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**INSTITUTE OF ANTHROPOLOGY, GENDER AND
AFRICAN STUDIES**

**WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES: A CASE STUDY OF FOREST IN
NKUBU DIVISION, MERU CENTRAL DISTRICT**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to solve the central problem of how to involve women in forest resource management. The study was undertaken at Nkubu Division, Meru District, where there are many conservation agencies, development agencies and civil society organizations which records heavy investments in forest conservation and community development, yet forest degradation levels continue to increase amidst high poverty levels. Current development research confirms that degradation of the natural resource base inevitably results in a reduction in the overall well being of people. According to UNDP (2006, p.11), more than 58.7% of the Women population at Nkubu live below poverty line. While several reasons could be advanced for this scenario, lack of women participation in management of the forest resources was the single most important limiting factor considered.

Unilateral approaches have failed at Nkubu because they fail to recognize the multidimensional nature of forest degradation and poverty, and they only identify the easily recognizable causes of low women participation in natural resource management. These approaches fail to acknowledge the importance of active participation of the resource users at all levels of decision making. Unilateral and centralized management regimes suffer from lack of adequate resources; they ignore local knowledge and capacity and seldom allocate the financial resources needed for research to, public awareness, community consultation and effective management. This has resulted into increased resource-user conflicts at Nkubu, leading to increased forest degradation and deterioration in the community's standards of living.

It is the argument in this study that the key to success in forest management is to give some responsibility to women (resource users) and the community groups that are most dependent on continued forest productivity. As such, a shift from a regulatory, legalistic and a sectoral approach to a more integrative and collaborative approach will require active women participation. In this

study it was hypothesized that women participation at Nkubu Division is influenced by intrinsic (not easily recognizable) factors.

In order to explore (understand) this problematic situation, a survey research design was adopted. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (questionnaires, interviews, focussed group discussions, transect surveys and observation) were employed in data collection. The collected data was cleaned, coded and summarized into working themes in line with the study objectives. Because of the nature of this study (diagnostic), data analysis was limited to qualitative, quantitative analysis.

This study found out that human factors (illiteracy , attitudes and perceptions, women discrimination), and governance/ policy differences (land tenure and ownership, governance structures) are the main limiting factors to women participation in forest management at Nkubu. There are often deeply entrenched policy and institutional barriers at local, national and international levels that work against the interests of the women. 80% of respondents indicated that failure by the government to communicate policies, greatly hindered women participation in forest management, while hostile staff, corruption and failure to uphold the law were serious hindrances to forest conservation and women participation.

It is therefore recommended in this study that a multifaceted approach be adopted in enhancing women participation in forest management. Such approaches includes capacity building and empowerment, provision of accurate and relevant information on forest management and a deliberate adjustment of governance structures to make them explicit, lean, participatory and responsive.