

# **Managing Conflicts for Sustainable Forest Management: Lessons from Mafungautsi Forest, in Gokwe Communal Area, Zimbabwe.**

**By T. Mutimukuru**

## **Abstract**

Historically, management of public resources such as forests has been the role of the state and its various agencies without any participation by local people. This top-down way of management has, however been recently criticized by proponents of people-oriented approaches, who believe that sustainable management can only be achieved if local people are directly involved in the management of their resources. However, so far, people-oriented approaches have not resulted in sustainable forest management and the improvement of human well-being and one of the many reasons cited by some researchers is the failure to deal with conflicts that arise among stakeholders in joint management efforts. Such conflicts arise because multiple stakeholders in joint management initiatives have different beliefs, values and interests. This paper focuses on identifying the conflicts that arise among stakeholders in joint forest management situations and how these can be resolved to enhance sustainable resource management. The paper argues that identifying and resolving conflicts enhances learning among stakeholders and leads to better management strategies for the forest resource. The research was qualitative in nature and made use of Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques for data collection. The main conflict resolution mechanism used during the workshops held was principled negotiations. The main findings of the research are that several conflicts arise in forest management and these can be classified in two broad categories, internal and external conflicts. Internal conflicts were those happening within the community and were related to resource boundaries and theft of resources, fire management, leadership, and incentives for the Resource Management Committees to work. External conflicts were those between local communities and outside stakeholders and are related to boundaries, fire management, access to resources in forest and the perception of the role of the forest by stakeholders. The other finding of the research was that three main mechanisms have been used to resolve external conflicts, namely, suppressing conflict (ignoring that conflicts exist), use of force and litigation. In all cases, these mechanisms were unsuccessful in resolving the conflicts. The major lessons of the study are that: (a) Managing conflicts enhances learning processes that result in better resource management by stakeholders, (b) conflict management should not be a once of thing for conflicts will continue to arise in resource management situations, (c) empowering stakeholders who feel powerless promotes conflict resolution processes, and, finally, (d) in situations where communication by stakeholders is not completely broken, principled negotiations are effective in resolving conflicts. However, some facilitation will be required during the initial phase of the negotiation process.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper focuses on management of conflicts in natural resource situations, in particular forest resources, and addresses the following general questions: (a) What conflicts arise among stakeholders in forest management? (b) What ways can be used to solve these conflicts and how effective are they according to the stakeholders' perceptions? (c) What conflict resolution mechanisms have been used in the past in forest management, and how effective were they in resolving conflicts? (d) Can conflict resolution enhance learning in forest management? If yes, what lessons were learnt and by whom? The paper argues that Identifying and dealing with conflicts creates a conducive environment for learning as stakeholders realize why they had different views in the first place and learn from

each other. Such lessons are crucial in enhancing better management strategies of the resource. In Mafungautsi, this research gives an opportunity lessons to be drawn that are crucial in up scaling of the resource-sharing project to the other state forests in the country.

The paper starts by giving background information with regard to the history of natural resource management and conservation in Zimbabwe, the forest resources, and conflict resolution mechanisms. This is followed by a description of the research methodology. The research findings are then presented and discussed. This is followed by a section on lessons from Mafungautsi and the paper ends with a concluding section.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **History of Natural Resource Management in Communal Areas of Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe's communal areas are highly disadvantaged due to past colonial policies. They are mostly located on the drier and remote parts of the country, which are inaccessible to urban, industrial and infrastructure developments and are densely populated. These areas have marginal to poor agricultural potential (Mehretu, 1994).

Concerns over management of natural resources in communal areas were first raised in the 1920s, by the colonial government, and several attempts were made thereafter to restructure land use patterns through measures such as altering the land tenure, limiting stock numbers, increasing cattle off take, establishment of improved veld management and demarcation of some of the communal forests as state land entirely managed by the state. Multitudes of people, who lived in the forest area during that time, were therefore, forced to move out and settle elsewhere. This expulsion created tension between the colonial government and the native Zimbabweans, and was (among other causes) the principal cause of the Chimurenga uprising against the colonizers (ibid.).

Upon election, the new government tried to redress the situation by acquiring land for resettlement in order to reduce pressure in the communal areas. The government also inherited some of the colonial policies like for instance, the gazetted forests remained as state forests being run by the Forestry Commission (FC), a government parastatal, for conservation purposes. People, who rushed to occupy the forests on attainment of independence, were again evicted and resettled in other areas. Tensions therefore continued to exist between the local people and the FC. The displaced people and those living close to the forest still consider it as theirs since they used to stay in the forest before it was demarcated as a state forest and they continue to utilize it illegally, while the FC takes the forest as a private Government property, and try by force, to prevent people from the surrounding communities from entering.

## The Forest Resources in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's forest resources fall under four main categories:

1. *Woodlands, forests and trees in communal areas.* These cover about 10 million hectares that provide households with construction timber and fuel wood (MacNamara, 1993). The quality of such woodland varies from place to place, but mostly, consists of remnants of scattered trees in what has effectively become open land. Such woodlands are also important sources of wild fruits that contribute to the nutritional health of the people. The woodlands are also important in providing pastures for the communal cattle,
2. *Woodlands and trees in large-scale commercial farming areas.* These cover an area of about 7 million hectares, and function as an important habitat for wildlife,
3. *Woodlands and forests on state land in protected areas.* These cover an area of about 6 million hectares. Such woodlands consist of badly overexploited, but still commercially productive woodlands, which cover an area of over a million hectares, of which 568 000ha are operated by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, while the remaining 439 000ha are operated by the FC (ibid.). A large proportion of the remaining area consist of parks and protected areas that are vital for the country's tourism industry and
4. *Industrial forest plantations.* These cover a total of 110 000ha which are of great commercial value, and produces timber based products for both the domestic and export market.

This research focused on woodlands and trees on state land in protected areas and in particular those being operated by the FC. So far, management of such forests in Zimbabwe has been problematic. *'Legislation regarding natural resource management in communal areas tends to be highly restrictive and provides inadequate incentives for increased local participation in management'* (McNamara, 1993, pp.2). The legislation concentrates control and management of resources in regulatory departments like the FC. The FC however, has regulatory and extension roles which are sometimes conflicting (ibid). Experiences so far with such management has proven that the current legislation does not work and there is a strong need for another legislation that seeks to enhance sustainable forest management by all stakeholders, rather than one which seeks to penalise or punish those very people who livelihoods are most dependent on forests. According to McNamara, 1993, *'long-term productivity of woodlands and tree resources will ultimately depend on the viability of local institutions and social structures. The government has neither resources nor the means to manage these resources at the local level effectively'* (pp.3)

It is because of this background that a pilot project was initiated in 1994 in Mafungautsi Forest (which falls under woodlands and trees on state land in protected areas), to encourage resource sharing of the forest by the two major stakeholders, the FC and the local villagers. The main aim of the resource-

sharing project was to enable the two stakeholders to manage the forest together in a sustainable way, while at the same time benefiting from it. Mafungautsi forest has been gazetted in 1954 as a state forest and has ever since been managed by the FC. The forest is located in Gokwe South district and has a total area of 82 100 ha, and is located on a plateau. The vegetation of Mafungautsi is predominantly miombo woodland and dominant tree species are *Brachystaegia* and *Julbernardia* species (Vermeulen S. J. 1994). The forest is a catchment area for four of Zimbabwe's major rivers, Sengwa, Mbumbusi, Ngondoma and Lutope, and this was the main reason why it became protected land. The forest has also some high value timber species that are important for raising government revenue.

Considerable effort has been made so far by the FC in trying to bring local villagers in the management of the forest. Resource Management Committees (RMCs) have been established with the help of the FC and their role is to coordinate efforts by communities in forest management and also to monitor resource utilisation by villagers, by issuing harvesting permits to resource users. The RMCs have been selected by the villagers with the help of the FC and were supposed to be answerable to the community. Despite the effort, there was not much progress in achieving this objective because stakeholders were not open to each other and they pretended that all was well yet conflicts remained hidden. For instance, the established RMCs were bitter that the FC did not pay them even though they were working for them, while at the same time the FC refused to pay the RMCs as they said it was the responsibility of their respective communities to do so. Several other conflicts existed in this pilot project and these have also retarded progress.

### **Background to Conflict and Conflict Management**

Conflicts can be defined as 'all kinds of opposition or antagonistic interaction usually based on scarcity of resources, power or social opposition and differing value systems (Fisher *et al.* 2000, Mushauri 2002). They arise from "imbalances in ...relations leading to problems such as discrimination, unemployment, poverty, oppression and crime. Each level connects to others forming a potentially powerful chain of forces, either for constructive change or for destructive violence" (Fisher *et al.*, 2000. pp.4). Conflicts can be classified under three broad groups; (a) latent conflicts. These occur below the surface and need to be brought in the open before they are addressed, (b) open conflicts which are visible and have deep root causes, requiring action to address both these aspects simultaneously, and (c) surface conflicts which are shallow and have no root causes, arising mostly from misunderstandings, and can be addressed by means of improved communication (ibid).

Causes of conflicts in natural resource management include perceptual differences (time, expertise, culture), priority of value differences, competition for limited resources, divergent goals, inadequate resource ownership (use/ access

rights), unbalanced power relations and interdependency that results in expectations not being met.

Various approaches for managing conflicts have been identified in literature and these are (ibid):

*Suppressing/ avoiding the conflict*

In this case, involved parties act as if there is no conflict and this could be due to a number of reasons such as inadequate channels for dialogue, when deeply held grievances cannot be heard and addressed and there is instability, injustice and fear in the society. However, suppressing conflicts leads to problem in future for it can become violent.

*Intensifying conflict*

This involves bringing conflicts into the open, and making it more visible so that it can be addressed. This requires empowerment of disadvantaged groups so that they can open up and talk about their grievances.

*Principled Negotiation*

In principled negotiations participants become problem solvers, whose aim is to achieve a wise, fair and efficient outcome. The negotiators focus on their divergent views and interests instead of their positions (Mutimukuru, 2000) and these are made explicit. Solutions are then sought for which ensure a 'win-win' situation for all stakeholders. Decisions and agreements made in this way are more likely to be adhered to by all parties since everyone's interest has been considered.

In cases where lines of communication have not been completely destroyed, principled negotiation takes place without the involvement of a third party. However, in situations where the level of confrontation and violence makes it difficult for parties to meet and engage in direct communication, a facilitator is needed to assist indirect communication that can later lead to direct communication by the involved parties. The process of principled negotiation has a number of steps and these are described below:

**Step 1: Preparation**

In this stage, a research is carried out to get information concerning the conflict. The needs and interest of conflicting parties are identified by making contact with both sides, and later agreeing on a date and time for the parties to meet and discuss.

**Step 2: Interaction**

In this stage, the conflicting parties come together, share their different perspectives, redefine their problem jointly, identify alternative solutions to their problems and priorities these options

**Step 3: Action planning**

The conflicting parties agree on the best option and develop action plans for each stakeholder. They also agree on a timeframe, and deadlines for action.

*Mediation*

This is used when direct negotiation have failed and communication between conflicting parties is broken. In this case, there is need for a third party to intervene to help them talk about their problem rather than fighting. The third party may volunteer to take this role, or may be asked to take this role by the conflicting parties. Mediation involves a number of steps and these are:

**Step 1: Preparation by mediators**

Partner mediators need to meet and plan the strategy and process. The mediators also need to meet with conflicting parties and introduce themselves, clarify their role, explain the process and get their agreement on the mediators of the process. They also need to ask the conflicting parties if they want to meet.

**Step 2: Opening statement by mediators**

The mediators welcome, make introductions and give words of encouragement to conflicting parties. They explain the reason why people have come to the meeting, what will happen and how long the processes might take.

**Step 3: Conflicting parties commit themselves to the process.**

The conflicting parties make commitments to participate in the process and seek solutions and make commitments to agree with the ground rules, and to participate until the process is complete.

**Step 4: Each part tells its story**

Each party narrates their story and their understanding of the conflict. The mediators' role is to control the process and time for each speaker and ensure that each party abides by the ground rules. The mediators may also summarise the story told by each party.

**Step 5: Identifying the main issues**

This step involves clarification of issues of disagreement and conflict. The parties also prioritise issues to be dealt with in the mediation process.

**Step 6: Direct exchange and seeking solutions**

In this step, the conflicting parties are encouraged to communicate their needs and fears, and then later on identify possible options to their problems.

**Step 7: Consensus building**

Parties are encouraged to choose or combine options to come up with jointly agreed solutions.

**Step 8: Finalise agreements**

In this step possible agreements are clarified and parties agreed on who would do what and when?

**Step 9: closing**

In this step, what the parties have accomplished need to be reviewed, and conflicting parties are congratulated for successfully resolving their conflict. And later on issues for follow up are clarified.

Strengths of mediation and negotiation include the following: local knowledge is respected and valued, it is accessible to the poor, it tends to be flexible, encourages decision making based on consensus and contributes to the empowerment of communities. Their weakness are that they may still be inaccessible to marginalized groups, and often cannot handle conflicts between communities and the state as communities feel powerless.

***Litigation.***

This involves the use of the existing legal system for resolving conflicts. Its strengths include the following: it is official and has well defined procedures, it considers national, international and other concerns, it involves judicial and other experts and decisions are legally binding. Its weaknesses are that it is often inaccessible to poor and marginalized people, may not consider traditional or local knowledge, can be inappropriate at times when there is a need to reconcile competing legitimate interests, it is reactive and promotes 'winner' – 'loser' solutions.

According to research carried out, positive outcomes for resolving conflicts include increased motivation and creativity by stakeholders, healthy interactions, increased number of identified alternatives and solutions, an increased understanding of others, stakeholders clarify their ideas more effectively, increased opportunities to change contentious issues, and increased self awareness by parties involved (Fisher *et al.* 2000, Mushauri 2002). Failure to resolve conflicts is said to have a number of negative outcomes and these include decreased productivity, relevant information not being shared, environmental stress, unpleasant emotional experiences, decision making compromised, poor working relations, misallocation of resources, and the ultimate result being the collapse of societies and death of groups and organizations due to their failure in adapting to the changing environment.

### **The Research Site**

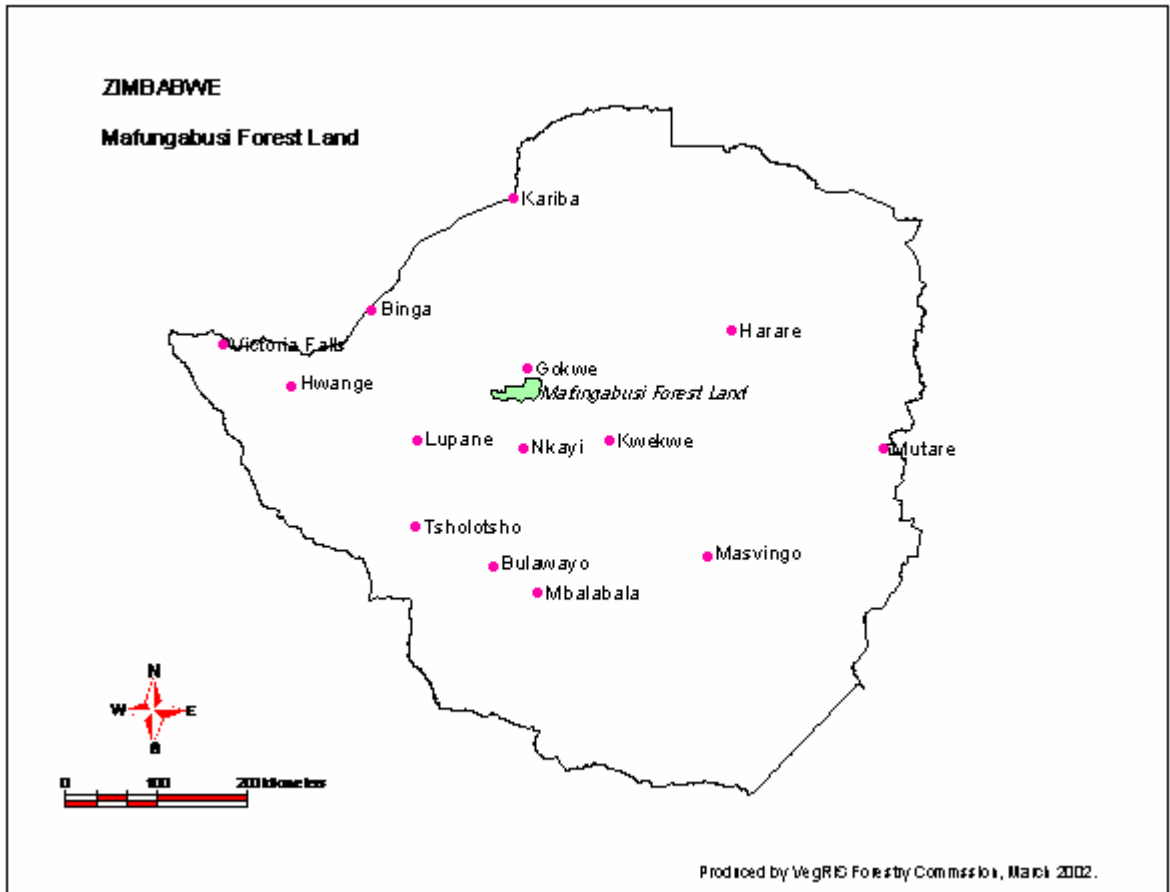
Mafungautsi forest is located in Gokwe South District in Midlands province, Zimbabwe (See figure 1 below) and has a total area of 82 100 hectares. The district receives a total annual rainfall of around 800mm (which falls between November and March), and suffers from mid-season dry spells and high temperatures, that makes it only suitable for animal production (Katerere *et al.*, 1993).

The vegetation of Mafungautsi is predominantly Miombo woodland and dominant tree species are *Brachystaegia* and *Julbernardia* species (Vermeulen, 2000) The dominant soils in Mafungautsi are the Kalahari sands and the forest is a catchment area for four major rivers in Zimbabwe, namely, Sengwa, Mbumbusi, Ngondoma and Lutope. Several resources are found in Mafungautsi forest and these include, pastures for grazing animals, thatching grass, broom grass, medicinal plants, honey, mushrooms, firewood, construction timber, game meat, Mopane worms<sup>1</sup>, indigenous fruits and herbs.

*Figure 1: Mafungautsi Forest Reserve, Zimbabwe*

---

<sup>1</sup> Mopane worms (*imbresia belina*) are edible and used as a relish when dried.



Communities surrounding the forest have been divided into 15 Resource Management Committees. Njaje RMC was deliberately chosen for this study, because it was identified as the one where there was least progress in communities participating in the resource management. One of the reasons why this was so was the many conflicts that existed between the community and the government parastatal – the FC. The FC therefore, had abandoned this site and people in Njaje remained unclear on what their role was in the resource-sharing project. The RMC consists of eight villages and is located in Chirima ward. The total population of the ward is 8302 people (1992 census).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research design

A case study research design was adopted in the research. A case study, according to Mitchel, is the documentation of some particular phenomenon or set of events, which has been assembled with the explicit end in view of drawing theoretical conclusion from it. A case study therefore is a detailed examination of events (or series of events), which the analyst believes exhibits the operation of identified principles. The research focused on the case of Nyaje RMC. Nyaje RMC was quite unique in that ever since it was formed in the year 2000, the



committee has been inactive as its members were still waiting for the FC official to come and tell them what they were supposed to do. Furthermore, even though the RMC existed, there was never input from the Nyaje community in terms of resource management.

The research started with a desk review on existing literature for the study area. In order to examine the conflicts that took place in the past, a historical reconstruction of events that took place since the forest was gazzeted in 1954 was done. This was followed by semi-structured interviews guided by a checklist, with key informants, resource users and the Nyaje RMC. One major finding from the interviews was that the community was passive and saw themselves as powerless and unable to open up and discuss the various conflicts with the responsible FC officials. The Vice chairman of the RMC actually said that *'imi ndimi mungatotibatsira nekuti isu hatinasimba rekutaura nevakuru ava'* meaning 'Its you who can actually help us to talk to them (FC officials) because we do not have power to do that'. This then led to the organization of a Training for Transformation (T for T) workshop to try and break this passiveness among the local communities<sup>2</sup>. An external facilitator facilitated the T for T process in a period of two days. The T for T was based on six principles according to Paulo Freire and these are: (1) No education is neutral – it can either domesticate or liberate you. Domestication involves making people fit obediently into roles required of them by the dominant culture, whilst liberation involves enabling people to be creative, active and responsible members of society. (2) Education has to be relevant. This encourages people to choose education and development programs that are relevant to them. (3) Communication that promotes dialogue. This statement emphasizes that dialogue is crucial in participatory learning and transformation processes. Also emphasized is the fact that no expert has all the answers, and each may have valuable information to contribute. Dialogue is therefore an integral part of uncovering the insights of all the concerned parties. (4) A problem solving approach that allows concerned parties to actively describe, analyse, suggest alternative solutions and plan for action in order to solve their problems. In this case, a facilitator only provides a framework for thinking and active participation by concerned parties. (5) Education that encourages a process of action and reflection. In this case the facilitator organizes situations for people to stop and reflect critically about their actions, as well as draw lessons for their future actions. (6) Radical transformation. This stresses that education should enhance radical transformation of individuals in their personal lives, communities, environments and whole societies. Transformative education empowers people to make their full contributions to issues relevant to them.

The major aim of the T for T was to break passiveness among in their active participation in conflicts resolution. The FC official, the coordinator of the

---

<sup>2</sup> The communities are composed of many stakeholders at that local level including, the RMC, the traditional authority, resource users, social clubs such as women clubs and soccer clubs, and the resident extension agents.

resource-sharing project also attended the workshop. A second workshop was conducted to try and raise awareness to the community and the FC regarding the various methods that can be used in resolving conflicts and their advantages and disadvantages. The second workshop also provided stakeholders with the opportunity to examine the conflicts they faced, individually or in the resource-sharing project, while paying attention to the mechanism they had used and how effective they were in conflict resolution. Later on, another workshop was conducted for stakeholders to examine the existing conflicts and attempt to resolve them. The main method used for resolving the conflicts was principled negotiation. Stakeholders were involved in negotiation processes regarding the status of the problem, the available alternatives and also to come up with jointly agreed solutions. Stakeholders ended up developing action plans about what they would do in order to enhance better management of their resource. The researcher later followed up on the progress being made by the stakeholders after the workshop.

### **Research methods and techniques**

The research made use of several Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques for data collection, including focus group discussions (FGD), personal interviews, participant observation, visualization techniques, role plays, story telling and group interviews.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Conflicts among stakeholders in forest management**

Several types of conflicts can occur in forest management. These can be classified under two broad categories, internal and external conflicts. Conflicts falling under these two broad classes are described below.

#### **1. Internal Conflicts.**

These were conflicts arising among local level stakeholders and these fell under different categories. The various categories are described below.

- **Resource boundaries**

Each resource management committee had been allocated an area where they could harvest resources such as broom and thatch grass. Yet in most cases, these boundaries were not very clear and this was a big problem in the research site.

- **Resource theft within and between RMCs**

In some cases, some people were apparently stealing resources from the forest to avoid paying the permit prices. It was alleged that those who stole the resources used poor harvesting practices that resulted in the depletion of the valuable resource. For instance, thieves were blamed for digging instead of cutting broom grass, and this was regarded as a poor practice. It was also

alleged that members from other RMCs steal resources in areas outside their RMCs, and this resulted conflicts among these RMCs.

- Fire management

Some community members were accused of starting forest fires, especially those who were involved in honey harvesting. According to Mr. Mazanhi the chairperson of Nyaje RMC, honey collectors from the forest were blamed for starting forest fires. It was also alleged that community members who did not have livestock, particularly cattle, were also responsible for starting out fires since they lost nothing when pastures got burnt.

- lack of transparency by RMCs.

Tensions also existed with regard to the RMC leadership because some people accused the RMCs of lack of transparency. In some cases RMCs were accused of starting to issue permits before the grass was ripe and especially to outsiders. In other cases, RMCs were accused of misusing money that had been raised in their RMCs and hence the communities were not benefiting from it.

- RMCs and subcommittees

There were also serious conflicts when new subcommittees were formed. In certain cases, some RMCs thought that these new structures had come to replace them, and in other cases, the subcommittees themselves thought that they were created in order to investigate the work by the RMCs. At one meeting where members of the RMC subcommittee were discussing how they should link up with existing institutions, someone suggested that the subcommittee needed to report to the main RMC, which would later hand over cases to the traditional authority if they failed to deal with them. There was, however, strong resistance from the rest of the group as they wanted to report cases and their findings to the FC. According to them, it was impossible for them to work with the main RMC since the members were not transparent.

- RMCs and traditional leadership

Conflicts existed between the traditional leadership authority and the RMC members. In some cases, traditional leaders were said not to be supportive of RMC activities. For instance, in one RMC, some village heads would not announce when RMC meetings would take place. Their village members would therefore not come to any of the meetings organized by the RMC. In such situations, it became very difficult for the RMC to operate in their areas without the support of traditional leaders.

- Incentives for the RMC

RMC members in some cases were very angry because they were not paid and wanted to be paid for the work they had done in raising money for the communities. However, most communities did not want to pay RMC members because they had already obtained their repayment during the year. In other cases however, the communities were said to refer the RMC to the FC since they

said that the RMC was working for the FC and not the community. The FC however, had made it clear that the RMCs were working for their respective communities, which were therefore responsible for rewarding them for their work. This resulted in tensions between people and their RMCs. In one case, the chairperson of one of the RMCs, Chemwiro Masawi, said that when his RMC appealed for people to pay them for their work, the people said that *'kana zvakukona rega, tinotsvaka vamwe,'* meaning: 'if you are fed up you can leave. We can always find someone to replace you'.

## 2. External Conflicts.

External conflicts arose between the two major stakeholders – the FC and the surrounding communities. These fell under a number of categories.

- Boundaries

There were serious boundary conflicts ever since the history of Mafungautsi forest. At one time for instance, in Nyaje RMC, the FC, using their map, came and evicted some people who they claimed were living in the forest. People of Nyaje were very bitter about this for some lost their fields whilst others were forced to move out completely to far areas outside Mafungautsi. According to the people in Nyaje, the FC had encroached their village in an attempt to increase the forest area.

- Fire management

There were serious conflicts in regard to forest fires. The FC accused communities of causing the many forest fires. However, community members were also angry that the FC started these fires in order to punish community members by destroying pastures for their animals.

- Resources allowed for RMCs to harvest

The FC allowed the villagers to only harvest the minor forest products such as grasses, mushrooms and herbs and not the major products such as timber, and villagers were dissatisfied about this. They also wanted to harvest the high value commercial timber found in the area. However, according to the FC, there were only a few ripe trees that were ready for harvesting and the last time they harvested the commercial timber was in 1992. The Nyaje community however, said they saw the timber, and would also want the FC to give them some percentage of the money they got after allocating concessions to timber logging companies, like what the campfire<sup>3</sup> project does.

- Perceptions on the role of the forest

According to the FC, Mafungautsi forest was a catchment area for four of the major rivers in Zimbabwe, that drain into the Zambezi river, the major source of hydroelectricity in Zimbabwe. According to the FC, the forest is dominated by very fragile sandy soil and hence needs to be protected in order to prevent siltation of the major rivers. Yet, for some community members, the forest is a

---

<sup>3</sup> Campfire is the\*\*\*\*

home, and they want to settle there. During the March 2000 presidential elections, more than eighty families actually invaded and settled in the forest. Other people also wanted to settle in their original homes so that they could take care of the graves of their relatives that were left in the forest.

### **Past conflict resolution mechanisms**

Three conflict resolution mechanisms have been used to resolve conflicts that arose in Mafungautsi. These are described below:

- Use of force to deal with the boundary conflict in Nyaje

When the FC told communities to move from the forest boundaries, communities refused to move for according to them, this was their area. The FC used force to evict the people living in the demarcated forest area and some of these people were left homeless and others with no agricultural fields. This method of conflict resolution was common with the FC. Also, when some people went to occupy the forest soon after independence, the army was sent by the government and people were again evicted. This method however, did not solve the problems at all but left community members bitter and waiting for another opportunity to go back to their original homes in the forest. This was seen when the villagers grasped the opportunity in the most recent presidential elections. More than eighty families moved back into the forest and there was massive felling of trees as they cleared new fields and started paving way for roads to their new village. Because of the political situation, the FC felt dis-empowered to evict these people this time, and according to the FC official, it was difficult to do so because 'the invaders would think that whoever asks them to move is from the opposition party'. The FC however, was waiting for authority from the government to again evict these 'invaders'.

- Ignoring conflicts

Over the years community members decided to keep quiet about their grievances with the FC. They, however, came up with several ways of making their situation better, through illegal access and utilization of the forest resources. The FC however, due to their limited capacity, was unable to effectively monitor and police those who disobeyed and in most cases, they got away with it. For instance, people harvested timber illegally, and also many of the forbidden resources and the FC had no capacity to police them.

In the case study site, when the FC official promised to come and show them where to harvest the resources, they just kept quiet as they said that they were still waiting for the official to come one day.

#### **Use of the legal system**

In some cases, the FPU used the existing legal system to deal with those that violated the Forestry Act. However, this system was not always effective. For instance, someone was taken to the police and arrested for putting snares in the

forest, but this individual was later released as the police in charge said that there was no law that said that putting snares in the forest was a crime.

### **Learning processes during conflict resolution**

Conflict resolution processes in Mafungautsi, were mainly centred on negotiation mechanisms by the involved stakeholders. However in this case the negotiations were facilitated by the researcher. Facilitation was very crucial because the two stakeholders, the FC and the communities, were very suspicious and not open to each other. Through the facilitation process stakeholders managed to bring their conflicts into the open and discuss, negotiate and resolve them. The discussions between the two major stakeholders provided great learning opportunities. Some of the lessons learnt are as follows:

#### *Learning about causes of fire by both stakeholders*

Negotiation processes by stakeholders trying to deal with their conflicts, resulted in great learning opportunities for the two major stakeholders, and in the end they came up with action plans to better manage their resources jointly. For instance, during the discussions, both stakeholders realized that they had some commonalities, such as wanting to protect the forest from fires. During the discussion on major causes of forest fires, the FC blamed the communities for starting fires and not putting any mechanisms to make sure that those who started fires were punished. On the other hand community members also blamed the FC for starting these forest fires and burning valuable pastures for their animals. The community members mentioned that there was rumor that sometimes the FC started fires to open up fireguards. The FC officer later explained that the FC was on rare occasion involved in starting small fires in order to prevent major fires in future. According to Mr. Mutasa, these fires were carefully controlled by the FC officials on duty. Community members learned from this exchange since their perception of the FC's role in starting fires was incorrect. The discussion resulted in the communities learning about the strategies used by the FC to control fires and the FC official also learnt about some of the reasons why community members were not helping in controlling the fire outbreaks in the forest. In the end, both parties agreed on strategies they would both use to stop or control forest fires. After understanding their positions and their common goal for stopping forest fires, stakeholders later came up with joint action plans for raising awareness on the effects of starting forest fires. The FC then asked the RMC members to come up with plans and organize awareness raising meetings on forest fires. The FC also promised to help the RMC organize such meetings if asked to do so as well as conduct demonstrations in the village with regards to fire fighting. In addition, the FC also offered to train people in beekeeping and construction of beehives as another way to reduce forest fires due to honey harvesting.

### *Communities learning about the status of timber*

Also, with regard to the resources communities could obtain from the forest, community members clearly expressed that they want timber and poles from the forest and wanted to know whether the FC would allow permit this. The FC official explained that at the moment they were not allowed to do so, but some provisions could be made. The FC official admitted that it was the FC's fault that it did not find out from the communities what was important to them on a community by community basis. Instead the FC generalized that everyone would receive the same type of resources and yet such resources could not be found in other areas. This response from the FC was a great relief to the community members and acted as a motivational factor. The FC learned from the dialogue that not all communities were interested in harvesting the same type of resources. In some RMCs, people were more interested in grasses, while in other RMCs people preferred poles and timber.

In another discussion, community members indicated that they wanted to benefit from timber concessions that the FC offered to logging companies. This generated much discussion and the FC explained that the last time they gave licenses to logging companies was ten years ago, and at the moment no survey had been carried out to find out how many trees were ready for harvesting. Community members however, said that timber was available in the forest, which they needed to have access to. After long discussions, the two stakeholders agreed to conduct a survey jointly to assess the amount of timber available in the forest. The FC official, later pointed that, they could make use of the survey that was being conducted in the forest, through CIFOR. The monitoring subcommittee could also participate in this survey to try and find out the available timber species and their quantities.

### *Communities learning about the areas for harvesting their resources*

People from Nyaje RMC mentioned that they were uncertain as to the exact areas where they were supposed to harvest their resources. The FC offered to divide the FC grass harvesting area, and gave a portion to Nyaje RMC. This was welcome news to the villagers who were uncertain as to their demarcated area for harvesting grasses.

### *Learning by the FC on conflict resolution and adoption of mechanisms to other RMC sites*

After the conflict resolution exercise, the FC adopted the conflict resolution strategies and began to apply them to other RMC areas. This shows that the FC had learnt and decided to change from the top-down way of resolving conflicts to being accommodative to the local people.

### *Lessons concerning ownership of the forest*

Another issue was raised by community members concerning ownership of the forest. The FC however said that the forest belonged to the communities. Community members alleged that the FC only said that the forest belonged to

the community, when they need some help from the community. They said that when it came to timber harvesting, the FC would say that the forest belongs to the government. The FC had to do a lot of explaining, in regard to this allegation. The FC official said that *'Isu ve Forestry takapiwa sango nehurumende kuti tirichengetedze kuti rigorambe riripo, asi harisi reduba. Asizve, hurumemde ndeyaani, hatisisu here vakaisarudza kuti itimirire. Saka, kana sango riri rehurumende, ndereduwo zvakare.'* Meaning, 'we the FC has been given a mandate by the government to sustainably manage the forest. But, since the government represents people who elected it, it means that the FC is actually working for the communities when managing the forest.' With more explanation and clarification by the FC, there was learning among community members who later confessed that this knowledge needed to be passed on to everyone, for all along they thought that the forest belonged to the FC and hence they did not really care about what happened to it. Now that they understood that it belonged to them, they will also help in managing the forest.

FC learning about local people's opinions regarding evictions

In trying to discuss and resolve the conflict concerning the evictions by the FC, the FC official learnt that this was a very deep-rooted conflict, which needed the root causes as well as the visible effects to be dealt with. The community members who were present clearly expressed their anger at the FC for the evictions for these resulted in some people losing their fields completely while others had to move out of the area completely and resettle elsewhere. The local people who were present however, admitted that they were not the right people to negotiate this conflict for this was an issue that required discussions with the traditional leadership. The FC official also explained that the FC had been given a directive by the current government to evict those people, and it was highly unlikely that this same government would change its policies at the present time. Both stakeholders ended up by agreeing that even though this was a very crucial conflict, this was not the right platform to try and resolve it. Both parties learned from the exchange – community members realized why the FC carried out such an act, and the FC also realized that this was a very serious conflict that would need to be pursued.

### **Outcomes of the conflict resolution process**

1. Joint planning by stakeholders to try and deal with problems faced such as forest fires occurred.
2. Working relations improved among stakeholders. Several resource management meetings were initiated thereafter, and Nyaje RMC was later invited to all the meetings organized by the FC for RMCs surrounding Mafungautsi.
3. Stakeholders became open in discussing conflicts and learning from each other.
4. There was trust building among stakeholders who began to open up and discuss their conflicts.



5. The FC adopted and started using experiences from conflict resolution in Nyaje in other RMC sites. The FC switched to dialogue with people instead of dictating to them.
6. People became more motivated and more interested in forestry related issues. Currently there has been increased collaboration between Nyaje RMC and the FC. For the first time since their formation, the Nyaje RMC began to be invited to meetings organized by the FC with other RMCs.

## **LESSONS FROM THE NYAJE CASE**

1. Managing conflicts enhances learning and better management in forest management situations. In Nyaje, discussions during the conflict resolution process resulted in great learning opportunities for both stakeholders, and subsequently their relations greatly improved.
2. Failure to resolve conflicts result in the degradation of the resource. For instance, Nyaje community members did not participate in fighting forest fires since they thought that it was the FC that started them.
3. Facilitation in conflict resolution is necessary, in the early stages of the conflict resolution process, in situations where parties do not trust each other. Facilitation mainly helps the parties to bring hidden conflicts into the open.
4. It is crucial to engage stakeholders who are passive and do not have power in empowerment processes so that they gain confidence in the negotiation process. During the discussions held with people of Nyaje at the initial phase of the research, stakeholders in Nyaje were actually asking the researcher to negotiate with the FC on their behalf. After the Training for Transformation workshop, the community members were confident enough to engage in negotiation processes with the FC official to resolve their conflicts.
5. Managing conflicts should be an ongoing process, and should not be a once off thing, since conflicts will always arise in resource management.
6. In conflict resolution it is essential for stakeholders to clearly specify what each interest group wants so that the solutions sought can be a win-win situation for all.
7. In situations where some stakeholders feel powerless to negotiate processes, it is crucial that they become empowered to boost their confidence in negotiation processes during conflict resolution.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The research demonstrated that conflicts arising in forest management are complicated and can occur at two broad levels among stakeholders namely internal and external conflicts. Internal conflicts were those happening within the community and were related to: resource boundaries and theft of resources, fire management, leadership, and incentives for the Resource Management Committees to work. External conflicts were those between local communities

and outside stakeholders and were related to boundaries, fire management, access to resources in forest and the perception of role of the forest by stakeholders. The other finding of the research was that three main mechanisms have been used to resolve external conflicts, namely suppressing conflict (ignoring that conflicts exist), use of force and litigation. In all cases, these mechanisms were unsuccessful in resolving the conflicts.

The research revealed that principled negotiations can be efficient for conflict resolution in situations where stakeholder communication has not completely deteriorated. However, the issue of power still need to be addressed as this can hinder the negotiation process and the less powerful may fail to engage in the negotiation process due to lack of confidence.

The study also showed that conflict resolution through principled negotiations enhances learning and better resource management by stakeholders, increased motivation and improved working relations among stakeholders. The Mafungautsi case showed that conflicts will always arise in natural resource management and the need to be continuously identified and made explicit, and dealt with if sustainable forest management is to be achieved. Conflict resolution therefore should not be a once off thing, but should also be a cautious process to enable stakeholders to learn and adapt their management practices.

## REFERENCES

- Fisher S, Lidin J., Williams Steve., Williams Sue., Smith R. and Ibrahim Abdi D.,2000. Working with conflict. Skills and strategies for action, ZED Books, London, UK.
- Katerere Y., Moyo S and Mujakachi L., 1993. The national context: land, agriculture and structural adjustment, and the Forestry Commission. In Bradley P. N. and McNamara K. (eds) , 1993. Living with trees. Policies for Forest Management in Zimbabwe.
- McNamara K., 1993. Key Policy Issues In: Bradley P. N., and McNamara K., (eds.), 1993. Living with Trees. World Bank, Washington, D. C., technical paper number 210.
- Mehretu A, 1994. Social Poverty Profile of Communal Areas In: Rukuni M. and Eicher C. (eds.), 1994. Zimbabwe Agricultural Revolution. University of Zimbabwe publications.
- Mitchell C., 1983, Case and situation analysis, in: The Sociological Review, vol.31 pp187-212.
- Mushauri J., 2002. Management of conflicts over common property resources: Challenges and strategies. A paper presented at the IASCP conference, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 17-21June 2002.
- Mutimukuru T., 2000. Facilitation or Dictation. A case Analysis of AGRITEX's role in the planning, implementation and management of Gwarada Grazing Scheme in, Zimunya Communal Lands, Zimbabwe. Msc thesis, Wageningen Agricultural University, the Netherlands.
- Nemarundwe N., Mutamba M., Kozanayi W., 1998. An overview of woodland utilization and management in three communal areas in Zimbabwe. Results of Participatory Rural Appraisal Research in Chivi, Mangwende and Gokwe South Districts. IES Special Report No 16, UZ.
- Ostrom E., 1990. Governing the Commons. The evolution of Institutions for collective action. Cambridge University Press
- Vermeulen S. J., Setting the context of the Mafungautsi Forest (Zimbabwe) Project in criteria and indicators framework. CIFOR, Harare