

# Legalization of Community Forests through NAFOLA Project

Challenges, Best practices, Lessons learned

## Sustainable Management of Namibia's Forested Lands (NAFOLA) Project





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## List of abbreviations

<b>AG</b>	Attorney General
<b>AGM</b>	Annual General Meeting
<b>AWD</b>	African Wild Dog Community Forest
<b>CBNRM</b>	Community Based-Natural Resources Management
<b>CBOs</b>	Community Based Organizations
<b>CFs</b>	Community Forests
<b>DoF</b>	Directorate of Forestry
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FMB</b>	Forest Management Body
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environmental Facility
<b>IFMP</b>	Integrated Forest Management Plan
<b>LUP</b>	Land Use Planning
<b>MAWF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry
<b>MTR</b>	Mid-Term Review
<b>NACSO</b>	Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Support Organisations
<b>NAFOLA</b>	Sustainable Management of Namibia's Forested Lands
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>PQA</b>	Project Quality Assurance
<b>PRA</b>	Participatory Rural Appraisal
<b>SFM</b>	Sustainable Forest Management
<b>SLM</b>	Sustainable Land Management
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
<b>TAs</b>	Traditional Authorities
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>VDCs</b>	Village Development Committees

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## 1 Background

Community Forestry is defined by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as any situation that intimately involves local people in all forest activities and decision makings (FAO; 1978). Community forestry is regarded as a forest management strategy and it is seen by many as a solution to sustainable management of natural resources in communal areas. It enables local control over monetary and non-monetary benefits from forest resources. Community Forestry encompasses of important aspects such as sustainable management, social, ecological and economical sustainability. It promotes social justice and equitable access to forestlands. It is an important factor in poverty reduction and sustainable resources management, consequently contributing to the Millennium Development Goals (Sikor et al; 2001). The environmental stability and improvement of local people's livelihoods remains the core interests of community forestry. However, it also plays other vital roles. Local people receive different trainings related to sustainable management of their forests and provide employment, thus providing capacity building in communal areas.

Agriculture plays an important role in the livelihoods of local communities and one of the top contributor to the country's GDP in Namibia. However, Forested areas are being threatened as a result of expansion of agricultural activities. Poverty and the increase in population means more land is required for agricultural practices, this leads to the expansion of agricultural practices into forested areas, in hopes to increase agricultural production and economic growth. However, these practices results in environmental problems such as the loss of forest cover, soil degradation and deforestation, biodiversity loss, climate change, drought and other environmental related adverse in most parts of Namibia. Due to rapid loss of forests, rural communities are at high risk to face the wrath of hunger. Deforestation and land degradation have caused serious harm to forests in Namibia, to the extent that these forests are no longer able to provide the ecosystem services that contribute to the well-being of local people.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) implemented the Sustainable Management of Namibia's Forested Lands (NAFOLA) Project, with funding from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). The project ran from 2014 to December 2019. The NAFOLA project's aim was to reduce pressure on forest resources by facilitating the gazettement of community forests, and increasing the capacity for the uptake of improved agriculture, livestock and forestry management practices in the community forest areas. The project's goal was to contribute to the maintenance of current dry forests and the ecosystem goods and services they provide in 13 Community Forests covering over 2.8 million hectares of forest lands through legalization of Community Forests. In addition, supporting about 500,000 ha to adopt Sustainable Land Management (SLM), Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) and other improved technologies. The NAFOLA project compasses of two main components:

**1) Knowledge based land use planning and policy change hasten gazettement of eleven Community Forests (CFs) and mainstreaming of forest resources in productive policies.**

**2) Implementation of Sustainable Forest Management technologies in selected CF hotspots.**

The project supported the gazetting of nine Community Forests and post gazettement activities in four gazetted ones, in line with Namibia's Community Based-Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) programme. It is the mandate of Directorate of Forestry (DoF) to ensure that the community forests



are utilising natural resources in a sustainable manner, and that they are adhering to the regulations stipulated in the Forest Act, 2001(Act, No. 12 of 2001).

## **1.1 Community Forestry Programme in Namibia**

A Community Forest (CF) is an area in the communal lands of Namibia for which local communities have obtained the rights to manage forests, woodlands and other types of natural vegetation according to the provisions of the Forest Act, 2001(Act, No. 12 of 2001). CF management is guided by the principles of sustainable management, whereby it should not deplete but should maintain and improve the resource base and involves the sharing of benefits among all local residents. The program is aimed at establishing CFs through the devolution of sustainable management and utilization rights of forest resources, enabling local communities to generate income from those areas in accordance with the Forest Act. CFs empower.

In Namibia, Community Forestry is a programme set up by the government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry. The programme is a government action guided by the Forest Act, 2001(Act, No. 12 of 2001) as amended Forest Act, 2005 (Act, No. 13 of 2005). It is one of the programmes of DoF, and is part of the country's CBNRM programme. The Namibian CBNRM involves giving use rights and management authority over natural resources to community institutions established in terms of local legislations. One of the principles of CBNRM is that effective management of natural resources is best achieved by giving the resource a focused value. CBNRM contributes to Namibia's national development objectives of poverty eradication, economic empowerment, job creation and promote environmental, ecological and biological stability. The institutions, conservancies and community forests are equipped with technical support from the government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (NACSO, 2013). Current status shows that 32 Community Forests are registered and 27 are still emerging in over 8 regions of the country (DoF, 2015).

This report will provide MAWF, UNDP and other stakeholders with lessons learned, experiences and challenges from the process leading to the legalisation of community forests through NAFOLA project, from the people who were involved in the gazettement process, including local communities, NAFOLA project staff members, DoF staff and other stakeholders. It also provides gaps identified and recommendations for future use to improve the gazettement process.

## **1.2 Gazetting of Community Forests**

The process of legalising a communal area as a community forest follows ten steps, known as milestones that needs to be completed through DoF. The ten milestones outlines the legal requirements for the declaration of a communal area as a community forest, as stipulated in the Forest Act, 2001(Act, No. 12 of 2001). The NAFOLA project facilitated the gazettement of the CFs shown in the table below.

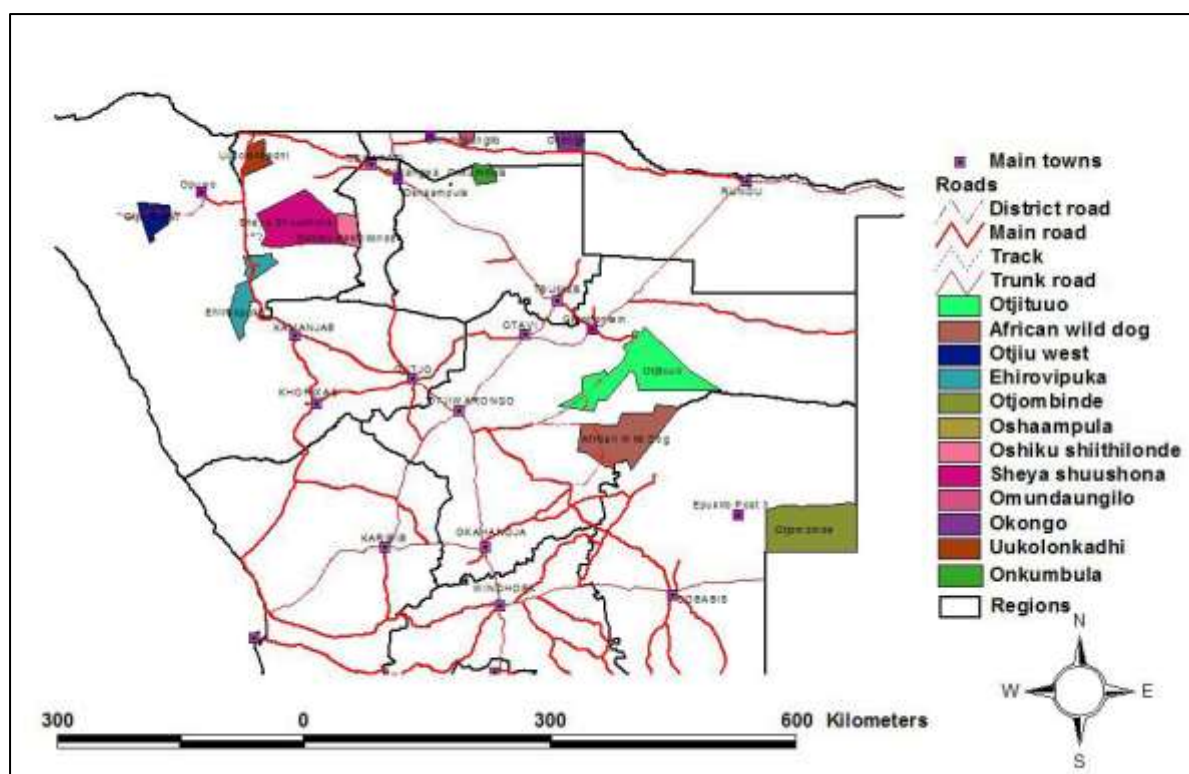


Figure 1: Locations of CFs supported by NAFOLA project – Source: project document

Table 1: NAFOLA hotspots in the 7 regions- source: project document

Community Forest hotspots	Region	Area in Hectares
Omundaungilo	Ohangwena	22,210.586
Okongo		77,890.402
Otjombinde ( <i>Otjombinde, Omuramba Ua Mbinda and Eiseb Block</i> )	Omaheke	591,001.038
Epukiro		17,495.000
Uukolonkadhi	Omusati	84,924.674
Ongandjera		507,373.261
Otshiku-Tshiithilonde	Oshana	86,977.863
Ehrovipuka	Kunene	198,406.096
Otjiu West		110,442.589
African Wild Dog	Otjozondjupa	473,244.247
Otjituuo		613,277.728
Oshaampula	Oshikoto	807.000
Onkumbula		56,103.000
Total Area for the Community Forests		2,840,153.484

### **1.2.1 Steps leading to the declaration of Community Forests**

#### **Initiation Phase:**

##### **Step 1: Awareness Creation and Consultations:**

Communities are made aware of their opportunities and the Government policies relating to community forestry, and they are able to make informed decisions about whether or not they should proceed with establishing a community forest area. The Objectives of this step is to create awareness amongst communities regarding their opportunities to establish community forests in accordance with existing Government policies and legislation. The main outputs are better understanding by the communities of the potential benefits and possible limitations associated with establishing a community forest; and a working relationship established between the interested communities and the Government. Awareness creation is concentrated on the rights and benefits of community forestry as well as the community's responsibilities and duties. It is crucial to be realistic about the community's potential benefits from community forestry, and undue expectations must not be raised.

##### **Step 2: Registration of Interest and Initiation the Process:**

A Letter of Interest addressed to the DoF is necessary to formalise the community's commitment to setting aside a certain forest area for management and conservation. This letter mobilised the process of declaring a community forest. The main Objective here is for a community to indicate to the MAWF/DoF and other relevant Government authorities that it has the intention to commit itself to becoming involved in community forestry. The main outputs is a written registration of interests (formally called a Letter of Interest) from the community to the DoF asking for support to establish a community forest; relevant authorities are informed that the community, supported by the Traditional Authority (TA), wants to proceed with the establishment and declaration of a community forest; and the community is informed about the requirements for community forest declaration. This is done in accordance with the principle that it must be ensured that that the expressed intention to establish a community forest really represents the interests of the community.

##### **Step 3: Community Organisation:**

Development of a formal management body or FMB is a pre-requisite for signing a community forest agreement. The development of a formal forest management body provides the opportunity for collaboration and co-ordination with Village Development Committees (VDCs), conservancy management committees (when areas overlap) and other agencies and NGO's that operate in their area. Such links can help to integrate forest, water, agriculture, veterinary and human health (e.g. HIV/AIDS) management issues. They encourage a more efficient use of human and material resources. The objective of this step is to organise the community by appointing a responsible management body, with clear established functions and responsibilities regarding integrated forest management. The main outputs are a management body for the community forest is established and functioning; a constitution for the management body is prepared and approved, and the management body is divided (if necessary) into an executive committee; conflict resolution mechanisms are stated in the constitution; and collaborative links with other Government agencies (e.g. MET, MLR) and NGOs/ Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are established.

## **THE APPLICATION AND DECLARATION PHASE:**

The legal declaration of a community forest provides a community with the incentive for investing in forestland in the long term and adopting sustainable practices. Through gazetting, the Minister formally transfers management rights and responsibilities to the communities. International experience has shown that the declaration of a community forest alone, through improving the security of land tenure and clarifying the rights and responsibilities of the land managers, will promote sustainable land resource management. Consequently, this phase can be considered the most important stage in community forestry development. This is achieved through 7 steps outlined below, which the NAFOLA project assisted the relevant CFs to go through.

### **The application and declaration Phase**

#### **Step 1: Indicative Land-use and Resource Mapping:**

The objective of this step is to identify and carry out indicative zoning of the proposed community forest. The main outputs is a zonation map for the community forest; improved understanding of land use categories, the location of various forest types and key forest resources; forest land management issues, associated threats and opportunities are also identified. Through this step, local communities and Government authorities identify all forested areas that could be protected and managed as community forests and, at the same time, recognise other potential land uses for the area. The resultant 'zoning for multiple uses', both within and outside the community forest area, is a key sustainable development strategy. It is important to ensure that the principles outlined in the guidelines are followed, thus: land use mapping and planning are made simple and cost-effective; are carried out jointly by community members and district forestry staff; mapping is closely integrated with boundary demarcation and provisional forest management planning; existing information, such as aerial photographs, regional forest inventory data, vegetation classifications, spatial biodiversity information, and satellite imagery are presented in such a way that villagers can understand and use it; all important land resources inside a community forest should be assessed in forest management plans based primarily on priorities set by villagers, but also acknowledging conservation objectives when they are of national importance; for non-forest land use, co-operation with relevant ministries and organisations are considered; and large areas that are currently used or may be used in the near future as (fenced) private farms or leaseholds should not be included.

#### **Step 2: Demarcation and Approval of Community Forest Boundaries:**

The formation of a clear boundary map is essential for integrated forest management planning. Clear boundaries strengthen ownership, promote more responsible behavior, and minimise conflicts over competing land claims. The objective of this step is to demarcate the boundaries of the community forest in order to enable legal recognition of the forest and tenure rights. The main outputs are: a boundary map depicting the community forest area including the boundaries and co-ordinates of corner points; community forest beneficiaries (i.e. villages benefiting from the community forest) are identified; and the proposed community forest boundaries are clearly understood by everyone and formally approved by the Traditional Authority and the villages involved. Always ensure that the demarcation process is not too technical, but allow for negotiation and conflict resolution (the use of GPS equipment is recommended); well-known and established natural or landscape features (ridges,

roads, dry river beds, fences etc.) are used as much as possible to help demark the boundary. Since the legitimacy of resource use is based on the local agreement concerning the boundaries, the adjoining communities and relevant TAs must agree on the boundaries at the local level. Once the boundaries are drawn, the communities will then get an opinion from the Communal Land Board for establishing a Community Forest.

### **Step 3: Socio-Economic Survey and Needs Assessment:**

A socio-economic survey provides important information on the community's expectations, needs and current practices regarding their forest use and management. It helps to address the challenges and opportunities that accompany the establishment of a community forest. The objective is to collect relevant socio-economic and environmental information (that has not been gathered during the previous steps) that will assist communities and District Forest Officers in forest management planning and monitoring. The main outputs are improved understanding of the social factors and decision-making systems that affect forest management and the sustainable use of forest resources; identification of vulnerable groups and the threats to forest resources, livelihoods, forest users and/or user groups; improved understanding of existing management practices and rules, including access rights of all forest resource users; clarification of the role forestry plays in addressing livelihood and environmental issues; identification of the organisations providing support services to communities. Those with overlapping aims and agendas are brought into the planning and development process. During this process, it is crucial to ensure that surveys are action-oriented; villagers and foresters collect only data that can be used as a direct input to management planning and monitoring; stakeholders should be encouraged to analyse the collected information to identify possible interventions (rather than simply preparing a report for foresters); the main focus is to help villagers analyse the information that is collected, and to see the linkages between specific events (e.g. excessive fires, deforestation, unsustainable harvesting) and impacts on their livelihoods, thus analysing threats and opportunities from a stakeholder perspective.

### **Step 4: The development of provisional Forest Management Plans and conditions of use:**

In order to produce the desired outputs there needs to be: zonation of the community forest for different management purposes such as grazing, protection/conservation, wood extraction and farm forestry; an understanding of current forest resource uses and users, priority forest-related needs and issues that constrain meeting those needs; the role forestry can play in contributing to people's livelihoods; what needs to be done to resolve the identified issues. The objective of this step is therefore to develop a simple provisional management plan and corresponding conditions of use that enable communities to participate in the management of forest resources in a fair and sustainable manner. The main outputs are a simple management plan that contains a description of the forest areas, forest resources and their uses, management objectives and activities; and a body responsible for management; initial condition of use indicating the rules governing the operation of the body responsible for community forest management, the use of forest resources and the envisaged management interventions. The planning process is always participatory, involving all key groups within the community with a focus on developing a shared vision amongst all stakeholders on how to address the identified issues, rather than on preparing a technical plan based on systematic and scientific analysis. The management plans are prepared by the community with external guidance from stakeholders. An Integrated approach to management planning is adopted paying equal attention to

both the products and environmental services provided by forests.

#### **Step 5: Developing Benefit and Cost Sharing Arrangements:**

Revenue from sustainable forest use (for example, from marketing forest produce, the collection of fees etc.), must be shared fairly within the community. This equitable benefit sharing is an integral part of sustainable forest management and is also a legal requirement for declaring a community forest. The objective of this step is to develop fair benefits and cost sharing arrangements and to ensure that stakeholders' benefits exceed management costs. The main outputs are benefits and cost sharing arrangements are clearly described in the Provisional Management Plan and conditions of use; key stakeholders (especially the community) are made aware of benefits and cost sharing arrangements; and incentives are created for forest management and protection activities. The rules pertaining to the issue of equitable benefit sharing must be clearly stated in the FMB constitution and conditions of use. These statements, in turn, must be consistent with the Forest Act and other relevant legislation. Benefits sharing must be transparent; communities should develop their own rules to compensate forest management work and to distribute surplus funds that may remain after deducting the management costs; community development should have the highest priority when distributing available surplus. The benefit sharing schemes must be kept simple, because often there is not much surplus to distribute; and keep both forest management and administrative costs low to ensure that benefits will exceed costs.

#### **Step 6: Negotiating and Drafting a Community Forest Agreement:**

A Community Forest Agreement between the FMB and the Minister is a legal requirement for declaration but it also forms the basis for implementation. Through this agreement the Minister transfers the responsibility for management of the specified area to the community with associated rights and responsibilities. The agreement is needed to clarify the duties and rights of the parties to the agreement. It binds both the community and DoF to the activities that need to be done as part of the community forestry declaration process and implementation. This step builds on previous steps and should result in the agreement as required in the Forest Act and Regulations. The Minister as part of the declaration, signs the Community Forest Agreement. The objective of this step is to establish a common, formal understanding of how the community and the Government will work together in community forestry. The main output is a Community Forest Agreements officially signed between the communities (represented by the FMB), and the Minister. It is important to ensure that the Traditional Authority and Regional Government are actively involved in this step, that the agreement is clear, simple and understood by all involved parties.

#### **Step 7: Applying for Community Forest Declaration:**

This step is vital. Unless it is completed successfully, it will not be possible for a community to proceed further. However, if the earlier activities have been completed following the legislation and guidelines, declaration should merely be a formality. The objective of this step is to officially declare a community forest according to the Forest Act, in order to be able to continue with collaborative forest management. The main outputs are Community Forest declared by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; a notice of declaration in the Government Gazette and Certificates of Declaration from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; and the Community Forest is registered at the Directorate of Forestry, and the Communal Land Board and Ministry of Lands,

Resettlement and Rehabilitation.

### **Implementation and Monitoring Step (*Participatory Monitoring and adaptive management*):**

An additional step will provide the newly gazetted CFs with the tools for regular monitoring and adaptive management. Community forestry should be a process of adaptive management or learning-by-doing. The objective of the participatory monitoring is to collect enough pertinent information to enable the FMB and the community to accurately assess if the management objectives are being met and the DoF to assess compliance with the agreement. It also enables both the communities and the DoF to adjust either the management objectives or the interventions accordingly. The outputs are monitoring reports (monthly, quarterly, annual) presented e.g. in a form of event books; and trend reports. In formulating the M&E plans, it is important to ensure that simplified indicators form the basis of the M&E – for example - rates of pole extraction, logging and fuel wood gathering; grass harvesting; rangeland (grazing) condition; forest and veld fire incidences; illegal logging incidences; forest product sales, revenue and costs flows (accounts); changes in resource quality, abundance and structure. Although, the scope for monitoring is extensive, parameters are chosen carefully – depending on the community's priorities, resources and available human capacity.

## **2 Challenges encountered during the gazettement process**

The following few paragraphs outlines several challenges encountered in the process of gazettement community forests through the NAFOLA project.

### **2.1 Slow progression of legalization of Community Forests**

The process of legalization of CFs is very slow and requires a considerable amount of funding, causing frustration among local communities and project staff.

According to the MTR report of the project, the Director of DoF indicated that there were few human resources that caused the delays (NAFOLA MTR, 2017). It was also clear that the overall gazettement process is complicated. Even though all field activities were completed and dossiers submitted on time, there was evidence that the main cause of delay in the approval of applications was at the top management level. Thus, MTR report recommended that a facilitation of improved approval process must be implemented as a matter of urgency, possibly led at a higher management level than the Director level. Technical staff in the DoF made some useful recommendations how the legalization process can be accelerated and how interim CF management committees could be approved for the purpose of smoother project implementation. They claimed that the Forest Act makes such provisions (NAFOLA MTR, 2017).

### **2.2 Community Forestry Tool Box**

The community forestry tool box was created by the DoF in collaboration with other community forestry stakeholders. It was designed to provide a detailed description of steps to complete the milestones leading to the legalization of CFs in a timely manner. It comprises of specific methods, procedures and templates to guide the implementation of gazettement process. However, the tool box is

outdated as a guiding tool in the gazetting process and did not really contribute much to the whole process. There was evidence that the templates provide in the CF tool box did not go through legal review, as many legal errors were discovered when the gazettelement documents were reviewed by the Attorney General's (AG) office. The project field facilitators (liaison officers) followed the guidance in the tool box, just to realise later that some of the templates and examples provided in the tool box were outdated, and were forced to make a whole lot of changes, thereby contributing to more delays in the whole process. The application form for declaration of a community forest provided in the tool box was not the same as the application form in the forest regulations, and DoF did not notify the facilitators about it, until some of the application forms were already signed by the relevant authorities. The project facilitators had to work hard to get the forms re-signed.

### **2.3 Disputes and lack of consultations prior to commencing of project**

Prior to the inception of the project and its introduction to the CFs, DoF/NAFOLA project did not take necessary measures to ensure that there were no disputes of any kind within the selected CFs that might impede the gazetting process. There were several disputes among community members in some of the CFs when the gazetting process started. For instance, in Otjituuo CF there was a dispute between Conservancy and Community Forest members. The Conservancy members wanted to integrate the two entities to be managed by one committee, while members of the community forest were against the idea. The Conservancy management committee also wanted to be the ones controlling the gazetting process, as they are already the legal entity in the area.

Another issue of dispute was the CF boundary demarcations. In Onkumbula CF, during the demarcation of boundaries, the communities bordering the area had conflicts on where the community forest's boundaries should end. This issue was raised by community leaders or village headmen who felt that their villages fall within Onkumbula CF and they did not want their villages to be part of the CF.

The same dispute was observed in Epukiro CF, where neighbouring communities felt that the boundaries of Epukiro CF overlaps with Otjinene Constituency. Conflicts of this kind are usually caused by the lack of understanding about Community Forestry programme and the lack of knowledge on where their village's natural boundaries ends.

The dispute among Onkumbula Traditional Authority (TA) council was a major challenge that affected the whole gazettelement process in the area. It is a prerequisite that all legal documents needs to be signed by the recognized TA of the area before submitting them to the Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry. However, this did not happen as the Ondonga Traditional Authority council dispute continued. Thus, all legal documents for Onkumbula community forest were not signed as the council was still divided and the infighting continued.

The Directorate of Forestry was supposed to conduct sufficient consultations with community members prior to the commencing of the project to ensure that all legal disputes are settled or select CFs with no disputes of any kind.



## **2.4 Sharing of project vehicle/ Lack of transport**

Two project liaison officers were allocated in each region where NAFOLA was operating, with only one project vehicle allocated per region. Two hotspots had to share one project vehicle, and community members always demanded to be provided with transport to and from any project meetings as they could not afford their own transport. This made it hard to implement all project activities at the hotspot on time. Even though liaison officers were stationed at DoF offices in the regions, the use of GRN vehicles for community activities were limited, due to Government budget cuts.

## **2.5 Communication**

Most people in rural areas are illiterate and it was hard to communicate all information about the project and the gazetting process in English as an official language. All documents used during the gazetting process are also in English and community members had a hard time fully understating the contents of the legal documents. Local people prefer to be addressed in their local languages. Thus, a translator was required to assist field facilitators who could not communicate in local languages.

## **2.6 Promises made to Community Forests**

Community members were also not well informed about community forest gazetting process, and DoF/ NAFOLA project made several benefit promises to the CFs. Perhaps this was done in order to convince local communities about the project. Most local people grew impatient, as they expected to see the benefits of community forestry straight from the begging of the gazetting process. While some demanded the benefits that were promised to them when the project was introduced to the communities, and labelling the NAFOLA project as just other project that comes and make promises to communities but don't deliver.

## **2.7 Stakeholder Cooperation**

All stakeholders involved in the CF gazettelement process are required to work together to achieve a common goal. However, due to experiences from other similar previous projects, there were some stakeholders who were doubting the NAFOLA project and were not willing to cooperate and act on time to fast track the process.

# **3 Best practices**

## **3.1 Engagement of target groups in project activities**

During the whole process of legalisation of CFs, there was constant communication between the project and all stakeholders, especially the Management committees and Traditional Authorities. All stakeholders were being updated on the progress of the gazetting process, even though some community members seemed to lose interest, due to the fact that the process was taking longer than they expected. The project MTR stated that Stakeholder engagement was positive under the NAFOLA project, especially on the site level, but also in terms of integration within the DoF and overall MAWF. The project ensured that all target groups were being systematically engaged in implementation of project activities. Drafts of all legal documents that are required for gazettelement were presented to

community members for their inputs and ensured that all members understand and approve their contents.

However, the Implementation and Monitoring Stage of Project Quality Assurance (PQA) report by UNDP stated that the *“targeted groups have been engaged in implementation and monitoring, with a priority focus on the excluded and marginalized. Beneficiary feedback, which may be anecdotal, has been collected over the past year to ensure the project is addressing local priorities. This information has been used to inform project decision making”*.

### 3.2 Harmonisation of forestry sector with other land uses

Under its **output 1.4: Policy harmonised, support local governance and reflect value of forest in national development programmes**, the project aimed to harmonised forestry sector with other land uses, including harmonisation of CF with Conservancy. The project’s target was that at least two sectors (Agriculture and Energy) are able to incorporate forestry considerations or forest sector issues are reflected in at least two planning processes (national or regional programmes).

Many of the CFs gazetted through NAFOLA were already registered as Conservancies. The scope for promoting the harmonisation of CFs and Conservancies for an effective CBNRM mechanism, is defined largely by the legal requirements for establishing and operating these institutions. There are both similarities and differences in these conditions. Some of these differences makes it more challenging to promote full integration of conservancies and CFs. For instance, the different definitions of membership within Conservancies and community forests, the different legislations administered by different ministries, the need for some aspects to be separate in order to avoid legal risks have provided challenges for achieving integration. However, there are a number of mechanisms that can be used to achieve a large degree of integration, or where appropriate, harmonisation and cooperation. It is important to advocate that the final purpose need to be kept in mind for establishing the two CBNRM entities.

During the project’s operation, forest issues were mainstreamed in the Regional Land Use Planning (LUP) for Omaheke region, and two active forums were established through Conservation Agriculture mechanisms for cross cutting issues. However, the MTR report of the project stated that there were confusions on the definition of Integrated Forest Resources Management plans used by Community Forestry and that the CF Management Plans were often not in line with LUP best practice and needs further refinement to be sound. Other practices on harmonisation were the integration of management committees for CFs and Conservancies, sharing the same boundaries and implementation of work plans. This form of cooperation was observed in CF such as Ehi- Rovipuka.

One form of cooperation is demonstrated between Okongo CF and Conservancy. Even though the two institutions have separate management committees, when Okongo CF holds their Annual General Meetings (AGM), they invite Conservancy members/representatives to attend the meeting as observers. The same applies to Conservancy. Both Okongo CF and Conservancy uses one hall for their meetings. The two institutions have agreed that Conservancy members will construct fire-breaks inside the core area, while the CF members will do the ones outside of the core areas.

Okongo CF did mini Forest inventory within its boundary because they wanted to sell some timber trees in order to generate income. The timber trees which were counted inside the core areas were

done by both Conservancy and CF members. The income to be generated from timbers inside the core area will go to Conservancy, while the income from timbers outside the core area goes to Okongo CF.

### 3.3 Support capacity building for Community Forests

Effective natural resource management requires capable partners and collaborative partnership arrangements. Capacity building across the board – from the village level up - is essential to enhance decision-making capacity and confidence (amongst villagers) and to strengthen technical and managerial skills in all aspects of community forestry.

Strong organisational capacity is very crucial for the effective management of community forests. One of NAFOLA project's targets under **output 1.3: Organisational Capacity for effective Community Forest Management strengthened**, was to increase the average capacity score card for technical institutions to 80% and to more than 50% for CFs institutions. Output 1.3 focused on building capacity of the communities, Government forestry officials and NGO/CBO staff to enable them to manage community forests in an efficient, collaborative manner. NAFOLA project have undertaken several training activities in the supported hotspots, in an effort to strengthen the organisational capacities of community members to effectively manage CFs and implement their Integrated Forested Management Plans (IFMPs). Local communities received different trainings and skills such as forest inventory methodology, the use of GPS, Forest Management Bodies (FMBs) roles and responsibility, financial management, carpentry and saw mill operation trainings and many other trainings provided by the project, in collaboration with other stakeholders. After the NAFOLA's interventions, some communities claimed that there have been some improvement in local skills, leadership skills and community organization.

The project also conducted **Management Effectiveness Assessments** in 4 community forests that were already gazetted (**Okongo, Uukolonkadhi, Oshaampula and Otjiu-West CFs**) between May 2017 and January 2018. The main aim of the assessment was to determine the progress of the CFs and the capabilities of FMBs to successfully coordinate and implement various activities in the community forest. The result from the assessment will assist NAFOLA project in tracking its progress towards achieving its outputs. The project also provided capital investments into low cost office and storage facilities for Oshaampula and Otjiu-West CFs to ensure that the CFs are functional.

### 3.4 Addressing gender equality

The project had taken measures to address gender inequalities and empower women. Through its **output 1.3: Organizational capacity for effective community forest management strengthened**, the project tried to advocate for women empowerment, to encourage women to be included in the management positions and to be involved in decision making. UNDP's PQA report for NAFOLA stated that the project has some data and evidence on the relevance of the measures taken to address gender inequalities and empowering women. There is evidence that at least some adjustments were made by the project, as appropriate. A rapid gender assessment was conducted giving recommendations on improvements to empower women and the marginalized. Members of some of the CFs have admitted

that they have seen changes and improvements in community organizations and in the advocate for women empowerment, after NAFOLA's interventions.

### 3.5 Legal review of dossiers by Attorney General's office

All the dossiers containing legal documents for each CF were submitted to the AG's office for legal and political review and recommendations, before being signed by the Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry. This is the first time DoF has taken this route in the process of gazetting communal areas. This step was taken to ensure that there were no legal and political adverse to the approval of gazette applications, and ensure that all documents are in line with legal requirements, including compliance with the Forest Act, 2001 (Act, No. 12 of 2001). After the dossiers were received from the AG's office, the documents were then updated according to recommendations and then submitted for signature by the Minister. Since some of the communal areas were already gazetted as Conservancies, the AG's office recommended that DoF/MAWF should obtain a letter of **"NO OBJECTION"** to register such communal areas as community forests from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET).

### 3.6 Development of integrated fire management policy and strategies

The NAFOLA project under its **output 1.4: Policies harmonised, support local governance and reflect value of forests in national development programs**, facilitated the development of a National Forest and Veld Fire Management Policy. The policy will provide local direction for the management of forest fire that will effectively restore the natural role of fire in ecosystem processes, as well as improve local communities' abilities to respond to unwanted wildfire. It is expected that the Implementation of the policy will result in healthier forest and range ecosystems; a reduction in areas affected by unwanted forest fires and a more cost-effective fire suppression approach.

### 3.7 Implementation of community pilot projects

Under its **output 2.5: Bush control program is piloted and provides financial incentives for controlled bush clearance**, the NAFOLA project targeted the reduction in bush densities by at least 20% and reduction in area covered by bush by at least 10%. Thus, the project implemented a bush to feed pilot project in African Wild Dog (AWD) Community Forest, as a bush control mechanism and as an income generating activity for the CF. The bush to feed pilot project was started in 2016. Two areas within the CF were cleared, one in Okahitanda which was cleared from September 2016 to January 2017 and another in Otjovazandu which was cleared from March 2017 to August 2017. However, the project is yet to conduct a post-clearing assessment and report on the pilot project to determine the extent of area cleared so far, the regrowth on area cleared and review the effectiveness of the de-bushing technique used, as a bush control approach and its viability as an income generating activity.

While, under its **output 2.1: Conservation agriculture piloted**, the NAFOLA project aimed to support the development and implementation of Conservation Agriculture (CA) and agroforestry practices in Omusati, Otjozondjupa, Kunene, Oshanaana and Omaheke hotspots. It involves the development and implementation of conservation agriculture management strategies, based on the landscape level plans, to ensure enhanced agricultural productivity and minimise environmental impacts.

The NAFOLA project assisted the DAPEES with purchasing a ploughing tractor for the Otjombo Constituency. In addition, the project financially assisted the Omaheke farmers to set up a regional CA forum. In collaboration with the DAPEES, the NAFOLA project facilitated a regional CA training session

at Pos 10 in Epukiro Constituency on 7th-11th November 2016. The training was intended to provide knowledge and awareness on CA, and capacitate crop farmers with skills in CA in the Omaheke region. Twenty nine crop farmers were trained, and seven officials from DAPEES and NAFOLA project also took part in the training. The training included theory, practical demonstrations and detailed discussions on various issues of CA. The principles and benefits of CA were discussed in detail. The processes involving land preparation, crop cover, livestock-crop interactions, as well as soil management were also part of the training. Several CA trial plots were set up in Otjombinde CF. However, NAFOLA project stopped its support to CA, after recommendation from MTR, because there are already a lot of similar support to CA across the country.

### **3.8 Support income generating activities in Community Forests**

A study undertaken by the NAFOLA project in 2015 through consultancy revealed that insufficient income generation in the community forests pose a threat to the sustainability of community forestry. NAFOLA project has since supported several income generating activities in some of the CFs, in order to achieve its targets under **outputs 2.3** of increasing income as an incentive for community participation in forest conservation, and contributes towards the reduction of pressure on forest resources, and enhance local livelihoods. Some of the income generating project supported by the NAFOLA project are:

#### **1) Brick making project in Uukolonkadhi, Omundaungilo and Otshiku-tshithilonde CFs**

The aim of the brick-making project was to provide bricks as an alternative sources of building material, and reduce the reliance of local community on woody materials for building.

In Uukolonkadhi, the project started operating in 2017, producing and selling bricks on reasonable prices to local community members and surrounding communities. As a startup, the community was provided with free bags of cement. However, about 70 bags of cement were used to repair the concrete area used for drying bricks and the toilet that was poorly built by the contractor. The community members indicated that they make a net-profit of about **N\$100.00** per a 50 kg bag of cement.

While, Otshiku-tshithilonde community forest received extra support from NAFOLA Project in 2017 to establish a brick-making project. As of May 2018, community forest have managed to generate an amount **of N\$ 8 332.90**. However, the brick making project is inactive most of the time during the rainy season, since people are much busy attending to their crop fields.

#### **2) Carpentry project in Okongo CF**

The carpentry project is the biggest income generator for Okongo CF and the carpenter, as the community generated about N\$ 29 000.00 from carpentry alone in 2017. The NAFOLA project supported the building of a new workshop for the carpentry project and has purchased additional equipment as well. The support from the project will help increase financial return from the carpentry project. The project has also conducted an assessment to determine status of income generating activities in the supported community forest, with special emphasis on income generated, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

### 3) Bee keeping project in Oshaampula CF

Members of the management body of Oshaampula CF received training on bee farming in 2017. The training was facilitated by NAFOLA project as one of the income generating activities for the CF. After the training, the FMB received bee farming equipment. These included all equipment used to relocate and remove aggressive bees from places where they are not needed; such as in houses, schools, churches and offices. The FMB have been capturing and removing bees within the CF and in the surrounding areas. However, they did not have bee hives where they could keep the bees for farming purposes, and the captured bees were relocated to the forest, away from public places. With the assistance from DoF, the Oshaampula CF was provided with bee hives, and in May 2018, the NAFOLA project facilitated the construction of five bee hive stands with five bee hives ready for bee storage, and one bee hive have been already filled with relocated bees. The CF hopes to harvest enough honey from bee hives and sell it for income generation.

### 4) Construction of an Auction Kraal

Under the project's **Output 2.2: Improved livestock practices piloted in Omaheke, Oshikoto and Otjozondjupa hotspots**, The project aimed at developing and implementing livestock management strategies and improving livestock off-take in degraded rangelands of the Oshikoto, Otjozondjupa and Omaheke regions. Thus, the NAFOLA project facilitated the construction of a livestock marketing facility (**auction kraal**) in Tallismanus, Otjombinde Constituency, in order to enhance the off-take of livestock in the area.

## 3.9 Community members take charge of all decision making

The whole process of gazettement used a participatory approach, where all community members were involved. The NAFOLA project and DoF only acted as facilitators, and communities were given the opportunities to make their own decisions on issues that directly affect them and their areas. Examples of areas in which the communities had strong influence on decision making were agreeing with neighbouring communities on the CF boundary demarcations, electing their own village representatives and community management bodies, setting up and deciding on the contents of their own community forest constitutions, benefit distribution plans, resource use regulations and integrated management plans as legal guiding documents toward the sustainable management of their natural resources. While NAFOLA and DoF only assisted and guided the communities in drafting these documents, all inputs and decisions on the operations of the CFs came from the community themselves, as the saying goes “**If it is for us, it has to be with us**”. However, NAFOLA and DoF ensured that all decisions related to CFs complies with the requirements stipulated in the Forest Act, 2001(Act, No. 12 of 2001).

## 3.10 Co-financing with other stakeholders

Prior to the commencing of the gazettement process, the project liaison officer had an induction programme with NAFOLA and DoF. DoF played a key role in conducting training and equipping liaison officers with all relevant information pertaining to the gazettement process, so that they are all aware of what is expected from them. Each liaison officer was based at a forestry office and was assigned to a staff member from the Directorate of Forestry, who assisted them with the implementation of activities at the hotspots. In cases where the project vehicle was not available, DoF office provided transport for community forest activities. During the implementation of project activities, the project

also received support from community stakeholders such as the MET. They were always willing to help, especially with transport during community meets and resources assessments.

The project also managed in accessing co-financing from other stakeholders that helped to fund the projects activities, such as co-financing with GIZ on the bush to feed project in African Wild Dog. Institutional housing of is an important part of project planning (MET, 2015), thus the NAFOLA project was housed in the Directorate of Forestry, which have the mandate to safe guard forest resources and have the authority to implement and oversee CF activities, thereby enhancing smooth operation and implementation of the project.

### **3.11 Project community liaison officers**

The project's community liaison officers poses either relevant educational background or experience and skills in the coordination of field work, working with different stakeholders and implementation of project activities. All liaison officers have relevant qualifications in the areas that the project was focusing on, such as qualifications in forestry, natural resource management and agriculture. They were deployed to the hotspots or based at DoF regional offices, so that they can work closely with local communities, and make it easier to communicate with all stakeholders and understand the particular background and needs of different CFs. The project ensured that the liaison officers were well equipped with everything they needed to effectively implement all project activities in their respective hotspots.

### **3.12 Communication**

The project tried different means of communication with the communities and stakeholders, such as through social media and project web site. Communication with local communities was only possible through telephones/mobile phones, because most community members have no access to internet. On the recommendation from MTR, the project appointed one of the liaison officers as a project Knowledge Management Officer, to document lessons learned, best practices from all project activities, and to gather, consolidate and disseminate knowledge management products to inform project decision making and ensure the relevance of the project towards its objectives. The project liaison officers were provided with laptops, internet modems and phone allowance to ensure continuous communication with the project management, other project personnel and stakeholders.

## **4 Lessons learned**

### **4.1 Limited support to Community Forests during the approval process**

As it is already stated above, the process of legalization of CFs is very slow and requires a lot of funding, causing frustration among local communities and project staff. Due to the very slow approval process of gazetting applications, some of the CFs only received very limited support from the project during the gazettment process, because they are not yet approved as legal entities. Thus, local communities have to wait for too long for them to exercise their use rights on forest resources and the implementation of their management plans. And because the Forest Management Bodies have not been formalized, and management plans are not approved, the project was unable to offer financial support to the CFs.

## **4.2 Fencing of communal lands**

Ownership of land for grazing, cultivation and other properties such as livestock are some of the crucial aspects for human well-being, and the lack of access to these assets exposes rural communities to poverty (Werner & Odendaal, 2010). Community Forestry initiative gives the right and free access to natural resources, including access to land for local people residing within that area. However, there were doubts over how the community forestry programme will operate in some communal areas where NAFOLA was facilitating the gazettement. For example, some CFs such as Otjituuo and Otjombinde are heavily fenced off into large grazing camps for private ownership. This was seen as a major issue for the community forest, as most community members might have limited access to forest resources that are allocated within the fenced areas, and this does not reflect the objectives of the Community Forestry programme.

## **4.3 Community involvement in the gazetting process**

Full participation of community member is highly encouraged as it shows that the local people are willing and interested in getting their CF gazetted. Lack of participation of all community members may worry the stakeholders, lead to disputes and the process may be delayed. Moreover, full participation of local people at all stages is very crucial. In most CFs, community members were very excited and got involved in the process pretty well. They were mostly motivated by the financial benefits that results from the utilisation of forest resources. The project liaison officers worked closely with the community management bodies during the implementation of project activities. However, the attendance of community member at projects meetings were low, and in some CFs they always demanded transport to and from the meetings.

## **4.4 Sustainability of Community Forests still an issue**

Some of the CFs were already gazetted as Conservancies. However, they lack income generating projects to generate funds their activities. They still rely on donor projects for funds. The effect of climate change, severe drought and lack of land for agricultural activities exerts more pressure on forest resources. Leading to expansion of agricultural practices into forested lands and the unsustainable utilization of natural resources.

## **4.5 Creation of awareness to enhance understanding of community forestry programme**

It was clear that community members lacked understanding of what community forestry is all about and how it operates. More effort, resources and consultations were needed during the project's preparatory phase to ensure that local communities understand its objectives, and no benefit promises to communities were not supposed to be made when the project was introduced. Many communities were excited about the project because of the promises rather than its main objectives of sustainable management of forest resources.

## **4.6 Capacity building and employment creation**

The process of gazetting community forests presented opportunities for local communities to generate income through activities such as forest inventories, where local people were trained and



used to conduct the inventories. Community members also acquired new skills through different trainings such as the forest inventory methodology, the use of GPS, FMBs roles and responsibility, financial management, carpentry and saw mill operation trainings and many other trainings provided by the project, thereby enhancing their institutional capabilities. A lot still needs to be done to fully capacitate local communities in different aspects, even though some communities claimed that there have been some improvement in local skills, leadership skills, community organization and advocate for women empowerment. The project MTR recommended that capacity building in the CFs should be a priority and an ongoing activity, and that the organisational capacity does not only include trainings, but also capital investments into low cost office or storage facilities for the Management Committees and associated structures e.g. for law enforcement.

#### **4.7 Gender equality issues**

Despite the NAFOLA project taking measures to address gender inequalities and empower local women during its operation, a lot still needs to be done to promote and achieve gender equality, especially in rural areas. There is evidence that cultural believes is the biggest challenge in addressing gender inequalities. In some areas, it is believed that women should be represented by men and they are not permitted to speak in community meetings. Thus, men still dominate in management positions in most of the areas.

#### **4.8 Communication**

As stated above that one of the challenges experienced was the use of English as a medium of communication, it was a challenge for some stakeholders with no English language background to understand the contents of the legal documents required for declaring a Community forest. Thus, there is a need to find an effective way to communicate important information to stakeholders, and ensure that everyone is informed. Some community members suggested that important documents such as community forest constitutions, management plans, benefit distribution plans and use-regulations should be translated into local languages, which will be beneficial to local communities, even though translating each legal document can be time consuming and costly. The NAFOLA project document also states that *“project will ensure that the Traditional Authority and Regional Government must be actively involved in this agreements steps, the agreement are clear, simple and understood by all involved parties, and that they are translated to relevant local languages”*. However, the translation of relevant documents into local languages was not fulfilled.

#### **4.9 Time frame of the project**

The experience from the process of gazetting CFs have revealed one of the biggest challenges that prevent many projects similar to that of NAFOLA from successfully achieving their outcomes. The life span of the project was five years. Even though the budget of U\$ 4.5 million allocated to the project was enough to achieve its intended outcomes, the project’s time frame was seen as a limiting factor in achieving all the project objectives. The short time frame of the project meant that post-gazettement support to CFs, which is one of the main aim of the project were unlikely to be implemented. The project faced several challenges from its inception to the implementation stage, including community disputes that delayed the implementation of project activities in some areas. There was a need to build capacity in the CFs, provide post gazettement support and address

important issues identified within the communities. Thus, there was a need to extend the time frame of the project beyond 5 years.

## **5 Recommendations**

It was observed that the process of gazetting CFs is very burdensome and expensive. Without committed funding, it is almost impossible for interested communities to actually successfully develop the necessary gazettelement documentation, especially without dedicated government funding support. This raises policy level concerns which should be further investigated.

To ensure fast gazetting process, there should be a strong baseline stakeholder consultation. It was clear that some stakeholders were not well informed of the project, leading misunderstanding and disputes among stakeholders. The community forest tool box as a guiding document needs to be revised and go through a legal review, to ensure that all legal documents required for gazetting a community forest are in line with the Forest Act. Prior to commencing of the gazetting process, DoF/MAWF should consider conducting consultations with the targeted CFs, identify and ensure that any existing disputes of any kind are resolved before supporting the gazettelement in that area. The DoF/MAWF should also consult with MET at the beginning of the CFs legalization process if it intends to legalise communal areas that are already gazetted as Conservancies, and DoF/MAWF should request for a letter of no Objection from MET.

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