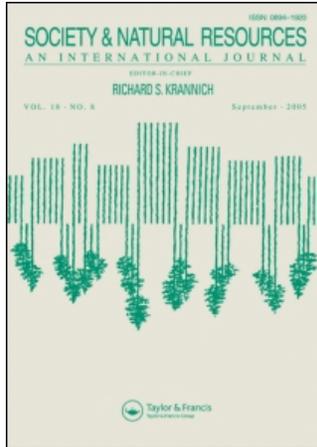


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## Forests, Community Conservation, and Local Government Performance: The Village Forest Reserves of Tanzania

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*Devolved management of natural resources offers a means of advancing democracy, combating poverty, and enhancing conservation. Remarkable successes have been claimed for devolved forest reserve management in Tanzania. However, these successes are discordant with the practices of village government, of which village forest management is part. This article outlines the claims made for village forest reserves and juxtaposes these to detailed accounts of the corrupt and violent practice of village government and to the predatory relationship between village government and the central state and district governments. It reevaluates the success of village forest reserves in light of this evidence and considers the broader implications of the problems of local corruption for calls for community-based conservation.*

**Keywords** community conservation, corruption, democracy, devolution, local government performance, Tanzania, village forest reserves, village government

Village forest management in poor rural areas is important for diverse debates central to conservation and development, but clear success stories are few. The claims made about the remarkable developments of Tanzanian village forest reserves are thus particularly interesting (Wily 1997; Wily and Dewees 2001; Wily 2002a; 2002b). These relatively recent reserves appear to devolve power over local forests to villagers, improving forest condition as well as strengthening local institutions. They are celebrated as win–win scenarios that result in healthier forests and better locally accountable democratic government, while at the same time supporting and strengthening local livelihoods.

But it is always important to examine the broader institutional context of which such successes are part. Village forest reserves are firmly rooted in local village government, which has significant weaknesses in other aspects of its work. In this article I juxtapose the success reported for Tanzanian village forest reserves with the weaknesses reported about Tanzanian village institutions elsewhere and consider

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the implications for village forest reserves specifically and community conservation more generally.

My argument proceeds first by considering current writings on community forest conservation. Second, I examine the story of Tanzanian Village Forest Reserves and the reasons given for their success. Third, I outline the methods used to produce the data in this article. Fourth, I discuss the problems with the popular story about Tanzanian Village Forest Reserves that emerge from a series of weaknesses of village government functioning that Forest Reserves' advocates do not adequately discuss. Finally, I evaluate the implication of these problems for the success of village forest reserves in Tanzania and the broader calls for community-based conservation of which they are part.

### **Forests and Community**

The importance of community-based conservation for tropical forests is disputed. Prominent conservationists have strongly argued that conservation measures such as parks and reserves work (Brandon et al. 1998; Sanderson and Redford 2003; Oates 1999, Kramer et al. 1997). They suggest that such proven conservation measures are the best means of using conservation funds, and that diversions into development activities, or more participatory, community-based activities are problematic. Forest conservation measures that allow human use and access, or that are not rooted in conservationists' priorities, result in marred ecosystems suffering from hunting and local extinction of plant and animal species (Redford and Sanderson 2000).

The first part of this argument (the success of parks) has received support from a number of studies. Bruner and colleagues (2001) found, on the basis of questionnaire evidence of a sample of 93 tropical parks in populated areas, that 40% had experienced improvement of vegetation cover and 43% had shown no further forest clearance since establishment. Naughton-Treves and colleagues (2005) compared 36 deforestation rates inside and outside protected areas. In 32 cases the deforestation rate was between 0.1 and 14% faster outside protected areas' boundaries. DeFries and colleagues (2005) examined the increasing isolation of 198 highly protected tropical forests using coarse-resolution satellite data and found that two-thirds experienced significant deforestation within 50 km of their borders, but only a quarter had such within their boundaries. There are problems with these studies, such as using questionnaire data to assess vegetation change. Moreover, Borgerhoff-Mulder and Coppolillo (2005) have pointed out that Bruner and his colleagues do not compare the efficacy of protected areas with other forms of conservation. Naughton-Treves et al. are handicapped by the methodological problems of quantitatively comparing the rates of deforestation across different studies. Nevertheless, the trend in these findings is clear.

In contrast, Hayes, challenging Bruner et al.'s exclusive focus on parks compared forests in parks (IUCN category 1–6) and forests protected by community rules outside parks (2006). Hayes found no difference between the condition of forests in both sets and found indications that forests with locally set and enforced rules were in a better state than those without such rules. A number of other authors have expressed unease at the shift “back to the barriers” of fortress conservation (Hutton et al. 2005; Wilshusen et al. 2002). Some observed that Bruner's data still show that a significant proportion of parks are not working (Roe et al. 2003). There is concern lest potentially useful and extensive forms of conservation

are not used. Hutton and Leader-Williams (2003) have argued that conservation based on sustainable use might mean conserving 80–90% of species on 5–15% of the land, rather than 10–30% on 1–2% of the land based on preservationist measures.

Community conservation advocates argue that even if locally conserved forests are hunted, they can still provide a means of protecting valuable vegetation cover (Schwartzman et al. 2000; Sharma et al. 1999). An estimated 370 million ha of forests and forested landscapes are thought to be conserved (how well is not clear) by community forestry in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and North America, as much as set aside in formal protected areas (Molnar et al. 2004). Measures like timber certification, though currently small (the Forest Stewardship Council had certified only 22 million ha of forest by 2001), are becoming increasingly important (Ozinga 2001). Moreover, given that many protected areas are used and/or occupied by people, engaging with their forms of resource use and institutions will be important (Brockington et al. 2006).

Finally, given the injustices of fortress conservation (Brockington 2002; Brockington and Schmidt-Soltau 2004), community-based forest conservation may be a more equitable means of achieving conservation goals. Several scholars have observed that the problem with community conservation is not that it does not work, but that it has not been tried vigorously enough (e.g., Murphree 2000). They note that the success of community-based conservation has been limited but insist that communities and local government have not been sufficiently empowered to allow them to work properly and emphasise the centrality of adequate and proper devolution (Ribot 2004; Hulme and Murphree 2001; Wily and Dewees 2001; Shivji 2002; Wily 2002b).

### **The Village Forest Reserves of Tanzania**

The story of Tanzanian Village Forest Reserves begins in the Duru-Haitemba Forest in Babati District.<sup>1</sup> District proposals to gazette a district forest reserve aroused opposition from villagers. A consultant, Liz Wily, was called in to explore solutions to this opposition. With the help of tolerant and influential forestry officers, the plans to take the forest under district control were abandoned. Instead, in three remarkable weeks in September 1994, the foundations were laid for the formation of Village Forest Reserves. Villagers surveyed their forest and set up elected committees to control and monitor forest resource use. Some parts were closed to general access, and some uses, such as commercial charcoal burning, were forbidden, as was grazing by stock from outside the village. Fines were levied for transgressions. Because the policies formulated by the village forest committees were submitted as formal village by-laws from the Village Council to the District Council for ratification, they are legally binding on all Tanzanians (Wily 2001a). The result appears to have made a material difference to the forest. In 1999 a district forestry officer revisiting Duru-Haitemba found

the forest looking different. The areas they had closed off because they were bare were now forests again. I counted an average of six young *Brachystegia* species in every square metre—excellent for any forest. (Wily et al. 2000, 36)

The Duru-Haitemba forest has become a model for a series of new village forest reserves. A recent law, the Forest Act of 2002, has made provision for village forest reserves (the autonomous management of forest on village land) and village forest management areas (delegated management of central and district government forests to local communities; Wily 2002a).

Wily argues that village forest reserves have worked because the villagers have been empowered as managers, rather than treated as merely users or beneficiaries (Wily and Haule 1995; Wily et al. 2000; Wily and Dewees 2001; Wily 2002b). But this still begs the question: How has proper devolution has been possible here, given that it has so often failed or been incomplete elsewhere? The answer Matose and Wily offer is that Tanzania's unique form of local government, with elected Village Councils having considerable powers, means that much of the hard work of devolution has already been undertaken:

Both through design, and default of assistance from government, many [villages] have become active vehicles of local organisation, self-reliance . . . and decision making. Social relations, and the identity of community, often built upon pre-villagisation, and even pre-colonial formations, have consolidated in the intervening years since formal villagisation of the 1970s. Many of the community's assets, such as the village school, health clinic, wells, and roads, have been communally established, maintained and owned. Indeed, with the abandonment of the one-Party state, the Village Council has become a fully democratic organ of village governance [with] a new lease of life. (Matose and Wily 1996, 202)

In order to assess the validity of this account, we need to understand how village government works and a detailed exploration of what this fully democratic organ looks like in practice.

## Methodology

I draw on fieldwork undertaken in southern Tanzania in 1999–2000. I spent a year living in a village called Mtowisa, in the Rukwa Rift Valley. Mtowisa is typical of many valley villages. The dominant ethnic group is the Fipa. The land is fertile, and farmers grow maize and finger millet for food, rice and sunflowers for cash, and cassava in case of harvest failure. Fish are abundant in the lake, as is game from nearby reserves; grazing is good and tsetse free. The village also houses a hospital, a secondary school, and government offices, giving it a larger cluster of aluminum roofs than other settlements in the valley.

I did not go to Mtowisa in order to test Wily's ideas. I was interested in the social, economic, and environmental consequences of an influx of Sukuma/Nyamwezi herders that had been proceeding for approximately 30 years. Many of the herders had moved permanently to the valley. I was particularly interested in how this migration had affected institutions of natural resource management. This required understanding how local government worked.

I chose the village on the advice of district and regional officials, as it had been the focus of severe quarrels between herders and farmers recently, but the tensions had been defused by regional government intervention (Brockington 2001). Much of my time was spent in participant observation: walking, talking, working, and

relaxing with farmers and herders in diverse ways. I also attended the meetings of the village council while I was resident in Mtowisa, as well as meetings of the Ward Development Committee (comprised of representatives of several villages). As people learned of my interests I was also invited to attend ad hoc conflict resolution meetings, development planning meetings, and meetings of the Environmental Committees newly constituted to deal with issues of arising from herder–farmer conflict. I sought additional interviews with key players in recent and past incidents associated with the immigration of herders. I also undertook nearly 80 life-history interviews with residents and immigrant herders, as well as 25 interviews with government officers concerning the immigration and environmental change. Toward the end of the fieldwork I conducted a quantitative survey of farming activities and of conflict between herders and farmers. I traveled to neighboring districts and regions, also subject to the immigration, to interview researchers, district officials, and development project staff. Finally, I collected quantitative data on local taxation, agricultural activity, and livestock numbers from district offices and examined archival records in the same offices and in the national archives. Formal interviews were recorded; other observations and remarks are reported as field notes.

I had not set out to study corruption and local government performance, but it became a persistent theme of my work, and in the pages that follow I report many allegations of corrupt and inept government. Villagers were quite clear that you can only get the state to work for you if you have money: “We do not have rights, because we do not have money, we do not have power” (cf. Brockington 2001).<sup>2</sup> Allegations abounded of local government officers pocketing government funds or accepting bribes in lieu of taxes or fines and “eating” public funds. But hard evidence of actual corruption is clearly difficult to demonstrate. Moreover, improper practice when it becomes the norm also becomes unremarkable. My favorite example of this is the meal of poached game meat served to a government leader immediately after he had run a large anticorruption meeting. Observations about corruption then become rather like observing that the weather is hot, the roads bad, or that mosquito bites itch. But the impressions and data I recorded, and next describe, all point to the existence of substantial problems. They are, moreover, accordant with similar accounts and research from other parts of the country, to which I refer wherever possible (Fjeldstad and Semboja 2000; Fjeldstad 2001; Fjeldstad and Semboja 2001).

### **Weaknesses of Village Government Internally and Externally**

The failures of local government and the weakness of its institutions and officers first became visible at the start of my research, as I asked about the consequences of the herders’ immigration. There was a widespread sense of resentment at their presence. Crop damage due to cattle incursions on farms had become a marked source of local tension between farmers and herders (Brockington 2006). Subsequent conflict was fuelled in part by the inability of poorer farmers to defend their farms in court against wealthy cattle keepers. I was repeatedly told that the bribes of the latter had perpetrated injustice, by numerous farmers in formal interviews and other conversations. What villagers resented was not just the presence of larger herds of animals. After all, many of the herd boys were in fact local youths who were paid in stock, which would then allow them to marry. What they resented was the cattle owners’ wealth, and the consequent power of the cattle owners to bribe village leaders to let them move where they wanted and turn court decisions to their own advantage.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of collecting direct evidence of this sort of corrupt behavior, I did witness a herders being given permission to stay in a village in dubious circumstances. In this situation a subvillage chairman received a variety of traditional medicines from the herder in question and in return wrote a short letter endorsing his request to be given permission to stay. The village council subsequently voted for the herder's removal. This decision was overturned by the village chairman on the payment of a fine for bringing cattle into the village. When the chairman was accused by a councillor of taking the fine as a bribe, the chairman arbitrarily fined the councillor for slander.

Accounts of the failures of the police and courts to cope with crop damage seem plausible in the light of their failures elsewhere. A government leader said that the police and courts were the most corrupt institutions in the country. One farmer told me that he had had to bribe the police not to bring his father to prosecution after his father had seriously injured a neighbor in a drunken brawl, another that he bribed the police to get his son out of custody, another that he was freely allowed to smuggle goods around the country when he was supposed to be serving a prison term. When I attempted to review court files of crop damage at the local courts I was met with hostility, suspicion, and opposition.

This perception is also endorsed by the locally famous case of criminal behavior by district officials. This is the story of the stock thefts that afflicted Mtowisa in the 1980s (cf. Brockington 2001; in press). The following account was reported by Sukuma and Fipa informants who were remarkable for their agreement on the details and substance of the story.

The Rukwa valley has been experiencing an immigration of Sukuma cattle keepers since the early 1970s. When the Sukuma first arrived, local herders had not been accustomed to tend their flocks in the dry season, but would leave them to look after themselves, roaming the grasslands of the valley. The stock were large and healthy and, as I was told by Fipa and Sukuma informants, some of the Sukuma immigrants stole them. This caused resentment and the local Fipa people decided that they would persuade the district and regional government to expel them from the area. Sukuma herders got wind of the plan and decided to root out the thieves from among their midst. They sent a delegation to Tabora district to learn how to set up Sungusungu groups. These are organized bands of villagers that originated in the early 1980s in order to combat cattle theft (Abrahams 1998). Sungusungu groups in Rukwa, composed of both Fipa and Sukuma leaders, arrested and questioned (in all probability violently) suspected thieves. Where confessions were extracted, thieves were required to return an equivalent number of stolen cattle to herders who had been robbed.

However, the cattle thieves then complained to the district police and judges. They claimed that cattle returned in compensation had in fact been stolen and could be found without difficulty (by their brands) in their neighbors' kraals. On district instructions, Field Force Units (particularly tough police units; cf. Fleisher 2000) were sent to repossess the allegedly stolen cattle and return them to the thieves. At this point, faced by an alliance of district courts, the police, and powerful thieves, the Sungusungu went quiet. A number were arrested and accused of murder. Villagers did, however, send a delegation to Julius Nyerere, who had just stepped down as president of Tanzania but remained chairman of Tanzania's single political party and still retained a great deal of respect. When he visited the region a little while later he called all the conflicting parties together, and on hearing both sides, found

categorically in favor of the Sungusungu group. The thieves were rearrested (although later released) and the cattle returned as compensation (by more Field Force Units) to those who had first been robbed.

The story is significant because it demonstrates the predatory relationships that can exist between the district government and villages under its jurisdiction. The elders recounting this affair to me conveyed the alarm they felt when they realized what sort of alliance they were up against, but also a remarkable lack of surprise that this sort of thing could happen.

But while this sort of violence and criminality is spectacular, it is only part of the story. There is a much more mundane set of everyday failures by local government and particularly village governments, in their failure properly to manage their financial affairs and the taxes raised from their citizens. The taxes included a head tax on adult males, and taxes on livestock ownership and transporting produce. A proportion was set aside for village governments to spend, and the bulk went to the District Councils.<sup>3</sup> The yearly tax burden could be considerable for poor rural households (about \$9 per year) and a significant source of revenue to District Councils (it generated about \$150,000 yearly in Sumbawanga, according to official records). But the literature on Village Forest Reserves is silent about these taxes and it is an extraordinary omission, because they are central to the work of the village councils that Wily and Matose praise so lavishly.

Villagers constantly complained that they received no benefits from the taxes. In part, this was because taxes were not spent on local services, a fact borne out by official district financial accounts. Sumbawanga district raised 90% of its revenues from peasant activities but spent less than 1% on agriculture and livestock departments (cf. Fjeldstad 2001; Brockington in press). Villagers likened the use of their taxes to milking a cow without feeding it.

But more problematic still was the clear impression that taxes were regularly criminally diverted, or inefficiently used, by corrupt or incompetent leaders.<sup>4</sup> There was no clear means of knowing how much money was raised, nor, crucially, how much was due back to the villages. Figures were sometimes mentioned at local meetings, but there was no systematic way of informing people how much tax money was available for government committees to spend. Accountability and transparency were entirely lacking.

Again this is not an easy subject on which to collect data. I only saw one set of accounts that detailed village revenues and expenditure, for a village in the neighboring Mbeya Region. This showed that 90% of village income was spent by a few select individuals, most often the village chairman, as fares and per diems to support their tax collecting duties (cf. Fjeldstad and Semboja 2000). Nevertheless, the absence of published accounts and the continual suspicions of what might be going on spoke volumes. At an early stage in my fieldwork, one group of youths specifically asked me to record that "They do not know how tax revenues are used." There are substantial data from elsewhere in the country of village leaders selling village assets (land) for their own personal gain (Igoe and Brockington 1999).

The problems of probity extended to community construction and development projects that the village government administered, and for which special local taxes (*michango*) were often raised, and forced compulsory labor called out. These are the "community assets" to which Wily and Matose referred. At Mtowisa, Mbele's study of the district development corporation (SUDECO) in Sumbawanga District documented many incidences of corruption and embezzlement of public funds on

various projects. He specifically mentioned a series of problems of poor management and accountability with the SUDECO ranch which was located at Mtowisa (Mbele 1980).

A more recent and particularly prominent example at Mtowisa was the case of Vuma secondary school. This school began in the early 1990s as a community effort driven by those who wanted their children to have access to a secondary school, of which there were none in the valley. It was not a universally popular measure, as attendance and support for primary education in the valley are not high. Nevertheless party officials (when Tanzania was a one-party state) were strongly behind it. A local tax was assigned and work began on teachers houses, dormitories, dining halls, and laboratories.

There was, however, no transparency over the use of funds, and there were many indicators that the funds were not used well. Buildings were not completed or fell into disrepair. When I was there in 2000, the school looked like a dilapidated building site with incomplete and decrepit buildings, no functioning toilet, and only one block of cracked and crumbling classrooms. Local payment into the school fund declined markedly. Student attendance, which had been good initially, plummeted as fees were introduced to make up for missing funds. The school survived because it was taken over by the Ministry of Education, which paid the teachers' salaries.

The school issue emerged because a new local development tax was launched in order to pay for the reconstruction of teacher's houses and to make crucial repairs. There was much discontent and opposition, but there was no fiduciary investigation or disciplining of the leaders who had misspent the initial secondary school funds. Local development projects were often seen by villagers as simply a means by which leaders could get access to local funds to line their own pockets.

Perhaps the most damaging incident of effort and energy wasted by incompetent government, however, was the case of the road to Sumbawanga. This project was initially planned in the mid-1980s and included a 1,000-meter climb over an escarpment. In 1985 villagers cut the route of the road using hand hoes, to enable a bulldozer to pass and clear a wider path. But the money that the District Council had set aside for the road's construction disappeared. Villagers were told that the District Council had used the money to buy a truck, which they were then forced to sell to meet debts. In the late 1990s villagers were again called out to repair the route of the road, and money was again promised by the District Council for the bulldozer work. The road was constructed while I was there, but the delays that accompanied it aroused a great deal of local anxiety and continual fears that the money would be diverted again.

To add injury to the insult of inept or criminal use of funds, villagers often complained of their violent treatment at the hands of local government officers while working on communal development projects. At one point I was told that the Ward Executive Officer (who oversees such work) had nearly been set upon by an angry crowd. I observed villagers being sworn at and abused as they undertook building the headmaster's house for the school. In other parts of the country violence was more readily apparent as the local government carried out its business. The militia often accompanied tax collectors, both to protect the collectors and to encourage people to pay through the threat or use of violence (Fjeldstad 2001). Some villages were effectively no-go areas for tax collectors without armed support: register books were burned and tax collectors attacked.

### Village-Based Conservation in Corrupt Institutions

How then should we respond to the apparent success of village forest reserves? Nothing is said in the literature on Tanzanian Village Forest Reserves about the problems of village government performance I have just raised. Let us consider three scenarios that could explain elements of the discrepancy between the two accounts.

1. The success is exaggerated. Village forest management committees are not functioning well and forests are not well protected. The laudatory reviews of village forest reserves written by their architects are simply too good to be true. Their assessments of forest condition are perfunctory and beg many questions, their grasp of village politics appears rudimentary, and they fail to demonstrate any sustained benefits to livelihoods.

This reaction is an understandable response to some of the more adulatory writings on forest reserves. Sjöholm and Luono (2002) describe them as an “almost total success,” and as an “initiative containing important components of participation, sustainability, empowerment, involvement of women and even poverty reduction” (135). But the only data here are the authors’ opinions, and these become less believable, given their later assertion that Village Executive Officers have “had a very positive impact in many villages” (136). Such an officer is also responsible for all village tax collection and the implementation of development projects. These are the officials who are so violently resisted in some parts of Tanzania.

But if the success of forest reserves has not been well demonstrated, neither is their failure. As regards forest condition, there have not been good assessments of the nature of change to forest cover in new reserves, but then the oldest are barely a decade old, and significant recoveries or marked differences between reserved and unreserved areas are simply unlikely after such a short time. As regards village forest management committees, detailed assessments and observations of their functioning have yet to be carried out, which means there is no good evidence to gainsay the current literature. As regards livelihoods, it is simply extremely difficult to demonstrate sustained change here. The proposition that the forest reserves can be dismissed as failures also requires good data.

2. Village forest reserves and their management committees are functioning well, but they are not serving the community in a democratic fashion. Rather, they are representing the interests of one particular village group, faction, or patron-client network. The democratic structures that forest management committees offer are not invigorating communities; they are simply new wineskins into which the same old groups, divisions, and politics are being poured.

Again, however, a lack of research on village forest management committees in action make it impossible to test this idea. But there are certainly indications that particular groups of villagers have contested the new forest management measures. Kajembe and Monela, in a frustratingly brief piece, observe that villages tend to be divided between traditionalists, who keep away from the state, and elites, who dominate and co-opt village government (Kajembe and Monela 2000). They found that the forest management committees at Duru-Haitemba were dominated by the traditionalists. The suggestion is that their success was in part dependent upon the power that these committees gave to some villagers in contravention of their normal domination by the elite. Similarly, Wily (2001a) reports that management plans at Duru-Haitemba excluded certain portions of village society. Pit sawyers and livestock keepers challenged the right

- of the forest management committees to exclude them from village forests in Duru-Haitemba, but lost their case once the laws were passed as village by-laws.
3. Pessimistic predictions of local community capacity based on existing corruption fail to appreciate the significance of the Duru-Haitemba case study. The relevance of village government failure is not that it makes community conservation impossible, but that community conservation may be a vehicle for tackling local government failure.

It has been claimed by those involved with the Village Forest Committees that these committees have tended to become informal monitors of the performance of formal village institutions. They have acted as an impromptu means of checking on problematic organizations. They are not just an end in themselves (good forest conservation) but a means (community mobilization) to a grander goal of better local government performance (Wily and Dewees 2001). This is manifest in this observation by one district forest officer who states:

“What I have observed is how CBFM changes villagers. They become less tolerant of bad leaders. They become braver to get rid of them and surer that the Village Council is elected to serve them, not itself.” (Wily et al. 2000, 44)

There are certainly cases of change proceeding despite corrupt circumstances. A World Bank-sponsored review of community-based natural resource management has noted that while ideally the correct enabling policy and institutional environment need to exist for local management to succeed, in fact, in many instances “local communities often forge ahead with activities even when such an enabling macro-level framework does not exist” (World Bank 1999, 13). Similarly, Nelson and Makko (2003, 14) observe that success in community wildlife management comes from “the community’s successful navigation of a relatively adverse enabling environment.” We have already seen at Mtowisa that village institutions performed strongly in spite of, or perhaps because of, wider problems of corruption. This was visible in the case of the local reaction to stock theft and the strength of Sungusungu despite district government collusion with these thefts.

But the forest officer’s observation are not evidence of this process in action. “Getting rid of bad leaders” could be the result of struggles between rival patron-client groups. It would be difficult to move from an apparent success in forest management to a broader challenge against corrupt village or district institutions. After all, many of the people involved in Sungusungu at Mtowisa were also involved in the poor management of the SUDECO ranch, the Vuma secondary school, and the failure to keep herders off village lands. They were effective because they were able to navigate the reality of patron-client networks and meet power (corrupt district government) with power (Julius Nyerere).<sup>5</sup> But even then they could only speak truth to power in the most unusual circumstances.

I am unable at this stage to take this analysis further. Juxtaposing experience of corruption from one site with stories of hopeful change from another cannot generate a more satisfactory conclusion. The full diversity of experience of village and district functioning, their oppressiveness, and their transformation require new accounts, which are just beginning to emerge (e.g., Nelson and Makko 2003).<sup>6</sup>

What are the implications of this case for calls (such as my own, Brockington 2002) for more power to be given to villagers over natural resource management?

The injustices occasioned by the brand of fortress conservation (Brockington 2002; Brechin et al. 2003; Neumann 1998) practised in Tanzania make it imperative to explore all possibilities that might make for fairer allocation of the benefits of resource use. Community conservation will be hard (Murphree 2000). Village-based resource management in Tanzania has to reckon with decades of disadvantage and disempowerment at the village level (Igoe 2003; Nelson and Makko 2003). It is still young and is bound to take time to work.

It becomes vital therefore to discuss the profoundly powerful structures and social practices in which community conservation has to operate. Corruption may be less a problem with government systems as an established way of getting things done (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Such practices, if they die at all, will go slowly and painfully (Andvig et al. 2001, 43). Ideals such as democracy, transparency, and civil society do not reshape practice of themselves; rather, they are shaped by the societies in which they are introduced. Where corruption is all-pervasive it is essential to recognise its diverse manifestations. Failure to do so may simply empower more corruption. It is problematic to infer our own ideals of "working democracy" or "local accountability in action" from local political dynamics such as the removal of village chairmen. This may simply obscure what is really going on. Assessments of new community conservation, and especially village forest management, need to engage with these harsh and brutal realities of the every day politics of the governed (Chatterjee 2004). Only by recognizing the power and depth of these structures can sustained change be won.

## Notes

1. The main source for information about this case is Liz Wily, who was involved in the establishment of village forest reserves here and who has been prolific in her communication of the achievements here (Sjoholm and Wily 1995; Wily and Haule 1995; Matose and Wily 1996; Wily 1997; Wily et al. 2000; Wily 2000; Wily 2001a; Wily 2001b; Wily and Dewees 2001; Wily 2002a; 2002b; Wily 2003). These are an incomplete selection of her writings on the topic. Kajembe and Monela (2000) offer some insights into the dynamics involved here, but are frustratingly succinct and based their work on brief PRA research.
2. This was expressed several times in different ways. One farmer told me: "The people are complaining a lot, and it is true as they say from time to time that the oppressed does not have rights. Its true that right now it is money that governs. For example your farm could be ruined, but if you ask for help from the agricultural extension officer you get nothing. Someone else will gain. This is a matter which causes a great deal of anguish."
3. The taxation has since been abolished, but it dominated village affairs when in existence, and in particular when the village forest reserves were formed (Feldstad personal communication 18 November 2003).
4. Corruption is a national problem. A national level enquiry into corruption found that "there is no doubt that corruption is rampant in all sectors of the economy, public services and politics in the country" (Presidential Commission of Inquiry Against Corruption 1996, 46). Tanzania performs poorly in Transparency International's surveys. External auditing of District Council accounts was weak because of the lack of qualified staff in the Auditor General's office. Between 1993 and 1996, only 64 audits were carried out, which, given that there are nearly 100 districts, is a small but a fraction of the potential audits that could have been conducted. Moreover, in these audits 33 councils were classified as poor (Feldstad and Semboja 2000, 25).
5. I owe the idea of navigation to Jim Igoe.
6. Furthermore, the relationships I have described are dated by the abolition of most local taxation. We have yet to see what this does to village-district relations and whether this frees villagers from oppressive structures or ushers in a new era of revenue seeking by district governments using other means.

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