
Forest management in Zambia: A focus on women's
access to forest resources management in
Chief Chiwala's area, Masaiti district

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Foreword

The basis of this research is the result of a proposal and discussion that I had with Professor Julie Stewart, Director of the Southern and Eastern African Regional Centre for Women's Law. When I first put the proposal to her, she not only approved it but also gave suggestions and critical insight in order to make the research more complete and original.

Professor Anne Hellum also suggested that the research should focus on women, especially in the Ndola rural district, so it would form a source of knowledge on the issues of women in forest resources management and also inform the wider society about women as key players in forest management and development in the country.

The research covered only a specific area of Kansamfwe in Chief Chiwala's area in Masaiti district in the Copperbelt province of Zambia. It dealt with forest resources management, cultural and traditional practices and beliefs as well as state and customary legal rights to forest resources management.

I was fortunate to benefit from the guidance of women's law experts in the various fields of this research. In fact without their active cooperation it would not have been possible to plan the research and fund it.

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1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background to the research problem, the objectives of the study, the assumptions that informed the research topic and the significance of the study. The limitation and scope of the study is also explained.

Background to the study

I chose this topic after considering the nature of work I do as a facilitator of community-based environmental management programmes. I toured Masaiti district in Chiwala in eastern Zambia whose rich indigenous forest reserve captured my attention. Going through the thick forest by the newly opened mine road to Lonshi mine which is on the other side of the border in Democratic Republic of Congo, revealed a lot of things that later influenced my concern about the forest resources, the people who have lived in and or along the forest, as well as the government's stand on striking an equitable balance to save both the people and the forest. I was curious as to what was envisaged in the provision of the laws and or policies and whether there would be any recognition of women's involvement in the management of forest resources. I looked at the livelihood of the rural women in forest resources management and the factors that strengthen or weaken their participation. Currently, forest policy attention is focusing on community-based resource management and women as members of the community are expected to participate at that level. The management of forest resources is aimed at achieving sustainability by encouraging local communities to use sustainable methods in order to reduce the depletion or degradation of forest resources.

Research problem

The research problem in this study was about forest management in Zambia, with particular focus on women's access to forest resources management in Masaiti district in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

Zambia's forest sector faces obvious challenges of how to meet the growing demand for forest products while at the same time safeguarding the ability of the forest to provide a range of environmental services. Moreover, what adds to the complexity and the challenges of the management and policy-making in recent years are, among other things:

'Protection against desertification; safeguarding the rights of the local communities; and ensuring widespread participation in decision-making related to forest management' (State of Environment, 2000:1).

The last two items are crucial components within national socio-economic policies and governance systems in Zambia and they formed a basis for further investigation in this research.

Statement of the problem

Zambia's forests are its most important natural resource but are widely neglected and tend to be degraded recklessly. But it should be appreciated that forests are vital for people's livelihoods as well as for the country's economy. Of late forests as a resource have been under pressure from various factors like the encroachment of people from all walks of life, deforestation, as well as unsustainable use of the resource. Apparently there has been a strong call from government, non-governmental organizations and many other key players dealing with the various natural resources crises worldwide, to include women in management of forests but serious issues on forests continue to impact on women and those who directly depend on the exploitation of these natural resources. Various policy measures and approaches are being adopted and implemented to improve forest management and to increase the country's forest cover and simultaneously meet the growing local demands for fuel wood, timber and other minor non-wood forest products.

Zambia, like other countries in the sub-Saharan African region and the global community has taken up appropriate policies, institutional and legal measures and strategies to address the current poor status of the forest. Divergent sets of principles have emerged on the management of natural resources and it has become necessary for Zambia to adopt national frameworks within which the natural resource base agenda should be set. The dimension on which this study focused is the status of women in accessing forest resources management:

'It has been widely recognized that women are the primary users of forest resources and are significant oral depositories of forestry traditions. But their rights to forest ownership, control and access, and their participation in policy formulation and management are not fully acknowledged. Consequently their interests and needs are inadequately met and represented in the process of development' (National Forest Policy, 1998:32).

Most rural women, especially in areas like Kansamfwe where there is little or no infrastructure such as schools, health services and good communication networks, fail to use their rights in accessing the resources they have depended on for a long time, even when management programmes are implemented for their benefit.

This study seeks to develop an appropriate management strategy that might help to address the problems women face in accessing forest resources management. It may also assist in tackling the various problems that are of major concern to the country for the benefit of women in rural areas.

Objectives of the study

The main objects of the study were:

- To promote awareness among rural women of the need to access forest resources sustainably within the legal framework;
- To lobby government to effectively and practically implement policy measures aimed at facilitating women's full participation in decision-making on forest resources issues;
- To disseminate information on legal access to forest resources issues to rural communities, especially among women and the children;
- To lobby government to understand wholly and support women's knowledge of forest resources management within the existing institutional framework;
- To raise awareness among other researchers about the need to use appropriate grounded theory methodologies in understanding women's lived realities and those of other marginalized people in communities; and also to use people-centred approaches to understand and help other people meet their interests and needs in the management of natural resources.

Assumptions of the study

The following assumptions guided the research:

- That women's access to forest resources management is hampered by government's failure to fully acknowledge women as partners in the management of forest resources;
- That state laws and or policies on forests do not consider the practical importance of women's diverse use of forest resources;
- That programmes and or projects adopted and implemented by the government underuse or ignore rural communities and women's knowledge about forest resources management;
- That government lacks a comprehensive policy on matters of forest resources but favours sectoral measures that subsequently contribute to the depletion of forest resources;
- That state law has not adequately considered women's rights to access forest resources for diverse uses and purposes at the local level;

- That policy measures aimed at facilitating women's full participation in forest resources management are practically in conflict with women's customary rights to forest resources and as such women's needs and interests are not adequately sustained.

Research questions

- To what extent does government's failure to acknowledge women as partners in forest resources management hamper women from accessing forest resources?
- Do laws and or policies on forests consider the importance women attach to their use of forest resources?
- How do programmes and projects adopted and implemented by the government use rural communities and women's knowledge about forest resources management?
- How does government coordinate sectoral policy matters of forest resources to alleviate poverty among rural women?
- In what ways does the state consider women's rights to access forest resources for diverse uses and purposes at the local level?
- How do policy measures for facilitating women's full participation in forest resources management conflict with women's customary rights to forest resources use?

Significance of the study

The study was worth undertaking because its final results would not only add valuable information to the academic discourse on management of natural resources in general but would also be used as a springboard for solving structural problems that continue to exert far-reaching effects on the wider population. The findings may also be used for future research on similar topics.

Limitation and scope of the study

The study was conducted in Kansamfwe in Chief Chiwala's area – Masaiti district in the Copperbelt Province in the Republic of Zambia. The study focused on one ethnic group (the Lamba) who share the same traditions and cultural values.

Both men and women who directly or indirectly use forest resources in Kansamfwe area took part in the study. Other actors involved were senior Chief Chiwala of the Lamba people, some traditional counsellors, forest officers in the province, farming households, and individual members of the villages that were near and or adjacent to Kansamfwe forest reserve area. The study sought to investigate the interplay between the legal entitlement and the provision for women and their socially, economically and culturally enforced rules that limit women's access to natural resources in specific contexts. The focus on law was mainly to help me understand the extent of Zambian laws in improving the position of women in forest resources management. I further examined the institutional and legal frameworks to find out what formal structures existed for women in accessing forest resources management. Moreover, I investigated the extent of the influence of customs and traditional practices on women's access to forest resources management and the impact these have on the state law.

Although this research was women-focused, men were also targeted in order to discover their attitudes and perceptions towards women in the collective management of forest resources. It must be stated that one would not understand or solve women's problems without understanding their interests and concerns. It is also important to understand the circumstances in which women forge their beliefs.

2 Literature review

People and forests

In today's world, there has been a remarkable decline both in the natural resources and the environmental base. More people in Africa continue to live in absolute poverty, unable to satisfy their needs while others experience conditions that are little better. In many of the once most fertile and accessible areas, agricultural production and thus average income has gone down following the introduction of structural adjustment programmes and as a result of a lack of development of infrastructure. In others agriculture has stagnated and poverty has increased.

'Survival is thus the most important issue for a large portion of those living in rural areas. Increasingly, the poorest of the poor are being forced onto protected or reserved forests, much of which is ecologically viable and has much agricultural potential' (Hall, 1992:29).

The natural resources problems that afflict third world countries may not merely be the result of rapid population increases but rather the product of a complex web of causes and effects that are beyond the scope of this study. However, the most crucial factors as seen from the Zambian context and surrounding countries are the social, cultural, political and economic structures in each rural society and how each interacts with the larger urban societies. I often ask why so many rural people have so little access to the resources needed to support them. And if the state laws impede rural women from accessing the resources by setting up formal structures, how then is the government likely to alleviate high poverty levels amongst the rural poor?

I raised this question after considering the abundance of resources in some rural places like Kansamfwe area yet the people, especially women and the children, are amongst the poorest. Why only the women and children? It has been observed in the Lamba chiefdom that traditional management systems, particularly those that promoted communal rights and customary rules to govern resource use, have crumbled under a host of external pressures, leaving resources in the chiefdom open to exploitation by outsiders. There has also been a loss of traditional livelihoods and significantly that has created new sources of social tension in some parts of the country at the local level. Many authors from various disciplines have attributed this to faulty policies and programmes. In third world countries such programmes have continued to worsen the position of women even where resources may be available. Africa as a whole, though, has abundant resources yet continues to experience environmental decline and or natural resources depletion:

'Vandana traces environmental decline and natural resources depletion to the dominance of patriarchal and western scientific authority in development planning. Moreover, the results of the technocratic strategies have been the global spread of capitalism and of a market-based economic system which has destroyed the long established bonds between communities and the environment' (Vandana, 1997:25).

I concur to some extent with Vandana that most African countries immediately after independence pursued economic policies directed by market-based ideologies. Under these ideologies the organizing principle for natural resources use was the maximization of profit and capital accumulation. Furthermore, the ideology of development was based on a vision of bringing all natural resources into the market economy for commodity production. Vandana further argues that the diversion of resources to the market economy generated ecological instability and new forms of poverty for women.

Zambia is no exception in this situation. After independence in 1964 the government had created a political and economic regime based on the state-owned enterprise. This system had accorded the state immense control and influence over most social, political and economic institutions, and natural resources. The economy and natural resources policies were formulated along political lines and these were further tailored to favour the urban areas. For instance, forest resources were transported from the rural areas to the urban markets by profit-

oriented individuals who took advantage of the rural populace. The high demand for rural resources compelled the traders to increase their supply to the urban consumers. As a result, unsustainable methods of exploiting rural resources were introduced which later led to enormous poverty among the rural population and depletion of certain species in many areas.

In many African countries there continues to be reduced forest resources, less fertile soil and less of other non-wood forest products. Since the vital forest resources are the basis of rural women's survival and economy, their scarcity is impoverishing rural women in an unprecedented manner.

The concept of forest management

Although world forests have long been prized as a source of timber and other products, the constant need for farmland and fuel wood has caused the destruction of forest in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Zambia:

'Rapid destruction of natural resources has exerted the effects of decreasing productivity and destroying sustained existence of these resources causing rural communities to be in conflict with outsiders and the state officials' (Gaidzanwa 2001:52).

Many people at the grassroots level ask questions like, who should be responsible for the management of forests and will regulations and laws ultimately continue to dictate rural people's responsibilities over forest resources? Until now Zambia, like other states in sub-Saharan Africa, has failed to appreciate the smaller organizational units such as village associations and or communities which were better equipped to manage their resources than large alternatives such as parastatals and state enterprises. Such units have of late proved to be more effective bases for rural development and rational resource management than institutions imposed from above (Gaidzanwa, 2001:63).

The SADC report of 2000 states that:

'Natural resources tend to be managed more sustainably when local communities and individual households have unambiguous ownership and secure control over resources that they will use' (SADC 2000:169).

However, taking care of forests must be a corporate effort to conserve it in a way that will best sustain the environment and all the people who depend on it. In the past, forest resources management had been viewed as government's responsibility. But due to deepening poverty some people have gone ahead and depleted the existing forest without considering the effects on the present and future generations. Others have no regard for the authority in that what is important to them comes first in difficult times. Generally:

'forest management is a concept of collective responsibility where consultation and identification of real managers is significant. It is a practice where certain "dominant" ideas such as the enthusiasm for democratic political systems, legal empowerment of the poor and sustainable development, reinforce each other, providing powerful synergies in both urban and rural areas' (Hall 1992:310).

Lately, the Zambian government, non-governmental organizations, corporate bodies and community-based organizations are trying to engage women in enhancing forest awareness and encouraging sound conservation and management practices. However, some of these management practices lack women's ideas, interests and a full recognition of women as key partners in the development process.

Guiding conservation strategy for forest management

The formulation and implementation of the national conservation strategy had considerably enhanced the conservation of natural resources in Zambia. The strategy's main goal was:

‘To satisfy the basic needs of all the people of Zambia, both present and the future generations, through the wise management of natural resources’ (Chabwela, 1995:171).

The strategy’s main method was to establish policies, devise plans and to fully integrate conservation into Zambia’s social and economic development. It also aimed to analyze trends and current issues so as to better anticipate problems and needs. This was the brainchild of the World Conservation Strategy of 1980 and Zambia’s conservation strategy’s main objectives were:

- 1 To ensure the sustainable use of Zambia’s renewable natural resources such as forests;
- 2 To maintain Zambia’s biological diversity;
- 3 To maintain essential ecological processes and life support systems in Zambia.

Limitations of the strategy

The strategy failed to be fully integrated into the national development priorities and clearly failed to reach local groups in rural communities. This was attributed to the planning process that was confined to scientists and government institutions. As such, local communities were not involved. Meanwhile depletion of natural resources continued at a faster rate than was expected.

After the strategy failed, attention shifted to conservation documents such as the Zambia Forestry Action Plan (ZFAP) produced by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. The Zambia Forestry Action Plan was intended to focus on forest-related issues such as re-forestation, forest management and forest conservation and restoration. It is important to note that the expansion of the current forestry sector in Zambia is based on the national development plan which was abandoned after the change of government in 1991. However, it may be difficult to mobilize national efforts in the absence of a national development plan. As it now stands the Zambia Forestry Action Plan without an accompanying national development plan may remain a sector programme with little influence on other sectors. It is through this forest plan that women’s access to forest resources is expected to occur. And when one talks about rural women’s participation in forest resources management in Zambia one is drawn to consider the Zambia Forestry Action Plan structures in which women are expected to operate.

Zambia Forestry Action Plan

The Zambia Forestry Action Plan is a national programme designed to define and implement the recommendations of the Tropical Forestry Action Plan. Its process started in 1993 and is the umbrella programme addressing forestry sector development at national level. The Tropical Forestry Action Plan provides a broad framework to help tropical countries and the international community coordinate their actions against tropical forest destruction. It seeks to overcome political and institutional barriers to effective action in forest management. The original documents show that the plan hoped to:

‘Contribute decisively to improving life in developing countries by providing better food security, more jobs, sustainable managed forests, increased flows of fuel wood and forest products, more community involvement in forest management, and protection for watersheds, wildlife and genetic diversity’ (Hall, 1992:177).

However, the processes involved have been questioned by various scholars. Firstly, it uses a top-down approach, with almost no involvement of people from the local communities. It never addresses the politically sensitive topics of rural poverty, national poverty alleviation policies and local development projects. The programmes under the Zambia Forestry Action Plan use a top-down approach. One of the key informants talked to at the forest department confirmed that the approaches taken even at provincial level were all top-down. As of now programmes initiated from the grassroots by the local people are not considered and do not receive policy support.

The way forward

Until the attainment of political independence in 1964, Zambia had an extensive forest resources base. But over the last three decades the forests had been and continue to be impoverished due to so many inherent factors.

'Evidence of continuing forest destruction leading to soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, dwindling water and agricultural productivity, environmental degradation and their impact on food security, national energy supply and social welfare, is widespread' (National Forestry Policy, 1998:13).

It is a false conclusion that natural resources degradation has been a result of poor rural communities' unsustainable activities. People and government must move away from the deception of attributing forest resources depletion to the unsustainable methods used by the local people. But we should critically study the insidious issues such as forest resources policies and extreme urban or rural poverty among women and children, all of which may force people to use resources unwisely in a desperate quest for survival. It has been observed that the patterns of forest resources exploitation promoted by the forestry industry along the line of rails or urban areas are unsustainable. As such the market deprives poor rural women of the forest resources they had entirely depended on for decades.

Forests should be renewable resources but all over the world much controversy surrounds the question of what constitutes good forest resources management. Although the technical aspects of forestry are complicated as well as the working of each ecosystem becoming difficult to unravel, the political, economic and social factors play a much more important role. People, whether rich or poor, should realize that once a forest is cut down it is not easy to replace. Trees, especially indigenous ones, grow slowly and this make forest research a long-term project. Rural communities must be aware of the consequences they may face should the resources they depend on be completely depleted. Decisions are needed now – especially those that will have a lasting impact on the resources and the people they support. However, what is missing from the discussion of the technicalities of modern forestry, hastily adopted by even poor nations, is the true understanding of the value of forests at national as well as local level and the concern of the people who directly depend on them for their livelihoods. Rural women's position in these discussions remains obscure.

However, paragraph 24.6 of Agenda 21 requires countries to take urgent measures to avert the ongoing rapid environmental and economic degradation in developing countries that generally affect the lives of women and the children in rural areas suffering 'drought, deforestation...and the aftermath of the use of unsustainable agro-chemical products' (Agenda 21 1992:497).

In the past there was an assumption by most African governments that national resources should be exploited in the most efficient and rational manner possible, to provide the global market with as much product as it was willing to buy. These consumption patterns were frequently wasteful because they never benefited villagers living along and adjacent to the forest area. Other parties reaped much of the profit but incurred considerable environmental costs and left few or no schools, jobs and health services for local people whose lives were severely disrupted. For Zambia it is observed that there is now a compelling need at the national level:

'... to institute appropriate measures not only to firmly re-invigorate the integrity of the estate but also to provide a viable framework to attract investment, redefine forestland ownership and marshal meaningful commitment from a variety of stakeholders, such as women, to tree growing, protection and forest product utilization' (National Forest Policy, 1998:13).

It must be realized that women provide sustenance to their families and the communities through their management and use of forest resources.

'However, the deterioration of forest resources results in negative effects on the health, wellbeing and quality of life of the population at large, especially girls and rural women of all ages. Women who are rarely formally trained as forest resources managers remain largely absent from decision-making and have their experiences and skills too often marginalized' (Platform of Action, 1995).

Although the need may be intense for some governments to manage forest resources within the legal framework, obvious challenges will have to be met such as the growing demand for wood fuel, safeguarding the potential of forests to provide valuable forest resources between the local communities and those from urban areas, and also the most recent crucial aspect which calls for ensuring widespread participation of local women in decision-making over forest resources planning, designing and management.

Women in forest resources management

Efforts to promote greater involvement by local people in the management of different natural resources have brought about legal reforms in many developing nations. Many countries are adopting policy changes that support local management to various degrees. Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, has seen a proliferation of new mechanisms for the devolution of power in forest management to local communities and villages through specific arrangements such as co-management agreements, village forest reserves, and community forestry.

In Africa a variation on such approaches are found in recent laws or regulations in the form of state level joint forest management. However, the relative extent to which state and community stakeholders have been and will be allocated rights and responsibilities under this arrangement vary significantly from country to country. The extent that women will be incorporated in the loosely-defined local community concept and how their contributions may be realized to improve their position and wellbeing remain obscure. But the challenges to include poor rural women and marginalized voices in the design and implementation of forest resources policies and programmes are significant.

‘Despite women’s widespread use and management of forest resources, forestry and forest development policies have largely continued to ignore women and their activities. But understanding the interactions between women and forests should be a vital component for a comprehensive view of forest resource use’ (Dankelman, 1988:52).

The scientific approach to forestry has made it difficult for rural women to manage resources in the formal structures. The Food and Agriculture Organization from which forestry management methods originated reports that:

‘Although women in rural areas are directly dependent on forestry and related resources, many forestry projects are designed with little mention of women and there is also no recognition of the impact the proposed activity will have on them’ (ibid: 54).

In most situations women are not paid for their contributions. And for paid employment they are involved in food-for-work programmes. However, whatever the case, women’s labour should contribute to their own development – development that constitutes an enhancement of people’s ability to use resources in problem-solving strategies. Therefore, before any programme or project starts, a clear analysis of women’s needs and situation is necessary in order to avoid overworking them and to lighten their burden.

Approaches to forest resources management

Development professionals have shifted their focus from ameliorating the conditions in which poor people live to a focus on the transformative capacity of the poor people to create systematic social change.

‘All over the African continent there are new ways for forest-local residents to participate in sustaining forests in ways not envisaged a decade ago’ (Alden Wily, 2001:3).

This has been as a result of the continuing loss of forest resources which most forest administrations in Africa are experiencing. But the approaches being taken or pursued vary widely from those that seek the co-operation of forest-local communities to those which look to these people as future managers of forests.

Zambia has had, adopted and implemented community-based natural resources management programmes for the improvement of rural livelihoods and poverty alleviation.

A flurry of new forest policy and legislation replaced the mainly colonial legislation across the African region. And most of this new legislation is 'democratic' and replaces the tautly-held central government authority by giving way to semi-autonomous commissions such as the forestry commissions in South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia.

The two main approaches to community involvement in forest management are with the community as forest users and with the community as forest managers. The first approach seeks to secure local peoples' cooperation by granting them legal access to forest products or a share in forest-driven benefits. This model involves the so-called joint forest management model such as the one in Mozambique (Tchuma Tchato), Malawi (Chimaliro) and Zambia (Muzama). Zimbabwe's wildlife-centred CAMPFIRE programme has been particularly influential in this paradigm and has been used as a model for forest management.

The second and more recent approach is more directly concerned with how forests are managed and aims to deliver a cheaper, more effective and more sustainable regime. It looks to forest-local communities as potential managers or co-managers and devises arrangements with them which give varying degrees of authority (Alden Wily, 2001:5).

This strategy works best where the community is acknowledged as the owner or potential owner of the resources and it also applies to government forest reserves. The principle which underwrites this approach is that the greater the authority devolved to forest-local communities, the greater their incentive to manage the forest sustainably and effectively. Emphasis in this approach is placed on helping the community to devise ways to make the forest sustainable over a longer term, and in a context which binds them and others to this regime.

Comparatively, the former strategy involves the sharing of access rights and benefits to advance forest conservation by communities. The latter however involves the sharing of power to achieve forest conservation. This approach is the more transformatory of state–people relations in forest resources management and of the regime of management itself. It is one which forest officials argue about – releasing powers long held to be the domain of government.

In most African states there is much rhetoric about projects with this main objective but projects that are implemented fail to achieve their objectives due to the implementers' resistance to losing their powers. Forest officials, particularly in Zambia, still insist that communities have no capacity to manage forest resources on their own.

It should be noted that making community management enforceable needs the presence of effective social institutions at the country level. However, in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa the absence of such institutions, let alone ones which have legislative power, is a constraint for the evolution of genuinely country-based forest resources management initiatives.

Zambia's new forest laws, however, make provision for bodies such as village resource management committees under the joint forest management strategy. But the formation of such bodies is complicated and the legal personality ambivalent, with local people's power vague or limited. Communities and women in areas where such committees are set up complain about being sidelined in matters that affect them.

3 Methodology and theoretical framework

This chapter presents the methodology and theoretical aspect of the study and the research methods I employed to obtain the answers in this study.

Significance of Kansamfwe

Kansamfwe forest reserve is an indigenous forest lying on traditional land of the Lamba people and it is both a protection and production forest area. Firstly, as a protection area it is a major water catchment area of the Kafulafuta river – a life-support system for creatures and the people living along it up to where it joins the Kafue river, one of Zambia's nerve centres for economic and social development.

Secondly, as a production area, it was used for the production of timber to supply the local people and the international market. As of now it serves vulnerable as well as poor men and women whose life experiences have been thrown into disarray due to worsening socio-economic factors.

Socio-economic situation

Geographically, the Lamba chiefdom lies in the peri-urban areas of the Copperbelt province of the Republic of Zambia. The proximity of the chiefdom to the urban town makes it easier for some people from the area to move to and from town. The economic situation of the area depends solely on subsistence farming and charcoal burning. These activities are done either in the forest reserve areas or in the open land. It is an underdeveloped rural area where people live in small mud, grass-thatched houses and form homesteads that are scattered near the forest reserve. A dozen homesteads form villages and many of these are usually situated around natural resources such as fertile forest land. Many of them, as well as those from the forest reserve, comprise a village head and his or her immediate relatives or friends. The people in these villages rarely carry out economic activities as a community. Although they get together to discuss their problems and possible solutions, they are not organized to improve their economic situation for themselves. They face the problem of outsiders to the area who come to exploit forest resources and often do not follow the traditional methods concerning natural resource use. Their lack of knowledge in terms of laws and regulations and the deficient links between their community leaders and the state worsens the situation. Large grouped villages are very far away from the forest reserve where one would find a few permanent structures like schools, health centres and retail shops. The nearest social infrastructures which the people of Kansamfwe are able to access lie within a 15 kilometre radius from the forest.

Given the above background one would be expected to adjust to the conditions in the area and use the resources available to meet social, economic and cultural needs. Generally, education levels among the women and children are low, because many of them have had little or no opportunity to go to school. The urge to raise money applies to nearly everyone in the area, even in situations where a person requires serious medical attention.

The major economic activities with which both men and women are occupied and which mainly influence their behaviour and determine their lives, were farming and charcoal burning. Farming in the forest reserve and along the forest assured the farmers a good harvest each season. The good yields helped women to barter for anything with the urban migrants who came to buy farm produce from the local people in the area.

The information that formed the bulk of this research was obtained from both primary and secondary sources.

Firstly, due to the dynamics of social, economic, cultural, political and legal issues surrounding Kansamfwe forest reserve and the rate at which forest resources were unsustainably exploited by both the local and other urban forest users, it became essential to investigate the structures responsible for forest management and the policies that were engaged for the proper management of forests.

The forest department was the starting point as it was mandated to manage forests, and some of its officials were identified and individually interviewed as key informants. Since Kansamfwe forest reserve lies on traditional land where customary law applies, both the state and customary laws were interrogated on how they each predispose the activities of the forest users. To do so senior Chief Chiwala became the key informant. The chief, as the custodian of customary law, was asked to substantiate the limitations of the two legal systems on forest-related issues in his area. Besides that, the legal and policy documents on forests were scrutinised and their validity crosschecked with practical issues on the ground.

Methods of data collection

The interview with the chief led me to other avenues where I discussed forest matters with notable living legends of the Lamba people who were known to be the experts in the reportedly traditional forest resources management. This approach took more time and expense but I covered the 40 unevenly and widely dispersed villages in the chiefdom headed by men and women. Gender inequality was apparently not an issue in this traditional political power structure. Villages headed by females were very far away so I was unable to reach them to verify the gender equality in the traditional political structure of the Lamba chiefdom. However, investigations on the issue revealed that gender was not an issue as the power structure embraced men and women.

The research commenced during the rainy season in Zambia, between November and January. This was the period when all adult villagers, men and women, were engaged in a lot of work such as farming, food collection and other domestic chores. It was also a period of many expectations from one's toil in the Lamba culture. The adage 'one reaps what one sows' was the catchphrase among the villagers. During this period people worked and moved in groups after each workday and this made it easier to conduct group discussions as the people settled down over some food or took some of the local sweet drink called 'munkoyo' to quench their thirst.

Group discussions were further spread across those men and women who directly or indirectly accessed resources from the forest reserve as well as those who would not normally have the opportunity to express their views about forest issues. These group discussions generated the need to identify individuals who raised pertinent issues that further informed the need to arrange for in-depth interviews. The approach in itself became an iterative process in that I moved to and from group discussions to in-depth interviews with identified persons from within the groups. This helped me to crosscheck the consistencies and inconsistencies in the data collected from either of the methods employed.

As the data unfolded about the customary law, cultural practices and beliefs, it became evident that I needed to go back to the forest department and engage the senior forest officials on policy matters. Contextualization of the policies and their application within the local setting became a major factor in this study.

I had made several visits to the forest reserve area after it was known that forest officials had identified real forest users, had dialogue with them about the forest reserve and had ordered all the local people to vacate the forest and or not access forest resources. This mandate was to be accompanied by government's initiative to provide the local people with incentives in the form of fertilizers and maize seeds to help them settle back onto their old traditional fields. This aspect was important for it formed the basis on which one would judge government's commitment and seriousness about handling conflicts arising from resource use. It was also a basis for understanding local people's reaction to some of the measures government took on the issues that directly influenced and or determined their social, economic and social rights.

Participant observation

The sensitivity of the information about customary practices and medicinal use of forest resources by some persons and others who, despite the ban, continued accessing the resources in the reserve area, called for an insider perspective. As an outsider, what I noticed about the Lamba culture rarely explained the reality of its practices, beliefs and values. I therefore sought to learn and hear from the experiences of the sons and daughters

of the 'royal' family, as well as some notable men and women. This brought me in contact with the 'living legends' among the Lamba people who jealously guarded their cultural and traditional practices. This method formed the basis of the grounded theory approach for data collection. It also helped me to identify and understand local women's problems in accessing forest-related products, not only in the national forest but also in the local forest. The approach further enhanced my understanding of women's interests and concerns and the problems that confronted them over resources to which dual legal systems applied. I identified myself with notable households, interacted freely with almost everyone in the fields and participated in farming activities as well as wild food collection. The rainy season, in which the research was conducted, meant too much work for older men and women in the fields but having too little to feed the workers in some households. This was the situation in which I found myself and I experienced what it meant to live in an area where the wellbeing of an individual depended entirely on the exploitation of the available resources.

Sampling technique

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique due to the small size of the villages. It also took into consideration the characteristics and similarities of the sample target especially in the rural areas. The technique helped to identify the direct users of forest resources either under state or customary laws. A sample of 72 respondents took part in the study that lasted progressively for three months. The primary respondents were rural women of Kansamfwe, men and women who directly and indirectly accessed forest resources from that area. It also identified other key informants assumed to be knowledgeable about the forest issues in relation to women and the general application of forest laws and policies in reality. The interviews were spread across different categories of people in order to get divergent views and perceptions. Some of the respondents were from surrounding urban markets where forest resources such as charcoal, timber and fuel wood were sold. The methods used in collecting data from both the primary respondents as well as key informants helped to understand the existing state reliance on an unchanged balance of power over forest resources use. They also revealed the limitations of the proposed forest resources management approaches designed to include women which in reality tended to leave out the poor rural women and children.

4 The findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The findings were obtained by triangulation methods. The objectives of the research were transposed on to the assumptions and questions, and the latter were tested using the answers obtained from both primary respondents as well as key informants. The issues that emerged after testing the assumptions were later screened through human rights norms as will be given in the later chapters. The discussion and analysis of the findings will then be given to link up theoretical and practical aspects of the problem under study.

The term forest resources refers to ‘trees and all the benefits one gets from trees such as medicine, firewood timber, fibre and so on’ (Joint Forest Management Guidelines, 2002:1). It also involves the services offered by trees like oxygen, climate regulation and also the environment created by trees for products like mushrooms, honey, fertile soil and animal life. Forests and woodlands in Zambia contribute significantly to the livelihood of the local communities residing near or adjacent to the forest or open area. The scarcity or availability of the resources influence the behaviour of the rural people living near or far away from the resource centre. And wherever the resources can be found people are bound to move closer in order to access the resources for their livelihoods.

Legal aspects of forest resources management in Zambia

State law

Like most African states, in accordance with the Forestry Act, 1999 of Zambia, ownership of all trees and all forest products derived from the national and local forests, customary land and local forest open areas is vested in the President on behalf of the Republic (Forest Act 1999 section 3).

However, the responsibility of controlling and managing the forest reserves, one of which is Kansamfwe, is conferred on the forest department. The forest reserves are in two categories as follows:

- 1 Local forests** – these are used for: conservation and development of forests for security of forest resources; protection of land and water supplies of local strategic importance; improvement of forest resources management and sustainability of the use of forest resources at local levels; and to meet the social, cultural and economic needs of the people.
- 2 National forests** – are used exclusively for the conservation and development of forests for national impacts. They include: the conservation of ecosystems and biological diversity; improving forests resources; and the management of major water catchments and water (Joint Forest Management Guidelines: 1).

These types of forest are further categorized either as production and protection forests. The production forests are managed for present and future production of forest goods and services, and for social and economic development. This includes the provision of raw materials for small and large-scale industrial use, fuel wood and charcoal. The protection forests are primarily used as conservation areas for environmental stability which includes protection of water catchment areas, wildlife habitats, cultural sites and fragile soils.

The forestry department has been responsible for implementing national forestry policies, plans on forest use and the general management and control of forest resources in order to meet national and local demand for other forest products and services. This is contained in its mission statement, as follows:

‘To ensure sustainable flow of wood and non-wood forest products and services while at the same time ensuring protection and maintenance of biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations through active participation of all stakeholders’ (Mulombwa, 2002: 5).

This mission statement of the forest department has been put in place because of the major policy reforms in the country.

The forestry department was previously managing the forest resources without the involvement of other stakeholders such as the community, and women in particular. The first forestry policy of 1965 has been repealed because it was rigid and gave full control to the central government over ownership, planning and management of forests. There was no provision for community management and access to forests. The 1973 Forests Act No 39 which is still being used alongside the 1998 National Forestry Policy, instead of the 1999 Act, emphasized the policing role of the forestry department and the exclusion or restriction of local communities in forest management. The Act further took away all private and individual ownership rights of trees even where title to the land was held. In the given circumstance women's role was not clearly defined or upheld. They were not recognized as partners in the management of natural resources.

Currently the forest policy of 1998 has been put in place. One of the major principles on which this forestry policy is based, which is also important to the study, is its emphasis on the following:

'To promote equitable participation by women, men and children in forestry development and adopt an integrated approach, through intra and inter sectional coordination in forestry sector development' (National Forestry Policy, 1998:10).

It has been observed that women's contributions to forest sector management and use are critical to sustainable forest resources management. Therefore a gender analysis should be used to contribute to an understanding of existing contributions made by both women and men. Gender equity in all aspects of forestry is a fundamental principle in achieving sustainable management and use of forest resources.

Customary law

Zambia has a plural legal system. Customary law was allowed to govern the personal status of Zambians before independence. Customary laws were recognized alongside state laws and these laws were applicable in traditional land where traditional chiefs and their traditional counsellors had jurisdiction over such land for human settlement and agriculture. However, the forest in the areas outside protected areas were communally used but commercial use of forests in customary land was controlled by the state through the forest department. State law still impacts on the customary law on forests, a matter that continues to disempower the traditional leadership and hence women. In many areas, traditional structures have little ability to maintain control over forest resource use and this has led to collapse of the forest resource base.

With regard to Zambian policy, measures have been pursued to restore traditional values that uphold women's access to forest resources but these are unworkable in the current institutional framework. Local traditional institutions are fragmented but under external pressure, they attempt to reinforce rules and check on the use and state of resources in order to deter the unwanted members from joining their community. For instance, when the people of Kansamfwe realized that outsiders were encroaching on the reserve forest, members from nearby villages teamed up and demarcated the forest according to each village grouping. It is through these village groupings that women accessed the resources from the forest.

Forest resources management in retrospect

Zambia's economy and the population depend largely on natural resources for social and economic development. Any changes to the sector have major socio-economic repercussions. Of late Zambia's natural resources have been degrading and depleting at a faster rate due to many factors surrounding it that not only affect the local people but are also a major challenge to policy makers. Of these natural resources, the forest sector is the most at risk and poses great management problems. The last 13 years had seen Zambia sweeping problems under the rug, lurching from crisis to crisis and doing too little too late. As a result disaster has been unavoidable in the management of forest issues. Before and after independence:

'...forests like other natural resources were considered in monetary terms to the extent that they would be converted to goods for exports' (Turok, 1989:46).

Zambia had established a market in the urban areas that had largely depended on the rural areas for forest resources supply. However, overexploitation diminished some forest species almost to extinction. People from all walks of life conducted various activities in the forests and this became worse as commercial charcoal production and logging were intensified. Ironically, overexploitation became attributed to the rural population in that rural people were perceived to be poor and because of excessive poverty, they were said to have been left with little choice but to exploit the resources. But it must be realized that Zambia's ecosystem is a fragile tropical system and once its vegetation is exploited or disturbed, it does not recover. In the past there has been limited appreciation of the true value of the forests because forests were looked upon as everlasting – they had always existed. Customary laws controlled the majority of the land and any member of the tribe obtained access to the land and anything on it through the right of occupancy. Thus women are said to have had the right to access any resources that were found on the land they occupied, such as forests. Under customary law women had the same opportunity to access forest resources but state law set limitations on women's access to forest resources on forest reserves.

Forest policies and legislation

Traditionally, African communities have been closely linked to their natural resource base though some communities have lost such linkages. Forest conservation has been carried out by tribal and traditional communities on the one hand and government institutions on the other. Immediately after Zambia attained independence, the Zambia National Development Plan was initiated to mobilize resources, coordinate activities, and evaluate and monitor their implementation. Projects and programmes carried over from the period before independence were brought under this nationwide development initiative. This could have brought in the colonial approach of excluding some people from accessing local resources.

'The forest sector's main objectives were mainly centred on the establishment of forests, the protection against floods, the maintenance of the flow of rivers and the achievement of self-sufficiency in timber and wood-based industries' (Chabwela, 1995:167).

Since there was an exclusion and control of some forest users, particularly in reserve areas, the state recorded progress in the management of indigenous forests and woodlands in the early years after independence. Additional policy measures were formulated to promote firewood and charcoal production and rural sector development, particularly in agriculture, village regrouping and rural reconstruction. Thus the need arose to establish conservation practices at local and village levels. Generally, the trend was an extension of some colonial regime approaches which had tried to bring all natural resources under government control. But all these efforts did not pay off because the programmes were implemented on borrowed money.

For instance, during the period from 1966 to 1983 the conservation programmes manifested important features that were pertinent but are lacking today in forest resources management in Zambia. Firstly, there was a clear move towards establishing coordination and linkages among government institutions in conservation plans such as land and forest use practices. Secondly, there was a comprehensive and expanded research programme that included investigations into the developmental projects that might have impacted on the ecosystems. Thirdly, the foundation for conservation measures was devised in Zambia.

The period between 1983 and 1985, however, represented an administration gap in the execution of the national development plan. This was a period of three years during which a structural adjustment programme was carried out under the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The programme was intended to restructure the country's economy but did little as far as natural resources conservation was concerned, particularly considering the reduction in extension and forest warden employment. And this has continued to be so in recent years. We have the structures only on paper but various departments dealing with natural resources fail to harmonize their activities and as a result they dispute over policies that overlook their part. Currently, such structures exist but without the recognition of women in access to forest resources management and equitable access to resources may not be realized. The structures continue to exclude women from the system.

Approaches to forest resources management

Forests are one of the most important natural resources of Zambia and cover about 60 per cent of the total land area of the country. But most of them are degraded.

The main approach to forest management throughout the 20th century was reservation. Reservation involved transferring forest resources management from the local domain into the supposedly protective hands of the state. Immediate progress was recorded but was later followed by failure, which has been observed clearly:

'The output in government owned and managed forest reserves has rarely guaranteed their preservation or sustainable use' (Liz, 2001:3).

Zambia, like other African states, is facing a decline in forests and has embarked on searching for new strategies to stop the trend and to place the remaining forests under secure and effective management. But management of forest resources is so problematic that it does not only depend on technical aspects but carries with it social, political and economic factors that must be clearly understood in relation to women. It must be stated at the outset that:

'...forest management is a concept of collective responsibility where consultations and identifications of real managers are significant' (Hall, 1992:310).

Over the years forest management in Zambia sidelined women and communities. As a result community members viewed the forests as belonging to the state. Many people are still expressing such views and as such they have not come forward to assist government in its management. However, Zambia currently intends to adopt joint forest management as a policy and programme initiative that will allow the forestry department, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to collaborate with communities in managing forest resources. It is stated in the draft document of joint forest management that under this system, the following will be expected:

'Local communities and other stakeholders shall become major actors in sustainable management of forest resources; the stakeholders shall have legal rights, an institutional base and economic incentives to take substantial responsibility for sustainable management and utilization of forest resources' (Joint Forest Management guideline, 2000: 4).

The position of women under these guidelines still remains obscure because forest resources management is a gendered activity. There is therefore need to clearly distinguish the level of management at which rural women will access forest resources. To start with, joint forest management is a strategy supported by the national policy to provide active involvement of local communities in the protection, management and use of forest resources. It is through the use of forest resources that women are expected to directly access the resources they depend on for their livelihoods.

'It [joint forest management] will ensure that the values derived from these forests will meet present-day needs of the people while at the same time ensure their continued availability and contribute to long-term development needs. The joint forest management arrangement will be practised in forest reserves and open areas' (Joint Forest Management guideline, 2000: 8).

One of the key informants from the forest department retorted that the emphasis on women's role in forest resources management was bringing confusion into the management system. He thought women and the community were inseparable and that the programmes initiated for the community also helped the women.

But it must be realized that social, economic and political factors affect men and women differently. It would be naïve for public officials to look at women as direct beneficiaries of any government initiated programmes when the facts on the ground clearly distinguish women's interests and needs. It may be lack of critical analysis by the concerned that excludes women from state-initiated programmes and also makes women fail to participate fully in such programmes. The state emphasizes gender-specific needs such as the right to decision-mak-

ing while at the same time leaving out the cardinal rule that practical gender policies are required to improve rural women's position, particularly those at the grassroots level. Those at the grassroots level are more directly dependent on the exploitation of the various forest resources on which the state control overall management practices. Because of the inadequate consideration of women's rights to forest resources the state might take too long or resist granting what might be beneficial to them.

Conversely, forest management deals with the overall administrative, economic, legal, social, technical and scientific aspects related to forest reserves, plantations and open forests. It continues to exercise its power on the management of forestry:

'It implies various degrees of deliberate human intervention ranging from actions aimed at safe-guarding and maintaining forests and maintaining forest ecosystem and its functions, to favouring specific socially or economically valuable species or groups for the improved production of goods and species (Joint Forest Management guideline: 8).

Though local communities will participate in the management of forests the management regime is more directed at the participation of government agencies rather than at local representation due to the technical aspects involved which require competent personnel. Given the lower level of literacy among rural women, the highly competitive formal structures indirectly exclude them from participating in decision-making processes. Only those with academic qualifications may be allowed to handle complex forest resources matters.

Community participation and rural women

Although the Zambian government has taken measures to address women's widespread use and access to the natural resources, understanding the interaction between rural women and forests is vital for a comprehensive view of forest resources use. Rural women are more directly dependent on the use of forest resources than their male counterparts for their livelihoods and the survival of their families. For women to access and participate in forest resources management, they also require the state to provide social services to improve their living standards. And because of the failure by the state to understand their needs, the policy measures put in place to allow women to fully participate in any programme end up not addressing the real issues on the ground. Even where communities participate in such programmes, they are less influential on decision-making as well as shaping their destiny because all that is done is decided by outsiders. Kansamfwe illustrates government's failure to implement viable local programmes and also highlights misallocation of resources from priority areas. It has earlier been noted that women in some rural areas like Kansamfwe will continue to be poor despite living next to the natural resources they entirely depend on due to government lacking coordination between education and individual empowerment, both of which are important enabling tools for women's access to various resources at a wider national level. Community development and other more technical agencies involved in forest resources management programmes all call for a high level of literacy which is lacking amongst the local women. Many of the programmes government initiates in which women are expected to participate rarely help the women on the ground. These programmes are carried out at highly technical levels at which women's views are not considered. But when it comes to the implementation of such programmes it is the local people, in particular women, who are expected to put in the effort. However, the disparity in the formulation and implementation process where women do not take part in what is meant for them leads to failure. Some female respondents in Kansamfwe reacted strongly saying that:

'We could not be part of the village forest committee because the officials serve their own interests. We were told to form village groups through which food for work and for the aged would be distributed by a non-governmental organization. When the food and other necessities arrived our aged parents who were in dire need of food were left out and to the contrary those who did not even register were the ones who accessed the food meant for the poor. It is common knowledge that we do not want to be part of a group that diverts what is meant for the community.'

Role of rural women in forest resources management

It is stated in the 1998 forest policy that women, men and children shall equitably participate in the sustainability, management and use of forest resources. Gender participation is one important factor that the new forestry policy emphasizes. As members of the community, women shall play the following roles together with the community-based organization:

‘Women shall advise government on policy formulation and implementation, shall be the key actors in planning and management of forests at local levels, and shall be the implementers and the determinants of the species and technologies to be used in community-based forestry plantation establishment and management’ (National Forestry Policy, 1998: 35).

The recognition of women as key players in national resources management has further been quoted in the national gender policy as a measure to redress gender imbalances. It is stated that:

‘Government will facilitate involvement of women in decision making at all levels in institutions dealing with the environment and natural resources’ (National Gender Policy, section 4, 12f).

However, the recognition of women does not practically confer rural women’s access to forest resources under state law. There still exists some institutional resistance in the structures where women are expected to operate. For instance, some of the approaches the state has adopted, in particular the joint forest management, fall short of what is required for it to be successful. The local communities have no idea of what is involved, including the senior chief himself, who is the chairperson of the traditional chiefs on the Copperbelt. Even if joint forest management is a pilot study, consultation with the key players is important and measures to communicate what benefits people may gain from it should be taken.

Institutional resistance to women’s role and use of forest resources will continue to impact on women as opposed to the provisions of the policy measures that are being put in place. Besides, the very policy measures in the formulation and implementation of forest resources management programmes continues to emphasize the use of top-down approaches that have over the years contributed to programme and project failure. A good example is the Luangwa integrated resources development project of 1987, a community-based natural resources management programme. The project was intended to improve the living standards of the people through sustainable use of both human and natural resources. Hachileka, who took part in the project states that:

‘Though the programme was designed to be community-based, involving all the members of the community in wildlife conservation, through planning, decision-making, implementation and benefit sharing, the communities were not fully involved. Instead the project adopted a top-down and paternalistic approach where they decided everything for the communities’ (Hachileka, 1998).

The state needs to be cautious in addressing women’s roles in forest resources management. Management of forest resources is highly gendered and measures should be in place to ensure that women are fully involved. Women’s access to resources management entails matching their abilities with regard to forest resources with their activities, in order to attain management objectives. The activities are nothing more than the daily routines of rural women. And what is required really is to increase their participation, make them more effective and more productive, rather than to overburden them with programmes that do not bring them direct benefits.

Local use of forest resources

A study of women only who accessed forest resources from the local and national forests revealed that the use and the value attached to the resources differed between women from the urban areas and those from the rural areas. Those from the urban areas did not consider forests as the basic necessity for their livelihood system but as something they used to supplement their economic benefit in the form of wood fuel and traditional medicine. Charcoal is perceived by many people as a moneyspinner but was not a major source of income for the female

urbanites though this was the case with men from both rural and urban areas. Generally, urban women and their male counterparts traded in charcoal and timber. Hence their constant visits to Kansamfwe and other surrounding areas in search of the commodity. On the other hand, rural women considered forest resources as the major source of their livelihood. Forest land in particular was the most prized resource in that it resulted in high yields of the crops planted. It was from these yields that women sustained their lives after sales and were able to support their families. Wherever fertile land is found women would explore such areas for farming. This explained their preference to farming in the forest reserve rather than on their infertile traditional land.

Charcoal burning is one activity that was secondary to forest land and rural women did it in conjunction with their men wherever enough trees were found. Women become active mainly in the rainy season when charcoal fetches good money in the urban markets and when many urban charcoal traders would come and camp in the forest while others engaged the local people to make the commodity for them.

Generally, women's uses of forest resources in Kansamfwe were mainly for consumption and a bit for commercial use. With regard to their health, conventional medicine has replaced traditional medicine and women opted for conventional rather than traditional medicine.

It was observed that not everyone knew the use of trees for medicine but only those men and women who had traditional healers or spirit mediums in their families.

These were the ones who administered traditional medicine to people with serious medical problems which conventional medicine had failed to treat or cure. Although the health centres are far away one female respondent stated that:

'Some of us are privileged to have relations at the health centres who often times supply us with some medicines for minor cases such as diarrhoea, malaria and so on. But in situations where cases become serious to such an extent that conventional medicines fail, we consult our parents and relations who are knowledgeable on the use of traditional medicine.'

The general perception of forest use from the group discussion was that forest resources were meant for the attainment of social and economic benefits for the people in the area. This was a common response obtained from the people in the area.

Access to forest resources

The Lamba culture is that of conserving and preserving natural resources. They use biomass knowledge to improve soil fertility in small portions of land. On big farming areas it was observed that the rotation methods of cultivation were practised. Here, a field would be abandoned to regenerate for some years before they would use it for farming again and this improved not only the forest cover but also the fertility of the soil. This knowledge had been practised throughout the generations and is compulsory for men and women when it comes to managing land and the local forests. It was observed that both men and women were expected to preserve certain trees on their apportioned homesteads, especially those which provided them with fruits, medicines and shelter, and those which retained water down seasonal streams. In certain areas where mushrooms and caterpillars were accessed, there were local restrictions and no one would tamper with trees or farms for fear of disturbing the ecology.

These forests provided women with seasonal foods, such as those mentioned above, but for men, access to forest trees was all year round since they always got somebody to engage them in either the charcoal business or timber felling and this formed part of their private work. Mainly these activities were done in places where there were abundant indigenous forest trees. In the local forest, the number of trees for charcoal and timber felling had been reduced because forests are used by communities and one's access depended on one's right of occupancy. Therefore people feared depleting the trees. As a result, both locals and urban migrants preferred to

do their activities in the forest reserve area thereby violating the laws in order to access specific resources. Under the state law, forest use regulations were not abided by either by locals or urban migrants. The regulations that existed were simply imposed on the people without putting alternative measures in place for local people to resort to in avoiding overexploiting the nearby forest resources. In rural areas both men and women's access to forest resources relies loosely on customary use rights. But, in principle, statutory law which overrides customary laws when it comes to commercial use of forest resources, regulates access to forest resources.

Policy implications for women

Government's failure to provide and uphold the traditional authority's role in the management and control of what lies in their areas created some conflict between the state machinery and the people. For instance, under customary law the local people were free to access the resources anywhere on traditional land. But this excluded the urban migrants that later started capitalizing on the weakness of the instruments on forests to access products from the reserve area. As such many unscrupulous people double crossed the government as well as the traditional authority and wantonly accessed forest resources for their own benefits. A problem emerged where local people and their leaders had maintained and respected the authority and the rules for forest protection, while the urban migrant's activities attempted to gain control over the resources. The question of who had the right to access the resources in the forest reserve became crucial in the minds of the local people because they did not see the benefit of living next to the resources and not using them while others from far away benefited. The problem of how policies with regard to safety nets for vulnerable communities and political will were coordinated became obvious to anyone concerned with access to natural resources. There was also the question of high levels of rural poverty versus livelihood systems, which compelled everyone to access and exploit resources within reach in order to survive. The arrival of so many urban migrants on the scene continued to worsen the position of rural women in access to resources under state law because any measures government had put in place to reduce overexploitation of forest resources largely affected rural women. The measures were intended to help a certain category of people rather than those who badly needed the resources. The local people demarcated the forest reserve according to their village groupings in order to exclude the unwanted forest user who did not belong to their village. From this development women were able to continue accessing forest resources under the village units.

However, the ban of forest users from the forest meant a shift in the socio-economic positions of the rural women. Women's view of the ban was as follows:

'We in Kansamfwe are used to cultivating on useless land, no wonder we are poor. Now that we are chased from the forest, we shall simply go back to our old infertile traditional land.'

Women would be indirectly discriminated against in access to forest resources in situations where gender distinction to resources is not made. The Kansamfwe issue illustrates how decisions made for collective application end up affecting men and women differently. The ban would not only affect women but the girl child in meeting her livelihood needs. Additionally, women's rights would not be fully realized in situations where government failed to provide basic infrastructures or skills and other income-generating activities.

Kansamfwe sets a typical example of many areas where women's rights and the rights of a girl child would always be abrogated. It was observed that no basic infrastructures like schools and health centres existed where basic educational skills for women and children could be imparted. There existed nothing to acquaint the local people with the urban set-up despite them living adjacent to the wealth of the nation, the rich indigenous forest, which brought in cash for economic and social development. However, living in Kansamfwe was a choice somebody had to make. To the local people the relatively easy and cheap life in the area made them settle there. But to some men the proliferation of small-scale timber traders provided them with small jobs although the traders benefited most from the sale of timber. However, this is a gendered activity which favoured only men rather than women who mostly need cash for survival. Therefore, in decisions made to control various unus-

tainable activities over resources, gender differentiation should be seriously considered to avoid punishing those whose lives entirely depend on the resources.

Much as government would have liked to facilitate full participation of women, no coordinated structures existed through which women would participate. For example, government officials talked not directly to the beneficiaries or major users of forest resources in Kansamfwe but talked to individuals who were often despised by others in the area. It was found that the Village Resource Management Committee that existed was only for one person who acted as a coordinator in the area. And when asked about the composition of the supposed committee in the area, the coordinator stated that he was the only one recognized by the forest department and it was through him that the forest officials supposedly talked to the people in the surrounding villages. The women talked to express their disillusionment with any committee meant to advance their cause. They claimed they were never consulted and they saw no reason to be part of the one-man committee, which did not bear any fruit. As a result women could not present their interests and concerns about forest resources issues. There's still need to consult women on the ground and find out how they perceive issues affecting them that might exert a direct influence on access to forest resources in the area

Constraints to women's access to forest resources

A general analysis of forest resources showed that though rural women might directly depend on forest resources near them, access to such resources was predicated by various factors that made them fail under state law. It is also lack of enabling resources such as education that made women fail to access other resources.

Poverty and economic barriers

In the three villages Mukulubwe, Chembo and Chipempula in which the study was made, poverty was a factor that hindered women's access to resources under state law. Most rural women would not afford the fees required to engage themselves in charcoal burning. It was found that in female-headed households, women rarely controlled their income from the produce they obtained from their farms. It was observed that grain levies were required from them which were compulsory for both men and women farmers. The levies were meant to pay for the upkeep of the senior chief, as he was the traditional owner of the land. Other levies went to the council in the form of conveyance permits on goods produced from the area such as sweet potatoes, vegetables and charcoal. The demand to pay the levies was said to have come through the traditional leaders who advised all farming households to pay for anything produced from the area.

It was found that some women were able to pay but others evaded the tax as they viewed it to be morally wrong. They cited cases where some people pretended to have come from the council and collected levies from the local farmers. The unknowing women were swindled out of what they 'suffered' for in the field. The economic barriers in the village were aggravated by prevailing economic policies. The women who gained supplementary income from charcoal sales lost customers and a source of livelihood when the state banned charcoal burning countrywide. The pressures where the means of production for sustenance of the rural people are disturbed trap poor women in a vicious circle of poverty from which escape is increasingly difficult. Women become poorer and poorer for they fail to make use of what could help them and their children in difficult times.

Resources degradation

As natural resources deplete, rural women spend more time and work harder meeting daily food and energy needs. Forest resource depletion not only affects rural women but also urban women who start to compete for the available resources. In areas where local women had free access to forest resources the presence of other competitors from outside restricted some women to their permanent infertile land. Many elders who grew up in Kansamfwe had experienced such changes and vividly remembered the signs of forest degradation and the drying up of the stream in the area, which now has completely dried up and gives no water supplies. Women in Kansamfwe draw water from open and shallow wells made by opening the ground near the dry seasonal streams.

There are not many boreholes in the area and those that are there are located only in those villages that are organized as a grouped community.

Heavy labour burdens

In most rural African communities, people work hard for long hours to sustain their lives. Though the type of work may differ from country to country, women do more work than men. Generally, rural women work longer hours than men and are involved in a wider range of activities. In rural areas women work 'double' days as they manage both production and maintenance. But adult men in the village have few tasks to do and therefore are freer than women. This gender imbalance in labour mainly reflects the obligations of traditional practices, changing social and economic realities and increasing resource degradation. The heavy workload contributes largely to a downward spiral of poverty for women and their dependants. The aspect of involving women in national programmes needs to consider the tasks women are already involved in. Otherwise women may fail to fully participate or access the necessary resources even where opportunities may be open to them.

Legal injustice

Forest resource use in the Lamba chiefdom depends on local people's ownership and control of land and other resources and on the sense of security provided for in the village. With the crumbling of traditional power structures and regulation on resource use, rural women are constantly lacking access to land and other forest resources, and state laws restrict their traditional rights to land ownership. In traditional tenure systems, land ownership was by virtue of one's occupancy but law requires certain legal procedures which involve the acquisition of title to the land.

The change in traditional ownership gives way to private individual ownership and men and a few women from the urban areas who have access to capital and credit to purchase land. These new systems, modelled on colonial structures, ignore community property rights that sometimes provide women with indirect access to forest resources through land ownership. Where land and forest resources contributed to food security and wellbeing of the family, women found themselves competing with outsiders who, by virtue of obtaining legal documents, were permitted to access the same resources. As a result these competing interests and needs fuel conflict on customary land.

Gender issues on forest resources

One of the key assumptions in the study is located in the conflicting policy measures that impact on women's full participation and realization of needs and interests. It has been observed that through their management and use of natural resources, women's work provides sustenance to their families. As consumers and producers and caretakers of their families they may play a major role in promoting development not only at household level but also at community levels.

However, the deterioration of the forest resources on which many rural women depend has negative effects on the wellbeing and quality of life of the rural population at large. Policy measures that state departments implement are often not matched with action on the ground and they maintain a top-down approach thereby marginalizing a cross-section of women. For instance, women who are not formally trained in the management of forest resources remain absent from decision-making and have their abilities and experiences marginalized. It is important to note that women have different gender interests even on forest resources management. Therefore those who plan programmes must understand women's gender interests in order to ensure that gender needs and interests are met.

Women's gender interests look at improving the immediate, difficult conditions that most poor rural women face daily, which is addressing their practical gender needs and tackling the underlying structural issues that cause these conditions.

In most rural parts of Zambia the socio-economic status of women as well as their relative access to economic resources continues to worsen. In the area where the study took place improvements in health, housing and

education have never reached the poorest of the poor women. This was because after independence the national development plans initiated by the government, one of whose policy measures was to promote village regrouping, failed to recognize women's practical needs in areas where villages were scattered. As a result, women lack the power to protect themselves when policy measures to mobilize scarce resources through the implementation of community groupings are initiated.

Discussion

My exposure in the field generated a gender analysis of the daily activities of the local people. This led to the discovery that women were more involved in both private and domestic work such as charcoal burning and gardening, and in food-for-work activities. Women's engagement in these activities contributed to their family income, survival and sustenance. Ironically, charcoal burning and farming for the men was private work. Some men did piecework on other people's farms and others facilitated the acquisition of land and other forest products like timber at the expense of their families. Asked what the local people would do if the management of the forest reserve was surrendered to them, some men said they would 'continue cutting down trees and make charcoal for sale'. Conversely, the women said they would preserve and protect the remaining resources and concentrate their activities only on those abandoned deforested areas whilst tending their old traditional fields as an alternative to sustainable forest resources management.

Women clearly understood what it meant to farm on exhausted land but were quick to state that they would need support in terms of farming inputs to improve the soil.

Generally not many people welcomed the initiative of receiving the inputs of two 50kg bags of fertilizer and a 5kg packet of maize seed. To the experienced subsistence farmers this could only cater for a household consisting of four people. Some female-headed household complained of the added tasks they would have on their infertile old fields and of the risks involved in applying fertilizers and other chemicals to their crops. The long-serving traditional counsellors bemoaned the use of uncontrolled different types of fertilizers as the factor that had in the past led to loss of good soils in most parts of the Lamba chiefdom. A 66 year old Lamba charcoal trader argued as follows:

'Government contributed to deforestation in the area when it encouraged the use of fertilizer immediately after independence. As a result large tracts of land became infertile, correspondingly leading to loss in growth in non-wood forest products. Our return to these areas would require enough bags of fertilizer – more than the number given to each household.'

It was discovered that government forgot to address one important group of forest users (urban migrants) who directly or indirectly influence the various unsustainable activities that take place in the forest reserve and also one that has potential to abrogate or render both the state and customary laws useless over natural resource use. This group needed to be dealt with decisively if people's use of forests and good management was to be achieved. However nothing was promised to the urban forest users in the area. Government needed to identify real forest users and channel its support to the right group. Failure to do that would perpetuate the current problems it faces in managing people and forests.

Analysis of findings

Generally, forest management as a concept involves a collective responsibility where consultation and identification of 'real' managers is significant. One of the key groups of managers are rural women who, despite being major users of forest resources, still play a minor role in forest management matters. On forest policy issues, rural women are loosely recognized under state law and are far removed from the decision-making structure in which they are expected to operate normally under state initiated top-down programmes.

However, forest management must look practically at certain paradigms such as the enthusiasm for political,

socio-economic and legal empowerment of the poor. It must be noted from the findings that rural and urban poverty and demographic trends are not problems that disappear overnight – neither would repressive authorities in as far as forest resources are concerned. But the ground swell for change lies among the rural or urban people in the country. And this may give a measure of hope for balancing people's needs and resource quality in the national forests:

'Balancing various people's needs while conserving long term resource quality is basic to managing the national forests and woodlands wisely' (Hall, 1992:47).

The key to change is partnership – partnership between the poor rural women, communities and government that creates coordinated links between people at all levels of organization. For instance, formulating policies to involve rural women in forest management is one thing and implementing the policies is another. In a discussion with Professor Hellum she said that 'any laws or policies that do not serve any purpose for the people are useless'. It does not help any government to bleat about any policies that are unworkable. If policies are there to increase women's equal access to and control of forests, why do rural women continue to be the poorest of the poor especially when resources are just next to their backyards? Policies that bear fruit and are well directed at the rural women are required.

In Chief Chiwala's area, particularly Kansamfwe, the most amazing thing is that women who entirely depend on forest resources for their survival either from the local forest or forest reserve have not gained access, control or rights over their lives and forest resources under state law due to a combination of several factors. For instance, the progress government has so far made at national level in recognizing the rights of women in their struggle for improved standards of living, access to health and school infrastructures as well as the recognition of their inherent social, economic and cultural rights to resources, still underlines the growing importance of alternative management of forest resources.

The government has not achieved a balance. Government must rise above its preoccupation with making unworkable declarations and adopt contextualized policies that are matched with action on the ground in order to promote the long-term health of rural women and of the forest itself. Government must do away with top-down approaches to natural resources management. Learned experience shows that this pays little attention to the needs and interest of rural women who are in similar situations as those in Kansamfwe. Kansamfwe as an indigenous forest requires sound local knowledge drawn from local women to manage it properly. This knowledge, however, is not understood by state officials as they prefer to use scientific forestry management of the resources as opposed to approaches that focus on women as resource users. Policy measures need to recognize that men and women's interests in and incentives for forest management differ in many situations as can be understood from the gendered nature of forest resources management. There is need for women to come to the fore, as they are the major users of forest resources.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Whose assumptions can they believe?

I come back to my earlier justification that in the quest to sustainably manage and access resources, the management of forest resources must and should be a collective responsibility, no matter how poor, rich, literate or illiterate members of any society may be. No one should be considered smarter than the other, especially now that those who usurped the power to run the affairs and management of the forests, and various natural resources found in such regions, in the past are now proving to have failed. For instance, in the world, especially in African nations, nature itself has shown that it does not call for powerful governments and authoritative leadership to run the social and natural affairs of the nations. Nature has its own way of doing things and people need to learn and understand from those close to it rather than impose leadership on the knowing. Women are closer to nature than men by virtue of their interaction with it in terms of work:

‘God gave man (men and women) dominion over the earth and this includes the right to hunt animals for food and to use other resources such as forests for the sustenance of human beings. He also required man to exercise this dominion in ways consistent with good stewardship. Further, man must not waste and destroy his environment for he is responsible to preserve it for God’ (NIV, Gen 1:28 – 29, 2:15).

From these principles we may derive some general principles governing management and conservation laws. The first principle is that ‘People (*men and women*) should be given maximum freedom to use natural resources for food and this freedom should be consistent with good conservation practices.’ The way forest resources have been managed and or accessed in third world countries through various government departments lacked the very fundamental aspect of recognizing women as key partners in managing resources sustainably. If we were to carry out an introspection of our lives, forgetting about all those secondary activities we do in this physical environment, we would find that we owe a lot to the natural environment. And as such we are expected to preserve and manage it properly not only for God but for present and future generations.

The second principle is that there is an inseparable relationship between human beings and natural resources such as forests. The third principle is that resource use and management should be in accordance with what people do in relation to their abilities. Those with the knowledge and ability to work with forests must do so and others should simply follow.

However, the way policy-making and laws have been carried out in most African countries will continue to worsen the position of poor rural men and women. It was stated in situations where conditions went to extremes that women would always be seen to be more affected than men. The situation that might have led to this gendered imbalance may be drawn from the specifics of colonization to some extent. Colonialism has brought third world countries to seeing themselves as having similar histories though they differed by specific cultural, social and political economic realities obtaining in the different countries. To start with:

‘The colonial governments did not develop the capacities and participatory abilities of the colonized people of third world nations. Thus at independence these countries had deficiencies of capacity in policy analysis, formulation and implementation of the policies. The problem was further compounded by the legacy of authoritarianism and ‘commandism’ amongst the new states, whose leaders’ favoured patrimonial relationships with the people and used the authoritarian machineries inherited from colonialism to maintain a grip on their people’ (Gaidzanwa, 2001: 8).

What has been noted from such conditions is that participation of the people took ethnic, class and religious forms that have not even to date filtered significantly into the policy-making process. Moreover, the political and administrative structures also provided very little room for policy players from outside the civil service to participate in meaningful policy-making and management.

This is a factor that has continued to disadvantage rural women and poor men. The weakness of post-colonial states has led to the development of corruption at various levels of government, the setting of development agendas that are out of step with local women's needs and the widening of power and wealth gaps between the poor and the rich at local, national and regional levels. The most effective participants in national policy-making are usually those who have managed to mobilize material, ideological and political resources at national level and these operate in well-defined formal structures or bureaucracies.

Gandhi said that 'the earth provides enough to satisfy every man and woman's need but not for some people's greed.'

It has been observed that third world countries, particularly in Africa, embraced complex development programmes and projects with the hope of producing more resources for the people. Alas, they failed to understand the impact such programmes and projects would have on nature and the people in the future. For instance, the promotion of the use of fertilizer on maize fields resulted in land losing its fertility and resource depletion. These effects have been felt by poor rural women to a larger extent;

'Forest resource depletion results from the overly rapid maladministration of natural resources and the failure to regulate environmental problems... better conservation methods and laws are the proper approach to resolving resources problems' (Carolyn: 101).

The current natural resources dilemmas and depletion of forest resources in rural areas are not peculiar to Zambia alone but are experienced across the African continent and in other third world countries. However, wherever these may be experienced, measures are being taken at national levels through the formulation and implementation of various policies to curb the situation. How such measures are taken and implemented is my concern especially when one looks at the gender 'blind' aspect of past policies. The past colonial forest policies Zambia embraced after independence still has root in the civil service. For instance, much as the highly consultative policy documents would like women to be recognized as partners in the management of and access to forest resources, this recognition is simply on paper and does not deal with the factual aspect of what it entails. Where acknowledgement has been envisaged and intellectually debated by men and women in academic circles, there remain insidious barriers that still expose the limitations of formal structures in which women are expected to operate. The most obvious of these is the continued preference for a top-down approach that remains embedded in government-initiated programmes.

Forty years after the exit of the colonial power is too long for a policy-maker to convince my daughter that 'we' are poor because of what the former colonial regime did to this country. Why should my daughter be poor when Zambia is endowed with so many natural resources? My daughter would not believe the paradox of poverty theory when she is convinced that there is something in the offing for her as a friend of nature. Colonialism is history and something needs to be done to suit the current situation. Rural women may have many more questions to ask than my daughter although they may express their views differently due to their exposure to the outside world – and urban or rural life. But the fact is that they know what is best for them whether they are poor or rich.

Gendered aspect of forest resources management

Gender issues in policy-making are not given sufficient attention or understood by bureaucrats and civil society in general. Specifically, the role of women and their relationship to men in social and economic policies, and access to forest resources is ignored in order to perpetuate the exclusion of women, control their activities and minimize their economic empowerment. It must be noted that experiences and access to forest resources under state laws and customary laws are gender differentiated. And that women and men have both conflicting and complementary interests and roles in resource management. There are also significant differences between women and men's experiences of change in resource use because of gender inequities in access to such re-

sources. For instance, when a ban is declared on the use of forest resources in the forest reserve area, women often lose command over their source of livelihood and do not have the capacity to diversify into livelihood strategies such as accumulating savings or engaging in other market-oriented activities. Normally poor men and women will need to widen the range of choices available taking into consideration gendered differences in rights over resources. What this implies in a literal sense is that gender differentiation will expose men and women to different opportunities or poverty levels. Normally in the rural setting the women are affected most. Poverty levels have been seen to be higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas. When this is viewed under a gender lens it becomes clear that gender inequality will impact on the extent of poverty in rural areas to a larger extent. It is therefore important to note that effective forest resources management requires participatory approaches that take into account: the different activities of men and women; the impact of their different uses of the forest resources on the environment; and the gendered interests and incentives for sustainable forest resources management.

Women's rights and international human rights

In Zambia women's lives are governed by a dual legal system of customary and statutory law. In practice statutory law overrides the customary rights to resources that are derived from the traditional chiefs.

'Women have the right to fully enjoy their right to sustainable development' (Protocol to the African Charter, July 2003).

Article 19 requires the state parties to take appropriate measures to:

- a) *Ensure participation of women at all levels in the conceptualization, decision-making, implementation and evaluation of development policies and programmes;*
- b) *Promote women's access to and control over productive resources such as land and guarantee their right to property;*
- c) *Ensure that the negative effects of globalization and any adverse effects of the implementation of trade and economic policies and programmes are reduced to the minimum for women.*

There have been numerous definitions of sustainable development at national and local levels and much debate about what constitutes sustainable management of forest resources. Because of the emphasis on technical aspects of forest resources management, rural women's recognition in forest matters falls short of what is recommended in the current Protocol to the African Charter.

'Zambia's abundant forest resources are threatened due to competition for forestland hence the need for sustainable forest management. Sustainable development aims at meeting the objectives of the society in an equitable, economically viable and ecologically sound manner' (National Forest Policy, 1998:10).

It must be realized that the above are simply concepts that may be applicable in particular contexts and may not be universally applied in the rural setting.

In the broadest sense, sustainability refers to the capacity of socio-ecological systems to persist unimpaired into the future. 'Environmental sustainability' refers to the maintenance of the ecosystem and the natural resource base. 'Social sustainability' is another term used to refer to the social conditions necessary to support environmental sustainability. It stresses the fact that natural resources are used within a social context and that it is the rules and values associated with this context that determine the distribution of resources within the present and the next generations.

The value that rural women place on the forest resources is rarely understood. However, it is women's desire that their households have adequate food resources. Therefore any change in the sources of food or resources impact hard on them.

Article 15a of the protocol urges state parties to:

'Provide women with access to clean drinking water, sources of domestic land, and the other means of producing nutritious food.'

Brundtland defines environmental sustainable management as that which involves:

'...meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Masika, 1997:3).

This definition has been abused by political policy-makers and appears not to hold in our situation. Meeting essential needs requires economic growth and equity facilitated by political systems that secure effective citizen participation in decision-making. But where political slogans become the catchword among policy-makers and technocrats things do not work out. The recognition of women's rights to sustainable development as envisaged in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, under Article 18(2), awaits the enforcement of these rights by state bodies to ensure greater participation of women in planning and presentation of the environment and the sustainable use of (forest) natural resources at all levels. However, the effectiveness of these provisions may be compromised by the fact that the measures the state has put in place to enhance the participation of women in decision-making lack the ingredient of consultation and communication of what has been put in place. In short, the channel through which such measures should be implemented: lacks adequate technical and financial resources; is unable to uphold women's use of forest resources and other natural resources; lacks coordination with other related agencies dealing with natural resources; and, above all, fails to respect the economic and social cost and benefits for women.

I am often struck by the pronouncements loosely made in public by some politicians in my country. I have no grudge against them but the naivety with which they make pronouncements like: 'I am happy to announce that Zambia has now qualified to be part of the highly indebted poor countries (HIPC).' What does that mean to the rural poor women? Similar slogans, though in different forms, were echoed when the structural adjustment programmes were initiated. The local people were able to remember what applied to them during the implementation of the structural adjustment programmes. For instance the major goal of the programmes as well as the benefits were said to lie in the future. Yet the future had not been reached despite people waiting for ten years now from the time benefits were promised. It must be realized that:

'...not all women are poor and dull in the rural areas, and not all people are women, but all women suffer from marginalization and discrimination, a fact they have come to realize.'

Gender inequalities that continue to oppress women even in situations where legal reforms have taken place should be addressed as an issue of human rights but action on the ground is totally zero. On access to forest resources, inequality is overt and we, as a nation, should not sweep dirt under the rug to indirectly or directly perpetuate the poor living conditions of rural women. We must accept that the socio-economic situation in Africa has made so many people poor because of some faulty developmental programmes for natural resources. Conflicting policies for women's participation and realization of needs and interests in forest resources should be revisited and later revised to address the immediate needs of the rural women:

Article 1 states that all people have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

To the majority of those in the rural areas forest resources are a direct means for their survival but the states take too long and are too slow to grant many poor people their rights over resources. There is too much emphasis on the application of state law which to some extent and in particular contexts violates cultural values that protect women's right to access forest resources. It is important to note that:

'So long as people regard law and or policy as the expression of definite fixed principles of right and wrong, they are likely to respect and obey it. But if they regard law as nothing more than the

will of those in power, respect for law diminishes and lawlessness increases. There ceases to be any moral compunction to obey the law; rather, law is reduced to a “weighted alternative” whereby one simply weighs the anticipated benefits of breaking the law against the probability and disadvantage of being caught’ (John, 1984:90).

As the situation stands now, the solution to women’s failure to access forest resources and inadequacy of law to provide a balanced level in resource distribution lies not so much in strengthening the law against law breakers but in building respect for the law governing all forest resources use in an equitable manner.

Enhancing women’s social and economic rights

There is need to widen the range of livelihood choices available to poor men and women in rural areas. This should take into consideration gendered differences in rights over access to forest resources. For instance, policy measures for women’s participation and realization of needs and or interests may not need natural resources focused interventions, but the provision of social services and infrastructures such as schools and health services. This may enhance their sustainable management and access to natural resources.

Alternative approaches to forest resources management

Alternative approaches are required which focus more on resource users rather than resources. This means the government needs to recognize women as key agents for change in the way resources are supposed to be managed. There is need for local people’s knowledge about resource management no matter how poor or ignorant they may be and whatever sex they are. Rural women are already involved, for instance, in natural resources management. It is their day-to-day activity although some do not realize it. Understanding the principles underlying their management practices would make their participation more effective, easier and more productive. The management strategy should focus on matching a suitable group to that resource in order to attain management objectives.

There has been widespread consensus within international development circles that sustainable management of natural resources should be based on local-level solutions derived from community initiatives. Community-based natural resources management has been widely supported in third world countries with little attention to factors that impact on it to succeed or fail. In this approach community empowerment becomes an important factor. It emphasizes community decision-making power over local resources. But these often fall short of expectations because the community approach tends to ignore the power and social differences of the players. In terms of bargaining power, interests and needs, community-based organizations reproduce relations of unequal power and authority. For instance, to obtain successful community-based natural resource management, there is need to establish differential benefits and interests. This means that those who meet the costs of living with natural resources must benefit. The highly-praised CAMPFIRE programme of Zimbabwe, which is now serving as a model for community-based natural resources management, benefits only the people in the area where the resource is found. This in itself is a principle of exclusion for some other resource users who may want to access the same resource. Therefore policies aimed at access to natural resources management solutions through decentralization, particularly the devolution of responsibility to local communities, needs to consider social difference and gender relations.

Action plan

Zambia’s position as regards what is envisaged in forestry policies and plans to involve women in forest resources management is unlikely to improve under the existing institutional framework. The continuing worsening socio-economic inequality of the poor rural men and women will severely affect all the initiatives in forest resources management. Control over forest management has not yet been exposed to gender orientation so as to change various paradigms of excluding rural women over natural resources use.

Moreover, the legal reforms, a necessary part of moving the rights of women in accessing various natural resources, has not been friendly to local resources management. This is because resource usage by the local people may have received some degree of legal recognition but the law itself continues to provide little scope for the local people. Statutory law simply gives weak protection to existing customary rights concerning women's access to and control of resources, and at the same time provides no alternative mechanism by which local groups might assert control of resources in their vicinity.

Zambia encountered high forest resources costs by pursuing development through expanded social, economic and political infrastructure and forestry activities in the urban areas. At the grassroots level the state offered little hope of prioritizing the views of the poor in an effort to reduce rural poverty and increase equity in forest resources. One has to ask whether the overall standard of living among rural women has been raised in order to balance forest resources management and the livelihood system through rights and responsibilities? Is the forest institution equipped to relinquish its power and control over forest resources to the local people?

One of the solutions that needs to be considered may be to prioritize programmes that seek to transform the lives of poor rural women and men. The achievement of equity of access to and management of forest resources requires a process that moves beyond a welfare approach, to one of women's agency. This process should include conceptualizing access to forest resources in terms of structural changes, moving towards women's increased control in determining access to forest resources and the distribution of benefits.

The absence of poor rural women's voices in policy-making over forest resources use deprives forest management of information which could provide strategies to improve the lives of the poor and this promotes 'disconnect' for both policy and practical measures. There is need to uphold rural women's voices in the setting up of political, economic and social goals over access to forest resources. This could be done by promoting full participation of women in forest activities. However, engaging women who have been typically marginalized from the process requires 'moving beyond the trends of stakeholder involvement that focus on official ministries' (Bangser, 2000:17). Meaningful participation of women in forest resources management needs to include the poor, particularly poor women. And effective mechanisms of participation need to promote equal participation through highlighting minority views that may run counter to those of the people in control of the decision-making process. There is also need to invest actively in building the capacity of marginalized women to determine the rules of decision-making processes.

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