Comparing the Effectiveness of Informal and Formal Institutions in Sustainable Common Pool Resources Management in sub-Saharan Africa

Mastewal Yami1*, Christian Vogl1, Michael Hauser1

1University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Working Group Knowledge Systems and Innovations, Institute of Organic Farming, Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems & Centre for Development Research

Gregor Mendel Strasse 33, A-1180, Vienna, Austria, E-mail: mastewalyami@yahoo.com, my.degefa@boku.ac.at

Introduction

The ongoing and partly severe degradation of common pool resources (CPRs) in sub-Saharan Africa is a threat for the sustainable development of local livelihood systems (Berhanu and Swinton, 2002). Important elements of local livelihood systems are informal and formal institutions (table 1 and figure 1) that regulate access to- and control over- the CPRs. Especially, the informal institutions are often neglected, in spite of their prominent local role (Muchena and van der Bliek, 1997).

Aims of the research

To compare the effectiveness of informal and formal institutions for sustainable CPR management in sub-Saharan Africa and,

To investigate the social, political, and demographic conditions which influence the institutions’ effectiveness.

Table 1 Overview of Differences between Informal and Formal Institutions (Illustrated by authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Informal Institutions</th>
<th>Formal Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of evolution</td>
<td>Endogenous</td>
<td>Exogenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional and structural arrangements</td>
<td>Site specific</td>
<td>Common at district or national level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material and mental support</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and cultural embedded ness</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overhead</td>
<td>Local communities</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and enforcement</td>
<td>Based on agreement of community</td>
<td>Legally by rules of CPR users</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods

Secondary data was collected by computerised searches of databases during November 2007 to June 2008. Then, qualitative meta-analysis method was used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

In CPRs management of sub-Saharan Africa, informal and formal institutions are expected to achieve six main sustainability outcomes (figure 2). The informal institutions contributed for sustainable CPR management by creating a suitable environment for joint decision making, enabling exclusion at low cost for CPR users, motivating users to manage CPRs, using locally agreed sanctions, and acknowledging local knowledge of community in CPRs management.

Formal institutions under decentralised conditions contributed less to sustainable CPR management than the informal institutions. However, formal institutions have important contributions to make during the implementation of strategies and technologies to sustainable CPR management.

Conclusions

The informal institutions have contributed to achieve most of the sustainability outcomes in CPRs management than formal institutions because they acknowledge local knowledge of the community in the CPRs management and they can be enforced at low cost for CPR users. In the future, policies and development interventions that recognise the strengths of both types of institutions and build the capacities of institutions depending on the local context are crucial to achieve sustainable CPR management.

References


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