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1 - INTRODUCTION



Figure 1 - Map of Najjembe

“If the NFA really wanted to help us, they would build some big factories!” (Thomas, 36 years of age, and a logger, May 6th 2016)

Does community based forest conservation lead to an even economic development? A basic premise for community based forest conservation is that it should lead to an economic development for the affected area that compensate people living there for the resources they are prohibited from exploiting (Hulme and Mumphree 2001). In other words, people need to be provided with alternative sources of income that does not affect their natural environment

in a negative way. This is also the premise for the conservation of Mabira Central Forest Reserve in central Uganda, which this thesis concerns. The conservation of the forest is carried out by the National Forestry Authority (NFA), which is a government organisation with a vision to “Contribute to a sufficiently forested, ecologically stable and economically prosperous Uganda” (<http://www.nfa.org.ug/>). They promote, certify and support community based organisations (CBOs) for conservation and new economic activities, and support the building of an infrastructure for ecotourism in the forest.

The argument of this thesis is as follows: While community based conservation may represent an alternative source of income and an opportunity for social and economic upward mobility for some, revenues from tourism and resources allocated from the outside to community development are insufficient to promote alternative sources of income and economic development for the population at large. The informant quote serving as an epigraph to the Introduction shows precisely this. In particular, residents who do not participate in the CBO programme or activities for tourists complain that they do not benefit from the conservation, while at the same time feeling robbed from the forest resources they would like to exploit. This feeling of injustice manifests itself in gossip about NFA staff and those of their fellow residents who participate in CBOs, saying that they do not have a sincere interest in forest conservation; that their true intention is to milk the external financial resources allocated to the conservation. Because of the unequal distribution of external resources, the project may be seen as increasing, potentially, socio-economic differentiation within the local communities, which goes against egalitarian values and norms of sharing in small-scale rural communities in Uganda. The unequal distribution of resources creates distrust and anger in the local communities within the forest, which may undermine the entire conservation operation. For any community based conservation strategy to work, people need to trust those in charge to provide what they promise, and this is not the case in Mabira. Economic development can be understood in many ways, but to people on the ground in Mabira it is seen as an immediate improvement of their financial situation. When these high expectations are not met, or perceived as benefiting only a few, it creates a lack of trust on several levels, each of which contributes to conflicts over resources, both natural and introduced.

Mabira Central Forest Reserve

Mabira Central Forest Reserve is located in the central part of Uganda, in between the country's two largest cities, Kampala and Jinja. It covers an area of 306 square kilometres, making it one of the largest remaining rainforests in Uganda. Most settlements are found in the southern part of the forest, around the main road. According to a NFA report made in 2006, the human population rose from around 50 000 people in 2005 to 120 000 in 2012, distributed amongst 27 villages (Galabuzi et al. 2015). Some are able to grow some crops at their own or shared plots of land, however these are rarely large enough to sustain a livelihood for a family. The biggest village in the forest is the trading port of Najjembe, with around 40 000 inhabitants (2012), which is located by the main road. Najjembe and the area around it has several schools for all ages, a large market by the road, several small shops and three ecotourism businesses. The NFA Ecotourism office and Sector manager can also be found there. Because Najjembe is by far the biggest village in the forest, and is arguably the tightest point of contact between locals and the NFA, it is where I spent the most of my fieldwork.

Najjembe can best be described as a large crossroad, made up of the main road from Kampala to Jinja moving from east to west, and a dirt road going from north to south. The largest portion of the village is located on the North-South axis, where housing areas, shops used by the locals, the NFA Ecotourism office, the Church, Mosque and schools are found. The East-South axis is mostly taken up by a large roadside market, where bypassers can stop to purchase roasted meat, drinks, fruits and vegetables. Most people live to the north of the main road, in a big housing area just north of the road. Few are able to afford buying their own houses, meaning that a substantial amount of people must rent a house in Najjembe. Some have been able to build or purchase their own house, but this is quite rare because of the price and lack of available land. A family of four may rent a room of approximately ten square meters, and can either pay to be connected to the available power lines or purchase a solar panel to have adequate lighting inside. Water can be bought at taps around the village or found in a spring in the forest approximately half a kilometre to the north. The relatively high density of people in Najjembe suggests that few have land available for their own use. As not everyone has the possibility of growing their own crops, other sources of income must be found. This makes job creation important to the inhabitants of Najjembe. People can work on other people's farms, as teachers or at other institutions. The single largest employer is the

market, where young salespeople are employed by shop owners along the road to sell goods like roasted meats, drinks and vegetables.

Surrounding the southern parts of Mabira there is a large sugar cane estate owned by the Indian company Sugar Corporation of Uganda Ltd (SCOUL). In 2006, the company applied for the de-gazettement of large areas of Mabira, for expanding the sugar fields. Although the proposition was declined, after several protests from Ugandan people, this, along with the population growth, created a substantial pressure on the already scarce available resources in the forest. Many people in Mabira are sceptical of the sugar cane plantation, saying that although there is work to be found there, the conditions and payment are so poor they compare it to slave labour.

The proposed expansion of the sugar cane plantation involved handing over 7100 hectares of the forest reserve to SCOUL for cultivating more sugar cane. There was some controversy surrounding the proposition, because of the huge value of the assets involved. According to Keith Child (2009), this led to the biggest protest rally Uganda had ever seen. People in and around the forest mobilised in large numbers, leading to several international partners, such as the European Union and Norway, threatening to stop funding to Ugandan forestry projects. The main pressure point, however, was provided by the World Bank, who had given Uganda a \$ 360 million dollar loan to finance the building of the Bujagali Hydro-Electric Dam on the lower Nile under the condition of conserving the ecosystem of Mabira (Child 2009:247-248).

Together with the rumoured low wages and unpleasant work conditions, these have led to the bad reputation of the sugar cane plantations inside the forest. People generally do not perceive working there as a viable option, and would rather seek employment elsewhere unless absolutely needed. The controversies in 2006-2007 are still remembered, however, creating uncertainty for people living in Mabira.

People experience pressure from the outside, because they do not trust that the plans for expansion are declined for good. At the same time, the pressure from within stems from several factors. Even with the conservation in place, the forest and especially Najjembe, offer some possibilities for young Ugandans looking for work. It might seem strange that an area that is experiencing a prohibition of usage on local resources experience a dramatic increase in population at the same time. Some reasons might be given though, these are to be discussed in the following.

The History of Conserving Mabira



Figure 2 - Sign in NFA Headquarters showing their "vision" – Private Picture

The Uganda Forestry Policy of 1929 was the first attempt at protecting forests in Uganda. It focused on protecting forest resources from degradation through over usage. It marked a shift from the traditional laws and systems already in place, and was entirely centralised. Local people had little or nothing to say in the matter, and this was to be the case for a long time. The policy was revised in 1948 to create more awareness about the importance of the forests. By this time, shifting cultivation had been identified as a threat, and restrictions on this were put in place. In other words, the protection of Uganda's forests is not a new project by any

means. An important factor of the early days was protection, rather than participation. People were simply told what to do and not to do regarding the forests (Galabuzi et. al. 2015).

From the 1966 Constitution of Uganda to the 1988 Forestry Policy, the country was in turmoil. The presidencies and civil wars during Milton Obote and Idi Amin's regimes led to severe degradation of the forests – Mabira included. In addition to the stress caused by the unrest, policies were made to encourage clearing, cultivation and settlement in the forests. An emphasis was put on prosperity, and the use of so-called “free land” was encouraged. Mabira fell under this category, which meant farmers and proprietors were clear to use the forest as they saw fit. This led to severe degradation over a period of more than 20 years (Galabuzi et. al. 2015).

When the current president Yoweri Museveni took the power in 1986, things were to change. The 1988 Forestry Policy made a new push for forestry in Uganda, focusing on planting new ones, and to balance out the protection and usage of the old ones. In 1994, a government order was passed, saying that exploitation of certain forest resources, like timber, had to stop (Galabuzi et. al. 2015). In Mabira, and certain other forests, however, licensed logging was still allowed. Local people saw this as an effort to deny them a potential income, and illegal harvesting and logging increased. The reply to this was the establishment of community involvement in the management of Mabira in 1995. To begin with, involvement was small, with a few people employed to work with ecotourism in the forest and a committee made up by members of the villages in the forest. This marks beginning of the community conservation of Mabira, but in the early years, participation was more symbolic than anything else.

With the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act in 2003, *Collaborative Forest Management* (CFM) was introduced. This marks a big step towards how the community conservation of Mabira looks today. From 2006 and onwards, this allowed local people to form Community Based Organisations (CBOs), to actively contribute to forest management and conservation. At the same time, people were still not happy with the legislation, saying it deprived them of sustainable livelihoods. The CFM initiative was not enough, and people felt exploited, leading to an increase in illegal activities and deforestation (Galabuzi et. al. 2015). This has gone on until the time of my field work.

The Community Based Organisation System

The Community Based Organisation (CBO) system is the NFA's method to these new opportunities and sources of income. The CBO system is based on an idea called "*Collaborative Forest Management*," or CFM. "CFM is a mutually beneficial arrangement in which a local forest user group and responsible body share roles, responsibilities and benefits in a reserve or part of it" (Galabuzi et al. 2015: 9). What this means is that a CBO should benefit both those involved in it and the NFA in different ways. As the ultimate goal is to conserve the forest, a CBO needs to do work that benefit the conservation, while creating income-generating opportunities for those involved. In other words, a successful CBO creates a new income opportunity for those involved in it, and at the same time contributes to the conservation of the forest. A CBO can take many shapes and sizes, and there are many of them inside Mabira. It has proven difficult to find the exact number of CBOs, making it hard to say exactly how many inhabitants in the forest are part of one. The important thing to note, however, is that the CBO system does not manage to incorporate and create opportunities for everyone at this point in time. Those who have managed to create a CBO, have done so by going through an application process. To establish a CBO, one needs to create a manifest, outlining the purpose of the CBO, how it can contribute to the conservation of Mabira, and establish a board. When this is done, an application can be made to the NFA to officially create the CBO and become part of the system. It is, of course, possible to create a CBO-like organisation without the approval of the NFA, but this would take away the proposed benefits provided. Such benefits can take form as training, payments or other forms of gifts. Upon approval, a mutual beneficial relationship is established, creating expectations on both sides.

As shown above, the CBO-system does not include entire communities directly, but indirectly promote, in the long run, economic development through individual entrepreneurs who establish CBOs. Other conservation projects, in which resources are distributed to the community rather than through individual entrepreneurs, appears somehow more successful, but share some of the difficulties facing the community conservation in Mabira (Sullivan 2006, Hulme & Infield 2001, Jones 2001). One reason for choosing the CBO system as the form of community based conservation may be that the forest differs from many other parks in that there are several villages and settlements inside the forest's borders. There is a high number of dwellers inside the forest conservation, and their settlements are spread into many small villages. The infrastructure is also poor. This makes it difficult to reach everyone at the

same time with information, and difficult to organise them into CBOs. Hence, and in spite of the regulations to protect the forest, exploitation of resources continues at some level today. While perhaps necessary then, this approach does create some difficulties, both at community and forestry levels. I both heard and observed illegal activities such as logging even in the more populated parts of the forest, and most people I talked to murmured about the NFA engaging in illegal activities themselves. This, and the indirect income opportunities the CBO system invariably creates, contributes to making conservation in Mabira difficult and less effective than it could have been.

The NFA manages the CBO, meaning that the NFA sanctions and registers every CBO. This is important because it means that any CBO first of all needs to be doing something the NFA sees as beneficial to the conservation plan, but also because it creates a mutual obligation between the two to benefit one another. Although the contract between a CBO and NFA establishes an understanding of a common goal, i.e. to create a sustainable environment for the forest and at the same time benefit the people working to achieve this, there is a fundamental difference between the two parties' expectations upon agreeing. I will argue that while the NFA sees conservation as the number one objective for the CBO system, the participants of it in most cases see it otherwise. To them, the number one reason for participating in the CBO system is to find an additional source of income.

Available Income Opportunities in Mabira

The purpose of community based conservation is to create alternative sources of income, separate from an economy based fully or partially on natural resources. At the time of writing this thesis, however, this is not fully achieved by the conservation plan in Mabira. Why then, has there been such an increase in the population over the last years? What I see, and people in the forest refer to as the biggest reason, is the market in Najjembe and the opportunities the market creates for wage employment, and self-employment. At the market, travellers can stop to get food or drinks from shops and hawkers. Opposite of the market, on the other side of the road, there is a motorcycle-taxis (*boda-boda*) stop, a fuel pump and, on the northern bank, there are general shops. However, the shops on the northern bank are seldom used by travellers, who tend to use the market further west on the southern bank because this is closer

to the road. The market consists of shacks made up of logs, and the goods are on display facing the road. Some of the villagers from the villages inside the forest conservation area sell at the market vegetable they have grown within the forest. They also sell vegetables they have bought from the nearby towns, Lugazi or Jinja. The most profitable business at the market is drinks and roasted meats sold to travellers by vendors occupying the space between the shacks and the road. Many of the vendors are employed by the shop owners, and they work at a first-come-first-serve basis. Upon seeing a vehicle, whether it is a car, lorry or bus signalling to stop, large numbers of them race towards the vehicles and literally jump on at speed to be the first to offer the goods.

The market attracts young jobseekers from the entire country. Jobs in rural Uganda are quite hard to come by. The market in Najjembe is, as far as I can tell, the biggest one in the area, with a relatively steady customer base. Because the main road passing through the forest not only connects Kampala and Jinja, but also the main road between Uganda Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania, it was heavily trafficked. Many of the young vendors are self-employed.

In addition to the market and the sugar plantation, there are public institutions such as schools and a hospital that provide employment not only for trained teachers and health workers, but also for unskilled workers. Compared to the market, these creates few jobs.

The problem with the market, however, is that while it provides a possible source of income, it is not entirely separated from the protected natural sources. The meat sold on the market comes primarily from livestock (cows, goats, and chickens) the local population keep and that need pastures. They roast the meat on firewood collected in the protected forest. In most, maybe all, cases this is not illegal, as collection of fire wood for private use is allowed, but it does affect the forest in some ways that are unwanted. I was told that there had been some attempts to limit the allocated space for the market, such as keeping all the vendors on one side of the road. However, this has not stopped its expansion yet. Another issue is that the market mainly attracts younger people. The market might be their first place of work, meaning that Najjembe is where they start settling down and make a family.

All in all, there are alternative ways of income available in Mabira, meaning that it is possible to make a living without participating in illegal logging. The problem is that some of these are limited and depends on the job seeker having some sort of education, or contributes to the increase in population. This means that the community conservation plan needs to create new opportunities in Mabira, rather than relying on those already present.



Figure 3 - Market employees waiting for a vehicle to stop at the Najjembe Market – Private picture

General Outline of the Thesis

In the following chapters, I examine the themes raised above in more detail. **Chapter 3** will provide a theoretical positioning and general overview of literature on the themes involved. **Chapter 4** analyses an award-giving ceremony in which NFA award successful CBOs. It will primarily explore the CBO-NFA relationship. Why do people get into CBOs, and why do they not? What happens when the CBO system creates an opportunity for social mobility for certain individuals only? Through this chapter I will show that a lot of this is based on a concept of trust. **Chapter 5** will provide an account of a successful CBO operation that is now employing people and is mostly self-sustained through engaging in ecotourism. The relation primarily in question here is that between CBOs and people outside the CBO system. Questions to answered here are: Has ecotourism contributed to improve the socio-economic status of people in Mabira? How can community based conservation create alternative economic opportunities? And how does this compare to community based ecotourism elsewhere? **Chapter 6** will look into the final trust-relation in this thesis, that between the NFA and the people outside the system. Through looking at the conflicts regarding resources that arise because of the increased population and conservation, it will attempt to tie up the different relationships in question and compare the situation in Mabira to other conserved areas in Africa and elsewhere. The creation of narratives will be of high importance to this chapter.

2 - METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During my first weeks in Mabira people seemed reluctant to talk to me about the conservation of the forest. They were by no means unfriendly, but shied away from questions and the topic as a whole. One reason for this could of course be that it is a delicate question. As the conservation is initiated from a top level, it is perhaps difficult to be outspoken about the problems one has with it, especially when talking to someone who has just entered into the community. Another reason, I think, is because I was thought to be working for the NFA to begin with, something I wish to demonstrate by sharing my “arrival story.” After doing so, I will move on to discuss some methodological issues with my role as a fieldworker, before moving to discuss the methodological framework and techniques used during my field work in Mabira.

Arriving in Mabira – Meeting the NFA

I arrived in Mabira two days after touching down at Entebbe National Airport. I was lucky to have established some contacts at Makerere University in Kampala prior to my arrival, who had set up a place for me to stay the first nights in Kampala, and put me in touch with the Ecotourism Camp in Najjembe. At this point I was aware of the conservation in the forest, and through reading up on the topic, I knew that there were some difficulties. I did not know too much, however, and was mostly concerned with finding a suitable place to stay. After resting up from the flight, I was eager to get to the forest and see for myself the place I would be spending most of next six months at. The 50 km ride took my driver and me about two hours, and I arrived in Mabira around midday.

I had arranged to stay at the NFA Ecotourism Centre, which had some simple bungalows available for hire. After settling in and unpacking, I wanted to see more of the village and went for a walk while waiting for the NFA Sector Manager to come back from meeting, as I was told I had to make a plan for my stay with her. Inside the Ecotourism compound everything was quiet and calm, with only the sound of the trees and monkeys.

Once outside the compound, however, things were different. I decided to walk towards the main road and market to get some food, accompanied by shouts of “*mzungu, mzungu!*” (Bantu word referring to a white person) from bystanders eager to talk to me. I did not know it at the time, but a white person was a rare sight in Najjembe, and to people there it is usually meant that the person in question was a tourist staying at the Ecotourism Centre. While I was not in Najjembe as a tourist, I did stay at the Centre, so the belief of me being affiliated with the NFA had already begun to take shape.

When I returned to the Centre, the Sector Manager had come back. After going through my permits and plans for my research, we arranged for a translator/guide that would be working with me the first week, taking me around the forest and to the many villages surrounding Najjembe. This was not only for me to get to know my way around the forest, but also for people there to get to know me so they would not get suspicious. The guide was a native of the forest and had been working as a teacher at several schools there, so he was a well-known face around the different villages. After deciding he would come back the next morning to start our tours of the forest, I sat down with the Sector Manager to talk. This conversation is what sparked my interest in the direct and indirect benefits of community conservation. She expressed frustration with the local people’s inability to see the secondary values forest conservation brings with it. Moving on, we talked about the CBO system and how it did not quite work as the NFA intended. “People are too lazy! They only want to sit there and get the money and not do any work for it. This is not how it should be working, they need to start doing something!”

My first week in Mabira was thus spent walking around and talking to people in the different communities with my guide. I did not fully realise it at the time, as I was not aware of the tensions between people and the NFA, but this plan placed me inside the NFA from people’s point of view. I learned a lot from these walks, mainly through observation. Walking through the beautiful, lush forest with my guide, we saw villages, traces of illegal logging and people collecting firewood. It proved difficult to really engage people in conversations, and in my eagerness to get going with my fieldwork this was bothering me a bit. My guide had no training in that kind of work, and neither did I. After the first week, I decided to move on without a guide, hoping that this would make it easier to get in touch with people. I had some suspicions that people were reluctant to talk to me because of our affiliation with the NFA, and found it troubling that I had to rely on the guide’s translations to be accurate.

While I learned a lot about the structural properties, which areas were marked as conserved and which areas people could live in the forest, I felt like I was struggling to really get in touch with people. This might have been a bit premature, but I was very eager to get going and frustrated with what I felt was a lack of progress, which might be written on the account of being an inexperienced field worker. In any case, the results of my first week in Mabira were both positive and negative. I had made some contacts I wanted to move on with and got a feeling for the life in the communities. At the same time, however, I had been categorized as working with the NFA, a label it took me a long time to get rid of.

My Role as a Fieldworker

After the first week, I decided to spend some time planning my progression. Because of the problems I experienced during the first week in Mabira, I wanted to change my approach slightly. First of all, I decided to find another place to stay to try and rid myself of the label as an NFA employee. It proved difficult to enter the private market in Najjembe. After some searching, I ended up staying at an Ecotourism Camp established and run by a CBO. This camp was located some distance from Najjembe, in another village in the forest, however motorcycle taxis were available for commuting between the village and Najjembe. Secondly, I wanted to move on without the guide, as I felt people were hindered from speaking freely with him present.

The first week shaped my time in Mabira in many ways. From talking to the NFA I was curious to see how the CBO system worked. Initially, I had planned to look at how the conservation of Mabira affected the local communities, and this seemed like an interesting entrance to the subject. I had also come to understand some nuances of the relations between people and the NFA, which shaped my strategy for moving forward. Before moving in on the subject more “aggressively,” I wanted to make myself known around Najjembe and at the Ecotourism Camp I stayed in, to let people get to know me and see where I could find an entrance to what I wanted to research.

I spent the following weeks in and around Najjembe, establishing contacts and networking. I wanted to locate relevant “social situations” for me to participate in. According

to James P. Spradley (1980), a social situation is a setting that contain three basic elements, a place, actors and activities. To begin with, I wanted to find social situations that helped me being accepted by the local people as more than the ordinary tourist or NFA employee. I spent time at the market, and through contacts there I was able to join the local football team. As some time passed, I felt more and more accepted in the community around Najjembe, and that more and more people started to realize I was in the forest on a long-term basis, and not only to have a look at the beautiful forest.

It is difficult to say whether I managed to get rid of my NFA label completely during my field work. I wanted to have a foot inside both “camps,” and had found some good friends within the NFA, meaning that I did also spend some time with them. What I can say, is that I see a difference in the way people talked about conservation as time moved by. Where they were reluctant at first, they became more outspoken with criticism towards the last couple of months. I found that a good method to be seen more as a local was participating in social situations a foreigner such as myself was not expected to participate in. Apart from joining the football team, I participated in a pilgrimage walk from Najjembe to a holy site called Namugongo, and spent some time at a local school and at the market. Without putting too much into how much it meant, a person I had some contact with the first week in Najjembe came up to me one day and exclaimed: “You are now called Emil on my phone, not NFA *Mzungu!*”

Methodological Techniques

I wish to make clear some of the techniques used to obtain my ethnographic data. There are several ways to do ethnographical field work, and the results coming out of it might depend on the methods used. Another important factor is the timing and location of the field work. I did mine from January to July 2016, mostly staying in or around Mabira. The main part of my field work was done in the village of Najjembe, with a focus on inhabitants there, their relation to the NFA and CBO-NFA relations. I also did some work in the village of Wasswa, which is located some distance away from Najjembe, and closer to the outskirts of the forest and the sugar cane plantations. During my stay in Mabira, people complained about a lack of rain, and a very late-coming rain season. This caused the crops that season to fail, which

might have made the time of my stay an especially difficult period financially. While this may have had an influence on people's hesitant feelings towards the conservation of the forest, I do not think it was of high importance as such. I heard complaints about the conservation several weeks prior to the rain season's beginning, and the lack of rain and conservation were never connected in conversations with informants.

The people I interacted with were mostly English speaking. Because of my problems with using a guide/translator and my poor knowledge of the local Luganda language, this was an active choice I made during my stay. While not optimal, I do feel like I was able to interact fairly well with most, and interviews were conducted with people from different layers of society. Because Uganda was an English colony, English is still one of the official languages. While some proved difficult to talk to, I found that many had an adequate knowledge of English for me to interview them. Interviews and conversations about the topic of conservation were conducted with people in the forest, the NFA and within CBOs. Of people not affiliated with the NFA, I talked to teachers, hawkers, a pastor in the local church and members of the local mosque and farmers, as well as unemployed.

Apart from observing what people did, I found the most effective way to acquire information was through what Spradley refers to as informal ethnographic interviews. These occur when an ethnographer asks anyone a question during the field work (Spradley 1980:123). Through using this technique, I felt like the interviews seemed more like any normal conversation, and this had a positive effect on the results I was getting. During the course of the field work, some attempts were made at formal interviews, but I struggled to find good questions to make people open up to me. Probably caused by poor interviewing skills on my behalf, it seemed that this was an unusual setting for the people I talked to, resulting in mostly one word or one sentence answers.

Another reason for choosing informal interviews is that whenever a formal interview is done, it creates a setting in which there are certain expectations as to how it will play out from both sides. It constitutes a focus on the certain topic the interviewer has chosen which is unnatural, and might therefore create unnatural responses (Briggs 1986: 2-3). Because the subjects I wanted to talk about are quite loaded with meaning and have a direct effect on people's everyday life, I was afraid this might cause them to answer more "strategically" than they might have done otherwise. While this might always be the case anyway, I do think it easier to get the "truth" while doing informal interview. Agency on behalf of the objects and the ethnographer will always be an issue when doing ethnographic research. Are people

telling you what is really going on, what they think you want to hear, or what they think would benefit themselves the most? A lot of people expressed a desire for me to “help them” with my thesis. One example of this was a young man working in the market, who told me:

Emil, if I talk to you, you have to tell your people about us here in Mabira. We are struggling here, no money, no food, no work. When you go back and write your book, tell them how it is.

I built up a network of informants using the the *snow balling sampling method*:

Using key informants and/or documents, you locate one or two people in a population. Then you ask those people to (1) list others in the population and (2) recommend someone from the list whom you might interview. You get handed from informant to informant and the sampling frame grows with each interview (Bernard 2006: 163).

I began with a couple of informants and through asking them who to talk to, I found new informants. This was relatively easy as I was put into contact with the Sector Manager at the NFA almost at once. As she had good knowledge of the situation, she was able to help me find more people to talk to, who then told me about someone else and so on.



Figure 4 - A housing area within the forest – Private Picture

My entrance “into” the CBO system, however, came by through a stroke of luck. One afternoon I was relaxing at Ecotourism Centre after a very hot day when I was approached by a young man in a suit. It turned out he was there for a meeting regarding the performance of the CBO he ran, to see whether it should still be supported by the NFA. After explaining my purpose of being in the forest, we arranged to meet again during the week. I was very intrigued by this, as it seemed like a good opportunity to get to know the CBO system from a participant, not only through what the NFA representatives had told me. Luckily, he was happy to help, and became a key informant for the remainder of my field work. Through this, I was able to observe a CBO from the inside, participate in their activities and meetings they attended.

Through telling my arrival story, I wish to highlight how I entered into the subject of social differentiation based on the conservation strategy. Further, it is important to note that it took me some time to be seen as disconnected from the NFA. The attitudes towards me during this beginning “NFA-phase” served as an entry point into the distrust I argue is important

Mabira's conservation plan. Other studies about community conservation tend to focus on the results of it, rather than the ethnographic reasons behind the results. I believe the method and story of my stay in Mabira enables me to say something about those reasons.

3 - OUTLINE OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Morals and Levelling Mechanisms

Emile Durkheim postulated that all humans live in societies based on morals and the implementation of these. Any deviance from said morals would lead to a retribution from the rest of the society in some form, and thus the social form is shaped (Durkheim 1933).

Christopher Boehm writes that these collective behavioural tendencies “are constants of human social life, and on this basis a moral community engages actively in social control” (Boehm 2000: 79). It would be too easy to look at moral as only actions taken against individual deviants, however, and Boehm makes the point that morality also incorporates a collective agreement as to what is acceptable behaviour and what is an acceptable social form. To achieve this, he says, “there (...) has to be a precise exchange of information among group members as they carefully track the behaviours of other individuals, and a capacity to manipulate deviants strategically in order to satisfy them (Boehm 2000: 80).

Through the community conservation in Mabira, I will argue that several means of what is considered deviance has been introduced. Based on the aspect of risk and a moral of distribution, people outside the system consider those inside to be exploiting it, and thereby acting defiantly. There was a strong moral implication present to “do things for the right reasons.” In simple terms, this means that whoever is inside the system should be so altruistically, simply to help the forest. Because the conservation is seen to be there to protect the forest, and the people living there do not trust the information they have been given about how it can help them as well, there is a consensus that practically no one is doing the right thing from the other’s point of view. The remaining chapters will be showing this throughout.

What forms does the reaction to the “deviance” take, then? James Woodburn refer to such reactions as “levelling mechanisms,” actions to make the terms level again. “Levelling mechanisms,” he writes, “come into operation precisely when at the point where the potential for the development of inequalities of wealth, power and prestige is greatest” (Woodburn 1982: 440). In other words, they make themselves useful in Mabira because of the conservation program. There is a potential in it for direct development of wealth for certain individuals, but only for some. The moral is then used as a levelling mechanism, as a way of

saying that the proposed accumulation of wealth has been made on the wrong terms, and at least power and prestige might be minimized within the society.

In Mabira, the morals are shown and carried out through the act of *gossiping*. Boehm (1999), argued that the concept of gossiping was, in fact, created as a way of equalising differences within a group or society. Barkow postulated that:

Gossip from an anthropologist's perspective is a means of social control, a sanction that forces one to adhere more closely to social norms than one would otherwise be inclined. Reputation is determined by gossip, and the casual conversations of others affect one's relative standing and one's acceptability as a mate or as a partner in social exchange (1995:627-628).

Gossip is, in other words, an important way of negating what might be seen as increasing differences within a society. If one is being gossiped about, it stems from that person "acting out," or exhibiting behaviour that goes outside the norms of the society in question. In Mabira, pre-existing norms of equality and egalitarianism are challenged by new economic opportunities introduced by the conservation programme. When people challenge them through making use of these new opportunities, others often turn to gossiping about them, either to force them "to adhere more closely to social norms" or as a way of attempting to level out the differences created.

Conservation

Conservation was defined in a UNESCO/FAO report to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 1968 as "the rational use of the earth's resources to achieve the highest quality of living for mankind." (UNESCO/FAO 1968: 25). The definition shows that there is an emphasis on human life within the conservation concept, and that it is primarily done to prevent a decline in living standards for human beings. The report addresses the obvious fact that this is somewhat unclear as to what is perceived as "the highest quality of living":

Since people are diverse in their wants and aspirations, an agreement on what constitutes quality of living cannot be expected. Conservation therefore involves the maintenance of the widest practicable diversity in both natural and man-made environments to provide for a maximum variety in potential ways of living for humanity, recognizing that man and his material needs will be dominant ecological factors (UNESCO/FAO 1968: 25).

The report defines human needs as a key element of conservation, and this might be done in many ways, the CBO system in Mabira being one of them. A system like this depends on trust. Ensuring “the highest quality of living for mankind” and because “an agreement on what constitutes quality of living cannot be expected” it must be necessary to create a platform for as many as possible to achieve what they perceive as such living standards. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to do so on an individual scale, making the creation of said platform necessarily a structural one. The following will provide an overview of the theoretical discussions concerning the concept of trust.

A Concept of Trust

In my discussion of the concept of trust, and to provide an insight as to what it will mean to the argument of this thesis, I will draw on Alberto Corsín Jiménez’ (2011) article about the issue. Trust as an anthropological concept has been widely discussed in recent times. A reason for this is that trust is one of the most important aspects of a society’s wellbeing. (Jimenez 2011). Trust does not only refer to individual relations or small scale transactions, but is a concept that is of high importance to our everyday lives. Jiménez argues that there has been a crisis in public trust the last years, and that this poses a threat to moral and social order in today’s world. Trust acts as an intermediary between many important aspects and institutions of societies around the world. If absent, it can lead to a breakdown in the negotiations that take place on an everyday basis. Jiménez links this to arguments made by Michael Power (2004), that there has been an increase of knowledge and risk management industries, arguing

that this points towards trust having a foundation of robust knowledge. Because such industries are seen as an answer to the “trust crisis,” there seems to be a link between the two. Through robust, or “trustworthy” information and knowledge, trust can be re-entered into the transaction or relation.

Tim Ingold (2009) writes about hunter-gatherers, that trust is an important aspect of their relations to nature and each other. He states that:

The essence of trust is a peculiar combination of *autonomy* and *dependency*. To trust someone is to act with that person in mind, in the hope and expectation that she will do likewise – responding in ways favourable to you – so long as you do nothing to curb her autonomy to act otherwise (Ingold 2009: 69-70).

It is from this statement he moves on to make the point that trust involves an element of risk, saying that: “Trust, therefore, always involves an element of risk – the risk that the other on whose actions I depend (...) may act contrary to my expectations” (Ingold 2009:70).

As I move on with my analysis, it will be these two concepts of trust that will be of most importance to it. First, that it is based on robust knowledge. The people of Mabira need trustworthy information about the conservation plan. As they are not the ones who distribute the resources or opportunities created by it, they need to know what it means for them, both in the present and the future. Likewise, the NFA need robust knowledge that the people will not engage in illegal activities in the forest while they are not watching. They cannot monitor everyone at any time in the forest, meaning that they need solid information that illegal logging is not happening to trust the people they cannot see.

Secondly, the aspect of risk is very present in Mabira. People there are struggling with surviving economically, meaning that the perceived risk involved is huge. Following Ingold’s essence of trust, the people in Mabira do not trust NFA to “pay” them back, or respond in ways favourable to them, the risk is too big. Further, those outside the conservation system do not trust those inside to share their benefits at some point in the future. This is where *social differentiation* and *moral* come into play. People in Mabira perceive see the conservation plan as *increasing* the social differentiation, by creating new categories of people inside the forest.

It is now possible to talk about people *inside* and *outside* the conservation programme, or rather, those who *have* and those who *have not* benefitted from it.

4 - AN AWARD-GIVING CEREMONY

This chapter examines a ceremony hosted by the NFA and an NGO that was held to reward some CBOs for their work. Through describing the ceremony in a “Gluckmanian” way, inspired by his article “Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand” (Gluckman 1940), I wish to show how the ceremony highlights the issues of trust described in the introduction. The function incorporates all the different levels of distrust present in the conservation of Mabira, while at the same time being an example of how the system is supposed to work – as an alternative source of income (the rewards) is being presented to those involved with the conservation programme. Further, it serves as an entry to the social differentiation that comes with the conservation plan, which is to be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 4, and the sharp distinction that is being made between people and the NFA, which will be the focal point of chapter 5. The chapter will begin with a chronological review of my experience of the function, before moving on to discuss its relevance to the argument of the thesis. To do so, I draw on Mauss’ work on the act gift-giving and Sahlins’ theories about reciprocity.

Hearing About the Ceremony

One day, as I was making conversation with some of my friends at the Eco Tourism Centre, I was made aware of a ceremony that was to take place at the centre the following day. In collaboration with the NGO *Nature and Livelihood*, they had selected three CBOs to reward and further encourage the work they were doing. At this point, preparations were already taking place at the centre. They were setting up tents and chairs in the parking lot, and got ready to prepare food for all the invited guests. I was told that the ceremony was going to be rather big, and there was a sense of excitement in the air. Upon asking whether my friends felt nervous, they assured me that everything was under control. However, they were excited about welcoming the guests of honour, whom they referred to as “big people.” I was told that these big people included several members of the NFA leadership, as well as the chairman

and founder of *Nature and Livelihood*, who was an important actor within the forest conservation in Uganda.

After learning about the ceremony, I wanted to see the founder and chairperson of one of the CBOs involved to see what he thought about it and expected. I will refer to him as Oscar. At this time, he lived with his family in a rented house a short distance away. The CBO he had founded was a children's dancing group, teaching children traditional dances from the Buganda area of Uganda. The goal was to have them perform the dances at functions, such as weddings or other parties, in order to raise money for school fees, uniforms and books. If they succeeded, the parents would not have to resort to illegal activities in the forest to cover for the education, and avoid that the children drop out of school to work in the forest. The gift being presented to them was a full public address system, including two loudspeakers, microphones, a fuel-driven power generator and a computer. The PA-system would be used at functions to help the group in their performance. For this ceremony, the CBOs had applied for certain gifts that they felt would help them in their work. The founder of the NGO had wanted to give something back to those involved with the conservation of the forest, and had called for CBOs to describe their work and apply for gifts that would help them proceed. The three CBOs involved in the ceremony were then chosen out for their work.

As I reached the house, I found Oscar rehearsing a speech he had prepared, pacing around in his living room, clearly excited and nervous about the function the following day. In addition to accepting the gifts, the group had been asked to perform at the function as entertainment. For the sake of the function, the dance group had been paired with another drama group from the community that focused on singing. This was cause for concern for Oscar. He told me that they had not been in contact since the pairing of the two, and he felt nervous about their performance together the next day. "I don't really know what they are doing, how can they expect us to dance when we don't know the song?" was one of his outbursts addressing this concern, although he did cool down after a while focusing on the excitement and gratitude with receiving the gifts. For him, this was seen as a defining moment in the group's history, as they could now reach bigger audiences and perform at bigger functions. After a while, I decided to leave him to his preparations and head home.

On my way home, I met up with my designated Boda (motorcycle) driver, who happened to be from the same village as one of the other CBOs receiving an award. This group was a so-called "youth group," a group set up for young adults, mainly men, to provide

them with additional income and activities in an area previously prone to poaching. The youth group had applied for a gift, in this case broiler chickens for breeding and selling. Before hearing about the function, I had not heard about the youth group, so I was curious to hear what the driver had to say about them. When I asked him if he had heard of them, he said that he had, but seemed rather reluctant to go deeper on the subject. Through our many motorcycle rides through the forest, I had come to know him as a kind and well-meaning, yet somehow critical man. Whenever we talked about the status of things in the forest, the country or the whole East-African region, he would have a very clear opinion on everything, often on the contrary of the popular or official view. He was also relatively well-travelled, having worked in several countries across East-Africa.

In his view, the youth group had not done enough for the local community to warrant their reward. According to him, they had not carried out the task set up in their manifesto, such as to work with and for the local community to prevent poaching. He also thought that membership was too restricted; making it “just a group for friends,” as he put it. This somehow hostile attitude could be due to the fact that he was not included in the group, as he might have been outside of their age limit, being around his forties.

His general opinions were common among people who were not affiliated with either the NFA or a CBO. Although not in every case, many of these claimed that the CBOs did not do the work they were supposed to be doing and that they were in it for the money only and did not care about the forest. This attitude did not go unnoticed by members of the CBOs. An informant called Ibrahim voiced his concern with this during a conversation we had one night. He had been part of a very successful CBO since its founding in 2003, and had been able to earn money and find work through it. Although this CBO was now an integral part of its local community and people there had grown quite used to it, he explained that it was difficult to earn people’s trust and respect to begin with.

The Ceremony

On the day of the ceremony, I woke up to rain. Although this was during the rainy season, the rain had so far been absent. The arrival of the rain this morning was therefore a good thing. The lack of it thus far had been of concern due to the disruption caused to the planting of

crops. For the ceremony, though, it meant that the parking lot where it was to be held would be muddy, as well as making transportation there difficult for many people, including me, due to the lack of tarmac roads in the forest. I put on my best clothes, and tried to find a boda to take me to Najjembe. I already knew this was going to be difficult, as they did not want to drive in the rain. This was both a matter of safety, as the dirt roads got extremely slippery, and a matter of keeping oneself as dry as possible, as anyone who has ever ridden a bike or driven a motorcycle in the rain will know about.

As the rain eventually stopped for a while, I could get hold of a boda. Because of the slight delay, I was anxious to see whether the ceremony had already begun at the time of my arrival. Upon arriving in Najjembe I heard loud music, further encouraging my concern, although the heavy bass and upbeat tempo seemed slightly strange for a function like the one I was going to attend. I got off the Boda and asked one of my friends nearby if the function had already begun, to which he replied: “Of course, people will be partying all day!” At this point I began feeling suspicious, and upon further inquiry it became clear that we were talking about two separate functions-; “mine” was to be held at the Eco Tourism Centre as planned, whereas the other had been arranged by a local radio channel and was more of a day-long music festival. It did not seem like my friend was aware of the function held by the NFA.

As I shall show, this proved to be the case for most members of the local community, only those involved with the NFA function seemed to know about it. I made my way to Oscar’s house to see if he was still there or if he had made his way to the Centre. As I came closer, the heavy bass disco music from the music festival faded and made way to the sound of drums and children singing. The whole group had gathered outside the house to rehearse their performance for the function. I went inside to find out if Oscar or his wife knew anything about when the function was to start, and found out they did not know, but intended on going there shortly. Oscar had time to practice his speech one more time before we went. It was clear that he was even more nervous this day than the day before, as his usual happy and open demeanour had given way to a more shut down, absent-minded behaviour. I decided to leave him with his preparations and make my way down to the Eco Tourism Centre to see how the preparations there were coming along.

The distance between Oscar’s house and the Centre was not very far, neither was the distance from the centre to the road. However, it was not possible to see what is going on at the Centre from road, because of a line of trees blocking the view. One reason for this is to prevent members of the community from disturbing tourists arriving there for a nature walk

by, for instance, asking them for money. Another is that the trees are there for educational purposes, one of each species has a label attached to it, explaining its uses and Latin name. A consequence of this then, is that people in most cases have little or no idea what is going on inside. This means that if you had not heard about the function from someone, you would not know that it was going to take place either. In addition to this, the function was to be restricted to invited guests. While I managed to be invited quite easily, I do not think it would have been as easy for any member of the local community that was not involved with any of the CBOs in one way or another. Before entering through the gates then, nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary. Once inside, however, it became quite clear that something was going on.

On the usual days, the reception at the Eco Tourism Centre was quiet, the only people present being the guides and the receptionist, waiting to receive guests. During my stay in Uganda though, this was quite unusual, as tourism in Mabira seemed to have struck a low. This meant that the employees had a lot of spare time, which they spent on other tasks or by spending their time relaxing and talking to each other. The lack of tourists was a talking point amongst several tourist-focused institutions in Mabira during my stay there.



Figure 5 - The NFA Ecotourism Office reception area – Private Picture



Figure 6 - Outside the NFA Ecotourism Office reception – Private Picture

As I walked through the gates, I could see that the area around the reception was being cleaned for leaves and other residue from the trees, and I could already smell the food being cooked for the communal dinner during the function. The guides welcomed me as I reached the reception and explained that the honorary guests had been somewhat delayed because of the bad road conditions caused by the rain. They assured me several times that everything was under control, however, and that there was no need to worry. At this point Oscar and his dance group made their arrival, and brought with them the sound of drums and singing as they went into a small classroom facility on the premises to further rehearse their performance. I tried to be in there with them for a little while before the loud sound of the drums in the confined area became too intense for me and I went back outside.

By now, more guests had arrived and started to fill up the seats in the parking lot where the function was going to take place. The guides and management of the centre, however, seemed to be lost. They had gone off to the big umbrella hut by the reception, and when I went there to see what was going on, there seemed to be some tension. At the time, I

thought it was due to the delay in the programme caused by the rain. Asking about it later, though, it turned out to be because of reports of a tree felling that happened in an area of the forest that had gone through some difficult times in relation to the policies. One of the guides pointed out the irony in this to me, that on the day of celebrating the good work done for conservation by the CBOs, they had to deal with this. This also highlights the importance of getting the CBO system right. Even though there was reason to celebrate on this day, the problems in the forest were still very much present.

At around 2 P.M. the honorary guests had arrived and the ceremony was about to begin. To begin with, there was some confusion as to who was going to play the part of the master of ceremony. After some discussion, the role was given to Robert, the man in charge of the CBO in which Ibrahim was involved. As he gave his introductions, I took my seat with some of my friends that had come to watch, although I was invited to sit in the “honorary” section of the stands. Robert explained that he would be talking both in English and Luganda as a service to me and the honorary guests. After a short introductory speech, he gave the word to the Director of *Nature and Livelihood* for the actual handing out of the gifts. Naturally, the youth group had not brought their broiler chickens with them, so the only gift to be given out at the ceremony was the P.A. system to the performance groups. Oscar and his group got up to receive applause from the audience as the Director thanked them and NFA for the job they did. He invited a man from the electronics shop they had got the system to talk the audience through what every part was and guarantee for its authenticity. At the end of this session, the director had a few more words to say before testing the system.

Because of my work in the forest I am very happy about the job that is being done to protect it. This gift is to keep up the work done by these groups and the NFA. It is important for me to note that this is a very expensive gift, that should be taken very good care of. You have the responsibility to care for it now, to keep it working and provide the adequate shelter.

To me, it seemed strange that he felt it necessary to stress this point. It certainly stood as a reminder of the hierarchy that also produced the two separate stands at this small ceremony with approximately 40 guests. To him, the recipients of the gift were still villagers who needed to be reminded of the sheer net worth of the gift awarded to them. At the same time, in

many ways the reminder was timely. There was no doubt that the P.A. system was probably worth more moneywise than anything the recipients had at the time of receiving it.

After this, the groups were invited to test the system. The concerns about the joining of the two groups proved to be somewhat misled at this point as they managed to give a performance incorporating both singing and dancing. The microphone was given back to the M.C., who invited us to go outside the Centre and plant tree seedlings as a symbolic act, countering the deforestation. As we walked outside, the “segregation” in the stands still proved true, as this was an act reserved for the honorary guests. The area in which the planting was to take place had been made ready with small holes to put the seedlings in. Everyone was handed a seedling, which they proceeded to place in the holes before scooping the soil back in its place.

After planting the trees, we went back inside for lunch. Although the food was for everyone, people would sit and eat in their own section of the stands. It should be noted that this is by no means strange, however, as this seemed to be the custom for all the functions I took place in during my stay in Uganda. The food was abundant, and soft drinks were provided for everyone, which is also the custom at any function or ceremony.

When the programme started up again, it was time for some important speeches by the so-called “big men.” While most of these were congratulatory speeches on behalf of the NFA, congratulating the CBOs and themselves, I will give some excerpts of one held by a person holding an important position in the central NFA board:

Thank you to all of you in Mabira for hosting this function and the good work that is being done here to protect the forest (...) Even if we are now here celebrating there are still problems with the forest. I have heard about the problems in sector 70 (sjekk opp). People are asking you to let them cut the trees to build a roof for their church? We cannot allow all these requests. You have a big tree in your compound there that is dead, yes? Why can they not have it? You see, you people here need to be smart because this forest is not in the best way. Some work is done, yes, but it is not enough.

After everyone had given their speeches and some more performances by the groups, the official part of the function was over. Music was put on the P.A. system and people danced their way through the rest of the evening.

Trust and Distrust

The ceremony served as a reminder of the difficulties regarding the conservation of Mabira. The speeches held by the founder of the NGO and the NFA representative did not focus on the supposedly good work of the CBOs involved, but rather focused on reminding them that about what a CBO should be and do. Through examining different aspects of it, I found the concept of trust to be of considerable importance to the conservation plan in Mabira on several levels. The one to be discussed primarily in this chapter is that between the two actors inside the conservation structure, CBOs and the NFA. First, I will examine how the community-based conservation of Mabira relies on trust through its establishment. As Ingold argued, trust always has an element of risk involved (Ingold 2000), and I will argue that the perceived risk from both ends of the deal is too big, and that the trust therefore is too little for the CBO plan to fully work.

Trust through the Exchange of Gifts

Establishing Obligations through Reciprocity

The most striking aspect of the ceremony to me, was the exchange of gifts happening between these two very important actors in the conservation plan. The exchange of gifts is a well-known subject to anthropologists, ever since Marcel Mauss' published "Essai sur le Don" or "The Gift" in 1925. Although many years has passed, the ideas behind the book still stand, and they can be applied to what took place at the ceremony in Mabira. In extremely short terms, the idea is that an exchange of gifts creates several obligations between the participating actors (Mauss 1995). First, there is an obligation to give the gift. In this case, this has happened long before the ceremony took place. In Mabira, the NFA and a CBO

establishes this obligation through the establishment of their cooperation. The two enter a relation that can be characterised as “balanced reciprocity” (Sahlins 1965). He writes that this form of reciprocity “may be loosely applied to transactions which stipulate returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period.” (Sahlins 1965: 194-1959. By working to enforce the conservation of Mabira in one way or another, the CBOs are entitled to receive some sort of compensation from the NFA. The ceremony is an example of this in practice. As the founder of the NGO said: “This gift is to keep up the good work done by these groups and the NFA.”

Through establishing this obligation, to give and reciprocate, the aspect of trust makes itself current. The members of the CBOs need to trust the NFA to provide them with compensation for their work. Ceremonies like this one seemed to be rather rare. This was the only one I was aware of during my time in Mabira, and it came to be through *Nature and Livelihoods* getting involved. From the CBO point of view, there is an element of risk involved because the people I talked to within them were never quite sure how and when they would be compensated. One member of a CBO told me that:

To me, this work I am doing is not very profitable. I do it to help these people involved find more money and more work, but we cannot manage. We do not get enough for the work that we do. These people (the NFA) do not help us enough. They are supposed to give us money, but we are not getting anything.

The members of CBOs I talked with were almost always uncertain or not satisfied with the rate of compensation or “reciprocation” from the NFA. As Sahlins writes: “Balanced reciprocity is willingness to give for that which is received.” (1965: 220). This willingness, then, is perceived to be absent, leading to a breakdown of trust from the CBOs point of view.

The same can be said about the NFAs view on the relation. In their view, CBOs often do not do enough to be compensated the way they feel they should be. One of the first things I was told by members of the NFA during my stay in Mabira was that the members of the CBOs only wanted money, not to actually do anything for it.

We want more people to get involved with the conservation of the forest. (...) They cut down the trees because they are poor. Why can they not get involved with some

collaborative organisation? (...) Some of these people in the CBOs they are too lazy. They only sit there and they want us to pay them for nothing.

It would seem then, that both parties feel like the alleged “balanced reciprocity” is not as balanced as it should be. Reciprocity is balanced only when the exchange is seen as satisfactory by both parties (Bell 1991, Barth 1981, Sahlins 1965). It can thus be argued that none of the parties involved feel that this is the case. Both feel like the amount they gift, time and work for the CBOs, and gifts or money from the NFA, is not reciprocated in a balanced way. What is supposed to be a balanced reciprocal relationship that creates trust in the conservation plan, is seen by both sides to be un-balanced, what Sahlins refer to as “negative reciprocity.” This is the most impersonal form of exchange, where both sides try to get as much as possible out of the exchange while giving as little as possible back (Sahlins 1965). The qualities of this form of reciprocity does not invoke trust, rather the opposite. The CBO agreement relies on trust to fully function, however the available robust information and element of risk involved in it works against it.

The Receiving of Gifts – Trust Re-established

The ceremony worked as a counterbalance to the negative reciprocity perceived by the parties in question. Through it, the trust required for the relationship to work was re-established, at least for the CBOs involved. The exchange discussed above works on a longer time scale, the giving and re-giving is in-direct. Here, there is a direct transaction that takes place. The NFA and *Nature and Livelihood* present the CBOs with a gift, something they can use to further their work. Another, perhaps more important exchange that happened at the ceremony, is what I will call a direct *exchange of trust*. Because the somewhat broken relationship between the two parties struggled with its lack of trust, the ceremony served to reinforce it. Through it, the NFA could tell the CBOs that they trusted them to do what the NFA wanted them to do. In other words, they would not have given the CBOs such fine gifts without being satisfied with their work. Even though the speeches held by them seemed to focus on an uncertainty of the system, they still provided the gifts. The CBOs, on the other hand, re-established a trust in that the system actually could provide them with the compensation they felt entitled to. Oscar

expressed his happiness with the P.A. system on several occasions after the ceremony, saying that:

These gifts can help us so much. Now we can go to bigger functions and perform for them there. Weddings, public meetings, all of them! Even with this computer, I can use it for communication and advertising! (...) Those people were very good to us.

The ceremony provided both knowledge that the system could work, by explicitly showing it, and thus minimized the risk involved with participating in it.

Reciprocating

Through the receiving of the gifts, an expectation of a reciprocating, or to give something back, is established (Mauss 1995). One problem that arises in Mabira is that the involved parties, the CBOs and the NFA, disagree on the entrance point to the exchange. In the case of this ceremony, the NFA feel that they are *giving*, and that the CBOs are *receiving*. The CBOs, however, feel that they have already *given* something to the NFA, and that the NFA were *reciprocating* the gifts to the CBOs. As shown by the quotes above, there are differing opinions about the work done on both sides of the deal. The act of gift-giving relies on these factors, but also on an agreement about who is the giver and who is the recipient. The ceremony should have been an example of the success of the CBO programme, but did not quite work out that way in the end. Because there were arguably different opinions about whether the gifts given were in fact gifts, or rather reciprocated gifts, the appreciation and establishment of trust did not work as intended from the NFAs point of view.

Visibility

There are, in other words, several factors that point towards the CBO programme not working as intended, even within a ceremony that should show its progression and how it could help

those involved. It can be argued that the ceremony shows that it is, in fact, working, and that the CBOs in question were happy about the gifts they received, which they certainly were. Oscar spent several weeks bringing up the P.A. system in almost every conversation we had. The problem, however, was that these functions or ceremonies were quite rare, as mentioned above. Another issue with the ceremony was that it happened in a secluded location, far away from everyone, and even on the same day as a different party. Following Jimenéz, an important part of the concept of trust used here, is that of transparency. It can be argued that robust knowledge and minimizing risk relies on transparency, to be able to see what is happening on the other side of the bargain. DiPiazza and Eccles write that: “(...) trust depends on the timely availability of complete, relevant, and reliable information – in a word, it depends on appropriate levels of *transparency*” (DiPiazza and Eccles 2002: vi). Had the ceremony been more visible, or transparent if you like, it might have worked to counteract the distrust present in the system. I got the impression that no one in the CBO system really knew how or when the NFA would compensate them for their work. In that manner, the ceremony could have served as a way of decreasing risk and giving more robust knowledge to people, but because anyone who was not participating really saw what was going on, it did not.

This has implications on the CBO system, and in turn, the entire conservation plan in Mabira. One problem was that it led to fewer people wanting to get involved with the CBO programme. A market vendor told me during an interview that he did not see how it would help him improve his livelihood.

No, I do not want to get involved with those people (the NFA). Why should I spend my time working for someone else? They want the forest for themselves. I talk to people who are in them (CBOs) and they are not too happy. (...) I have no time to spend unless trying to find money!

I will move on to examine what impact this lack of trust in the system has had on the CBO programme, and the community conservation as a whole. Because the CBO programme is the NFA’s primary way of achieving their community conservation plan, it can provide a good insight as to how the conservation affects the people in Mabira.

Benefit Distribution in Community Conservation Programmes in Africa

Lucy Emerton writes that when it comes to community conservation, “Benefit distribution is a necessary, but in itself may not be a sufficient, condition for communities to engage in wildlife conservation” (Emerton 2001:209). This is arguably true in Mabira. The proposed benefit distribution from the NFA is not enough to get involved with the CBO programme for most people. Emerton writes about conservation programmes in Africa’s failure to provide economic benefits to the communities they are concerned with. According to her, there are three factors that need to be in place when having an economic approach to conservation. The last two are concerned with costs of protecting the wildlife and governmental policies regarding valuation of wildlife. According to the first, however, one needs to look at “*The nature of livelihood systems in wildlife areas and the form in which wildlife benefits are received by communities*” (Emerton 2001: 215). As in Mabira, the socio-economic status of people in or around protected areas is often at best unsure. There is a scarcity of job-options, meaning that people rely on other sources to sustain their livelihoods. This is often what causes the conservation to be necessary in the first place, as it has an impact on the nearby areas, either because of hunting, or like in Mabira, logging or clearing patches for farming. The conservation plan then take these options away, and attempt to create alternative sources of income, separate from the protected resources. The problem is that these alternative sources rarely manage to provide a stable enough income to further achieve a sustainable livelihood. This, in turn, lead to people going back to their old ways (Emerton 2001: 215-217).

Benefit Distribution in Mabira

People do not trust the attempted introduction of alternative sources of income created by the CBO programme to be adequate for sustaining their livelihoods. Even people within the CBO programme struggle to see this as being possible. While the gifted P.A. system was very nice, and Oscar spent several weeks talking about it, it did not provide an immediate lift to neither his nor the groups economy. In fact, it proved to be something of a liability immediately after the ceremony, as they had nowhere to store it. Storage had to be rented, and a guarding schedule had to be made, and I did not see the system in use for the remainder of my stay.

The immediate recipients of benefits from the conservation in Mabira are quite few. The partially community based structure of the CBO system means that for example the P.A. system or the broiler chickens were given to the specific groups, not to the communities as a whole. Those who do not directly benefit see the gifts, however, and therefore know that Oscar and his group had been given a P.A. system, and that the youth group had received some new broiler chickens. A man from the same village as the youth group told me that: “I see now they have got the new chickens. Where can I get those? They did not even allow me to be in the group!” While the P.A. system and the broiler chickens might not have had an immediate economic impact on the recipients, it contributed to the social differentiation and distrust going on in Mabira. Both gifts were seen as symbols of accumulation of wealth, and a lack of visibility and knowledge of the ceremony and work done by the CBOs led to other people having a lack of trust in that they had gained them in a morally acceptable way.

Indirect Income

A big part of the issue is the relationship between direct and indirect benefits. As the NFA sector manager told me the first night of my stay; “the people here do not see the secondary value of the forest being conserved.” During this conversation, she was referring to values such as the forest creating a good climate for agriculture and providing clean, fresh air. Moving further, however, this can be translated into how people in Mabira look at direct and indirect benefits, or more specifically here; how the compensation or benefits provided to CBOs translate into direct or indirect income.

In both cases at the ceremony, the gifts received are based around an indirect income opportunity. This relates to the alternative sources of income that community conservation must create, and an attempt to create a way to find a sustainable livelihood separate from the forest’s resources. Both the P.A. system and the broiler chickens are gifts primarily production resources for the future. The P.A. system could be used to provide Oscar’s dance group with a better product, and increase their possibilities to get a job performing at functions in the surrounding areas. As for the broiler chickens, they need to be cared for and re-bred to really have an impact on the economic situation of those in the group. The first batch of broilers was too small to have such an impact. As shown by several of the quotes

above, however, the general attitude is that this form of income is not enough. In other words, people feel they cannot take the risk of trusting that an indirect income such as these will provide them with a sustainable livelihood in the end.

Barrow and Murphree points to another problem, that:

Rural Africans are unlikely to hold the same values and goals, or to articulate conservation as a discrete set of concerns (...) Conservation is for them an investment for present and future value, the goal being the maintenance or enhancement of their livelihoods. They are unlikely to willingly collaborate in community conservation schemes if these initiatives do not achieve this goal (Barrow and Murphree 2001:29).

The implications the lack of trust in the system has on the community conservation of Mabira, is that there is first, a reluctance to participating in it. People are afraid they would be exploited by the system, and that participation would be a waste of important time. The people who has chosen to engage in the system (I cannot speak for all, but at least those whom I talked to) confirm this distrust in the system in many ways. Although the ceremony provided the dance- and youth group with the broiler chickens, they could immediately benefit from them. I argue that economic improvement is imperative to people in Mabira when assessing their possible contribution to the community conservation. Emerton concludes her article by saying that:

Community approaches to wildlife conservation can be judged to be economically successful if they not only generate benefits but also ensure that these benefits are of a sufficient value (...) compared with other wildlife-displacing livelihood alternatives (Emerton 2001: 226).

Because of the lack of trust in the system this might prove hard to measure in Mabira. It might be that the community based conservation system could provide the factors Emerton talk about, but if no one are willing to take the risk and participate, there is no way of knowing.

Trust Revisited – Community Participation in Conservation Management

The last aspect of the CBO-NFA relationship I want to look at in this chapter is that of actual community participation in conservation management. At the ceremony, the CBOs were granted some autonomy, in so far as they could “choose” what they wanted as their own gifts. The speeches held by the NFA representatives and the *Nature and Livelihoods* founder, however, did not imply any participation in the management of the conservation. According to Adams and Hulme, it is extremely important within community conservation “to allow people in and around the protected areas, or others with property rights there (in land or living resources) (...) to participate in the management of conservation resources (Adams and Hulme 2001:13).

The CBO programme does not necessarily invoke a feeling of participation in the conservation management. While people are able to choose what their CBO focuses on, they still have to fit into some pre-determined plan made by the NFA. This is not seen as participating in management, but rather contributing to it. To Oscar, this feeling was enforced by the speeches held by the “big people” at the ceremony. This fits well with an example from another protected area in Uganda, the *Lake Mburo National Park*. While community participation in the conservation management has been implemented, its contributions to the actual management has been close to nothing (Hulme and Infield 2001: 122).

Following the statements made by the NFA Sector Manager and the speech held at the ceremony, I will argue that this is at least partly because they do not trust the people involved in CBOs to have adequate knowledge of the issue. Their complaints are dismissed as “not understanding the values of secondary values” or that they “only care about money.” This attitude resembles what Gísli Pálsson (2006) refer to as “experts” and “laypersons” in his article on Icelandic fisheries. In this particular case, the experts employed by the NFA, with academic backgrounds and scientific knowledge on the matter of conservation, do not believe the local “laypersons” have anything important to say on the matter.

Through examining the ceremony as an example of how the CBO system is supposed to work, I have attempted to show how the community based conservation of Mabira is

severely hindered by a lack of trust shared by the parties involved. This lack of trust stems from a disagreement on the different positions in the structure, who is giving and who is receiving? What is supposed to be a form of balanced reciprocity is not seen to be so by neither the CBOs nor the NFA, and the trust needed for the relation to work is broken down.

By comparing the ethnographic material from this specific case to other examples from African conservation programmes, I have argued that an important reason for community conservation failure is exactly this lack of trust. The CBO programme is the NFA's way of reaching out to the people of Mabira, and while it might, and has for some, worked very well, I argue that people outside the system still consider participation in it too much of a risk to trust it.

5 - COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS AND ECOTOURISM

This chapter will discuss another level of trust relationships within the forest; that between people inside the conservation system and those who live in the forest but are not incorporated in the system. To do so, I will look at the ecotourism segment of the forest's conservation plan, more specifically a camp managed by a CBO. Tourism can be an integral component of economic growth in any community. Amanda Stronza notes that when sustainable development and conservation is added to the equation, ecotourism becomes an important factor (Stronza 2001:264). The ethnographic material in this chapter was collected at an ecotourism campsite managed by a CBO in Mabira Forest. The chapter will examine how the community conservation plan can create a possibility for economic mobility for only a few, which increases social and economic differentiation among the villagers and, in the long run, leads to an uneven economic development. Through examining the ecotourism aspect of the conservation plan, I wish to show the levelling mechanisms used to counterbalance this uneven development. I will argue that distrust plays an important part in this as well, as people outside the system do not trust those inside to have gained what is seen as an advantage on fair terms.

By analysing ethnographic material in comparison to the theoretical discussions made in chapter 2, this chapter will provide a basis for the argument that this primarily happens due to what I will describe as a lack of trust based on a moral of distribution not shared by all participating actors. Because the campsite is located on the outskirts of a small, secluded village, the boundaries between the two categories, of those inside the CBO system, and those outside, become a bit more pronounced. In addition to this, the concept of ecotourism is an important part of the conservation strategy, and not only the campsite in question, but also the NFA and CBOs offers facilities and activities for tourists. Analysing the lack of trust and morals of distribution on this level of relations between the actors in the forest will contribute to what I will argue is a pattern of gossiping as a levelling mechanism, crossing all three levels discussed in this thesis. The first part of this chapter will be a description of the campsite in question, before moving on to an analysis of the levelling mechanisms in place and the social differentiation that develop.

The Campsite

The ecotourism campsite is located on the outskirts of a village along the forest's border. The campsite staff are recruited from the local residents, both at the campsite and in the CBO office. The employees are paid either monthly or by commission. Approximately 20 people are employed by the camp, some on a full-time basis in the office, and some are called upon for particular ecotourism activities or camp maintenance. During my stay, there were two women working in the reception. They were responsible for cooking food for the guests, cleaning the huts (*banda*) and other chores in and around the camp. They did not live on site, but stayed quite close by in the village. For accommodation for the tourists, the camp offered five self-sustained, solar powered rooms, one dorm without bathrooms or electricity, as well as camping sites. Tourists seldom stayed in the camp overnight, but, during the weekends they participated in one of the activities offered. These include a variety of the classic ecotourism activities, such as forest walks, birding, educational trips and others. Most people, however, came for the one of a kind zip line constructed with the aid of a volunteer inside the forest. The zip line allowed people to climb up into the canopy and glide from tree to tree and see the forest from above.



Figure 7 - Campsite reception area – Private picture



Figure 8 - Self-sustained rooms available for tourists – private picture

The zip line guides were recruited from the communities surrounding the camp. After having received training by more experienced instructors, they became part of the team that took visitors to the zip line starting point, and ensured safety standards for zip lining were met. They were mostly young people, who had been chosen for training because of their physique and knowledge of the forest. Another factor is that they had to have an adequate knowledge of English, as many visitors are tourists from abroad. The hard nature of the work, including climbing trees up to 50 metres high, along with the demand of English capabilities, make the pool of possible candidates for the program rather small. These young people were called when a visitor arrived, and worked on commission, meaning they were paid per visitor or trip with the zip line. In addition, they kept all the tips they received from the tourists.



Figure 9 - Zip lining through the canopy – private picture

At one point during my field work there was talk of changing the method of payment for the zip line guides from the commission-based system to a monthly fee. The argument made for this by the camp leadership was that it would provide them with a more stable income, for example during months with low visitation. When I talked to one of the guides about the issue, I was surprised to learn that he was strongly against the change:

This change is not good for us. They are trying to rob us our money! You see, when people come here, they pay the money and we get paid. If one month there are too

many people, and we provide for all of them to zip line, where is our money. These people are trying to rob our money!

Several of the guides murmured about this. None of them thought that the change would be a good idea. While I do not know whether a change took place, it served as a reminder of the distrust present amongst the actors within the system. This correlates with the point made in the previous chapter, about participation in the conservation strategy. The employees at the campsite did not feel like they had a say in the matter, and that an alleged change would be happening against their will.

I stayed at the campsite on multiple occasions during my time in Uganda, and could witness first-hand how they operated it and what they did there. The main office of the CBO that runs it is located in Najjembe, and this is where they handle reservations for accommodation or other activities on offer. Most of the visitors come for these activities and because the access road goes through the village, the villagers can observe that visitors are arriving, but they rarely get the chance to meet or interact with them.

To get to the camp, one must drive off the main road and pass through the large sugar cane plantations on the outskirts of the forest. My first visit there came after spending the first week in Najjembe, and I was eager to see what it was like. The first difference I became aware of was the size of the village located next to the Campsite. This village was a lot smaller than Najjembe, and its location meant that almost any car passing through was going to the ecotourism camp. At that time I was using a taxi to get around. These cars often come with tinted glass, making it easy to spot them as “tourist vehicles.” As we slowly drove through the village on the dirt road, I could see the people outside their homes and in the village square paying close attention to us. The road we took out of the village leads directly to the campsite, meaning there must have been no doubt in their minds as to where we were going.

Later, I understood that this was the case on almost every weekend, whenever a car passed through the village on its way to the camp. As with the ecotourism site in Najjembe discussed in the previous chapter, the camp was closed for the local inhabitants, meaning that they could not see or partake in what was going on inside. The operations and decision-making of the NFA and the CBOs appeared to the villagers as obscure. This may be a problem for mobilising local residents for forest conservation. Following Jiménez’ and

Ingold's concepts of trust, it can be argued that visibility is a very important aspect, both when it comes to robust information and the element of risk. An informant named Fred said this about the issue:

All you people going there, how can I know what you do? Actually, I know what you do; you go there to spend money. All that money, where does it go? Not one shilling comes back to Fred here. You see? (...) These people, they cannot be trusted.

Further, it points out that Fred did not seem to care for the fact that the people involved with the ecotourism business presumably got paid for it. As I have argued, this is seen as a form of deviance from the local norms of sharing and equity, an exploitation of the system, and this is where social control, or *levelling* comes into play.

Levelling Mechanisms in Mabira

Fred was very sceptical about the way the people involved with CBOs earned their money, and unhappy with their sharing of the benefits received. I use him as an example of something several people outside the CBO conservation system told me, that the ones who were participating in a CBO were not to be trusted and that they had exploited the system. Fred, and many with him, even felt like it was himself that was being exploited. Because he did not participate in the CBO programme, he felt like those who did, and gained an advantage from it had no right to do so. As Woodburn noted, levelling mechanisms make themselves useful and needed at the point where any one member of a society or group gets an opportunity for social or economic mobility (Woodburn 1982: 440). This is what has happened in Mabira with the introduction of the CBO programme. Because it cannot incorporate everyone, it creates these opportunities for some and leave others behind.

According to Boehm, social control or levelling works both ways. "Social control," he writes, "is about the power of deviants to harm or distress others, but it is also about the power of a vigilant, assertive group that is bent upon manipulating or eliminating its deviants"

(Boehm 2000: 80). Both for Boehm and Woodburn, who writes about egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies, levelling or social control can have severe consequences, all the way to capital punishment (Woodburn, 1982:436). For Fred, severe forms were not an option – the consequences for himself would be too grave and the potential accumulated wealth of those involved with CBOs is too small to warrant going to extremes. The Ecotourism camp provides a good example of the type of social control manifest in the relations between people outside and inside the CBO system. As far as I could tell, the Camp was the only example of a CBO in Mabira that had gone on to be almost self-sustained. The levelling mechanism manifests itself as backbiting and disgracing those who participate. “Look at that man,” Fred told me once, “look at how big he thinks he is now. He used to be like Fred here, but now he cannot even talk to me!”

Socio-economic Mobility through Ecotourism

An important aspect of any community based conservation program is improving the economy of the surrounding areas. Although the term conservation is concerned mostly or only with nature, the addition of the community to the equation creates an obligation to include the people directly affected in one way or another. The ecotourism promoted by the campsite is a prime example of this. One of its core goals has been to counteract illegal logging common around the Campsite. They counteract illegal logging by informing about legal implications and punishment, and through improving the economic situation of people in the local community, so they do not have to rely on illegal logging to survive. The idea is that through giving people other options to provide an income, the necessity for utilizing the forest is reduced. In 1996, Héctor Ceballos-Lascurain defined ecotourism as:

environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations. (Ceballos-Lascurain 1996: 20).

A community based ecotourism, like in Mabira, on the other hand, should be one that “recognises the need to promote both the quality of life of people *and* the conservation of resources” (Scheyvens, 1999: 246). From these two definitions, it becomes clear that community based conservation and community based ecotourism have the same goals and a lot of the same means to get achieve them. They both focus on a combination of creating alternative sources of income for local communities and, thereby, protecting natural resources. Both also imply a shift in focus, from having one goal to begin with, protecting nature, to having two separate, yet interlinked goals, protecting nature and helping people.

From these statements, it can be argued that ecotourism is concerned with creating possibilities for economic mobility. By this, I mean that the strategy is supposed to be working from the bottom-up, instead of from the top-down. The following will focus on how this social and economic mobility manifests itself in Mabira, how it is seen and done, and how it affects people.

The Importance of Job-Creation

The people I spoke with in Mabira focused on job-creation as a key aspect of their economic survival. In other words, improving people’s socioeconomic conditions is tied to getting them a job. During a conversation with an employee at the Campsite, he explained how they were trying to help the local community:

Our goal is both, to conserve the forest and ultimately eradicate poverty here. (...)
You have to look at why people cut trees. It is because they have no job. If they have a job they would not need it. It is not easy. We try to use the camp to help in different ways, employing people, doing work for the community and helping other CBOs.

More people seemed to make a connection between being unemployed and illegal logging. Payed work becomes more important due to the conservation strategy in Mabira. By dividing

the forest into zones and allowing few of them to be used for farming, pastures and logging, the number of people that can survive there as peasants is quite low. The low amount of people that are self-sustained makes it necessary to create opportunities otherwise. This is also something people who are not within the CBO system highlights. During an interview with an un-employed woman in Najjembe, she explained to me that the NFA would be much better off teaching people skills that could get them a job. While ecotourism provides a direct opportunity to do so by creating various possibilities for people to work, it cannot incorporate everyone. More economic opportunities is exactly what people in Mabira want from the community based conservation plan, but the scale of the new opportunities is too small for the growing population.

There are, however, examples that ecotourism can provide opportunities for upwards social and economic mobility for individual persons. One such example is the story of Hamad, a local man I met through the Campsite. A native of Mabira, he had found work in the Umbrella CBO by a program of theirs, and now held a higher position with the organisation. Hamad had struggled to find work in the past, getting by with odd jobs here and there. Because one of the main goals for the Campsite from the offset was to improve the economic situation for the local inhabitants, they searched within the forest to find tour guides for the tourist forest walks. Hamad applied for their training program, and was lucky enough to get a position as a tour guide trainee within the Umbrella CBO. After becoming, and working as a tour guide for some time, he was asked to take up a management position instead, something he was more than happy to do. Through community based conservation and ecotourism services, Hamad was able to move from virtually unemployed to holding a management position in one of the biggest businesses in the forest. For him and his closest, ecotourism has thus provided a great opportunity for social and economic mobility. He was now earning money and could sustain his livelihood, while not only avoiding illegal activities in the forest, but actually promoting its welfare.

Stories like Hamad's might be the ones that are promoted by those responsible for the conservation and ecotourism of the forest. After all, his story is right to the core of ecotourism and the narratives that are told to back it up. It can be argued that when the structures are put in place, like with the Campsite and the opportunities it creates for the grassroots, all that is needed is some agency from the local inhabitants. Hamad saw an opportunity and worked hard to get it.

A lack of belief that the system would provide potential socio-economic mobility for people outside the system, seemed to be prevalent in the interviews and conversations I had with several people, not only at the Campsite, but within many CBOs and the NFA. As an informant named Thomas once put it: “These people here, they only care about money.” This marks an important separation between people inside and outside the community conservation system, whether it is regarding ecotourism or not. Those on the outside of the system feel like they are not getting their share of the influx of external resources conceptualised as a compensation for prohibiting logging and farming in the forest. Tourists driving through the village in cars with tinted screens and the tourists using money in the Campsite where the villagers are denied access epitomize the influx of external resources. At the same time, those who are inside might feel that the “outsiders” are not doing enough and that they had all the same opportunities to begin with as they had. This displays the lack of trust described earlier.

This might come true at a future point in time; the problem is that those waiting neither think like they are getting what they feel entitled to, nor feel like it is a good enough deal for them anyway. In the household economy of Mabira, it certainly is difficult for some to wait for an alleged rise in your income to happen in the future, while someone else, whom might be your neighbour, is having an immediate positive effect on his or her economic situation. During a conversation, a villager brought the ecotourism “problem” to the fore, saying that: “All these cars I see coming and going. To me those cars mean money. For them (tourists), they come here to spend their money, but I don’t see it.” When I asked about the potential long-term effects, he replied by telling me how he could not wait, and needed money now.

All in all, the situation comes down to this; because of the situation in the forest, a lack of trust makes itself prevalent on both these sides of the community conservation and ecotourism plan. Because none of the parties, neither the NFA, the CBOs, nor people outside the system, feel that the other is doing the right thing, problems emerge and differences are made clearer rather than washed out. At the level discussed here, between non-participating members of the community and those participating in CBOs, it makes for possible quarrels and disputes at the ground level. Hamad told me about a situation like this some time prior to my arrival in the forest. He explained that during the Campsite’s first years of existence, there were murmurs in the local village that they were not benefitting enough from the ecotourism initiative present. Although that dispute was settled through a meeting, I still found these attitudes prevalent in many interviews and conversations with non-participants.

What, then, is the reason for this lack of trust? Does it not make sense that those actively pursuing work within the system benefit more directly than those who do not? There might, of course, be many answers to these questions. The one I will focus on, however, is based on what I will call a *moral of equality*, suggesting that people in Mabira feel like they have been deprived of their available resources and that compensation for this should be distributed equally between everyone. This is reflected in something a forest dweller told me during one of my first days in Mabira: “No one planted this forest, it is for everyone!” In other words, people, especially those outside the system, see the conservation plan as almost illegitimate, and that the resources should be equally available to everyone.

Both Boehm and Woodburn recognize that the number one reason for the need of levelling mechanisms is a perceived unequal distribution of wealth. In Mabira, it contributes to uneven economic development and increased social differentiation. As argued in the previous chapter, the community conservation of Mabira relies on trust to fully work. This means both a trust that the system will provide the benefits it promises, and a trust that those who get immediate access to those benefits distribute them amongst the rest of the community. Fred did not have that trust. To put things bluntly, his opinion was that people like Hamad did not do what they were supposed to do. Said in a different way, things may have been a lot different if Hamad had used his newly gained funds to explicitly help others in the village. At the same time, that would have been counterproductive for him. After all, it was a wish of improving his economic situation and ensuring his survival he entered into the CBO system. As I have shown by the various quotes made by people in Mabira, their number one concern is economic survival, trying to find money wherever they can. The Campsite employees' income will be redistributed indirectly among the other members of the community. For example, Hamad and his fellow workers at the Camp will spend their salaries at the village shops, perhaps buying more food or clothes, which in turn would enable the shop owner to buy more goods and increase sales and so on. The problem is that, since few are employed in ecotourism it not be enough to create local economic development through higher consumption.

Comparative Cases of Ecotourism

In the chapter so far, I have discussed the increased social differentiation and levelling mechanisms caused by ecotourism. How does the ecotourism in Mabira in this regard compare to other places in and around Uganda? Can ecotourism provide means for an equal economic development for entire communities, or does it only create these opportunities for individual mobility? To answer these questions, I will draw on examples from two other community-conserved parks in Uganda, *Lake Mbuoro National Park* and *Mgahinga Gorilla National Park*.

Lake Mbuoro is located approximately 300 kilometres to the west of Mabira. According to Hulme and Infield (2001), community-park relations were bad in Lake Mbuoro before the implementation of a community based conservation in 1990. The “layout” of the conservation here is quite different from Mabira. In Lake Mbuoro, the people concerned mostly live outside the park, the problems there were related to cattle herding, fishing and hunting the animals in the park. A large initiative to reach out to the nearby communities was launched to begin with, and the relation between the people and the park improved somewhat.

The concept of ecotourism was introduced to Lake Mbuoro to increase cash benefits to local communities. There were attempts to train community guides, but these were blocked by park officials. The ecotourism program at Lake Mbuoro had not been particularly successful. In 1996, the park had 8,365 visitors, which yielded next to no profits to the communities. It is quite safe to assume this number has increased over the years, however, but how much is hard to say. Hulme and Infield summarize by saying that “Expecting to create a situation in which the local residents describe the park as ‘...our park’ may be unreasonable given the unavoidable costs to local communities of conservation” (Hulme and Infield 2001: 128).

The situation in Lake Mbuoro is in some ways similar to the one in Mabira. Hulme and Infield focus on the economic yield of the community conservation programme in Lake Mbuoro. One aspect the two have in common is a lack of enough tourists to sustain an even economic development. As mentioned, people at the ecotourism camps in Mabira complained on several occasions about the lack of tourists. It is clear that an increase in tourists would mean increased income and possibly increased benefits for the communities.

Mgahinga Gorilla National Park is located in the southwest corner of Uganda, and reaches into Rwanda and Congo as well. Adams and Infield (2001) write that the community conservation of the area came about to tackle poverty a demand for land in the surrounding areas. The park is home to the mountain gorilla, and is as such a prime destination for ecotourism visitors to Uganda. The ecotourism aspect of the community conservation programme in Mgahinga is based on revenue sharing. According to Adams and Infield, this has resulted in several projects being finished, amongst them a primary school funded by revenues from the park. This was made possible by several factors. First, the interest for gorilla trekking is very high, leading to a large quantity of visitors. Secondly, gorilla trekking is expensive, making each paying visitor leave a lot of money in the park. Because of this, the shared revenue strategy has been a success. People in the surrounding areas expressed happiness with the construction of the school and reports of illegal harvesting or entrance to the park has gone down (Adams and Infield: 2001).

While it seems that the shared revenue strategy might be a better strategy to promote conservation and economic development, its success in Mgahinga does not easily translate into the ecotourism opportunities in Mabira. Based on my observations, the shared revenues from the campsite in Wasswa would not be sufficient to pay for an entire school, nor provide a big enough amount of money to share amongst the villagers around it. Another important difference is that the camp in Mabira is run by a CBO. In Mgahinga, the entire park is under the ecotourism umbrella, meaning that the ecotourism sector there is operated by the Government. If the camp in Mabira was to share its revenues directly with the outside community, it would mean that the employees would have to accept a decrease in their salaries, something the quotes about the change in payment from commission to monthly show that they were not particularly interested in. While the ecotourism project in Mabira might not be perfect, it is thus not necessarily as easy as to simply copy one that is working from elsewhere, as location specific considerations must be made.

In their article about two ecotourism sites in the Caribbean, Carrier and Macleod seek to burst what they call an “ecotourism bubble.” They argue that ecotourism has become but a symbol, and that it does not necessarily protect and improve socio-cultural aspects of the people concerned. The term has become a “pop-word” in the tourism industry, and several tourist destinations that should not necessarily be labelled as ecotourism are done so to increase the attractiveness of the destination. They provide an example from Montego Bay, where the introduction of ecotourism has displaced local fishermen from their favoured

fishing areas. The bay has been divided into zones, much like Mabira, and fishing is prohibited in several of them. The introduction of ecotourism, which is supposed to benefit both nature and people, has led to restricted access to surrounding areas for the fishers, in addition to transforming the meaning of their surroundings, from nature to commodity, “a commercial resource to be managed” (Carrier and Macleod 2005: 328).

They argue that ecotourism must be viewed critically to “burst the bubble” and that it does not necessarily involve an improvement to local people’s livelihoods. Their study focuses on the socio-cultural side of it, by which they mean the livelihoods of local people (Carrier and Macleod 2005). While this might be true, and as we have seen is argued by many inhabitants of Mabira, Carrier and Macleod (purposely) neglect the conservation aspect of ecotourism. In the case of Mabira, the people would rather have factories to work in than the forest, meaning that while the conservation programme and ecotourism has influenced access to areas and resources, an absence of it would possibly lead to the forest’s destruction.

Carrier and Macleod’s article raises some questions about ecotourism that translates well into the community conservation of Mabira. Can the two, conservation and community, be equally protected and prosperous at the same time? One possibility for this to happen is certainly through ecotourism, but as we have seen both in Mabira and the Caribbean, this is easier said than done. Problems facing the ecotourism in Mabira is that it, at the moment, is too small to make an impact on local livelihoods that are not directly influenced. The number of visitors and profit is not substantial to directly contribute to a compensation the villagers around it feel would be adequate compared to the potential resources that are in the forest. Another factor is the lack of participation surrounding areas have in the camp. The camp is surrounded with trees, and people from the communities feel encouraged to walk around it if they have to get to the forest. This leads to a low visibility, and because of that, transparency, which in turn makes people unsure as to what is going on inside and how much money they actually earn there. From this, a feeling that people working in the camp are holding back money is born, and a lack of trust has been established.

MABIRA FOREST ECO-TOURISM CENTRE			
	East African	Non-east African	Foreign
ENTRY PERMIT			
Per person (above 16 years)	5,000/=	10,000/=	20,000/=
Per Person (between the age of 5-16 years)	1,500/=	5,000/=	10,000/=
Children below (5 years)	Free	Free	Free
Guided Nature walk (0-4 hours)	15,000/=	30,000/=	35,000/=
Guided Nature walk 4 hours on Wards	20,000/=	40,000/=	40,000/=
Guided Nature walk for Children between the age of 5-16 years	3,500/=	10,000/=	10,000/=
Bird Watching for half day	80,000/=	90,000/=	90,000/=
Bird Watching for full day	110,000/=	120,000/=	120,000/=
Camping			
Public Campsite	5,000/=	10,000/=	10,000/=
Private Campsite	10,000/=	20,000/=	20,000/=
Mangabey/ Monkey tracking	20,000/=	40,000/=	40,000/=
Filming	20,000/=	30,000/=	40,000/=
Tent Hire (max 5)	30,000/=	30,000/=	30,000/=
Tent Hire (above 5 people)	50,000/=	50,000/=	50,000/=
Biking	60,000/=	60,000/=	60,000/=
Accommodation			
Single Banda	20,000/=	30,000/=	30,000/=
Double Banda	30,000/=	50,000/=	50,000/=
Family Unit	30,000/=	60,000/=	60,000/=
Dormitory Style	5,000/= per person	10,000/= per person	15,000/= per person
Picnic Site	30,000/=	50,000/=	50,000/=

Figure 10 - Sign showing tourist activities at the NFA Ecotourism Centre - Private photo

6 - NARRATIVES AND COUNTERNARRATIVES OF FOREST CONSERVATION: DISTRUST BETWEEN NFA STAFF AND RESIDENTS.

While the last two chapters have focussed on relations between people within the CBO system and their fellow residents, this chapter focuses on the relations between the NFA and the local people outside the CBO system. Whereas the previous two chapters have been based on case studies, this chapter will be based more on interviews and analysis of informants' narratives, as well as comparative cases of forest conservation. In addition to highlighting distrust on the level between NFA and local people, I examine the commonality of distrust, inequity and increased social differentiation in forest conservation.

I noticed early on that the relationship between the NFA staff and the people of Najjembe, where the NFA office is located, was not good. This triggered my interest in the distrust present in the conservation project. As mentioned in the introduction, Mabira has seen a substantial population increase over the last decade or so (Galabuzi et. al. 2015:301). In Najjembe, this is mainly attributed to the market, and the discursive theme is that young people come to the forest to work in the market. This has led to an increased pressure on the forest, and thus on the conservation plan. Representatives of the NFA had noted this.

For the forest, the best thing would be to get rid of the market. There are too many people here struggling for money, food, and land. This is a problem for us. We are trying to help the forest here and these people. If there are more people, it is more easy to only help the forest. They are pressuring it, so we have to be more strict to them.

It is quite clear that an increased population inside the forest leads to an increased pressure on its resources and space. Najjembe is already quite congested, with people living close to the forest boundaries and in tight spaces in the middle of the city.



Figure 11 - Construction of a new house in Najjembe – private picture

The combination of focus on communities and conservation is a difficult one. Communities here ultimately refer to the people living inside, or close to, the conserved area. As I have shown throughout this thesis, there are several examples of this, not many of which has been thoroughly successful (McShane et. al. 2010, Sharpe 1998). In this last section of the main part, I wish to explore the somewhat elusive term “community.” After all, what is put into the term is essential to any community conservation plan, as it is supposed to be as important to it as the conservation. In Mabira, a correct use would be “communities,” as several villages are scattered around the forest. Apart from Najjembe, the inhabitants of the other villages are mostly “subsistence farmers cultivating annual and perennial crops” (Galabuzi et. al. 2015:301). During my stay in Mabira, some farmers complained that the rain season failed to provide sufficient rain to cultivate these crops.

(While talking about the weather) Ah, now this sunshine! It is too much. I am sweating now. Even the crops have failed me. I cannot plant this season, there is not enough rain. I will have to wait. For me, I cannot afford to plant if it (the yield) is not good.

Because of the uncertainty of being a subsistence farmer in terms of yield in Mabira, it is necessary to enable all the communities around the forest to feel incorporated in the conservation programme. This is easier said than done. In this chapter, I will discuss how the people of Mabira have been unable to successfully unite around a narrative that benefits their cause. At least partly, I argue that the difficulties faced with this is due to the population increase and the impact it might have had on these communities.

During one of my first days in Mabira, I talked to an NFA representative about what I was there to do. When I said I would be going out and talking to people in the communities, he had a concerned look on his face, and told me that:

When you go and talk to those people, then maybe you can come back and tell me what they say? I want to know. These people living here, they don't talk to us too much. (...) They don't like us. Because they think we have taken their forest. Really, we are here to help them, if it was up to them, they would cut it down! (...) If I go up there in the market, people are quiet when they see me. Please, if they say something bad about me, do not listen!

NFA staff were aware of people in the forest not trusting them, and the representative I was talking to seemed more concerned with people bad-mouthing him. To him, people did not trust NFA staff because they did not understand what they were doing. Trust is a two-way relationship, and the conservation invoked an impression that he did not trust the local people to manage the forest either. In other words, it was obvious right from the beginning that the relation between the NFA and the local communities did not have the trust required for a community conservation project to really work. My initial impressions of distrust were later

reinforced by people's reluctance to talk to me because they thought I was working for the NFA.

James' Story

Later on, as I had gained at least some trust from the people in Najjembe, I was able to sit down and interview some of them. They told stories about distrusting NFA staff. The following is the story of a young man named James, who worked as a motor cycle driver in the village. He did not own the bike, meaning that James had to give the owner a share of his daily income.

Life here is too hard! I have to work from morning to evening just to get by. When I wake up, I do some exercise, put on my clothes and drive to the boda-stand (motorcycle taxi stand). I stay there, take people around the forest, to Lugazi, even to Jinja! All the way to evening. The money is not enough. (...) I want to find money to purchase my own bike, I can earn a lot of money! Then, I can buy a house for my mom, my sisters, me, everyone! But here there is no money to find, not enough customers! (...) On one day, I can earn about 10 000 Shillings [equivalent to approx. 25 NOK], then I have to purchase fuel, pay the owner, ah! I cannot manage.

James wanted to improve his living standards and better provide for his family, but felt deprived of opportunities to do so. He had not been able to finish school because he had to start working to contribute to the family's economic survival. I asked him whether there were any opportunities for him within the community conservation project. He frowned and said that:

Ah, those people [the NFA], I do not want to work with them. You know, they are thieves! They only want the forest for themselves. They go in there and they cut down the trees for themselves to sell them. Imagine if I could do that! You can earn good

money in Lugazi from selling the timber. (...) I do not trust those people, they only think about themselves. They should create jobs for people like me!

James did not trust NFA staff, making accusations that they were monopolising the resources of the forest. In his opinion, the only way they could help people in forest, like they said they would, was to create jobs. However, he did not have any faith in them being able to do so. Like many people in Mabira, James' concern was economic survival and socio-economic upward mobility. To him, it was not enough to be told that protecting the forest would be beneficial in the future. Faced with future promises and slow progress, and the lack of transparency in the conservation plan promoted, he did not feel that he could risk trusting the NFA to provide him with a better opportunity for a sustained livelihood in some years' time.

Creating Narratives

Adams and Hulme claim that “contemporary frameworks for the analysis of change in the understanding of the environment and natural resource use in Africa highlight the cut and thrust of ‘narrative’ and ‘counter-narrative’ creation (...)” (2001:21). James created a narrative in which he was deprived of a resource that others benefitted from, a narrative he was not alone in making. A man working in the market shared James' views on the distribution of resources in the forest, saying:

Why can they [the NFA] decide, why not me? Why can they tell me that I cannot work in the forest? My chicken needs firewood! Who can eat the chicken when it is still raw? No one! I live here, so I should be allowed to decide what I do with the trees. They grow up, even! Look, if you cut that one now, it will grow again in some years!

Although the market employee seemed to be frustrated after a long day of working in the sun, he was clearly unhappy with the situation. His narration follows the same pattern as Fred's. On one hand, it is a delegitimization of the NFA's authority and ability to evenly distribute the allocated resources. People are not being allowed to use enough of the forest's resources under the current regulation. On the other hand, he made a point of how he did not see the

cutting of a tree as a danger to the forest. Or rather, it was more important to him that he could roast his chicken and sell it to ensure his own survival than it was to save one tree from destruction. Another narrative along the same lines was provided by a woman living in Najjembe, having moved there from Northern Uganda some years prior to my arrival. She had not been successful in finding a job in Mabira, and was frustrated at the lack of opportunities available:

I came here [to Najjembe] in 2013 because I had heard there was work. Unfortunately, I have not managed. I can do anything to bring money for my children! They need to go to school. In this place, there are too many people and not enough work. either you can work in the market, in the sugar cane or in the forest, but they cannot allow us to work there unless cooperating with them. I have heard you can go in the forest and cut for the NFA, but it is too secret, I don't know. Anyway, they are not helping us. They should be training people, not just take the forest away.

A common theme in informant's narratives, is that their economic survival is made significantly more difficult by the conservation of the forest. In other words, they told narratives that looked at the conservation as hindering economic development, rather than promoting it. There is a fundamental discrepancy in how the conservation is supposed to be working, and how people see it. Through creating narratives where the NFA are considered "villains," the community conservation plan is being undermined from the bottom up. A recurring theme is that everything would be better, had the conservation been lifted and the resources in the forest made available for extraction.

J. Peter Brosius (2006) wrote about the creation of narratives in an article about the Penan people of East Malaysia. The situation there differed somewhat from that in Mabira. For the Penan, a hunter-gatherer group, the problem was that their hunting grounds were being destroyed by large companies extracting timber from the forest. The Penan, with the help of some environmental groups, made several efforts to save the forest, in which the creation of narratives was of vital importance. Brosius claims that there is a "need to foreground notions of agency in narratives of landscape and dispossession" (2006:316). There are several examples in which the creation of narratives is important to the "struggling" party in cases like this, often linked to claims about "indigenoussness" (Brosius 2006, Karlsson

2006, Berglund 2006). Through creating narratives in which the “indigenous” or “native” inhabitants of an area have an almost symbiotic connection with the nature around them, the argument goes that they are best suited to distribute the land they have been using for hundreds or thousands of years. The argument is that through their strong, inherited connection with nature, they are able to live alongside it without destroying or exploiting it excessively. While the specific details about distribution and conflicts in these cases differ, they share some common features. These features can also be found in the narratives of people living in Mabira.

Understanding Nature

To conceptualise these narratives, and better understand their impact on the conservation of Mabira, I turn to Gísli Pálsson. He writes about issues regarding different narratives about how to best live with and by nature. Pálsson’s theories on this are somewhat controversial, however, I will use them as a loose conceptual framework. He argues that such narratives can be differentiated into three distinct, yet loose, categories of human-nature relations depending on what one wants from a transaction with nature. The first category, *orientalism*, establishes “a fundamental break between nature and society” and that “people are masters of nature, in charge of the world” (Pálsson 1996:67). In other words, it is up to human beings to do with nature as they see fit, and an orientalist worldview is characterised by exploitation, or a negative reciprocity. This often leads to depletion of a resource.

The next category is *paternalism*, in which human beings are still very much in charge, and “masters of nature,” but use their power differently. Instead of exploitation, paternalism is concerned with protection. According to Pálsson, this involves a separation of power between experts, or scientists, and laypersons, and is characterised by a balanced reciprocity between humans and nature. Though employing “expert” knowledge, natural resources are to be used sustainably, and in a way that ensures that they are not depleted. Most “modern” conservation plans fit into this category. Experts decide the largest possible use of resources from an area, and maximum usage is imposed on the area by the government.

The last category is what Pálsson refer to as *communalism*. This is how the indigenous groups of Meghalaya and the fishermen on Iceland attempt to communicate their human-

nature relations. According to Pálsson, this is based on a rejection of the human-nature separation, and is characterised by a generalised reciprocity. Within communalism, there is a belief that certain groups have a deeper, almost mysterious knowledge of nature, passed on through generations (Pálsson 1996). Karlsson (2006) provides an example from Meghalaya in India, where the people living there claim that through living close to, and using nature, through hundreds of years, they have gained specific knowledge on how to best use it and live with it.

The classic example of resource conflicts is that of an orientalist or paternalist state trying to destroy or protect areas on which communalist people have been living for decades. In the Amazon Forest of Brazil, we hear about peaceful tribes having their homes destroyed by capitalist companies and governments. The case of Mabira follows along some of the same lines, but does not quite fit into this pattern.

The conservation project of Mabira fits into the paternalist category. The NFA have so-called “expert knowledge” about the forest’s state, have created a plan for how to best protect it. Through examining the population of each species, it was decided that the forest needed protection, which was then deployed on the people living there. A decision such as this is based on creating a narrative in which nature, or Mabira’s, survival is seen as so important that it needs human intervention to achieve it. In Pálsson’s example of fishing, “experts” deemed the cod population outside of Iceland to be dangerously low, and decided to negate this trend by distributing quotas on the total fish yield (Pálsson 2006). In Mabira, the introduction of a cap on collection of house hold articles from the forest follows along the same lines. “Experts” see that some resource is getting scarce, and attempt to protect them by introducing restrictions.

The people living in Mabira, however, appears to have a different relationship to nature and, hence, use other narratives. In Pálsson’s categorisations, they might seem to best fit into orientalism, because they would like to use the forest as much as possible to be able to survive economically. According to informants, however, this does not stem from a notion of being “masters of nature” or not caring about it at all. Rather, people see exploitation of forest resources as a necessity to survive. Their struggle is not with “how big the tree population of Mabira is”, or exploiting it unnecessarily. For them, they struggle with survival. Had they seen other options than depleting the forest resources, they might have taken those. Because of Mabira’s history, where restrictions are fairly new and not very welcome, however, they do

not see the conservation as a legitimate enough reason to abstain from using its resources to achieve their aims of survival and social and economic upward mobility.

Distributing destruction

Whereas the narratives often associated with people living close to nature tend to romanticise their relations to it, this is not always the case (Karlsson 2006, Pálsson 2006, Wilk 2006). The shifting cultivation Karlsson describes in Meghalaya, for example, was not particularly healthy to the available land. In Mabira, the story is somewhat different. People in Mabira make almost no effort towards being seen as particularly “eco-friendly” or in touch with nature in the eyes of NFA or the outside world. Like James, most people’s narratives about a future without the conservation involve the destruction of the forest through exploitation of its resources, like logging. The following statement was made by an unemployed inhabitant about her desires for the future:

I wish that they would build here big factories! Everyone here could find work there. They could make timbers from the forest, charcoal even. Even for me, I could be working there and my children could go to school. Imagine, every day I go to work and I bring home the money!

Factories, or a logging industry, within the forest would presumably lead to increased deforestation. The narrative, or argument, of people in Mabira is thus not along the lines of people of Meghalaya or Pálsson’s fishermen on Iceland, claiming to have a better or different understanding of how to best create a sustainable use of natural resources. In Mabira, people want better living standards and socio-economic mobility, and many see the destruction of the forest as one way to achieve it. Therefore, the narratives created clash with the narratives of the NFA and the conservation project. For people living in Mabira, the forest is seen as a commodity through which financial gains might be made. Following the conversations and quotes given by informants during my field work, I will argue that this way of thinking is so embedded in people’s minds that it will take a big effort from the NFA to change it. While the goals might be similar, to achieve upwards socio-economic mobility for the residents, the desired means of getting there are too different. To people living in Mabira who are outside

the conservation programme, the perceived means of an upwards socio-economic mobility are through destruction of the forest, the exact development against which the NFA have a mandate to work.

An Untrustworthy Narrative

In the cases of Meghalaya and the Icelandic fisheries, the arguments of the local people have been at least partially successful. Based on their knowledge of how to best interact with their natural environment, they have been able to counteract what they see as negative trends in their allocated use of resources. As in Mabira, people were unhappy with the laws and regulations of conservation, and did something about it by creating counter-narratives that presented the people, with their knowledge of the area and their tradition, as the best positioned to manage the resources in a sustainable way. Why then, have the people of Mabira been unsuccessful in creating such a narrative?

Throughout the thesis, I have pointed to several factors leading to the conservation programme being unsuccessful, most of which are related to the lack of trust between the different actors in the forest. The counter-narrative of people outside the conservation programme and CBO system does not position the people as the best keepers of the forest. Rather, they present themselves as being almost adamant; if a proper local labour market does not develop, they are bound to exploit the forest resources excessively to survive. Hence, the NFA staff do not entrust the local residents of the forest to successfully manage the forest on their own.

By telling narratives that might be interpreted to fit inside an orientalist view on human-nature relations, the people of Mabira appear to the outside as incapable of living within the forest without destroying it. The narratives they communicate and the history of deforestation point in the same direction. The result is that the people in Mabira who are currently outside the conservation programme, feel like the only outcome the conservation has provided for them is making financial survival more difficult. The NFA, on the other hand, are complaining that people do not wish to cooperate. The narratives presented by both sides are thus working against each other. Because the conservation plan has failed to create the opportunities people feel it should have done, they turn to narratives that increase antagonism and distrust between the actors.

While what would happen to Mabira if the conservation had been removed is difficult to say, I argue that this is a contributing factor to the trust issues found within the plan. This works both ways. Following Ingold, the risk of trusting each other is too big. The notion that an increased allowed outlet from the forest is the only way to increase their socio-economic situation is too strong. Further, this makes it more difficult for people to create a narrative that is “fitting” to their case. They cannot, like Karlsson’s Meghalayan or Pálsson’s Icelandic examples, make a claim that they would be able to manage the forest themselves, in a sustainable, non-exploiting way.

Differing Motives

There is a difference, then, in what the different parties in the forest want from the conservation. The NFA is mainly concerned with the protection of the forest. Their goal is to achieve an environmentally sustainable management of the forest. To do so, they have to create ways for the people living in Mabira to sustain their livelihoods without exploiting it. The people are thus seen as an obstacle to the conservation. To the people living in Mabira, the main goal is economic survival first, and upward mobility second. As such, many of them cannot really afford to care about the actual conservation of the forest, unless they see opportunities for survival and/or mobility within the conservation programme (Galabuzi et. al. 2015). This leads to a situation where both sides feel that the other is trying its hardest to work against them and the fundamental trust community conservation needs is lacking in the relation. A similar pattern can be found in several community conservation projects (Hulme and Infield 2001, Adams and Infield 2001, Jones 2001, Emerton 2001).

A common feature shared by the community conservation programmes that have had some success in improving the socio-economic status for its surrounding communities, seems to be revenue sharing (Kangwana and Ole Mako 2001, Adams and Infield 2001). In both of these case studies, revenue sharing from the protected areas has contributed to several projects in communities, such as building schools, roads and providing electricity. This is an explicit way of showing people how conservation can improve community’s infrastructure and provide options for social upward mobility through education. This does, however, need an abundance of revenue to share. In the cases of Kangwana and Ole Mako (2001), and Adams

and Infield (2001), the community conservation benefits from a strong ecotourism sector. This generates large revenues to the protected area, and creates a surplus for distributing the resources to the individual communities. In Mabira, the revenues are too small. The ecotourism sector in Mabira suffers from a relatively low visitation number. Tourists I talked with in Kampala said that they would rather spend their time in Uganda watching wildlife offered by the national parks than go on a forest walk where no big game is found.

People living in Mabira, and those responsible for its conservation, create narratives that are shaped by the new reality of the conservation plan. Because of the lack of success the people feel it has had, their narratives increase the tensions and distrust between them and the NFA staff. The NFA, on the other hand, see this as a threat to the job they are supposed to be doing. At the moment, both sides are thus working against each other, tensions fuelled by gossip and narratives about the “other” doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons.

Conservation vs. Community

There seems to be a consensus amongst the people living in and around the forest that conservation and community development does not go hand in hand in Mabira. For James, and many with him, the problem is the conservation. The conservation of Mabira has led to a more difficult everyday life than they think it would have been if the forest was not protected. To the NFA, the communities in the forest are the number one reason the conservation is not working as it should. Is it possible, then, to achieve true community conservation, one that protects both nature and community? Hulme and Murphree argue that the answer is difficult to find. If the alternative to the community conservation is so called “fortress conservation,” in which everyone living in Mabira would be evicted and the forest left on its own, they argue that community conservation is indeed beneficial (2001: 281). This was in fact a concern for people in Mabira as well. Even with the dissatisfaction concerning the conservation, they did not want to move away from the forest, as many did not have anywhere else to go.

This forest is my home, how can I move away? Where can I go? I hear now there are rumours about evicting people from the forest again, I hope they will not do so! That

would be too bad for me. They (NFA) come here and tell us to leave? This is our home, not theirs!

A fear of displacement is not unfamiliar when it comes to conservation of an area or a resource. In its simplest terms, this is what it comes down to in Mabira; how much is the communities in the forest worth compared to conserving it? Again, the answer is extremely complex and difficult to find. As long as people are allowed to live inside it, however, Uganda and the NFA look at the communities as important enough to try and incorporate them. As Igoe, Brockington and Schimdt-Soltau write: “The ultimate challenge facing conservationists today is (...) to determine how to shape human interactions with nature in landscapes of which people are a part” (2006:251).

Because of the perceived failure of the community conservation in Mabira, the narratives and attitudes tend to create a separation of conservation and community, whereas, in fact, the two should in fact be united. While perhaps not saying so explicitly, many of the statements made in this thesis has this as an underlying theme. The conservation will indefinitely lead to distrust when it is almost always referred to in an “us vs. them” scenario. A creation of such scenarios is not unfamiliar when talking about conservation, however. After all, it involves a change in resources distribution which in most cases has a negative impact on those who depend on said resources to sustain their livelihoods or use them in other ways. While, officially, the government has owned the forest for many years, the different policies and legislations on use of the resources within it might have led to people seeing it as theirs. To some, this is manifested by attempts to make the current policy, as this statement shows:

Who are these people to come here and tell me we cannot use it [the forest]? We did not choose them. I have lived here many years, more than these people have. Why can they tell me to not go in there when they even do so themselves?

Returning to the Penan in Malaysia, Brosius writes that they too “assume that most government officials are acting as agents (...) for purely personal gain” (Brosius 2006:311).

Although they are more aggressive in their claims for resource use, the process of making other claims to resource distribution illegitimate is somewhat similar.

Through making claims such as these, the people of Mabira attempt to separate conservation and the community, and attempt to create a discourse where the community is suffering because of the conservation. In other words, accepting that conservation and community are not separate would mean accepting that the conservation is there to stay. According to informant statements, however, this is not what people want. Adams and Hulme say that a risk of community conservation is exactly this, that while it “is conceived of as a way of placating local opinion, it may in fact inflame it as participants argue with the conservation agency (or with each other) about their rights, needs and aspirations” (2001:21).

Community conservation depends on communities both being part and taking part in the conservation. Through using different tactics, this is worked against in Mabira, promoting a separation of the two. The schism is created from both sides. When NFA employees talk about people living in the forest as “a problem”, they put them aside the conservation plan. Simultaneously, when people talk about the NFA and the conservation managers as “those people,” claiming that they do not own the forest and cannot tell them what to do, they label the conservation of the forest as something that is separate from the communities and their well-being. In the narratives created by the people “outside” the conservation programme and those responsible for it, there is little sign that “conservation” and “community” are working together towards the same goal. This is further increased by another factor, the rapid population increase the forest has experienced in later years.

Agrawal and Gibson (1999) argued that the idea, or concept, of “community” is problematic when talking about conservation. According to them, it is too easy to homogenise the different beliefs, dreams and aspirations of a group when referring to them as a “community.” Because of the nature and history of the term, it is too often used in such a way that it silences the voices of the individual actors within the conservation area. In Mabira, the population increase and the narratives communicated are indicators that this is true, to some extent. There does seem, however, to be a general theme in people’s narrations, to achieve higher living standards and socio-economic upwards mobility. While people living in Mabira are culturally, historically and socially as diverse as anyone, they are all struggling within the

same framework. Their everyday lives revolve around survival, struggling to find ways of sustaining their livelihoods within the structures of the conservation plan.

7 - CONCLUSIONS

In the thesis, I have tried to show that the community based conservation of Mabira Central Forest Reserve has led to social differentiation and created a lack of trust among those involved in the operation. The basis of the operation is to create alternative sources of income for those living in the forest, making them less dependent on resources from the forest to get by. As I have argued, this has not happened at such a scale that it is perceived to be successful by the forest's inhabitants, and while it does create a platform for social and financial mobility for some, this is not perceived as possible by most.

Through employing the CBO system as their main strategy for the community based conservation, the NFA are relying on trust to get everyone in on their operation. As I have argued, this system can be seen as “partly-community based” rather than purely “community based,” because it relies on the social and financial mobility of some to create the same for others further down the line. In other words, most people in Mabira need to rely on an indirect mobility rather than a direct mobility, because the CBO system cannot employ everyone. For those not employed, either by choice or lack of opportunities, trust that the system will provide them with a better economic situation in the future is imperative. Based on the concepts of trust put down by Jimenez, that it is largely based on robust information, and Ingold, that it always involves an element of risk (Jimenez 2011:180, Ingold 2000:70), I have argued that this trust is absent in Mabira.

Through the chapters, I have explored the concept of trust on the different levels of interaction within the forest conservation project. First, between the NFA and CBOs, then between those who have been employed by CBOs and those who have not. Lastly, between the NFA and those who are not directly involved. My argument has been that a lack of trust can be found on all of these levels, however it manifests itself in everyday life in different ways. What they do have in common, however, is that they in some ways can be regarded as levelling mechanisms. While not necessarily outspoken, they still exist in everyday interaction. Often, they are based on an egalitarian ideal that any conservation act, carried out either by the NFA or by members of the communities, should have its base in the conservation, and not be based on desires for social or economic mobility. Paradoxically, this ideal is non-existent until an opportunity for mobility is present to some. Until then, social and economic mobility is often the number one wish and dream for everyone and socially accepted in every way. This egalitarian ideal, then, works as a levelling mechanism between

the different levels of society, but only when mobility through the conservation system is an option.

Everyone I talked with in Mabira wanted to improve their economic situation. The narratives they created and told were almost in every case focused around economic survival and managing to improve their livelihoods. The introduction of alternative sources of income through the conservation programme has indeed provided opportunities for socioeconomic upwards mobility. For people working at the Ecotourism camp, for example, the conservation strategy in Mabira has led to an improved livelihood and an increase in income. People working there are still a part of the community, and interact with people there on a daily basis, live their lives and have friends outside the system. The people of Mabira are in no way unfriendly towards each other or anyone else, and the issues discussed in this thesis only make themselves visible when talking about conservation. The conservation of Mabira is, however, an important part of people's everyday life, as it surrounds them both physically and mentally. Physically, through the forest's sheer presence, always visible and surrounding Najjembe on all sides. Mentally, because it acts as a monument of possibilities lost and present, and an income source just out of reach.

The people of Mabira want social and economic mobility. Almost everything that happens and every conversation revolves around ways to find a source of income. The conservation plan has created new opportunities. Jobs have been created in different sectors, and facilities for tourism has been developed. Problems occur because only a few have so far benefitted from these developments, not the community as such. The result of this is that firstly, the conservation does not work as intended, and secondly, that the small, egalitarian village communities have become more economically differentiated. Hulme and Murphree finish their book by stating that:

A conservation that can protect Africa's unique species and habitats; that can reduce the costs it imposes on, and increase the benefits it provides to, rural people; and that can make conservation less socially illegitimate than it presently is for the citizens of African countries, is many decades away (2006: 296).

It is difficult to argue against this with the case of community conservation in Mabira. It is certainly necessary to continue working for a better conservation, not only for the forest, but mostly for the people struggling to survive within it.

The community based conservation of Mabira has thus not, as of yet, managed to provide an even economic development for the people living in the forest. Rather, it has introduced distrust between the different actors in the conservation. This is not to say that the conservation is a complete failure, or that relations inside the forest are at a breaking point. However, it has had, and will probably continue to have, a significant impact on people's everyday lives inside the forest boundaries. The conservation influence people every single day, whether it is in a positive or negative way. There is no arguing, however, that there is a fundamental difference in what the people of Mabira and the NFA want. I will finish this thesis in the same way that I started it, with a statement made by Thomas, an informant outside the conservation system, during an interview:

“If the NFA really wanted to help us, they would build some big factories!” (Thomas, 36 years of age, and a logger, May 6th 2016)



Figure 12 - Sign reading: "Fine: 50.000 \$. DO NOT LITTER!" – private picture

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