

Village Land Use Planning: A Potential Tool for Greening Landscapes in Mbarali District, Mbeya

Executive Summary

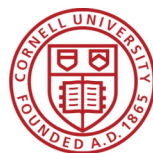
In Tanzania, village land use planning (VLUP) is a recently introduced tool for improving rural development processes. VLUP engages villagers in delineating their village land for various livelihood and environmental uses. Mbarali District in Mbeya Region, Southwestern Tanzania, experiences persistent conflicts over land and water resources due to declining land productivity and dwindling water resources for irrigation, environmental flows, power and livestock watering. VLUP has been introduced for managing land and water use conflicts, the environment and biodiversity conservation. Assessments of one village (Mabadaga) with a formal VLUP and another with informal VLUP (Matebete), reveal that VLUP helps reduce conflicts between land users within villages and enhance conservation efforts. Villagers have witnessed the return of annual stream flow, regeneration of natural vegetation in delineated areas for forests, re-emergence of wild animals and more systematic management of crops-livestock interactions. Furthermore, sedentary farmers asserted that VLUP is highly valuable for acquiring a Certificate of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCRO). This is less the case with many pastoralists who argued that CCROs are less valuable for communally owned grazing land and they do not facilitate migration between grazing areas. It was also evident that a lack of consideration of minority interests, such as those of pastoralists, reduces the viability of VLUP for conflict management, particularly when grazing and water resources are scarce. Additionally, VLUP appears ineffective for resolving boundaries conflicts between villages, which calls for other mechanisms for resolving these conflicts, as clear agreement on village boundaries is prerequisite for initiating the VLUP process.

Introduction

The government of the United Republic of Tanzania recognizes that smallholder farmers are the heart of Tanzanian agriculture. More than 80 percent of the country's population relies on farming for their food and livelihoods, and agriculture accounts for 25 percent of the GDP (SAGCOT, 2011). Given the centrality of agriculture to the Tanzanian economy and the well-being of Tanzania's people, the government is committed to boosting public and private investment to transform agriculture through recent initiatives like Kilimo Kwanza and Big Results Now.

Simultaneously, interest in the Southern Highlands is growing for its wealth of biodiversity and as a source of water for downstream hydropower plants, irrigation schemes, and game reserves. These expanding interests in southern Tanzania offer many opportunities for the economic development of the region. Although policy makers claim that the well-being of smallholder farmers is at the core of the country's investment strategies, concerns have been raised about whether or not smallholders will in fact benefit from anticipated economic growth.

Village land use planning (VLUP) is one strategy currently being implemented to support economic development and help guarantee that smallholders and pastoralists benefit from growth. The Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999 outlined detailed guidelines for implementing VLUP, giving authority to district governments to manage the VLUP process. VLUP provides a mechanism for reducing conflicts over land and natural resources, while providing a legal mechanism for





Mbarali District Planning Officer, Geoffrey Mwajibele, and the research team consulting a map of villages in Mbarali District. Photo credit: Abigail Hart

securing smallholder tenure, designating conservation areas, and identifying areas for investment. In most cases, VLUP is a necessary step along the way, but not the final step for achieving these goals.

A variety of actors may be interested in supporting land use planning for their own objectives – tenure security, establishing conservation corridors, inviting market-based development opportunities like REDD+, or encouraging large scale foreign investment. Apart from these objectives, ongoing work with agricultural and conservation leaders in Mbeya suggests that it is also a key step in expanding “green growth”- a strategy for economic development and sustainable agricultural intensification that supports biodiversity and natural resource conservation.

Research team member and Matebete Village Member engaged in an interview. Photo credit: Abigail Hart



Objectives and method

While some reports have documented VLUP processes and experiences in northern Tanzania, very few have described experiences with VLUP in southern Tanzania. With interest in the region increasing, it is important to study VLUP in southern Tanzania, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the process and to make relevant recommendations for District Executive Councils.

These initial findings and recommendations are based on the experiences of three villages in Mbarali District in Mbeya region. The objectives were 1) to determine the current status of VLUP in the district; 2) to identify how VLUP contributes to villagers’ development objectives (e.g., improved tenure security) and allow villagers (especially crop and livestock farmers) to make new or different choices about their land; and 3) to determine what villagers would like to see in a VLUP process including specific provisions and ways of engaging stakeholders.

To achieve these objectives, we interviewed Mbarali District Officials, and village councils and village members in Mabadaga, Mwaluma and Matebete villages. Interviews focused on their knowledge of the VLUP process and their satisfaction with their participation. They also addressed the benefits that villagers expect to receive from the process and the challenges experienced in developing and implementing the plans. By involving villages with and without formal VLUPs, the interviews gathered rich information related to awareness and implementation of VLUP.

The study engaged community leaders and innovators in understanding and shaping the policy environment for improved land use planning in Mbeya. We hope that the study will inform organizations that may support VLUP processes of the major challenges and opportunities for supporting smallholder and pastoralist investments in sustainable production.

Key Findings

Strengths and benefits of VLUP for green growth

Participation – In villages with land use plans, the protocol for participation specified by the National Land Use Planning Commission (NLUPC) is being followed. Village members from different groups are involved in the development of the plan and feel satisfied with the level of their engagement, even in cases when they are not satisfied with the outcome of the process.

Establishment of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) – VLUPs have resulted in CCAs whose boundaries and bylaws for use are respected by the communities. In some cases, these conservation areas are already providing tangible results in the form of restored annual stream flow, new economic opportunities in bee keeping, sustainable firewood extraction and recovery of wildlife activities.

Tool for conflict management – VLUP is being used with moderate success as a tool for addressing land use conflicts between user groups within villages. It helps establish mechanisms for clarifying access rights, reporting conflicts and seeking restitution for damages. However, VLUPs have been of little value as a tool for resolving boundary conflicts between villages. These conflicts must be dealt with before VLUPs can be developed.

Contribution to secure tenure – Although VLUP does not guarantee tenure security for individual farmers or livestock keepers, it has served as a foundation for improving tenure security by creating access to Certificates of Customary Rights of Occupancy (CCROs).

Weaknesses of the current VLUP process

Lack of knowledge on VLUP – While Village Councils and villagers were aware of the Village Land Act and the VLUP process, few understood the steps they would need to go through, or the budget or skills necessary to advance a VLUP in their village. Even after plans have been developed, the timeline for approving by-laws or revising the VLUP were not clear.

Absence of future planning in VLUPs – So far, no VLUPs in Mbarali district include areas for investment. Also, most plans have not adequately accounted for population growth and immigration or adequately considered the types of land use that these

populations may engage in.

Promotion of unequal resource allocation – Despite participatory processes, VLUPs in some cases have institutionalized rules that restrict the access of some village members to key resources, such as water. This signals that conflicts persist and VLUPs can be developed in such a way that some groups benefit more than others. These challenges are exacerbated perceptions of corruption, such as village leaders accepting bribes for granting residency permits. These concerns are greater in villages with greater diversity of livelihoods and ethnic groups.

Persistent challenges

The current VLUP process provides a stepping stone for several legal processes, including customary land titling and the designation of conservation areas, among others. However, two main challenges have limited its widespread implementation.

First, the district governments face serious budget constraints for facilitating land use planning. For instance, in Mbarali District, the development of a VLUP costs TSH6-8 million. The district government receives enough funding to support one to three VLUPs per year. Currently the district has VLUPs in 26 of its 99 villages (26 percent). However, given these financial limitations, much of the funding and capacity to facilitate the VLUP process comes from facilitating organizations or villages themselves.

A Participatory Land Use Management Committee Member and pastoralist village member share their experiences with VLUP in Mabadaga. Photo credit: Abigail Hart



Second, although some of villages have successfully managed to advance their own land use plans with minimal support from the district council, others have had difficulty discerning the steps for establishing a VLUP. A few villages have been able to pull together the necessary funding but lack internal capacity to complete the steps on their own, requiring actors with the capacity to help villages navigate the VLUP process to step in.

Both of these challenges have resulted in third party actors, often civic sector organizations, supporting VLUPs. In some cases, facilitators are able to leverage power that villages lack to push VLUPs and bylaws through the approval process. Some of these organizations have their own interests for supporting VLUPs, often related to opportunities that come through VLUP development (Table 1). To date, very little attention has been paid to the differences in interests that drives actors to engage in VLUP. By recognizing rather than ignoring these differences, they can be used to achieve broad outcomes for sustainable agricultural intensification that support biodiversity conservation.

Conclusions and recommendations

1 The incentives for farmers to participate in VLUP are clear. Holding a Certificate of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCRO) for their land immediately increases their land value, access to capital and legal power to protect assets. CCROs also create incentives for intensifying crop production by limiting the supply of land.

2 The government has actively extended messages, supplies and inputs for intensifying crop production. However, the same messages and practices for intensifying livestock management and promoting improved rangeland management are more or less absent from current extension systems. Districts should recognize that effectively engaging other groups such as pastoralists in VLUP; and providing appropriate extension services would augment conservation and restoration efforts through education on sustainable livestock intensification.

3 Experiences with VLUP in Mbarali are relatively limited (26 percent of the district). Before developing VLUPs in the remaining villages, the District should review the experiences of villages with VLUPs to see if the plans are being followed, if communities are satisfied with their plans, and how the plans are meeting new and changing village needs. This information would help the District to address current challenges before developing plans across the entire district. Ideally, this review would also inform how VLUP impacts different groups of people. The district could use this as an opportunity to determine if villages are revising VLUPs every three years, as outlined by the law, or if the revision process is being overlooked. This would also help the District to address the outstanding concerns of villages regarding timelines for approving bylaws and other stages of the process that often stall the implementation of VLUPs.

4 VLUP is crucial to the goals of many actors in southern Tanzania. These goals and incentives should be recognized and mobilized to support more rapid advancement of VLUP

Table 1. Actors involved in VLUP, their interests in participating in the process and their potential contributions to green growth.

Actor	Interests	Long-term contribution to sustainable intensification
District government	Conflict management, conservation, investment	Ensure that VLUPs contribute to district vision and plan for conservation and agricultural investments that support local livelihoods and preserve resources
Village Leaders	Conflict management, economic development	- Identify key areas for conservation within village boundaries - Provide education and extension materials on sustainable crop and livestock production practices - Establish relationships with knowledgeable CSOs that will help build local capacity
Crop and livestock farmers	Secure land tenure, access to capital, access to water and natural resources	- Improve crop and livestock management systems implemented on individual plots - Leverage new capital to invest in sustainable practices - Establish farmer and livestock keeper associations to share knowledge and build capacity on sustainable practices
Facilitating CSOs and government programs	Large scale biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, large scale agricultural investment, formalization of land and business ownership, etc.	- Establish guidelines and protocols for sustainable investments - Educate villages on the opportunities and values associated with biodiversity conservation and sustainable intensification - Improve market access and opportunities for smallholder organizations to participate in value adding activities - Advise district government on suitable areas for conservation and investment, or other economic development opportunities - Provide funding and facilitation for VLUP



Photo credit: Abigail Hart

development in the region. Many of the challenges that the three villages have faced relate to awareness of the land laws and education on the VLUP process. To more rapidly advance VLUP, the district could work with facilitating organizations to develop and provide all villages with materials clearly outlining the VLUP process, the basic costs, and actors involved at each stage.

5 The delineation of village boundaries is a prerequisite for VLUPs and depends on government authorities above the village level. Currently, disputes over boundaries are limiting the advancement of VLUP development. By helping villages resolve boundary disputes, through intervention or clarification of procedures that villages should follow, district authorities could accelerate the VLUP process and improve the outcomes.

6 Despite the participatory nature of the VLUP process in Tanzania, it is clear that minority perspectives are not always taken into consideration in the development of VLUPs. The current VLUP process needs to be made more sensitive to minority needs and livelihood objectives in order to successfully reduce conflicts between land users over the long-term.

7 The district, in collaboration with villages, could consider developing a District Land Use Plan that outlines priority areas for forest conservation, protection of water resources, agricultural production, and investments, as well as strategies for dealing with growing and migrant populations. With such a plan, the District would be in a better position to advise villages and establish a coherent vision for green growth. It would be better positioned also to create partnerships with CSO facilitators who have vested interests in seeing different parts of the District developed in ways that support their interests. A district plan could open economic opportunities for smallholders while protecting the critical resources that will sustain the region over the long-term.

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For Further Reading:

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