

POVERTY AND CONSERVATION IN TANZANIA

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The government of Tanzania began to move in the direction of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy in the mid 1990s, and adopted a plan entitled the National Poverty Eradication Strategy (NPES) in 1997. The status and role of this plan was subsequently overtaken by events, however, because not long after its publication Tanzania was drawn into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process, whereby preparation of the PRSP and its acceptance by the donors became a precondition for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. An Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) was prepared in consultation with the donor community in early 2000 followed by the full PRSP in October 2000. By November 2001, Tanzania was deemed by the international financial institutions to have met the conditions for enhanced HIPC debt relief, and US\$2 billion of outstanding debt was thereby cancelled.

While Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world, it is firmly committed to poverty reduction, as reflected in its National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP), and to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The NSGRP identifies the environment as a cross-cutting issue with a bearing on poverty reduction. With 87% of Tanzania's population involved in agriculture, the environment is of key importance to the livelihoods of much of the country's population. Fifteen of the NSGRP's 108 targets are directly related to the environment and natural resources, and interventions on the environment are expected to contribute to other targets. For instance, goal 4 (cluster 4.7.3) aims at harmonising natural resource sectoral policies and strategies and remove any conflicts in laws and regulations. It aims also at improving land conservation measures and at community-based and environmentally sound natural resource management.

In Tanzania, poverty remains overwhelmingly in rural areas where about 87% of the poor population live (Figure 1).



Figure 1: A household at Difinga village, Mvomero district, Tanzania

The prevalence of poverty is still high in Tanzania. According to the Household Budget Survey of 2000/01, the proportion of the population below the national food poverty line is 18.7% and that below the national basic needs poverty line is 35.7%. The poor rely heavily on natural resources. For instance, given the prevailing poverty, exploiting timber resources for short-term gain may be the preferred strategy for many. It may even be rational for poverty stricken communities to decide to exploit prized species to (local?) extinction and invest the proceeds in other income-generating activities or in education for their children. Given this situation, for conservation to attain a higher priority in a devolved setting, ways of making it pay for local people have to be found.

Qualitative research suggests that the institutional environment facing the rural population in Tanzania does not actively foster the flourishing of diverse activities required for rapid poverty reduction (Elis and Mdoe, 2003).

About 43.7% of the total land area in Tanzania is somehow protected (or conserved) (Figure 2) where wildlife protected areas (including Game Controlled Areas) cover at least 28% of the total land area of mainland Tanzania and forest reserves cover around 15.7%. However, most of the wildlife is found outside existing protected areas thus making its survival to be in a race against development. Nevertheless, Tanzania has been practicing community-based natural resource management by encouraging participatory forestry and wildlife management through Wildlife Management Areas, Community Forest Reserves.

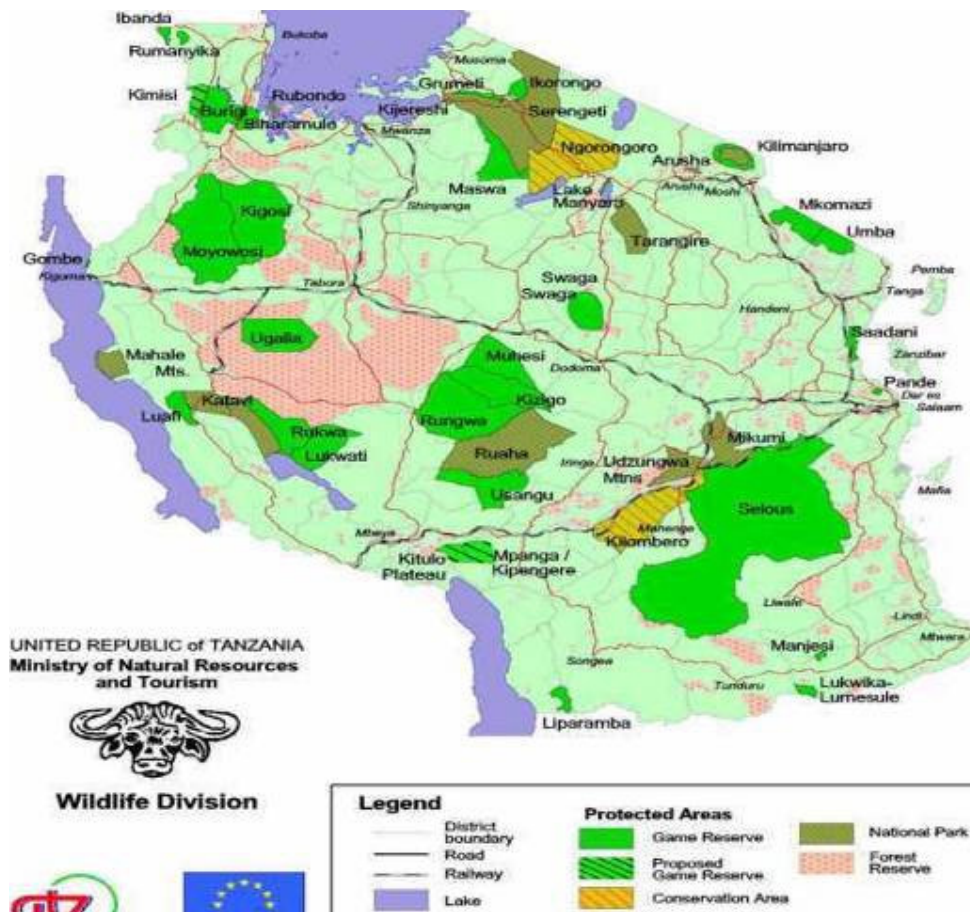


Figure 2: Map of Tanzania showing protected areas

In 1997/98, the nation started implementing the first-ever documented policies, which adopted radical changes in natural resource conservation. Legislative changes have since followed suit: Forest Act in 2002 and the Wildlife Conservation Act, 1974 is under review. Objectives of the natural resource policies include to:

- promote conservation of biodiversity;
- administer, regulate and develop protected areas;
- involve all stakeholders in conservation (including sustainable utilization), as well as in fair and equitable sharing of benefits;
- contribute to poverty reduction & improve quality of life of Tanzanians.

Threats to conservation in Tanzania include land biodiversity degradation (Figure 3), lack of accessible, good quality water, environmental pollution, loss of wildlife habitats (terrestrial), deterioration of aquatic systems and deforestation. Research suggests that these problems are affecting the well-being of the poor.



Fig. 3a: Charcoal



Fig. 3b: Poorly planned agric



Fig. 3c: Pole cutting



Fig. 3d: Pit sawing



Fig. 3e: Poaching (all types)



Other threats are bush meat hunting (Figure 4), wild or bush fires, grazing, limited education possibilities, human and wildlife health concerns, development pressures, limited land use planning, lack of environmentally friendly technology, and high population growth - actual human population densities over the years have been 19.9 in 1967, 28.3 in 1978, 37.3 in 1988 and 55.8 in 2002.



Figure 4: Bush meat is a big business for some residents of Kibindu village, Bagamoyo district

Rural poverty is strongly associated with lack of suitable land for agriculture (part of it is in protected areas) as well as inability of the residents to secure non-farm alternatives. Conservation of natural resources requires land, land which the people need for settlements, agriculture, grazing and other socio-economic activities, thus conflicts over land are common.

The rural poor encounter a public sector institutional context that is neutral or blocking rather than enabling for them to construct their own pathways out of poverty. But, poor communities and households usually do not carry out “environmental impact

assessments” and, as a result, poverty increases as the environment and natural resources get destroyed. The challenge is, therefore, to implement policies and enforce mechanisms for sustainable exploitation of the resources.

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