

Project Briefing

No 57 • July 2011



Key points

- Social accountability can improve forest governance where it changes cost-benefit perceptions on illegal logging
- But civil society communications and the use of evidence must be politically aware and targeted to build strategic alliances with a range of actors from public and private spheres
- Attention must also be paid to the enabling (and empowering) potential of the relevant governance framework – such as Participatory Forest Management in Tanzania

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Lessons on accountability in forest governance: The *Mama Misitu* Campaign against illegal logging in Tanzania

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In early 2007, the Tanzanian press unleashed a national debate about the costs of illegal logging in the country, by reporting the findings of a report published by TRAFFIC: *Forestry, governance and national development: lessons learnt from a logging boom in southern Tanzania*. This revealed some of the true costs of illegal logging (Box 1).

The report's authors tackled head-on the controversial political realities that stand in the way of transparent and environmentally sustainable forest resource governance. They also recommended actions to improve outreach and advocacy, monitoring and transparency, and to promote better forest management practices. While there was significant resistance to the initial publication of the report, it could not be ignored once it entered the public domain, as it had been backed by the government and foreign donors, and was published with the support of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism.

The TRAFFIC report prompted a collective and rapid response by a coalition of civil society organisations (CSOs) from the Tanzania Forestry Working Group (TFWG) to initiate the *Mama Misitu* ('Mother Forests') Campaign

(MMC) to promote better forest governance. The campaign is coordinated by the Tanzania Natural Resource Forum (TNRF).

This Project Briefing examines the experience and lessons of the MMC, drawing on findings from a research project undertaken in 2010 jointly by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the TNRF.

Mama Misitu Campaign: a collective action strategy

The MMC strategy has two key goals:

- 1) To make local communities and other stakeholders aware of the value of forest resources and the potential benefits of sustainable forest management.
- 2) To make village, district and national public and private stakeholders aware of the potential benefits of better forest governance.

The MMC used the media focus on forest governance generated by the TRAFFIC report to set in motion a multi-pronged strategy against the illegal timber trade. Key features of MMC action include:

Box 1: Key findings of the TRAFFIC report

- The Tanzanian people rely heavily on forest resources, with 87% of the rural poor depending on forest livelihoods.
- The degree to which most Tanzanians benefit from these resources is limited by illegal practices in the sector that often go unpunished.
- It is estimated that the under-collection of natural forest product royalties at the district level alone results in losses of up to \$58 million annually. Only 10% of potential revenue is collected from timber exports.
- Large-scale corruption and collusion between local and foreign private sector interests and government officials prevents good forest management.
- Unsustainable harvesting leads to the loss of biodiversity, denying future generations of Tanzanians the chance to enjoy the benefits of their natural resources.

Working collaboratively: The MMC has used the TFWG members' network to reach actors and institutions at the national, district and village levels (strengthening outreach), and to take advantage of the different areas of expertise of each partner organisation (strengthening synergies).

Working politically to address the balance of power: The work of the MMC is based on the assumption that change is not just about technical reform but about transforming power relations and incentives within decision-making and implementation bodies. For that reason, the Campaign has worked not only with intended beneficiary communities, but also with a range of actors involved in forest governance, including political authorities at the central, district and village levels as well as foreign stakeholders in Tanzanian forest resources.

Using knowledge and communications strategically: The MMC communications strategy uses the TRAFFIC report findings to publicise both the scale of revenue loss for government and communities caused by the illegal timber trade and the potential benefits of improved forest governance. The aim is to help shift the incentive structures affecting different stakeholders. For example, MMC has raised awareness of the merits of recent measures such as Participatory Forest Management (PFM),

which empowers village communities to have better control over forest resources (Box 2).

Working through informal networks: The MMC has worked through informal networks to cultivate inter-personal trust, build a shared sense of purpose and develop strategic alliances among campaign partners and forest governance stakeholders, including high-level Forestry and Beekeeping Division (FBD) leaders.

The overall MMC approach is based on the idea that an effective social accountability strategy requires linking local, district and national levels of governance, and working across a range of relevant institutions (both formal and informal) and actors to shift incentive structures and behaviour in forest management and timber production.

Forest management in Tanzania: harsh realities

The MMC strategy to promote the recommendations of the TRAFFIC report is, inevitably, shaped by local realities.

In Tanzania, dominant party rule and a strong executive limit the scope for effective checks and balances across government. Efforts to improve the accountability of public officials through the decentralisation of decision-making has had limited impact; indeed, decentralisation has often strengthened patrimonial power structures at the local level. Accountability relationships have been further weakened by collusion between political figures and business interests, including those connected to the illegal timber trade (Box 3).

As in a number of other sectors, the formal institutions governing the forest sector interact with, and are occasionally undermined by, strong informal institutions and networks. In practice this has meant that even where well-meaning forest governance reforms have been adopted, their effectiveness has been limited in many cases by the resistance of powerful vested interests. This is made worse by low levels of awareness of the market value of forest resources and of relevant legislation, high foreign and domestic demand for timber, and a lack of livelihood alternatives for those engaged in illegal forestry activities.

Box 2: Knowledge as a driver of change

Interviewees in Nyamwage village described how the MMC had broadened the community's understanding of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) and Joint Forest Management (JFM), allowing the village to develop a management plan in line with the District harvesting plan. This included the demarcation of 10% of the forest as a fully protected area. Village authorities now have a clear mandate to control the harvest and protect their forest and its produce. When attempted illegal harvesting was discovered in the village's forest reserve, confiscated timber and round logs were sold using village by-laws, and the funds were deposited in the village account.

The village forest management plan has been used to raise funds for an office building. As one leader noted, this has encouraged the participation of the patrol team in management activities, as they see concrete rewards (the revenue collected by the village). Stronger engagement with the Policy Forum, another MMC partner, will improve the capacity of the campaign to monitor improvements in, and adjust, social accountability efforts.

Box 3: Links between illegal timber traders and local authorities

Reported cases of the harvesting, transporting and processing of illicit forest products with impunity suggest close connections between the wrong-doers and some political authorities. In one village in southeast Tanzania, forest patrol officers caught individuals with illegal forest products and sent the case to district officials, but the culprits were not fined and there was no feedback to the patrol officers about the case. Such events seem common and were reported by several interviewees.

Those among the local authorities who are active in uncovering such relationships may face serious consequences. In one reported case, a village executive officer was transferred to another village for revealing business connections between illegal timber traders and district officials.

Opportunities for action

In such a context, the successful enactment of the recommendations of the TRAFFIC report requires identifying opportunities for action by CSOs to tackle these barriers. Such opportunities may emerge from changes in policy.

Fieldwork shows, for example, that the results of PFM initiatives vary extensively across locations, with poor performance in some areas resulting from limited local resources and capabilities, low levels of awareness of the law, and the distorted use of local decision-making structures. However, the success of PFM initiatives in other locations

shows that PFM can also generate opportunities for change if supported by context-sensitive and politically informed strategies.

In other cases, CSOs may be able to engage with key allies to help build coalitions for reform. The MMC has, for instance, taken advantage of the presence of reformers in key positions, from high-level officials within the FBD to supportive District executive directors and village authorities at the local level.

The campaign's alignment with international norms and the support of key international actors and donor partners have also been crucial. The campaign's work with public and private sector stakeholders such as the Tanzania Revenue Authority and licit timber traders has been equally important. Ultimately, however, success depends on all relevant actors understanding the benefits of 'buying into' improved forest governance and of curbing illegal logging practices.

In addition to working strategically within the constraints of the socio-political environment, the experience of the MMC reveals the need to ensure that its own operational and strategic challenges are reviewed on a regular basis. This includes: the need for consistent investment in keeping member partner organisations on board and informed of campaign developments; the development of more robust relations among key institutional actors in relation to the legal enforcement of forestry laws; and the development of further relations with private sector actors involved in licit timber production.

A note on accountability

Social accountability is part of the vertical mechanisms by which society holds public and elected officials to account (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006). It includes strategies such as using the media, civil society activities, legal mobilisation and popular protest. Increasingly, it also refers to more politically informed forms of social mobilisation, including those that engage with horizontal accountability mechanisms, and with different government stakeholders (Box 4).

Social accountability campaigns are more likely to be effective if they work with a locally-grounded understanding of accountability. This takes account of how communities perceive legitimacy, how they feel the exercise of public office should work, and what they believe constitutes probity in public office. For instance, are officials in Tanzania judged by a *process*-based understanding of accountability (namely, holding public officials to account according to the formal rules), or by the *outcomes* of their decisions (namely holding leaders to account for the material benefits they deliver to communities, regardless of whether formal rules are observed or not)?

The MMC has worked with both types of accountability. The campaign established a connection between awareness of the value of forest resources

and of the sustainable management of forests for the state and communities *and* the enabling (and empowering) potential of the legal framework of forest governance – notably through PFM. This focus on *outcomes* is particularly important where resources are scarce and the short-term benefits of illegal logging often quite appealing. But by pointing to the increased revenues to be obtained by the same actors through improved forest management and by curbing illegal logging, MMC may help to promote more *process*-based notions of accountability. This more realistic approach may produce better results in terms of changing attitudes and conduct among the relevant stakeholders along the forest governance chain.

The multi-layered approach of the MMC shows how an exercise in social accountability can help communities to engage more effectively with, and benefit from, legal accountability systems, and suggests some lessons on working with effective social accountability strategies to achieve this.

Lessons learned for CSOs and social accountability

While blueprint approaches should be avoided, the MMC sheds some light on how CSOs might work more effectively to leverage change:

- *Acting politically* to engage stakeholders along the governance chain at the local and national level is important to achieve change in power dynamics. This includes working through informal networks of strategic relationships to secure alliances with champions for change at different levels, including international stakeholders.
- *Using knowledge strategically* to disseminate information on the merits, in this case, of improved forest governance to change cost-benefit perceptions and behaviour in relation to illegal logging.
- *Being realistic* about the structural, institutional and political constraints that characterise the

Box 4: Dimensions of accountability

Horizontal accountability: mechanisms of checks and balances within state structures, including the separation of power and an assortment of oversight bodies, including the auditor general, anti-corruption commissions and human rights commissions.

Vertical accountability: mechanisms by which society holds public officials to account, including elections, and mechanisms of social accountability through the action of the media, civil society organisations, popular protest and legal mobilisation.

Political accountability: ensuring the responsiveness of government to the preferences of the electorate.

Legal accountability: ensuring that the actions of public officials are framed legally and constitutionally.

socio-political environment in which social accountability action is located is important, both to inform strategies and manage expectations among relevant stakeholders.

- *Periodic reviews of strategy and operations* are necessary to ensure that campaigns periodically reassess their operational coherence as well as the viability and appropriateness of underlying assumptions in light of experience on the ground.

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ISSN 1756-7602

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Project Information:

This briefing draws on findings from a research project undertaken jointly by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Tanzania Natural Resources Forum (TNRF). It examines the *Mama Misitu* ('Mother Forests') Campaign (MMC) aimed at promoting better forest governance in Tanzania. The campaign was launched in 2008 as a collective response to the TRAFFIC report by a coalition of civil society organisations that are members of the Tanzania Forestry Working Group (TFWG), and coordinated by the Tanzania Natural Resource Forum (TNRF). The study involved a political economy analysis of the MMC, as an example of a social

accountability strategy aimed at supporting improved forest governance. The full project report – 'The Political Economy of Social Accountability in Tanzania: Anti-logging Advocacy and the Mama Misitu Campaign' – is available at <http://bit.ly/mama-misitu>

This study is part of the Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) Programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by a KPMG-led team including MDF-ESA, Delta and ODI. To find out more about AcT please visit www.accountability.or.tz