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Decentralization and Institutional Development
in East African Forest Landscapes

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Facts & figures: Deforestation and livelihoods

Forests in East Africa are not only a source of ecological goods and services, but also a part of local peoples' history and culture. Despite their importance for ecosystems and livelihoods there is a net loss of forest area in the countries of our study: Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The figure below indicates overall high significant negative trends in all four countries from 2001 to 2012. The highest significant negative trend could be found in Uganda where between 2001 and 2012, 21.81% of the forested area was affected, compared to around 16% significant NDVI decrease in Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia. Forested areas of Kenya show the highest positive significant trend from 2001 to 2012 (3.83%).

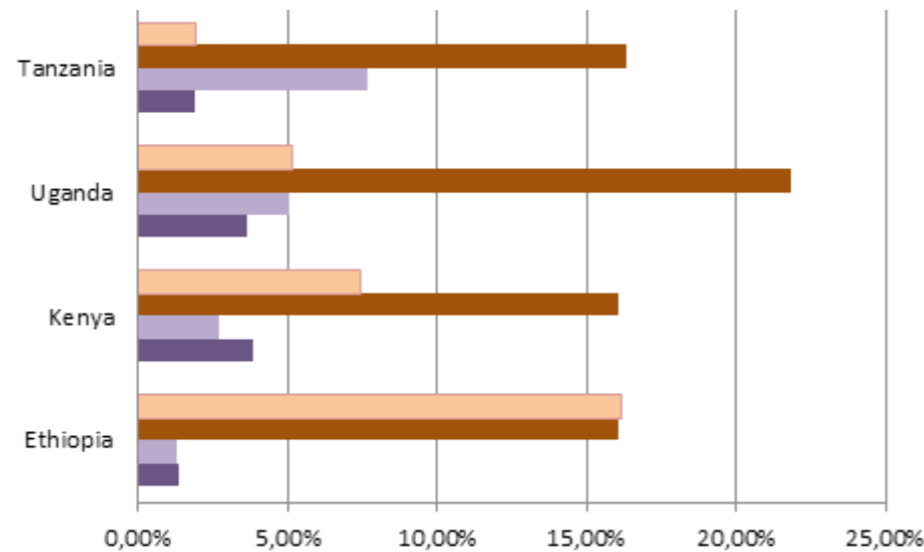
Causes of deforestation

The dynamic picture of deforestation is largely driven by changing livelihoods. Forest-dependent communities usually belong to the poorer sections of society and neither have alternative sources of income, nor land or fuel to make a living. Also, farming communities adjacent to forests often draw on forest resources for fuel wood or grazing areas for livestock.

These communities have largely been excluded from impressive regional economic growth rates in other sectors. Income inequality has increased in all four countries, indicating that sustaining livelihoods has not become easier for the marginalized forest-dependent communities. Charcoal production and firewood collection are major sources of cash income but pose a threat to forest conservation. A lack of alternative income opportunities, combined with insufficient incentives and resources

Figure: Trend changes of the NDVI in forested areas between 1982 – 2001 and 2001 – 2012.

Source: Banana, A.Y. et al. 2014. Chapter 1, in Gatzweiler, F. (ed.) Institutional and Livelihood Changes in East African Forest Landscapes. Frankfurt.



	Ethiopia	Kenya	Uganda	Tanzania
1982-2001 significant negative (%)	16,14%	7,41%	5,15%	1,91%
2001-2012 significant negative (%)	16,03%	16,07%	21,81%	16,32%
1982-2001 significant positive (%)	1,28%	2,67%	5,06%	7,64%
2001-2012 significant positive (%)	1,35%	3,83%	3,64%	1,87%

to invest in sustainable forest management, are important causes of continuing forest decline in the region.

Impact of decentralization policies

Apart from the difficulties to secure their livelihoods, forest-dependent communities are facing additional organizational challenges which came with decentralization and institutional changes in forest management during the mid-1980s. Research results indicate that decentralization can improve but also worsen service provision and governance (Gatzweiler 2014). By assessing forest resources and institutions in East Africa we concluded that it is not sufficient to devolve resources and rights to lower levels of governance. Rather, new viable systems of forest governance need to be built which can fundamentally deviate from traditional forms of governance. This poses additional challenges for communities and can hardly be achieved without considerable accompanying support from external agencies and organizations.

The close people-forest linkages in East African forest landscapes call for forms of governance which consider forests and livelihoods at the same time. Opportunities for sustaining livelihoods from agriculture and from non-agricultural sources of income reduce reliance on forest resources and create opportunities for sustainable forest governance. These income opportunities come with changing use rights and access to physical resources, knowledge as well as to decision-making.

However, forest-dependent communities in East Africa are facing disintegrating social networks and degrading social capital. This is due to a lack of an enabling environment such as central governments, professional foresters, and NGOs as sources of knowledge and facilitators for managing

forests according to legal provisions on the one hand and migration to secure household incomes on the other. In the past, informal institutions and traditional ecological knowledge have been part of functioning systems of forest landscape governance. Yet, traditional knowledge in all four countries is vanishing and traditional societal structures are becoming decoupled from forest environments and increasingly fragmented.

Since the 1990s, participatory forest management approaches have been promoted in all four countries of eastern Africa, of which the major forms are: Participatory Forest Management (PFM), Collaborative Forest Management (CFM), Joint Forest Management (JFM), and Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM). CBFM appeared to be the most promising. This may be caused by improved enforcing of forest rules by local communities, tenure security, and benefits for communities with CBFM arrangements. Tanzania was successful by implementing CBFM with more active community participation.

Conclusion and a way forward

Each of the four studied East African countries have learned important lessons during the decentralization processes, though the results of decentralization for people and forests are mixed. Difficulties relate to various factors which need to be interlinked into a viable system. The viability of systems of people and forests in forest landscapes that can maintain or improve forest conditions and peoples' livelihoods depends on locally specific conditions and factors, such as the type of participation, security of tenure, dependence on forest resources as a source of income, public support, and the degree to which a stock of



social capital and organizational learning are available.

Gatzweiler et al. (2014) identified important components of viable systems of forest landscape governance which have the potential to improve forests and livelihoods in East African forest landscapes:

- Resource flows in viable systems of decentralized forest governance are constituted by new property rights which extend to forest landscapes, enabling incomes from forest and non-forest activities and generating public revenues needed for forest conservation endeavors.
- A broader set of stakeholders needs to be included for viable systems of decentralized forest governance including those directly affected by forest ecosystem functions.
- Local communities need to participate as citizens with rights and duties to contribute to and enable public decision-making.
- Long-term viability of decentralized systems of forest governance is integrated into associated governance systems in agriculture and public decision-making.
- Within forest landscapes, forestry and agricultural resources and multi-level institutional infrastructure match to create viable systems. Forest management alone cannot achieve sustainable ecosystems and livelihoods, if it is not integrated into broader landscape structures and institutional designs.
- Viable forest governance systems are adaptive and able to deal with varying social and ecological challenges. Freedom and scope for action is required for stakeholders to learn how to collaborate

in new forms of forest management. Crafting viable community institutions require continuous involvement and strengthening of community social capacity and networks especially, at the lowest level.

- Systems of organizational learning of new forest management practices. Organizational learning for sharing experiences within and across countries would facilitate the processes of institutional change towards sustainability.

References

Gatzweiler, F. (ed.) 2014. Institutional and Livelihood Changes in East African Forest Landscapes. Decentralization and Institutional Change for Sustainable Forest Management in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia. Frankfurt: Peter Lang

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