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# From Shiny Shoes to Muddy Reality: Understanding How Meso-State Actors Negotiate the Implementation Gap in Participatory Forest Management

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## ABSTRACT

Recent research on participatory forest management (PFM) in the global south has highlighted the existence of a widespread “implementation gap” between the ambitious intent enshrined in legislation and the often partial, disappointing rollout of devolved forest governance on the ground. Here, through an ethnographic case study of forest officers (FOs) in Kenya, we draw on a framework of critical institutionalism to examine how key meso-level actors, or “interface bureaucrats,” negotiate and challenge this implementation gap in everyday forest governance. We go beyond consideration of institutional bricolage in isolation or as an aggregate category, to analyze how bricolage as aggregation, alteration, and/or articulation is variously driven, shaped, and constrained by FOs’ multiple accountabilities and agency. Our analysis highlights the locally specific, contingent, and mutually reinforcing nature of accountability, agency and bricolage, and their explanatory power in relation to the performance and nature of “actually existing” PFM.

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## Introduction

Transformations in the institutional frameworks of forest governance, through the ostensible devolution of rights and often enacted through participatory forest management (PFM), have become widespread in the global south over the past three decades. Such apparently paradigmatic shifts in governance regimes reflect aspirations to sustainable forest management, enhanced livelihoods, and reduced rates of deforestation, as well as concerns with equity and the myriad limitations of the state. However, the results to date of these worthy intentions have often been disappointing, in Kenya, the focus of this paper, as elsewhere. Numerous authors have noted the “implementation gap” between the lofty aspirations enshrined in new legislative and policy frameworks and the actual rollout of PFM/decentralized forest

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governance on the ground and across diverse countries (de Koning 2014). This “implementation gap” has been variously assigned to inadequate funding, lack of collaboration among stakeholders, and unwillingness of state actors to cede power (Mogoi et al. 2012). Recent studies in Kenya have confirmed the partial status of devolved forest governance, despite it having been enshrined in key legislation such as the Forests Act (FA) (2005) for more than a decade (*ibid*). Such studies also chart local struggles to secure access to valuable resources under PFM, and to negotiate genuine benefit-sharing (Chomba, Treue, and Sinclair 2015).

However, what is missing from many such accounts is a sustained, critical engagement with meso-level state actors and their practices, positioned as they are often uncomfortably between national government institutions and local communities, and the ways in which they produce and enact “actually existing” PFM on a daily basis (Funder and Marani 2015). Originally formulated by Lipsky (2010) as “street-level bureaucrats” and more recently as “interface bureaucrats,” meso-level state actors have become the focus of new and emergent ethnographies of the state, including in relation to natural resource governance (e.g., Bierschenk and de Sardan, 2014, p. 36; Blundo 2015). Building on such work, a focus on meso-level actors’ everyday practices re-orientates questions concerning the “implementation gap” in PFM from *why* this gap occurs to the less-familiar, but equally important question of *how* meso-level actors live with and negotiate it on a daily basis.

“Practical norms” have some explanatory power here, being informal “modes of regulation,” for example negotiation of compromise solutions and practices of “petty corruption,” periodically deployed by meso-level actors in everyday governance (Blundo 2015, p. 155; Cleaver 2015). Accountability and the ways that multiple networks of accountability both shape and constrain daily practices also require consideration. Blundo’s (2015) concept of “vicinal accountability” is particularly apposite, as it highlights obligations for mutual support between members of close networks, variously based on ethnicity, village of origin, political party membership, or social networks. Meso-level bureaucrats are themselves inevitably entangled in such networks, which taken together with their bureaucratic, vertical accountabilities, require continuous trade-offs and (re) negotiations in accountabilities and resultant practices.

The tools and ideas of critical institutionalism (CI) have also begun to be applied herein, notably through the concept of “institutional bricolage,” by which process “people (consciously and non-consciously) draw on existing social formulae (rules, traditions, norms, roles and relationships) to assemble and adapt arrangements, including practical norms, and in response to changing situations” (Cleaver 2015: 209). For our “street-level bureaucrats,” processes of institutional bricolage, enacted through daily practices, respond to conflicting demands and accountabilities, albeit being limited by the agency of specific actors.

Conceptually, our work is grounded in these literatures, particularly in CI, but notably in its intersections with issues of agency and accountability. With its attention to institutional complexity and dynamism, institutions’ embeddedness in social and historical contexts, and perhaps most importantly, the role of institutional bricolage, CI offers much explanatory power in understanding the everyday governance practices of meso-level state actors, as they negotiate the “implementation gap.” We contribute to further improving this understanding in the following ways. First, by paying attention to agency in relation to bricolage, something that remains notably underdeveloped in current literature (Hall et al. 2014; Cleaver and de Koning 2015). Second, the “messy meso-level” has been explicitly identified as a promising area for CI-informed studies of bricolage, through reorienting the analytical gaze from the ubiquitous local scale (Cleaver and de Koning 2015: 6). Through attention to accountability

and intersections with agency, we not only take up this challenge, but cast light on the nature of and constraints on bricolage practices. Accountability is rarely considered in discussions of bricolage, but has particular relevance for meso-level actors. Furthermore, there remain significant gaps in understanding of their agency, the ways in which this intersects with accountability and enables or constrains daily enactments of institutional bricolage. It is to these conceptual debates that this paper contributes.

### ***Agency, Forest Governance, and the Limits of Bricolage***

Contemporary theorizations of bricolage are typically placed within challenges to mainstream institutionalism. In the latter paradigm, (economically) rational actors create and respond to purposefully designed, formal institutions, to realize optimal resource management outcomes (e.g., Cleaver and de Koning 2015). CI challenges this through emphasizing the socially embedded, partial, contingent and continually evolving nature of institutions, informed by identities, power relationships, and diverse goals (*ibid*). “Bricolage” denotes the creative practices by which actors draw on, shape and adapt a range of new and pre-existing formal and informal institutions in particular situations. Specific bricolage practices may be driven by individual aspirations, the imperative to maintain resource access and also, we hypothesize, by issues of accountability. As highlighted by Blundo (2014: 143) and Blundo and Glasman (2013), meso-level “bureaucrats in uniform” suffer not from a lack of accountability, but rather from excess and conflicting accountabilities. Here, we are concerned with how accountability shapes practices of bricolage, a melding of concepts notably lacking in analyses of the “implementation gap” thus far. The point here is that accountability initiates action, despite a lack of ostensible supervision or punishment. Although meso-level actors may apparently acquire *de facto* autonomy in understaffed and under-resourced agencies, they nonetheless feel compelled to enact/produce an approximation of a functioning service (Blundo 2014). In practical terms, they engage in practices of bricolage to “get the job done.” Understanding the forms these bricolage practices take requires recognition of accountabilities beyond the bureaucratic, to attend to the social networks in which these “interface bureaucrats” are enmeshed. It also requires attention to these actors’ agency and its limits.

Here, following Giddens (1984: 15) and Forster, Downsborough, and Chomba (2017: 4), we understand agency not to refer to “the intentions people have of doing things, but to their capability of doing those things in the first place,” in other words to their capacity to act and through this to have effect, to “make a difference,” underpinned by the strategic exercise of power. In the context of our study, and following Cleaver (2001), creative agency thus enables and underpins practices of institutional bricolage. Agency may be conferred by bureaucrats’ positioning in relation to state structures, but also be simultaneously undermined by lack of resources, weak social networks, and by stretched and conflicting accountabilities. Agency may also be shaped by embodied and physical norms and constraints, for example uniform as a signifier of status, ability to be physically present at key meetings, and control over technologies, all of which may affect particular actors in different ways (Poppe 2013; Cleaver and de Koning 2015). Overall, those lacking agency struggle to engage *effectively* in bricolage, irrespective of their desire to do so, to bridge the “implementation gap.”

It is here that further attention to the concept of bricolage is helpful. Recent work has begun to unpick this monolithic category to highlight its component practices of

aggregation, alteration, and articulation (de Koning 2014). Briefly defined, these denote action to creatively combine new and existing institutions (aggregation); adjustment or adaptation of newly introduced institutions to better fit local norms and priorities (alteration); and resistance to/rejection of newly introduced institutions through reference to tradition, culture, or identity (articulation) (*ibid*). It is argued here that meso-level actors' bricolage practices can usefully be explored in relation to these three dimensions and to the ways in which they are variously enabled and produced in relation to intersecting factors of agency and accountability. In doing so, we go beyond previous work wherein ethnographies of meso-level state bureaucrats have tended to rely on single framings (e.g., accountability) or aggregate notions of bricolage to explain daily practices.

It is to these issues which we turn in subsequent sections, following a brief analysis of Kenyan contexts and our methods.

### **Kenyan Contexts**

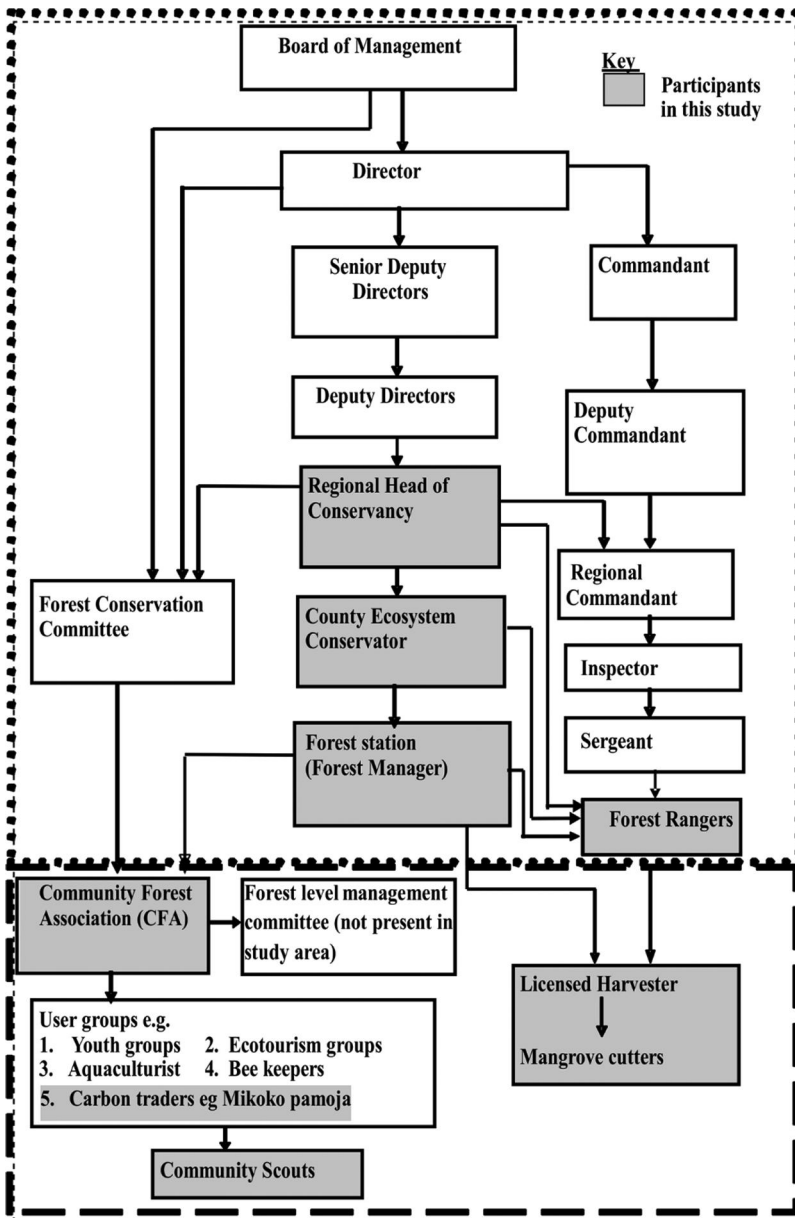
Globally, the management of tropical forests has historically involved a “command and control” approach, with state forest agencies exercising control over local resource use and access. In Kenya, this exclusionary approach was gradually revised through the 1968 Forest Policy, the Kenyan Forest Master Plan [Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MENR) 1994] and more recently the Forests Act (FA) [Republic of Kenya (ROK) 2005]. The FA (2005) in particular entrenched PFM through enabling the creation of Community Forest Associations (CFAs), authorized to sign management agreements with Kenya Forest Service (KFS), the statutory forest agency. Such agreements, theoretically at least, give CFAs both rights and responsibilities in management of and benefit-sharing from forests. However, despite this ostensibly radical policy shift, changes in Kenyan forest governance have been far less marked, with incomplete devolution and lack of genuine benefit-sharing widely reported (Mogoi et al. 2012; Chomba, Treue, and Sinclair 2015).

Within these challenging contexts, meso-level KFS actors are required to play a critical role in PFM implementation, in initiating governance (e.g., CFA) structures, facilitating preparation of management plans, and monitoring of progress of PFM projects [Mbugua 2009; Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MENR) 2015]. They also enjoy the right to control access to forest resources, for example through licensing of CFA activities (Thygesen et al. 2016). These KFS “interface bureaucrats” are furthermore mandated to collect revenue for the organization, for example from registration of CFAs, and issuing of permits to individuals and companies dealing with sale of wood and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) (Chomba, Treue, and Sinclair 2015). They are thus required to negotiate tensions between enforcement roles, reflecting their paramilitary status, and community engagement/development roles (Poppe 2013). Evidence to date, in the form of rates of CFA formation and continued deforestation, suggests that the “implementation gap” noted elsewhere is undoubtedly present in Kenya, and also in our study area, as explored below (*ibid*; Huxham et al. 2015).

### **Methods and Contexts**

The study area is in Kenya's South Coast region, which incorporates both mangrove and terrestrial forests. This selection reflects the authors' previous work under the ESPA-funded Swahili Seas project, which gave rise to an innovative form of PFM under the South Coast

Mikoko Pamoja Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme (Locatelli et al. 2014). This current paper arose from the subsequent Coastal Ecosystem Services of East Africa project, one of the aims of which was to explore the meso-level contexts/barriers to scaling up of PFM initiatives. Forests in the region cover a wide area, making it necessary for several CFAs to be established to cover all resident communities. The existence of only four out of a possible eight CFAs, with only one management agreement in place, provides clear indication of a PFM “implementation gap” and thus further justifies our site selection.



**Figure 1.** Institutional framework for forest governance in Kenya.

## Study Design

The study used ethnographic approaches. Shadowing, which necessitated following participants in the course of their daily duties and recording their activities, was carried out in all KFS stations in the study area, comprising two forest stations, one zonal station, and one regional station, from January 2015 to March 2016. Following Gupta and Ferguson (1997), multi-level shadowing was adopted to target various hierarchies and power structures within KFS.

Kenya Forest Service's structure is summarized in [Figure 1](#), together with pertinent community groups and institutions, under the CFA umbrella organization. Within KFS, forest managers (FMs), in-service trained in paramilitary skills, report directly to ecosystem conservators (ECs), who are officially in charge of the forests in each sub-county. They are assisted in discharging their duties by KFS rangers, uniformed paramilitary employees under a commandant, who are responsible for forest law enforcement and compliance, with legal powers of arresting and prosecuting forest offenders. The actual operation of this hierarchy is examined further below, as part of the analysis of agency and bricolage.

Best practice in institutional ethnography informed our approach, with its emphasis on sustained, immersive engagement with key actors over superficial engagements with multiple personnel (Billo and Mountz 2016). Specifically, four senior forest officers (FOs), drawn, respectively, from KFS's regional office, the zonal/county ecosystem conservation office, and from each of the two forest stations, all charged to deal with PFM, were shadowed for 3 weeks each month. These FOs, a general term used subsequently to protect informant identity, were accompanied in their offices, to over 30 internal meetings and workshops, public events, forest patrols, community activities, and four KFS-organized community focus groups. Data were collected through participant observation, supported by informal conversations and eight semi-structured interviews each of 90–120 minutes duration. A further four interviews were conducted with community members (CFA leaders, a licensed harvester, and mangrove cutter). In all instances, datasets focused on forest governance, particularly institutional contexts, the agency of meso-level actors and their practices and limitations in relation to institutional bricolage, within their wider PFM remit. All field notes were subsequently typed-up then coded using NVivo software.

In the following sections, we draw on the above datasets to examine interlocking dimensions of agency, accountability and bricolage in FOs' attempts to enact key aspects of PFM, namely initiating and subsequently managing these new institutions and practices. Our discussion focuses first on the introduction of PFM ("Beginnings"), its management and reproduction ("Being"), and finally limitations, both of PFM and of local practices of bricolage (Benefiting?).

## Results

### ***Beginnings: New Governance Structures, Bureaucracy, and Bricolage***

Successful PFM necessitates a well-established and governed CFA, a core institution under the FA (2005), through which, ostensibly, communities are empowered to participate in forest projects and management. However, the process of CFA formation and subsequent operation is complex, and embedded in hierarchical and bureaucratic procedures ([Figure 1](#)). The FM at each local station has a legal obligation to implement PFM policies,



as delegated from the KFS Director and set out in the FA (2005) and PFM guidelines [Republic of Kenya (ROK) 2007]. These obligations *de jure* include the formation of CFAs. As one FO explained, “A CFA is born at a forest station since it is the responsibility of the FM to initiate community activities in the forest to implement PFM.” Each FM must provide the EC with monthly written reports on their efforts to discharge such duties, as well as evidence of fulfillment of other statutory responsibilities, for example through photographs of confiscated illegal forest goods, or even the goods themselves.

This bureaucratic accountability is paralleled by FOs’ vicinal accountability to local communities as experienced, for example, in conflicts over forest use (Blundo 2015). FOs are officially charged with reducing deforestation, a KFS objective linked to Kenya’s Constitution (2010) and Forest Policy (2014), wherein targets of achieving 10% forest cover by 2030 are set. However, FOs are challenged in this respect by illegal local offtake and thus seek solutions by which they may reconcile their dual enforcement and community support roles. For example, one FO described how interventions against illegal harvesting could lead toward PFM: “The firewood collecting women, who enter into the forest unauthorized, are arrested by the forest rangers and when taken to court are given heavy fines. So the culprits eventually ask the forester how to solve this problem. So FOs suggest coming up with a user group that is registered, to allow them to access forest products legally.” Such actions assist FOs to discharge their responsibilities for forest protection and ultimately for CFA formation while assisting community members to gain legal access to dead timber or NTFPs.

Thus, diverse accountabilities compelled FOs to act. However, they often did so in ways that deviated from FA/PFM guidelines, driven by a range of constraining factors. The most obvious of these were financial limitations; quarterly station budgets averaged only \$6,204 (2015), within which allocations for community forest-based activities and development of CFA management plans were notably lacking. In some instances, FMs responded creatively by reaching out to wider networks, which included private companies and international NGOs, for financial aid, as well as at other times being more passive recipients of donor projects. In reality, linking nascent CFAs to donors lay outside FOs’ official responsibilities, but limited resources compelled strategic action, where options for external funding existed. These actions were sanctioned and even driven by KFS’s bureaucratic hierarchy, as ECs and the Head of Conservancy (HOC) often required FMs to act as a bridge between donors and CFAs, despite their lack of formal mandate for such a role.

In parallel, FOs also drew on their professional networks to collaborate with other agencies’ meso-level actors, themselves struggling to “get the job done.” As explained by one FO; “(PFM) ... is tedious and involving in terms of finances and time. To overcome this we look for partners ... particularly government offices like Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) ... then we assist one another.” Such strategies were commonly deployed by all FOs in charge of forest stations, albeit with varying degrees of success shaped by the extent and strength of individuals’ social and professional networks. Where these were weak, FOs had few options but to strategically reinterpret their statutory responsibilities to require only community awareness raising activities, rather than direct engagement with CFA formation.

Thus, in initial encounters between incoming PFM and existing institutions, meso-level actors were held accountable to senior KFS management, as well as to local communities, but discharged these accountabilities in different ways, and through more or less creative



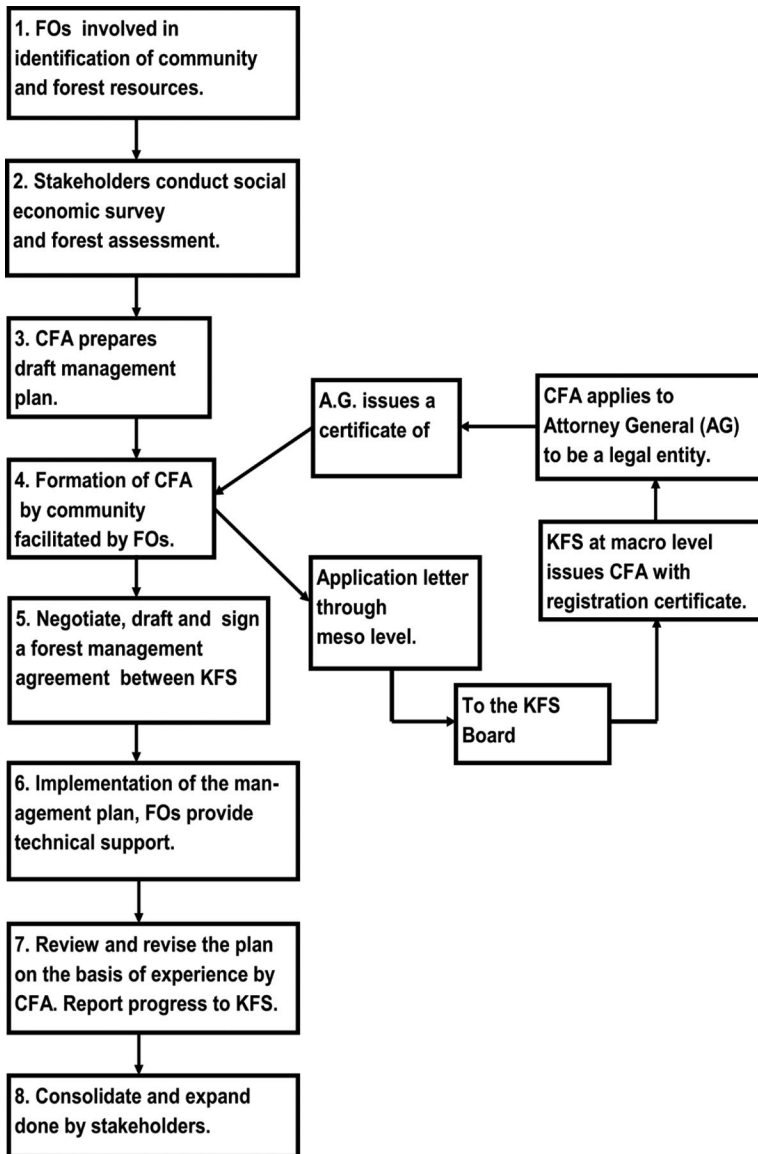
deployment of agency. One FM deployed bricolage as alteration, through adjusting requirements for CFA formation and their own role therein to mere information dissemination, in the context of weak social networks and lack of donor funding. Others deployed bricolage as aggregation, whereby new institutions were enacted by novel means, through linking established ways of working with donors to the rollout of PFM. In enacting such deviations from official procedures, junior FOs commonly sought to legitimize and formalize these, and thus protect their own position, through strategic enrolment of their seniors. According to one FO, “If I plan to do something informal and I know the EC will react about it I simply decide to bring the EC on board first or I just write a letter through the EC to the Director.” The acceptance of such strategies by seniors provided further incentives for FOs’ continued performance of the approximation of a functioning service by any reasonable means.

As a next step in the rollout of PFM, nascent CFAs are required to apply to KFS, register with the Attorney General, and obtain a certificate of operation (Figure 2). Meso-level actors continue to play a role here, with CFA applications initially evaluated by FMs against the management and conservation criteria outlined in the FA. However, their powers in authorizing CFA operations are limited, as the ultimate decision rests with the KFS Board. The typically lengthy process, in one case involving 4 years for approval of a management plan, is problematic for FOs, given vicinal as well as bureaucratic accountabilities. As one FO argued, “authority to approve CFA formation and management plans should be devolved to the EC or HOC ...” Others concurred that “an application to write a management plan through the FM could easily be done at HOC level or at EC level instead of going all the way to the Director who is not in touch with things on the ground.” Thus, a rather partial devolution of authority to meso-level actors, as well as to local communities, acted as a further factor constraining the agency of local FOs in establishing PFM, but also prompted various bricolage practices.

For example, FOs sought to discharge their local accountabilities by overlooking aspects of the protocol, to facilitate faster registration and operation of the CFA. In some cases, FOs permitted community-based forest activities even prior to formal approval of a CFA management plan. Such actions were strategically designed to encourage community engagement in forest protection, thus filling the gap left by the lack of KFS rangers. This apparent flexibility was also deployed by FOs as a tool to generate local goodwill and even in an attempt to neutralize CFA demands for benefit-sharing, albeit with little success in the latter instance. Such bricolage as alteration was generally supported by senior FOs, as providing evidence of some PFM-based activities, despite circumventing formal bureaucratic procedures.

Although some of these endeavors were motivated by the need to overcome the complexities of bureaucracy, there was also a need to capitalize on time-bound donor-funding, again reflecting FOs’ sense of local accountability. Between 2013 and 2014, the World Bank/GEF-funded Kenya Coastal Development Project provided CFA user groups with a total of \$310,000.00 for mangrove conservation and community development projects (Osore 2014). According to one FO, “Sometimes, a user group within the CFA gets some funds ... these funds usually have time bounds. It would be very sad if they have been given money to let’s say reforest a certain area and we deny them simply because they do not have a management agreement.” FOs therefore felt compelled to act to meet the agendas of other organizations as well as their own.

The bricolage practices and strategies deployed above may be seen as FOs successfully balancing their bureaucratic with their vicinal accountabilities, and supporting emergent



**Figure 2.** Steps in participatory forest management in Kenya (adapted from PFM guidelines 2007).

CFAs. However, and in parallel, FOs also adopted strategies inimical to CFA development. Specifically, despite the fact that making management plans is a legal obligation of KFS under the FA (2005), this task was widely delegated by FOs to nascent CFAs, through the agency afforded them by their position of authority within the KFS hierarchy. Such seemingly contradictory behavior reflected the limitations of FOs' available bricolage practices, with none being able to substitute for the considerable resources required for management planning. Offloading this responsibility onto communities often represented the only viable strategy for FOs, despite its functioning to stall CFA formation.

Thus, overall attempts to introduce new, formal institutions of PFM in study areas have not produced intended outcomes thus far. As observed elsewhere, meso-level agents

attempt to mediate between vicinal and bureaucratic accountabilities in attempting to bridge the implementation gap (Blundo 2015). Here, we highlight how the formal introduction of PFM in Kenya's South Coast region has led to emergence of a range of daily practices, practical norms and diverse, at times contradictory, types of bricolage amongst FOs, while being mediated and constrained by specific actors' (lack of) agency.

### ***Being: Managing PFM Projects and Everyday Bricolage***

As observed previously, FOs are charged with patrolling and conserving forests while empowering CFAs, a dual role encompassing both “the repressive state and the state as service provider” (Blundo and Glasman 2013: 3). These tensions are brought into particularly sharp relief in the ongoing “necessary improvisation” of daily practice in implementation of PFM (Cleaver 2015). In the study area, the southern-most forest station is in charge of 6345 ha of mangrove forests and 5145 ha of terrestrial forests, which are widely scattered and manned by three rangers, each living within the communities neighboring the forests. Under the FA (2005), rangers, as paramilitary personnel, are responsible for forest protection and law enforcement, including protection of CFA-managed areas, through forest patrols. Legally, they are accountable to the regional commandant through a hierarchy of sergeant and inspector. However, in practice, they answer to the local FM, since the sergeant and inspector levels have no personnel at local stations. Rangers are required to provide daily written reports of activities through an “occurrence book,” which is then submitted to the FM, who prepares a monthly report to the EC.

This accountability-driven incentive for action is not, however, matched by rangers' capacity to fulfill the demands of the role. To patrol the region effectively requires four-wheel drive vehicles, boats, and radio communication equipment. However, only one car and one motorcycle are available, which are often immobile due to lack of fuel, with these constraints further compounded by inadequate staffing levels.

Meso-level state actors attempted to work with/around these constraints through creative interpretation of official rules concerning patrols, facilitated by links to informal, social networks. Rangers were compelled to reduce the frequency of patrols from four per week set by FMs, to “only when the need arises,” for example on receipt of reports from community members of illegal logging. Material constraints thus prompted an alteration of formal rules from the proactive management approaches envisaged by the FA (2005) to more reactive modes. In their attempts to “get the job done,” FOs relied on networks of local community members to report forest incidents. In return, they occasionally credited community members' mobile phones with airtime to encourage continued reporting of forest incidences. However, as one FO stated, “Even when communities report concerns ... .due to lack of fuel there is delayed action or the issue is simply ignored ... .” Furthermore, officers' attempts to engage in practices of institutional bricolage as alteration through social networks were sometimes met with suspicion by older community members accustomed to a lengthy history of more repressive state-driven forest protection. Others declined to report forest offenders or even misled rangers through false reports, as relations were easily soured when FOs failed to meet community expectations of reward for favors received, or were seen to otherwise neglect vicinal accountabilities.

Material as well as social constraints also combined to shape FOs' agency. Specifically, even where patrols and meetings took place, attendance by FM and rangers was fleeting

and could not be sustained or repeated at regular intervals over extensive territories, despite rangers' residence in local villages. Technological constraints, such as lack of geographical positioning systems, further constrained "room for maneuver," as FOs were unable to even partially compensate for lack of physical presence and mobility through such tools.

The issue of dress emerged as important, and as facilitating a form of "embodied agency," through underlining the wearer's professionalism, status, and power (Poppe 2013). All FOs are issued with an official uniform while rangers are also issued with paramilitary uniforms that must be worn during operational duties. To emphasize the importance of uniform as a symbol of power, the zonal FO required subordinates to wear uniforms during all official ceremonies. When worn in the field, however, the uniform acted to reduce the effectiveness of the few patrols undertaken. During patrols, rangers were observed to dress in their uniforms and well-polished black leather shoes, which quickly became muddied or even lost, should they actually walk within mangrove forest interiors. Patrols were typically constrained to forest peripheries where it was less muddy and wet, with forest interiors effectively rendered inaccessible, not only by lack of boats in offshore areas, but by officers' lack of suitable attire. While the dress code in part constituted an enactment of power, and afforded the FOs "symbolic capital" (Poppe 2013), it actually formed part of an interlinking set of constraints on officers' ability to exercise agency effectively in relation to discharging their duties.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that, despite FOs extensive, creative efforts to "get the job done" and fulfill the requirements of bureaucratic accountability through deployment of agency and diverse practices of bricolage, resultant reports were rarely referred to or used by seniors. Consequently, many records accumulated dust in station stores while others became termite food. In this respect, the performance of a functioning service seemed to have evolved to become an end in itself.

Thus, as argued by Funder and Marani (2015), bricolage becomes a central strategy for meso-level actors in under-resourced contexts and in their somewhat ambiguous positions as both rule enforcers and governance partners. Multiple accountabilities shape actual practices, including in this case the performance of bricolage (Blundo 2015). What is also highlighted here are the ways in which attempts at bricolage at times foundered due to the ambiguous positions of FOs and perceived failures to adequately discharge local accountabilities. Enactments of embodied agency also acted as a two-edged sword in relation to FOs' attempts to discharge their duties. In relation to bureaucratic accountabilities, the *performance* of a functioning service, for example, through FO's delivery of regular reports, sometimes assumed primacy over actual content.

### ***Benefiting? Harvesting, Access, and the Limits of Bricolage***

Harvesting practices are one key area of PFM in which institutional weaknesses and the limits of bricolage are brought into further focus, both in relation to protection of the forest resource and to benefit-sharing.

Relationships with local scouts provided one way in which FOs sought to manage harvesting and to circumvent their own lack of capacity. Scouts are employed by CFAs to protect PFM sites, with support and training from KFS. FOs liaise with scouts to their mutual benefit, despite the fact that scouts are not contracted to KFS. Scouts have no legal powers of arrest of forest offenders and therefore rely on FOs to act, while FOs rely on

scouts for regular reports on forest issues. FOs' relationships with scouts embodied ways in which FOs sought to ameliorate capacity constraints and discharge statutory responsibilities through creative bricolage practices. However, in many instances, these relationships soured over the longer term, much as they did between FOs and the wider community, around expectations for "adequate" compensation. For scouts, these expectations took the form that FOs would facilitate their employment as rangers or allow them to become licensed harvesters. When such benefits failed to materialize, scouts' loyalty to FOs was often undermined. Thus, FOs' bricolage practices were temporally limited and relied on continuous renegotiation and re-investment to facilitate desired outcomes.

As a core incentive for PFM under the FA (2005), benefit-sharing through CFAs is another contentious issue. Harvesting schemes, based on licensees' sustainable offtake and mutually agreed rules between KFS and CFAs, are, theoretically at least, a key mechanism by which this may be enacted. However, in the study area, benefit-sharing was typically not negotiated at the outset of CFA formation and thus not enacted in practice. Nascent CFAs lacked the knowledge to negotiate this, while FOs tended to revert to entrenched enforcement behaviors in the face of these materially significant considerations. In this specific respect, therefore, vicinal accountabilities exerted little influence on FOs' practices. FOs furthermore failed to negotiate clear rules for harvesting by licensees and lacked resources to supervise harvesting. Instead, they relied on market preferences for high-quality timber to constrain licensees'/cutters' behavior. Rangers also devised methods of controlling illegal harvesting by demolishing structures constructed using undersized poles. This, however, only acted to ignite conflict between rangers and the community. Thus, the key issues of harvesting and benefit-sharing, despite FOs' attempts to ameliorate resource constraints and practice bricolage, remained particularly challenging and inimical to the further rollout of PFM.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The spirit of the FA (2005), the key legislative instrument for implementation of PFM in Kenya, is clear and progressive; it expresses strong support for the involvement of local people in forest management and for the principle that they should benefit from doing so. It sets out specific roles and responsibilities for meso-level actors in initiating and managing PFM, in conjunction with local communities. However, the slow and partial rollout of PFM in our study area highlights a clear implementation gap between policy intent and execution. The wider context of PFM in Kenya echoes problems encountered elsewhere in the transformations from exclusionary state-centric modes of resource protection and governance to devolved, more inclusive models. Superficially, these may be explained as a function of insufficient resources (funds, manpower, equipment, etc.), to varying degrees underpinned by state actors' unwillingness to cede power, both to juniors within their own institution and to local communities. Such conclusions are scarcely surprising. What is more useful, however, in understanding this implementation gap, is insight into the agency, accountabilities and bricolage practices of those who operate within it and which, to a large degree, determine the shape of PFM on the ground. As our analysis revealed, it is in the intersection of these factors that "everyday governance" is performed.

Specifically, despite myriad constraints, meso-levels bureaucrats feel compelled to act, to perform an approximation of a functioning service, despite the effective isolation,

particularly of more junior staff/rangers, from daily surveillance. Of course, they are nonetheless subject to bureaucratic accountability, upward through the complex hierarchy of KFS and through the media of reports, images, and confiscated goods. However, as our study highlighted, they are also accountable to local communities, with whom they are frequently enmeshed in social networks and relations. This is particularly true for rangers, who typically resided in the local communities they were required to police. *Desired* forms of action were thus shaped by these intersecting accountabilities on a daily basis, with FOs seeking strategies to negotiate the expectations of both KFS superiors and community members. In this respect, our findings support those of Blundo (2015) and de Sardan (2015) on meso-level actors' practices and strategies in diverse African contexts. Here, we further highlight how FOs' decision-making in relation to the trade-off between diverse accountabilities varies with the issue at hand, as well as with their own agency. In the case of benefit-sharing, for example, vicinal accountabilities typically carried little weight, while exerting greater influence in aspects of the initiation of CFAs and conflict resolution.

Through the necessity of enrolling wider partners to ameliorate KFS gaps in funding and manpower, FOs also became on occasion accountable to other statutory agencies, through informal collaborations to institute PFM, and to donors with funds for forest projects. Our analysis also revealed that the ostensible performance of FOs' legally prescribed roles, as evidenced through reports and images, was often treated as more important than what these reports revealed. The latter were rarely analyzed or deployed in management planning and were not collected as part of any scientific management plans, but rather functioned as a record of action and bureaucratic compliance.

Furthermore, although diverse, and at times conflicting, accountabilities compelled action, they did so in diverse ways. The agency of particular meso-level actors shaped their range of options therein. For most FOs, agency in relation to the performance of PFM was shaped by their mandate as state/paramilitary agents, charged to enforce regulations and protect the forests, as well as to engage with local communities. This authority was displayed and enacted through dress, especially among uniformed rangers, thus echoing Poppe's (2013) observations on foresters' uniforms as an expression of status and symbol of state authority in Burkina Faso. For our case study, these displays of "symbolic capital," were limited however, by FOs' inability to travel and thus to be physically present in many parts of their extensive territories, and could also act to undermine as well as support FO's agency. Such limitations on agency prompted reliance on wider social and professional networks through which FOs sought to monitor the forest via community members and scouts and acting at a distance. For some FOs, however, weak networks further limited their capacity to act.

Applying the lens of CI is revealing here. While CI perspectives have tended to stress bricolage as a creative practice, there has been less attention to its limitations. In this case, and responding to calls [e.g., by Cleaver and de Koning (2015)] for CI to interrogate aspects of bricolage more closely, we have identified how such material and embodied constraints intersect with particular individuals' social networks to shape and constrain their prospects for and choices around bricolage. We also show how the forms of bricolage subsequently practiced (as aggregation and alteration) are themselves limited in terms of their impacts on the rollout of PFM. Interrogation of local harvesting practices further served to highlight how the agency of meso-level actors to manage offtake is limited, even as they seek to engage in bricolage, for example through informal links to local scouts.



While bricolage as aggregation and alteration was effective in addressing some bureaucratic constraints imposed by PFM policies, it was often inadequate where access to valuable resources, through harvesting and benefit-sharing, were the core issue at stake. As Funder and Marani (2015) observe that bricolage does not necessarily progress community-level agendas, but can serve to support the enforcement role of the “local state.” For FOs, in our study area, bricolage practices shaped by agency and linked to social networks also required constant effort and investment to renegotiate and enact, contra their somewhat static portrayal, as “one off” solutions in aspects of the literature.

Overall, we highlight how attention to accountability, agency and bricolage, and their multiple intersections can shed further light on meso-level actors’ daily practices in the “implementation gap.” To progress the implementation of PFM in Kenya, greater devolution of power and resources is indicated, combined with capacity-building and financing the process of establishing CFAs. While processes of bricolage have enabled meso-level state actors to work productively with local communities to some extent, constraints on their agency and their dual enforcement/facilitation roles, and accountabilities continue to limit the ways in which they deploy bricolage; more substantive institutional transformations are needed to facilitate effective and equitable forest governance in the future.

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