

Back from MJUMITA meeting by Cassian Sianga

Introduction

I came from the last MJUMITA meeting which was held in Morogoro as from the 19th to the 21st November 2008. I managed to attend the first two days and could not make in the third day where they had their general elections. I had to join the annual meeting for MJUMITA as we have a vested interest as TFWG since we have a belief that MJUMITA can be a pillar for the governance of forest resources in Tanzania.

MJUMITA are networks of community members living adjacent forest (community forests or government forests) involved in the management and utilization of the resources. These communities are the ones who know what is in these forests and know how best they can manage them.

MJUMITA have their annual general meetings once a year to discuss their development (both as per their activity plan and financial implications to the organisation) and they elect a new secretariat after every two years. This year they had their annual meeting which was then followed by a general election.

Personal observations

I have to briefly highlight few things that I would like to bring to your attention as TFWG members so that you take them up as one of your activities. As I have mentioned in my introduction, these community networks are those who are managing and making use of forest resources in their areas. These are important forums for you as you are also interested in managing the same resources at your workplaces. They have a common goal just as you. I therefore urge you to pay a lot of attention on what they are doing. For those who are already working with them I congratulate you but for those who have not been in contact with these networks I propose you start doing that as they are our clients and focal members in the villages.

I have also to mention that TNRF in consultation with some TFWG members has developed a proposal to strengthen MJUMITA networks in Tanzania and have submitted it to the Foundation for Civil Society in Tanzania. If this proposal comes through then it is a good avenue for all of us based in the districts working with communities to strengthen this network. Despite all these efforts I have two observations that I made from the meeting that I would like to share with you in the following sub sections.

a. Organisation and management of the workshop

It was really a great achievement to bring the Director of Forestry and Beekeeping Dr. Felician Kilahama to officially open the meeting and answered key questions which members wanted to know. The Director of Forestry and Beekeeping did not answer most of the questions as some of them were directed to specific personalities and asked members to send their questions directly to him rather than waiting for such meetings and that these meetings are supposed to be forums for them discussing their developments and how they addressed to some of the challenges they have been facing.

As to the organisation and management of the meeting I observed that the organisation could be improved if the secretariat could take more time to put most of the documentations in place (e.g. minutes of the last meeting with list of participants) and more involvement of community members as it is their baby. May be this can now be strengthened since MJUMITA has its technical advisor who can assist in this. The MJUMITA secretariat should as from now make full use of their Advisor.

b. Roles, rights and responsibilities of small networks

For small networks of communities living adjacent forest reserves of managing forest reserves it is my hope that they know their roles, rights and responsibilities. It is very easy and it is in most cases that we talk of roles and responsibilities but forgetting their rights. I also discussed with few of the small network members of these networks and I have the opinion that some of them know their roles but the understanding of their rights is lacking. I think as TFWG members it is our role to help the network members understand their roles, rights and responsibilities as a governance issue in forest management.

c. Mama Misitu award

For those who were at the launch of Mama Misitu campaign at Karimjee Hall on 10th April 2008 we presented MJUMITA with an award for the good work they have been doing. I am sure this award is in the offices of MJUMITA and it could be interesting for the small networks in the Districts to know what the award meant. We had proposed to MJUMITA to have annually events where the best performing network is presented this award and rotates each year. I did not see this award during this meeting and did not even hear it being mentioned. I am sure such awards make these networks more active and I expect the trophy to be used in competitions in the future. We can do a lot with such an award and the annual meetings are the forum for presentation of the award as most members come to this meeting.