



THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY FORUM IN SIMANJIRO DISTRICT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

For quite a long period of time now, many rural communities in Tanzania derive few benefits from the natural resources despite the fact that the country is endowed with immense diversity of natural resources. One of the key obstacles that is vividly seen and experienced for long time is lack of more accountable and transparent government institutions to spearhead and monitoring the sound management of natural resources to ensure that communities are empowered and accrue substantial benefits. Since any initiative towards realising human development and eradicating poverty in a more consistent and sustainable manner must involve the community concerned then Community should be empowered to guide the development process and influence it towards the direction and speed they perceive it to be in tandem with their future development aspirations. In order to ensure that these are achieved, there is a strong need to have a fundamental strategic change in the whole approach- that is supporting and facilitating the establishment of informal institutional structure (preferably known as a community forum) to facilitate implementation.

This field report tries to describe the process, objective and rationale of establishing the community forum in Simanjiro district-primarily as an informal management tool for leading and catalysing the lobbying and advocacy processes with the decision making authorities on behalf of the whole community. The establishment of the forum is a demand driven implying that the community has had recognised the essence of having such a tool to be used as a forum where the critical issues pertaining to natural resources management will be discussed openly, fairly and in transparent manner. The creation of forum in Simanjiro district to a large extent was contributed by the involvement of famous traditional leaders (mostly elders) known as *Laigwanan*. During the creation of the forum the technical facilitation was provided by technical personnel from TNRF (community liaison officer) as well as UCRT (project officer).

2.0 ACHIEVEMENTS

This can be focused in one major area that is- the creation of community forum with a higher turn out of the participants who were very keen and show strong interest to have such kind of community based management tool. Therefore, by establishing the community forum it implies that the empowerment process to local community has gradually gained impetus and in long run there is no doubt that it would have the positive effects.

3.0 CONSTRAINTS

During the course of establishing the community forum, the *Laigwanak* pinpointed out that in the past the Maasai society have had their own traditional and culture norms

associated with indigenous technical knowledge that were extensively used to conserve and manage the natural resources like wildlife, forestry, minerals, land etc. The social solidarity (known as “Orkiama” in Maasai) among the people in the society was extremely high. However, in recent years the social solidarity is not very much strong like the past. The following factors have been cited to contribute to this situation:-

- Poor government policies which are non-participatory (literally known as “enjung” in Maasai language) and marginalise the poor people.
- Corruption and greed by some few political leaders
- Incompetent and irresponsible leaders, including lack of accountability and transparency.
- The functional roles and responsibilities of *Laigwanan* have been undermined and assumed by the local government authority.
- People have much more personal interest
- Good cultural practices have been left out for the sake of modern (western) culture
- Private investments (known as “endokilipa” in Maasai) especially in tourism industry have interfered the normal Maasai traditional and culture due to frequent social interactions between Maasai and investors.

4.0 PROPOSED STRATEGIES TO RETAIN THE SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

The followings were some of the proposed strategies aiming at retaining the social solidarity in Maasai society in Simanjiro district:-

- *Laigwanan* should be effectively used by entire society to make sure that they lead the way, influencing and unite the people.
- Sound and sustainable mechanisms should be developed to control and eventually eradicate the corruption.
- Maasai should continue to stick to their traditional culture and norms and negate the foreign culture.
- Training on leadership & leadership skills and administration should be provided to *Aigwanak* as a way of ensuring that they provide good services to the people.
- *Aigwanak* should be facilitated to develop their own informal local institution (having the guidelines and by –laws) that would spearhead their daily implementation hence avoiding the interference from external authorities.
- Bad politics must be eliminated
- Awareness should be done and People should be educated about the essence of recognising their basic rights and how to demand it.
- *Aigwanak* should meet regularly to discuss the emerged problems and to put down sound strategies to resolve the social problems.

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ESTABLISHED FORUM

TNRF in collaboration with the partner NGOs will continue providing the technical assistance and financial resource to the forum to make sure that it implements its activities according to the plan. It is in this context that external support is often critical to get the overall process going on smoothly as well as maintaining its momentum. Nevertheless, during the meeting it was unanimously agreed by *Aigwanak* that they will mobilise the community so as to contribute the local available resources (both in cash and in kind) to the forum to complement on external source.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing community forum is a resource consuming business. But since the members of local community are striving to bring about the true and fundamental changes particularly in the aspect of natural resource management system in the country, they must be supported to make sure that they don't lose heart and their efforts are being recognised and respected. If community lose heart and give up the struggle in the course of trying to balance the power over natural resource management then it is obviously that the community will be loser and worse enough will be much poorer in future than at present. Hence, it is our anticipation that the created forum would have long term significant impacts to the whole society despite the fact that much work still remains to be done.