results are presented for two categories of people: (1) forestry personnel and (2) local people. There were three forestry officials at the forestry station: two had some PFM responsibilities and one was specifically appointed to implement PFM. They provided answers to queries concerning the role of the forest in poverty relief, threats to forest biodiversity and the role of PFM in informing local people about their rights and privileges and about permitted and prohibited practices in the surrounding indigenous forest.

6.1 Forestry Officials

6.1.1 Forest contribution to poverty relief

The three forestry officials at the Tsitsikamma Forestry Station agreed that PFM has contributed to rural poverty eradication, especially through provision of employment to local people who work on PFM-initiated projects. It contributes to poverty eradication through ecotourism and the intrinsic job opportunities. Many chalets, B&Bs and hotels are operated in Tsitsikamma by private businesses, providing jobs to local people. Tourists also support local businesses by purchasing locally manufactured handicrafts whose raw materials are supplied by the forestry station. They pointed out two notable projects that run in the Tsitsikamma area. The first project is the Stormsrivier Adventures which is operated on a state forest land by a local businessman and involves, among other things, tree canopy tours, canoeing and diving. The personnel for guiding tourists in these activities were selected from the surrounding communities, trained and employed by the Stormsrivier Adventures. This forest-based business employed 15 people at the time of this study.

The second PFM-based project is run by a community trust at the Khoisan Village in Tsitsikamma and consists of two components: woodturning and indigenous tree nursery. DWAF supplies the woodturning workshop with off-cuts from its timber harvesting operations free of charge. The forestry administration also provided the community trust (Khoisan Village) with technical advice and skills for running the indigenous tree nursery. DWAF supplies the Khoisan Village with natural regeneration seedlings uprooted from roads used for harvesting timber and for inspecting forest. In so doing, the department cuts down the village's investment in seedling production by at least three years because seeds of indigenous trees are generally dormant and seedlings grow slowly. Furthermore, DWAF supplies the village with water.

6.1.2 Threats to forest biodiversity

Forestry officials at the Tsitsikamma Forestry Station indicated that new housing developments at Coldstream, Stormsriver and Thornham in the Tsitsikamma area attract people from Port Elizabeth and areas further north in the Eastern Cape Province. These houses are constructed for the local largely coloured people. However, corrupt housing officials allocate these new houses to new arrivals from Port Elizabeth and other areas, thereby causing influx of people to Tsitsikamma in search of either houses or jobs. This influx has caused dramatic increase in snaring and poaching. For example, snaring had dramatically increased from 10/annum to 30/month now. A vast majority of people in Tsitsikamma also depend on firewood for cooking and heating and on wood from the indigenous forest for fences. This has exerted unprecedented pressures on the indigenous forest in Tsitsikamma.

6.1.3 Knowledge of rights and privileges

Forestry officials in Tsitsikamma indicated that the PFM forum at Tsitsikamma makes local people aware of what is legal and illegal. The PFM initiative makes communities aware of their rights and privileges. It seeks community support for conservation throughout Tsitsikamma, including the Covie village.

6.2 The Covie Community

The responses of the householders in Covie are presented in Figures 2 to 8 below.

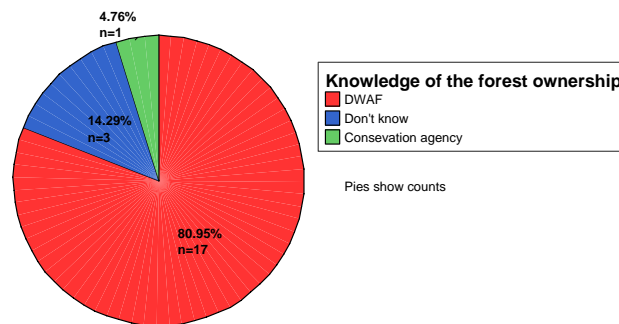


Figure 2. Knowledge of the ownership of forest resources in Covie.

Seventeen households, representing 81% of the sampled houses in Covie were aware that DWAF owns the indigenous forest in their immediate surrounding. Three households (14%) did not know the ownership of the forest, but they believed that the forests are owned by somebody or entity. One household attributed the ownership of the forest to a nature protection agency.

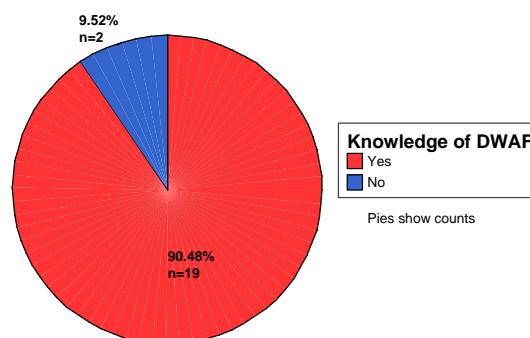


Figure 3. Knowledge of the Department of Water Affairs and forestry among people.

Nineteen households, representing about 90% of the households surveyed were aware of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF).

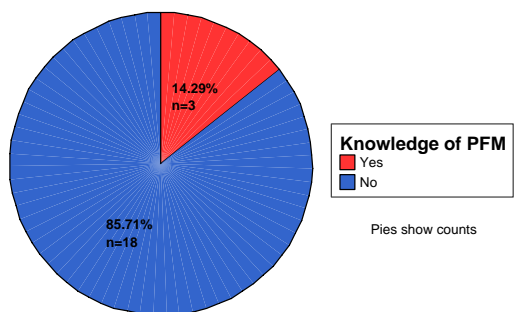


Figure 4. Awareness of participatory forest management in Covie.

The vast majority (86%) of the households interviewed in the Covie Community were unaware of PFM at the time of this study. Similarly, they were oblivious of the commencement of PFM in Tsitsikamma. Only three households (14%) have heard of PFM. One household was visited by a PFM staff from the Tsitsikamma Forestry Station and another has a member on the PFM forum, while the other heard of it at the workplace. The heads of two households in Covie work for DWAF. However, only one household reported having heard of PFM. All the households in Covie that heard about PFM were not knowledgeable about the practice and intended outputs of the PFM initiative.

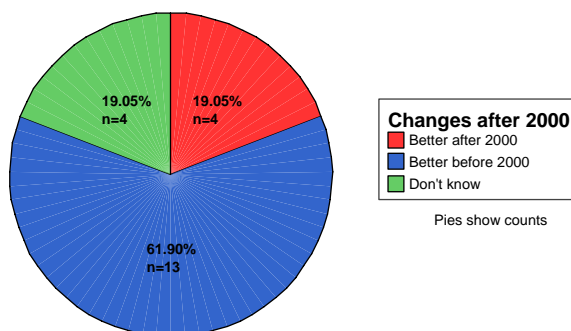


Figure 5. Changes in the indigenous forest management in Covie.

Thirteen households (61%) indicated that the management of the indigenous forest has become more restrictive now. Four households (19%) could not state whether there were improvements or retrogressions, while four others (19%) maintained that there had been improvements in the management of the surrounding forest.

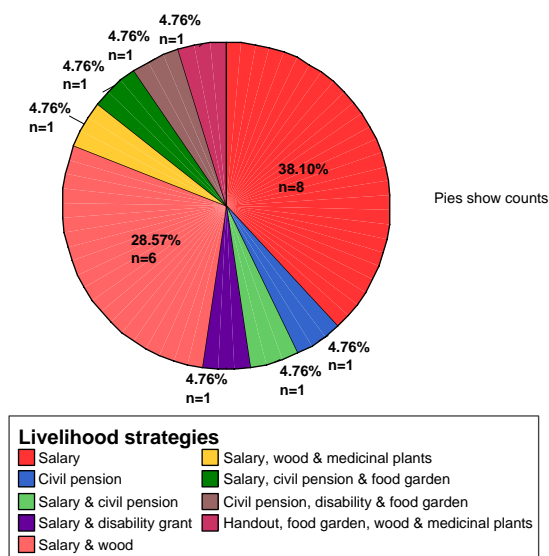


Figure 6. Livelihood strategies in the Covie Community.

Eight households (38%) depend entirely on salary for livelihood and two households (9%) have salary and civil pension as sources of subsistence, while seven households (33%) depend mainly on salary and to a lesser extent on wood. One household depends entirely on indigent pension and another lives off civil pension, disability and a food garden. Food crop production in gardens is a livelihood strategy in three households. Disability grants augment incomes in two households. One household depends on occasional salary and handouts from the community, cultivation of food crops in its backyard and on illegal removal of wood and medicinal plants from the surrounding protected forest and fynbos vegetation.

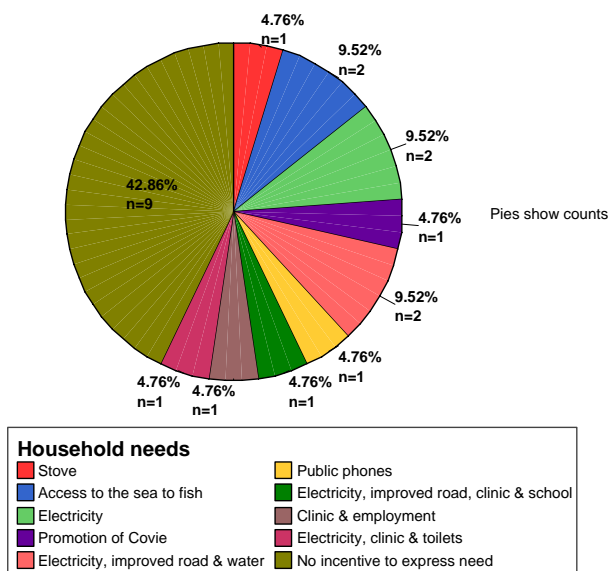


Figure 7. Household needs expressed by the Covie Community.

The greatest need in the community is electricity, which is expressed by six households out of 12 that articulated their needs. This is followed by improved road and clinic; access to the sea to fish and tap water; school, toilets, firewood and stoves; and creation of public interest in the Covie Community.

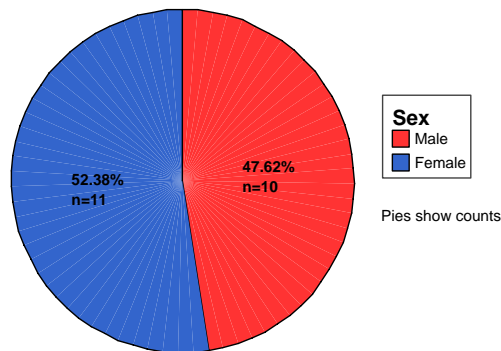


Figure 8. Proportion of male and female headed households in Covie.

Fifty-two and 48% of the households are headed by women and men, respectively.

7. Discussion

7.1 Knowledge of forest ownership, DWAF and PFM

Smooth flow of information to rural communities is likely to make them knowledgeable about the issues under consideration, i.e., PFM for sustainable socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation. Supply of regular information about PFM should also educate rural people about their rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Information is a service-oriented incentive because it encourages the delivery of desired goals (Watts, 2002). This reality is captured by the White Paper for Sustainable Forestry Development in South Africa, the National Forestry Action Program and the National Forests Act of 1998, which collectively seek to achieve sustainable forest management in South Africa (DWAF, 1996; DWAF, 1997; Government of South Africa, 1998b). Thus, it is inconceivable that right attitudes needed for implementing PFM would ever be evoked among local people in Tsitsikamma, when a forest-margin dwelling community like Covie is unaware of this supposedly “people-centred” forest management practice. It is obvious that DWAF officials had not visited this community for PFM purposes ever since the initiative was implemented in the area. The authors visited the area only three times from a distance of more than 500 km away, but every household in Covie still recalls these visits. The Tsitsikamma Forestry Station is closer (29 km) to Covie yet only one household knew about forestry staff that visited Covie for PFM. The fact that 80% of them were aware of DWAF, but are poorly informed about PFM strongly reveals that the department has not involved local people in the management of the Tsitsikamma Indigenous Forest.

Ironically, rural community participation has emerged in South Africa, as elsewhere, as an important concept in policy formulation and implementation (Beierle & Konisky, 2000; Sanoff, 2000). This is because a shared vision as well as a shared ownership of problem is fundamental to collective action (Ravnborg & Westermann, 2002) needed to tackle sustainable forest management. Participation facilitates accurate understanding of problems and their nature, leading to collective action. This implies that if policymaking continues without the involvement of stakeholders, the problem cycle continues uninterrupted (Carley, 1994). Increased public participation promotes consensus building at all levels in priority setting and decision-making. Involving people in the design and implementation of policies and strategies for environmental management is crucial on both ethical and sustainability grounds (Furtado *et al.*, 2002).

The drive for increased community participation stems from the optimism about the ability of stakeholder inclusion to improve both the substantive and procedural quality of decisions affecting the environment (Beierle & Konisky, 2000). For example, collaborative, participatory decision-making is more likely to result in lasting and satisfying decisions than unilateral ones (Susskind & Cruickshank, 1987). Participation can identify shared community values that form the foundation for joint decision-making (Dryzek, 1997). Participatory processes help stakeholders to appreciate others' goals and perspectives, thereby facilitating communication even if the concerned parties fail to resolve a particular problem (Beierle & Konisky, 2000). It increases efficiency by involving local resources and skills. It enhances effectiveness of activities and secures their sustainability because these activities are based on local knowledge and

understanding of problems (Ribot, 1999; UNDP, 1997). The process builds local capacities for managing natural resources and for negotiating locally relevant environmental developments. It also facilitates better targeting of benefits to the voiceless and poor via the identification of key stakeholders (UNDP, 1997). Participation leads to incorporation of new kinds of information in environmental decision-making; it shifts the responsibility for environmental conservation from state to every affected stakeholder.

7.2 Constraints on active community participation

The lack of active participation by the Covie people in the management of the natural resources in their vicinity contradicts the conservation laws that encourage their involvement in biodiversity conservation. Two primary explanations suffice for the absence of knowledge of PFM and lack of participation. First, the forestry personnel responsible for PFM do not seem to understand the management practice. This appears to have been exacerbated by lack of leadership from the head office to implement the program. Consequently, forestry managers at the grassroots pursue PFM on their own. These managers end up focusing more on the formation of PFM forums. Once established, the forums result in endless meetings without any tangible outputs from the resolutions adopted in these meetings. Series of meetings for one to two years without approval of natural forest-based projects proposed by local people result in disillusionment and disinterest in PFM. Today, forestry managers are unwilling to call for PFM forum meetings because they do not know the whereabouts of the projects submitted to the regional office in Knysna for approval.

The second factor concerns community representation on PFM forums in the Southern Cape Forests. Currently, people who attend PFM forum meetings are not mandated by their respective communities. Consequently, they are not accountable to the communities that they purport to represent. As a result, the local people remain fundamentally uninformed about DWAF's intentions and activities. DWAF is unaware of whether the community representatives report back to their constituencies or not because the department does not freely interact with local people. Contrarily, the native population in Tsitsikamma stated that DWAF interacts freely with businesspeople that recently relocated to the area. They maintained that these businesspeople come to PFM forums only to seek approval for their forest-based businesses. They benefit more from the management of protected areas in Tsitsikamma. This argument is authenticated by the report of the recent visit to the Southern Cape Forests by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Forestry. The report highlights the lack of interactive community participation in the management of natural resources.

A further anomaly concerns the weighting of community representatives by DWAF. Communities that have 20 and 150 households respectively have one representative each on the PFM forum. Thus, it is unlikely that both communities would be equally informed about PFM even if the community representatives were fully accountable to their respective communities. With the exception of the Thornham Community in Tsitsikamma, all the communities lack structures or organisation for effective communication within themselves and also with outsiders. The Thornham Community has one representative on the PFM forum like other communities in the area, but the community is well-represented because this delegate reports to the community management committee that consists of about 10 people. It is this group of people that reports to the wider constituency. The management committee is conversant with the needs of the community and the local politics of the area; certain members of this committee have postgraduate qualifications. Consequently, there is no congenial relationship between this community and conservation authorities in Tsitsikamma because they challenge certain management decisions. Similarly, certain conservation-based businesspeople react negatively toward this community.

7.2 Changes in the management of the forest

More than half of the people in Covie (62%) indicated that the management of the indigenous forest in Tsitsikamma had retrogressed in the past few years, with the introduction of PFM. They pointed out that previously they were not prohibited to enter the forest in their backyard to gather wood and they were granted access to the sea for subsistence fishing. However, today, they are denied access to these resources through increased restrictions such as permits. The local people in Tsitsikamma generally see permits to be unnecessary restrictions, and many believe that they have to pay to be issued forest utilisation permits. Nevertheless, permits for certain forest products and services are issued gratis to resident communities. This again highlights the intrinsic lack of communication between grassroots forestry officials and local people in Tsitsikamma. Furthermore, the Covie people also consider travelling to the forestry station treacherous because there is no public transport between Covie and Tsitsikamma. However, 19%(n=4) considered employment, free water and occasional supply of off-cuts of wood from the

indigenous forest during felling operations as improvements in the management of the surrounding indigenous forest.

Almost all the householders in Covie stressed that they had not benefited from the management of the indigenous forest. Current natural forest products used in the community are extracted illegally and hence are not considered benefits. Only one household head agreed that his household benefits from the surrounding indigenous forest and the national park through illegal harvests of products. Every household expressed negative sentiments about DWAF, but nothing on PFM because they were not aware of it. They blamed DWAF for resettling their relatives to other villages and Port Elizabeth to make way for plantation forestry. This dismantled their social networks, eroding local livelihood strategies.

The significance of social networks in enhancing livelihood strategies is discernable in Covie where the unemployed are supported by the seasonally employed or by pensioners or those that earn disability grants. This is valid for one household that depends largely on handouts from the members of the community. The beneficiary is not expected to pay back what has been given to his household, but he must support other needy households when his position improves. There is also a great deal of interaction between the people in Covie and those that had settled elsewhere. This strong linkage among the people facilitates distribution of problems and hence survival of the less fortunate individuals or households. Thus, the community in Covie like the Thornham Community is still homogenous. The people can easily be mobilised, with the approval of the community leader for a good cause.

7.4 Livelihood strategies

Formal and casual employment is the most important source of income in Covie. There were two household heads who worked for DWAF at the time of the study. Civil pension and to a lesser degree disability grant also support local livelihoods in the area. The nearby forest is a handy source of fuelwood for all the householders in the Covie Community. However, the local people would not readily supply this information in fear of retribution or increased policing by DWAF. In fact, they hardly regard forest products like wood and medicinal plants as benefits because they had ostensibly been exploiting these resources on their own for a long time. There is local expectation for DWAF to do more in Covie. This increased expectation reflects the general mentality of poor rural communities across Africa. To them, the transition from conservation as a preservation of the current biological resources to conservation as sustainable exploitation (Brown, 1998) should result in more employment and drastic changes in their standards of living.

There is no discernable impact of the illegal use of wood for energy by the local people on the forest structure because they collect only dead, dried and fallen twigs and branches at the periphery of the forest. They also collect tree debris generated during the felling of diseased and dying trees. DWAF employees who live in the village have access to subsidised wood from their workplace. Thus, everybody in Covie benefits materially from the surrounding forest and also indirectly, especially through the sheltering effect of trees on food gardens and homestead. The luxuriant forest also has a great aesthetic appeal to the people. Therefore, enhancing their current livelihood strategies by supporting eco- and cultural tourism on the community land will go a long way in sustaining the community as well as the ecological integrity of the indigenous forest.

7.5 Community needs

The stated needs of the Covie people reflect the basic requirements for establishing a sustainable local community capable of attracting tourists that visit Tsitsikamma. The Covies ask for basic services, such as electricity and water which the South African government provides a certain proportion for free. Water and sanitation are basic requirements for a healthy living. Moreover, section 24(a) of the South African Constitution states that "everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing". The need for a school and hence education is a right, according to section 29(1). Most of the things that the Covie people asked for are their rights and accord with the Bill of Rights in the constitution (Government of South Africa, 1996a).

Meeting these needs is likely to boost the economy of the village as well as encourage the conservation of the indigenous forest. For example, it is doubtful that Covie would ever benefit from the vibrant tourism industry along the Garden Route and especially in Tsitsikamma when there are no toilets, well-functioning water and road systems and electricity in the area. Brown (1998) succinctly noted that tourism in Africa suffers from the lack of tourist infrastructure. Therefore, changing the status quo by providing these facilities would increase the investment potential of the village. Private businesses would invest in chalets, B&Bs and associated services, thereby enhancing the employability of the local people. Additional sources of income would improve the standard of living and lessen dependence on natural

resources. The provision of electricity would reduce the rate of extraction of dead wood from the forest, thereby restoring the nutrient cycle in the forest system.

7.6 The role of gender and age in information giving

Gender does not play a role in information giving in Covie, but the age does. Adult children (30 years and above) led discussions for this study only in the absence of their parents, otherwise it was often one of the parents that played a leading role. Parents often consulted with children and husbands with wives during discussions. Every person in a household who had some idea of the issue under discussion felt free to contribute their opinions irrespective of their sex. This is unlike black communities where women cannot articulate their views openly in the presence of men during meetings. In many cases, black women physically sit at the periphery of meetings, while men constitute the core of information giving sessions. For example, Cross and Hornby (2002) maintained that gender discrimination in South Africa is rife in traditional authority districts. Male community leaders and men use obstructive behaviour, including violence to resist female participation (Cross & Hornby, 2002). However, what enhanced the active participation of women in this study and would promote their effective participation in PFM is that the Covie Community representative is a woman. She witnessed the establishment of the protected areas around her community.

8. Conclusions

There are no changes in Covie that could be attributed to the implementation of participatory forest management (PFM). Casual and formal interactions with people as well as personal observations revealed awful lack of understanding of PFM by the community. The Covies feel neglected by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF). They compared the apparent lack of inclusion in forest management to the inattention of the municipal government in the Plettenberg Bay to their requests for basic services. Covie is the most impoverished and neglected community in the tourist destination of Tsitsikamma. Their situation is unlikely to change, with a population of mainly elderly pensioners and young people who are often unaware of platforms for challenging their exclusion. The size of the community does not also seem to appeal to local politicians in terms of vote.

Furthermore, the success of PFM is doubtful in communities where they cannot readily identify with resident forestry officials. Rural people do not acknowledge change unless there is a practical evidence on the ground. Implicitly, the Covies and the whole local people in Tsitsikamma would appreciate community participation if there were forestry personnel from some or any of the surrounding communities. The local people around the Farleigh Forestry Station in the Southern Cape Forests relate better to the forestry officials in their locality because some forestry staff were recruited from the community. This is truly a change in the eyes of the neighbouring communities.

9. Recommendations

To overcome the problems hindering the active participation of local communities in forest management, we recommend first that there should be a countrywide review of PFM. This should be compiled into "lessons learnt" for each forestry station based on the experiences of grassroots forestry officials and local communities. Training in PFM techniques based on proper understanding of local constraints that affect the effective implementation of the initiative is more realistic than trainings based on theoretical or hypothetical assumptions. Second, there should be a clear differentiation between primary, secondary or tertiary stakeholders to facilitate optimal allocation of benefits and costs. It is inappropriate for secondary stakeholders who establish forest-based enterprises such as ecotourism, B&Bs and chalets to harness windfall gains from forests in the name of job creation. This is of particular concern when these businesses break even and the socio-economic status of their employees do not improve. Currently, it is the well-to-do that mostly benefit from PFM.

Third, PFM is a forest-based poverty reduction activity that should be implemented in a collaborative manner with other service providers at the grassroots. The need for such a coordinated multilateral approach to rural poverty eradication is reflected in the desires expressed by certain community members for services in Covie. For example, the provision of electricity, water and toilets; clinic, road and school; access to natural resources in protected areas; and public phones requires municipal, provincial and national governments as well as the private sector (Telkom) to join forces. These agencies with responsibilities for the Covie people should synchronise their services to have tangible effects on the ground. DWAF and SANParks who are represented on the ground should coordinate and lead the process. Furthermore, conservation efforts should include initiatives that enhance local people's livelihood strategies.

For example, DWAF and SANParks could facilitate local people's access to financial resources to establish forest- or nature-based small, medium and micro-enterprises to relieve pressure on protected areas.

Fourth, PFM and community conservation in general should encourage academically competent high school learners from the surrounding communities to study conservation at tertiary institutions. This should be a long-term capacity-building plan, with the ultimate objective of recruiting future managers from these communities. This would entrench the sense of ownership of protected areas in the local people. Finally, DWAF and SANParks should help communities to organise themselves to have accountable representatives on PFM forums. There should be a functional community committee in each community from where the PFM forum draws community representatives. PFM forum representatives should report to their respective committees whose members regularly report to the wider community. The size of each community committee should be determined by the number of households in each community. For example, 10 households could have a representative on the committee, depending on the ease of exchanging information with each household. DWAF should ensure that there is smooth and regular interaction between PFM forum representatives, community committees and all the households that form communities.

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