



POLICY BRIEF

Strengthening Community Participation in Mangrove Management in Tanzania

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INTRODUCTION

Mangrove forests are known for their economic, social and ecological importance. They are critical for coastal protection, biodiversity, and livelihoods. In Tanzania mangrove forests are classified as national forest reserves and primarily managed by the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS), with roles also played by fisheries, environmental authorities, and local government institutions. While Tanzania has progressive legal frameworks for mangrove governance, persistent challenges remain in institutional coordination, clarity of community roles, and implementation at the local level. Strengthening community participation is equally essential for sustainable management and equitable benefit sharing.

Landesa with funding from the King Philanthropies (KP) is implementing the Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves Project in nine countries which include Bangladesh, Cambodia, India (State of West Bengal), Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand in South and Southeast Asia, and Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa. As part of the project in Tanzania, Landesa has undertaken an in-depth legal analysis, consultation with the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS), and community assessment in six villages of Kilwa¹ and Lindi² Districts regarding mangrove management in the country.

Landesa developed this policy brief based on these assessments and interviews. The brief highlights key governance challenges and identifies priority areas for strengthening community participation and sustainability in mangrove management.



KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Limited Coordination and Policy Dialogue Across Stakeholders

Tanzania's Mangrove Management Strategy³ describes coordination challenges for both state and non-state stakeholders. Mangrove forest discussions are conducted in silos and there is no specific platform for mangrove forest dialogue at all levels despite attempts by the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS) to bring stakeholders together for dialogue in collaboration with other players in the field. The dialogue platform is important to bring voices from communities to the national level for collective action. Mangrove ecosystem management includes both state and non-state actors who are working on different interventions. These include policy and legal reforms, improved governance, improved community livelihoods, restorations, among others. It is important for stakeholders to find ways to share working approaches, challenges which require joint efforts to address and build a community of practice. Dialogue platforms at National, landscape and local level will help inform sustainable changes both in law /policy and practice for sustainable mangrove ecosystem management.

2. Gaps in Legal Harmonization and Institutional Coordination

Mangrove forests are primarily managed by the Forest Act⁴ and the National Forest Policy⁵ supported by other sector laws including the Marine Parks and Reserves Act⁶, the Fisheries Act⁷, the Village Land Act⁸, the Land Use Planning Act, among others. These laws also establish institutions which are related to

¹ Tingi, Malalani and Miembe Miwili villages

² Mmumbu, Mkwaya and Mbanja villages

³ The National Mangrove Management and Development Strategy 2025 – 2035 at page 4

⁴ The Forest Act, [Cap 323 R.E 2023]

⁵ National Forest Policy, 1998

⁶ Marine Parks and Reserves Act, [Cap 146 R.E 2023]

⁷ The Fisheries Act, [Cap 279 R.E 2023]

⁸ The Village Land Act, [Cap 114 R.E 2023]

mangrove management either directly or indirectly. For example, the Marine Parks and Reserves Act establishes the Marine Park and Reserves Authority which manages marine ecosystems including mangrove forests which are designated as marine parks. In the absence of legal harmonization, there can be a conflict between laws and various governance institutions. These coordination gaps are particularly visible in licensing decisions for coastal investments, where unclear or overlapping mandates have limited effective oversight of mangroves areas. The National Mangrove Management and Development Strategy (2025-2035) encourages review of legal and institutional frameworks and development of integrated mangrove management plans at local and national levels. This promises a good opportunity towards strong laws and policies and coordinated institutions both at national and local levels. It is critical for the village authorities, where mostly community members reside and have been in the mangrove host areas for a long time, to feel part of the management and development and to smoothly interact with national authorities without conflict.

3. Limited Clarity in Community Co-Management Frameworks

Community members living in the villages have contributed for generations to the management and sustainability of mangrove forest in their localities though that does not connote there has not been pressure to these resources from the same communities. However, their role in the management is not clearly defined in the legal systems and therefore provides limited opportunity to directly engage in the management through formal systems. The village authorities have powers to establish Natural Resource Management Committees (NRMCS) and Beach Management Units (BMUs). These platforms provide avenues for community participation in mangrove and marine ecosystems management but require guidance on their powers, how they coordinate with one another, as well as capacity development on how to carry out their responsibilities.

4. Persistent Gender and Youth Gaps in Governance Structures

Despite some limited avenues for community participation in mangrove ecosystem management, women and youth remain unrepresented due to discriminatory customs and traditions and gender-blind legal frameworks which do not call for enforceable roles of women and youth in the mangrove ecosystem. For example, women engage in the fisheries value chain in many capacities but in the formation of Beach Management Units, there are no clear requirements to include women in membership or decision-making. Therefore, many times these bodies remain dominated by men. This is equally the same in the formation of the Natural Resource Management committees, where the law does not specify the number of women or youth in their formation. This lack of specific provisions as to quotas of women and youth prevent their active participation and involvement to their full potentials.

5. Tensions around Access, Tenure and Livelihoods

Community livelihood activities in mangroves areas are closely connected to marine ecosystem management. Most communities depend on small scale farming/production and fisheries which have impact on sustainability of the marine ecosystem including mangrove forests. The position of the law as it relates to mangrove forest management, is that these areas are either national forests managed by the Tanzania Forest Service Agency (TFS) or Marine Parks and Reserves managed by the respective authority. Strict interpretation of relevant laws means that access to these areas is restricted and/or highly insecure for host communities. In some cases, this leads to tensions between the community and the respective authorities responsible for management. This also results in significant challenges to livelihood activities of local communities. In the absence of clear plans, strategies and guidelines on the use rights and access to these resources, sustainable and inclusive management of mangrove forest and other marine ecosystems is difficult. Clear frameworks that support community livelihood advancements including through sustainable access to mangrove forests and marine resources are critical.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issues identified through the project assessments, the following are recommended for consideration:

1. **Establish and strengthen multi-level dialogue platforms at all levels.**
Facilitate structured platforms at national, landscape, and local levels to support coordination, knowledge-sharing, and policy feedback. This will help with the smooth flow of information and help address the right problems through collective efforts and solutions.
2. **Harmonize laws and institutional roles in mangrove forest management.**
The different laws and policies with their established institutions need to work in harmony and avoid conflicts. Review and reform the legal framework to ensure conflicts are resolved. Establish coordination and collaboration among different and related institutions, including clarification of the role of TFS and others in decisions affecting mangrove areas.
3. **Develop socially inclusive and gender equal plans and guidelines both at national and local level for sustainable mangrove forest management.**
Community participation in mangrove forest management is critical and therefore proper community management plans and guidelines will help advance sustainable use and access to marine and mangrove ecosystems which in turn will improve livelihoods of the people in the communities. Introduce measures to strengthen women's participation in VNRCs and BMUs, alongside capacity-building and leadership support.
4. **Strengthen livelihood frameworks linked to mangrove management.**
Mangrove forest can be more sustainably managed if management equally delivers livelihood benefits. Therefore, strengthening frameworks which support programs/projects for livelihood is essential. Promote models that combine conservation with livelihood benefits, including sustainable resource use, ecotourism, and blue carbon opportunities.
5. **Develop mangrove-specific Joint Forest Management guidelines.**
Support the development of national guidelines to clarify roles of VNCRs, BMUs, and communities in mangrove co-management.
6. **Support implementation of carbon and benefit sharing frameworks including ensuring communities can access and benefit equitably from emerging carbon markets.**
Strengthen awareness and enforcement of existing carbon benefit-sharing regulations and build community capacity to engage with emerging opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Tanzania has a strong foundation for mangrove governance, but gaps in coordination, clarity, and inclusion limit effective community participation. Addressing these issues will be critical to strengthening community participation, improving governance effectiveness and ensuring sustainable mangrove management.

REFERENCE

- Landesa (2026), In-Depth Analysis of Legal Framework for Mangroves in Tanzania, Unpublished
- Landesa (2026), Tanzania Program Report on Community Assessment on Mangrove Conservation and Management in Kilwa and Lindi (Report)

